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CONTENTS

CRITICISM

1. South Asian Literature in English: An Introduction
Editor
2. Mohsin Hamid on a Literary Pastime
Dr. Ram Bhagwan Singh
3. James Goonawardene's One Mad Bid For Freedom : An Evaluation
Chhote Lal Khatri
4. A Golden Age From Gestation to Delivery of Bangladesh
Dr. Brajesh Prasad
5. The Balladry of the Bhutanese Lo-zey : A critique of the Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi
Seema Murugan
6. The Aesthetics Of Desire in Kamala Das's Poetry
Tauqeer Fatima
7. Cyril Wong's Poetic Corpus
Dr. S. Radhamani
8. Multiculturalism and Political Protest in the Singaporean Novel A Candle Or The Sun by Gopal Baratham
Nandini Kumari
9. Sri Aurobindo's 'Man ... the Image of God': A Testament of Hope and Faith
D.C. Chambial

10. Major themes in Michael Ondaatje's "The English Patient"
Dr. Purnendu Shanker
and Dr. Jai Ram Prasad
11. Taslima Nasreen's No Country For Women : A Feminist Reading
Ram Niwas Sharma

POETRY

1. Monsoon Blues & Durga
Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata
2. Beware Man ! Beware
Mandal Bijoy Beg, Orissa

BOOK REVIEW

1. Dilip Kumar Ojha
2. PCK Prem
3. Pronab Kumar Majumder
4. S.L. Peeran
5. Padmashree Ravindra Rajhans
6. Dr. Christoday Raja Jayant Khess
7. Ranu Uniyal
8. Mahesh, Sangeeta
9. Tarun Kanti Rout
10. Kamla Jain

South Asian Literature in English: An Introduction

The horizon of English literature is ever expanding. It no longer means British literature or American literature or Commonwealth literature; it refers to a number of literatures prospering under its umbrella and is always receptive to new entries. Just a few decades back Canadian literature, Australian literature, Caribbean literature and New Zealandian literature were nonentity. Even Commonwealth literature as a new body of literature got recognition around 1960 with the introduction of a course in Commonwealth literature at the School of English in the University of Leeds under the guidance of A.N. Jeffares, followed by the establishment of a Chair of Commonwealth literature and the publication of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* edited by Arthur Ravenscraft. Of late SAARC literature has made its mark with the institution of the Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature at New Delhi and with several initiatives at formal and informal levels. SAARC as a political outfit of eight countries has limited South Asian writing as a body of literature which could have been otherwise a conglomeration of more than two dozen countries with their multilingual literatures, with their distinctions and commonalities. South Asian countries are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Nepal, Bhutan and others. This special issue is focused on the scenerio of English literature in these countries, obviously an attempt to give extension to SAARC literature. However,

we realized that except Singapore and Malaysia no other country has any significant take in English literature.

This context takes me to the main issue of making a plea for South Asian Literature. Here lies a good opportunity for India, to be precise for Indian universities to play the role that the University of Leeds in England played in the formation of Commonwealth literature. Indian University must take a lead to form a Chair for South Asian Literature in English, collect all the scattered materials at one place and initiate a course in it and undertake translation of regional literatures into English. It may be a good point to take off South Asian literature and make it a strong case to be recognized as a distinguished body in New Literatures. This one act alone would give tremendous boost to the creative talents in South Asian countries and would certainly promote the objectives with which SAARC was formed and extend them to other South Asian countries.

Coming back to the point this is a modest attempt to present a creative contour of South Asian writings in English. As we know the acronym SAARC stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which is a political organization of eight countries namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan founded on common cultural and historical ties besides geographical proximity. Cultural and literary exchange among member countries is on the agenda of SAARC. This should be extended to other South Asian countries as well. It is a matter of fact that Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Sumatra have age old cultural bound with India owing to Hinduism and Buddhism. Keeping

historical, geographical, cultural, racial and linguistic proximity in mind and the sheer bulk of literature produced in these countries make a strong case for South Asian literature. We can take off from where SAARC leaves and can build a strong edifice of cultural, political, economic and social cooperation. What common grounds R. B. Singh has drawn in his Introduction to *Creative Neighbors: SAARC Writings in English* equally apply to South Asian countries:

Five of the SAARC countries have been the ex-colonies of Britain and they still sustain the common colonial aftereffects. Their commonalities can be seen in culture and tradition, religion and philosophy, history and folk lore apart from inter connecting geographical boundaries. From religious point of view Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism are practiced in all the SAARC countries in different proportions. Linguistically Urdu is common to Pakistan and India, Bengali to India and Bangladesh, Tamil to India and Sri Lanka, and English with all the SAARC countries as an acquired language. And more, these languages belong to the Indo-European language group. English in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is virtually a naturalized language. In India alone people using English outnumber those in Britain itself. They have an exclusive branch of creative writing like Indian writing in English. It's a fact that creative writing in English in the SAARC countries is much more than in the British colonies in European countries. (CN. viii).

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have gone through the same trauma of colonialism and partition. Despite political partition, emotional, cultural and spiritual bond still exists. Above all creative writers and artists know no boundary. Rais Amrohvi's song in the wake of

partition is worth quoting here.

Ye Hindion se Kahna, O Hind jane wale
Bhule se bhi nahin ham tum ko Bhulane wale
Munkir na ho sakenge hargiz zamane wale,
Hain Hindo-Pak wale sab ek gharane wale
Rabte-Khwas le ja, shauke-awam le ja
O Hind jane wale mera salam le ja.

[Oh ! Tell our friends the Indians. Oh ! You who go to India :

Sweet fragrance fills our longings. Notes of the lost area.
We cannot long be parted. We are of your kith and kin,
The favours of the favoured one. Reach out to them our feelings:
Oh ! You who go to India Carry to them our greetings.]
(Translation by Mani Shankar Aiyar)

India's proximity with Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka is well known. In Sri Lanka both Tamil and Sinhalese are of Indian origin. Similarly the early settlers in Maldives were Dravidian and Sinhalese people who practiced Buddhism. Islam was adopted only in 1153 A.D. As for Afghanistan it was a part of Mauryas kingdom. The inference is that all these countries have been a part of cultural India. Consequently the oral tradition of literature, myths and legends and even the creative writing today have several things in common. It is unfortunate that except India, no other South Asian country has got due space for its literary contribution. A brief outline of creative writings in English in each member country excluding India would suffice the purpose here.

Pakistan: Faced with turmoil, political uncertainty and a constant surge of violence Pakistan could produce only two novelists worthy of the name in the first three decades of Independence. The first one is Ahmed Ali, the author of *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and

Ocean of Night (1964). The second is Zulfikar Ghose whose novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan* in 1967 brought him close to Pakistan though he never lived in Pakistan. He settled in Brazil. However, Pakistan lays claim on them as Pakistan national writers.

Pakistan's debut in literature in English begins with Bapsi Sidhwa's partition novel *Ice Candy Man* and *The Crow Eaters*, a hilarious account of Parsi life in Pakistan. She has produced an impressive body of literature. Though the socio-political situation at home forced her and most other writers to look for green pasture in the western countries, we cannot deny Pakistan of its legitimate claim on the diasporic writers. Bapsi Sidhwa, Tahira Naqvi are settled in America while Adam Zameenzad, Tariq Ali and Hanif Kureishi in England. Now Pakistani's writers are taking greater interest in exploring the problems of Pakistan to catch the interest of the world. Shashi Tharoor writes :

Mohsin Hamid with his two novels *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* finally woke up the rest of the world to Pakistani fiction in English. Other younger writers the world will hear more of include Nadeem Aslam, whose *Maps for Lost Lovers* has won high praise from critics, and several women writers, such as Kamila Shamsie, Moniza Alvi and Feryal Alvi Gauhar. (I would love to have included the brilliant memoirist Sara Suleri in this list for her *Meatless Days*, which is as much literature as the finest novel, but alas, it isn't fiction.)

He further adds:

Any lingering doubt one may have had about the future of the Pakistani novel in English has just been dispelled by two remarkable debuts. The first is the publication this month of Mohammed Hanif's exuberant but risk taking *A Case of Exploding*

Mangoes, a remarkable reinvention of the conspiracies surrounding the assassination of General Zia in 1988, the second debut is all of 23 years old, a Harvard graduate and the son of the courageous Pakistani editor (Friday Times) Najam Sethi. (Times of India, July 2008)

Pakistan's poetry is also thriving on the theme of partition trauma, alienation, loss of identity and the exploitation of women under the patriarchal system and above all love of the new land and disillusionment with the establishment. They form the common concern of the South Asian poets. Above all we cannot forget that the Urdu poetry of Mir, Hali, Ghalib and Iqbal contributed to the growth of a composite tradition of poetry. Among the poets, too, Ahmad Ali is a father figure followed by Zulfikar Ghose. Ghose's *The Loss of India* (1964) and *Jets of Orange* (1974) are celebrated works of art dealing with the theme of exile. Contemporary poets like of Nasir Kazmi, Daud Kamal, Muneer Niazi, Alamgir Hashmi, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, Mazeed Amjad, Parveen Shakir to mention a few are carrying this composite culture of poetry further.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh, the youngest nation of the group despite religious and political proximity with Pakistan has a distinct linguistic and literary identity. The national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam was known for his secular credential and the imbibing spirit of the *Quran* and the Vedanta. Since he was born in India and lived in India till 23rd May 1972 when he and his family were taken to Bangladesh with the consent of the Indian government, it may be called that his literature equally belongs to India. Translation has virtually effaced the language barrier. The original works of Nazrul in Bengali is now available

in English translation. Bangladesh has drawn some attention of literary world through the controversial works of Taslima Nasreen. The other notable writers are Humayun Ahamed, Shamsur Rahman, Daud Haider and Belal Choudhary. But its contribution to literature in English depends on translation.

Afghanistan's share in South Asian literature in English is even more dismal. This neighbouring country has long been deprived of peace and prosperity. It is interesting to note that in our culture the image of Afghanistan is identified more with Kabuliwala. Even the official language Pasto is a dialect of Sanskrit. However, it is not devoid of creative writers. Khushat Khan Khattak is the national poet of Afghanistan. Jaldudine-Balkhi Rumi is a well known poet in Dari language. Other notable writers are Ustad Khalilullah Khalili, Akbar Nadim, Abdul Ali Mustaghni, and Abdul Shukoor-e-Rashad. We have very little information of their works and literary activities. The most acclaimed novelist today is Khaled Hosseini who first took us on a tumultuous journey to 1970s Afghanistan in the 2003 best-seller *The Kite Runner*, and followed by *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2007, a novel about two women in Hosseini's homeland. On May 21, his third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, hit the market. Unlike his previous works, it jumps across continents, weaving together a tale about love and loss across generations.

Nepal : The very thought of Nepali fiction or poetry conjures up in mind an image of ethereal and invigorating mountain breeze of the Himalayas. But Nepali's fiction or poetry has little of it. However, it has recognizable body of literature in English and is steadily emerging. Laxami Prasad Devkota and Mohan Koirala are representative poets in English.

Manjushree Thapa's *A Tutor of History* was the first ever novel written in English. Her second novel is *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*.

Bhutan, a small Himalayan kingdom with a rich tradition of folk songs and stories, has little to offer in terms of original writings in English. R. B. Singh says, "Authors like Kunzang Choden and Karma Ura have amply demonstrated characteristic Bhutanese literature mostly in Dzongkha and some in English." (XIV) Kunzang Choden's novel *The Circle of Karma* is a journey novel in which the protagonist Tsomo moves from Kalimpong to Dorjiten, Kathmandu, Dehradun, Delhi and finally settles in Thimpu and bears the injustice inflicted on her by men. V. P. Singh rightly comments,

The Circle of Karma is not so much a feminist novel as a moving narrative of human suffering told with simplicity. Yet the nature of Tsomo's suffering is typical of the lot of women in a patriarchal milieu where the father and husband are figures of authority who can emotionally and even physically roughshod women and get away with it. (P. 46)

It has a cultural dimension also. In Bhutanese society women are more permissive and premarital sex is not considered disgraceful as it is in India.

Maldives: The Republic of Maldives consists of about 1300 small coral islands of which only 202 are inhabited. It has ethnically mixed population of races like Dravidian, Sinhalese, Arab and Chinese. It got independence from the British rule in 1965 and joined this British Commonwealth in 1982. I have no information of Maldivian's novel in English. However, there are a few poets who merit critical attention. It is the *Gestures: An Anthology of South Asian Poetry*

published by Sahitya Akademi in 1996 that familiarizes us with the poetry written in SAARC countries. The important Maldivian poets are Abdulla Fahumy Didi, Abdulla Sadiq, Adam Abdurrahnan, Muhammad Jameel, Saeed Ali Falhu, Yosuf Mohamed Falhu and Farah Didi.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's cultural, historical, linguistic, mythical and geographical proximity with India is too obvious to be deliberated here. Buddhism is the greatest of all links. Interestingly Sri Lanka is next to India among SAARC countries that has produced such a rich corpus of fiction and poetry in English and is marching fast towards an independent identity in Commonwealth literature. It has a long list of writers in English published from reputed publication house like Penguin. Carl Muller, Jean Arasanayagam, Kamala Wijieratne, Premini Amarasinghe, Ashaley Halpe. Tissa, Rajiva Wijesinha, James Goonawardene to name just a few have explored the Sri Lankan psyche, ethnic strife, violence, anger, fear and suspicion in narratives and poetry in English and they are getting international recognition and critical attention.

Singapore: Professor Koh Tai Ann of Nanyang Technological University and her team of research assistants have meticulously prepared an annotated Bibliography that offers a comprehensive overview of Singaporean literature in English from its beginnings in the 1950s, when it shared a common historical lineage with its Malayan, then Malaysian (from 1963–5), counterpart, and before Singapore became a republic in 1965 to 2007.

The immigrant cultures, and especially the Baba Chinese, were the earliest to use English for creative

purposes in the Malaya peninsula. But poetic traditions were slow in taking root because immigrant populations were generally intent on more pragmatic needs. Sporadic attempts at writing poetry in English began in the late 1940s, but Singapore's most prominent poet, Edwin Thumboo expressed his anguish in 1970 that 'although we have had the language for 150 years we continue to be embarrassed by the fact that we have not produced any writers of the first rank' (Thumboo, 1970, p.2). English offered itself as a liberating possibility. The earliest poetry was motivated by the nationalist ideal of a Malayan consciousness. Here is a brief example from Wang Gungwu's *Pulse* (1950) was the first volume of poetry in English from the region:

Thoughts of Camford fading,
Contentment creeping in;
Allah had been kind;
Orang puteh has been kind.
Only yesterday his brother said,
'Can get lagi satu wife lah!'
Ahmad was educated;
The education was complete. --(Brewster, 1989, p.4)

The most prolific out-put is seen in short stories and traditional stories bear the imprint of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The first published record of the short story in English in Singapore was in 1959: *The Compact*, edited by Herman Hochstadt represented incipient efforts of local writers to produce a volume of stories in the English medium.

The notable Singaporean writers in English have been Hwee Hwee Tan, Simon Tay, Hsu-Ming Teo, Edwin Thumboo, Toh Hsien Min, Wang Gungwu, Wooi-Chin J-Son, C.M. Woon, Cyril Wong, Angeline Yap, Arthur Yap, Aaron Lee Soon Yong, Yong Shu Hoong, Boey Kim, Goh Poh Seng, Lee Kok Liang, Lee Tzu Pheng,

Lim Thean Soo, Tan Kok Seng, Kelvin Tan, Robert Yeo and Gopal Baratham. In promotion of poetry and short story National University of Singapore and Malaya University have played an imitable role by bringing out journals and anthologies.

Myanmar : The literature of Burma (or Myanmar) spans over a millennium. Burmese literature was historically influenced by Indian and Thai cultures, as seen in many works, such as the *Ramayana*. The Burmese language, unlike other Southeast Asian languages (e.g. Thai, Khmer), adopted words primarily from Pali rather than from Sanskrit. The earliest works of Burmese literature date from the Bagan dynasty. They include prose recording monarchical merit acts and poetic works, the earliest of which was *Yakhaing minthami eigyin* (Cradle Song of the Princess of Arakan), dated to 1455. During the Bagan and Inwa dynasties, two primary types of literature flourished, *mawgun* and *eigyin*, and *pyo*, religious works generally derived from the Jataka tales. Burmese literature was also influenced by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

When Burma became a colony of British India, Burmese literature continued to flourish, even though the institution of the Burmese monarchy, the leading patron of Burmese arts and literature in pre-colonial times, had been dismantled. A major landmark in Burmese literature was called the *Hkit san* (Testing the Times) movement, a search for a new style and content, led most notably by Theippan Maung Wa along with Nwe Soe, Zawgyi, Min Thu Wun and Mya Kaytu.

One of the greatest female writers of the Post-colonial period is Kyaw Ma Ma Lay. Khin Myo Chit was another important writer, who wrote, among her works, *The 13-Carat Diamond* (1955). The journalist Ludu U

Hla was the author of numerous volumes of ethnic minority folklore, novels about inmates in U Nu-era jails, and biographies of people working in different occupations. The Prime Minister U Nu himself wrote several politically oriented plays and novels. Other prolific writers of the post-colonial era include Thein Pe Myint whose *The Ocean Traveller and The Pearl Queen* is considered as a Burmese classic.

In 2012, *Bones Will Crow: 15 Contemporary Burmese Poets* [8] was published by Arc Publications (U.K.). This bi-lingual edition of poetry is regarded as the first anthology of modern Burmese poetry in the West. But there is little in the name of original creative writing in English.

Vietnam : Vietnamese literature includes both oral and written works, created largely by Vietnamese-speaking people, although Francophone Vietnamese and English-speaking Vietnamese authors in Australia and the United States are counted by many critics as part of the national tradition. Twentieth-century America reduced Vietnam to “Nam”: the surreal site of a military nightmare. The early twenty-first century has seen the revision of this image to recognize the people and culture of Vietnam itself. Vietnamese Americans, both immigrants and the American children of immigrants, have participated in changing this perception, consistently presenting their side of the story in memoirs published since the 1960s. *My Viet* is the first anthology to provide a comprehensive overview of these memoirs and the historical picture they offer and to include Vietnamese writing that goes beyond memoir, revealing a new generation of Vietnamese American poetry, fiction, and drama. The narratives in Part 1, *Tales of Witness* treat the major events of the

Vietnamese diaspora: Vietnam's resistance to French colonization, the "Vietnam War," post-war Vietnamese life, immigration to and life in America, and reconnections with contemporary Vietnam. Part 2: *Tales of Imagination* moves beyond the master narratives of war and immigration to survey exciting innovations in the work of Vietnamese American writers. The texts demonstrate the full flowering of Vietnamese American literature in English and are among the best contemporary writings of any category. *My Viet* presents a rich, varied, and provocative collection of literary work that explores Vietnam from several points of view, sees America through a specifically Vietnamese American lens, and broadens the scope of Vietnamese American literature to its fullest extent. Notable contribution to this volume comes from Nguyen Thi Thu-Lâm's *Fallen Leaves*, Tran Thi Nga and Wendy Wilder Larsen's *Shallow Graves*, Nguyen Cao Ky's *Twenty Years and Twenty Days*, Yung Krall's *A Thousand Tears Falling*, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Mai's *Electioneering: Vietnamese Style*," Tran Van Dinh's *No Passenger on the River* and from several others.

Indonesia : There are several languages and several distinct but related literary traditions within the geographical boundaries of the modern nation of Indonesia. For example the island of Java has its own Javanese pre-national cultural and literary history. There are also Sundanese, Balinese, and Batak or Madurese traditions. Indonesia also has a colonial history of Dutch, British and Japanese occupation, as well as a history of Islamic influence that brought its own texts, linguistic and literary influences. There is also a rich heritage of oral literature. May Moon's *Journey of the Heart* is the most celebrated novel in the

country, today. This novel is the second book of a sequel. The first one is *Rahasia Dua Hati* or *Secret of the Hearts* by Maimon Herawati alias Muthmainnah. These two novels tell stories about a woman (Tita) from Indonesia and a man (Harry) from England.

Cambodian or Khmer literature has a very ancient origin. Like most Southeast Asian national literatures its traditional corpus has two distinct aspects or levels: the written literature, mostly restricted to the royal courts or the Buddhist monasteries and the oral literature, which is based on local folklore. It is heavily influenced by Buddhism, the predominant religion, as well as by the Hindu epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. But we have no knowledge of original creative writing in English.

Malaysian literature is the collection of literary works produced in the Malay Peninsula until 1963 and in Malaysia thereafter. Malaysian literature is typically written in any of the country's four main languages: Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. It portrays various aspects of Malaysian life and comprises an important part of the culture of Malaysia. Malaysian literature in English has evolved through three stages: 1. Literature produced by representatives of the imperial power like Hugh Clifford, Richard Winstead, Katharine Sim, Margaret Leong, 2. works produced under imperial license by natives and outcastes like those of Gregory W. de Silva and Han Suyin, and 3. Independent literature or post-colonial literature began with *The New Cauldron* in 1949.

Writing in English in Malaysia has been kept alive largely through the determination of an English educated minority, both Malay and non Malay. The

major Malaysian writers often work across genres, as in the case of Lloyd Fernando, novelist, short story writer and critic; Wang Gungwu, poet, short story writer and critic; K.S.Maniam, novelist, dramatist, short story writer and critic; Muhammad Haji Salleh, poet and critic and Salleh ben Joned who is also a poet critic.

Wong Phui Nam presents an Islamic view of Malaysian society in his poetry.

Thailand: There is a growing consciousness among Thai intellectuals and academicians to evolve both a Thai variety of English language and creative literature in English. A popular slogan among them is "Think in Thai, write in English". Two important names of bilingual writers I have come across are Kumut Chandruang and Pongpol Adireksam. The former is the first published Thai English author well known for his autobiography *My Boyhood in Siam* (1940). The latter is a contemporary creative writer who made his mark with his novel *Until the Karma Ends: A Plot to Destroy Burma*.

Philippines literature in English has its roots in the efforts of the United States engaged in a war with Filipino nationalist forces at the end of the 19th century. However, writing in English began in the 1920s with the founding of newspapers and magazines like the *Philippines Herald* in 1920, the *Philippines Education Magazine* in 1924 (renamed *Philippine Magazine* in 1928), and later the *Manila Tribune*, the *Graphic*, *Woman's Outlook*, and *Woman's Home Journal*. The publications helped introduce the reading public to the works of Paz Marquez Benitez, Jose Garcia Villa, Loreto Paras, and Casiano Calalang, among others.

Cash incentives were given to writers in 1921 when the Free Press started to pay for published contributions and awarded P1,000 for the best stories. The organization in 1925 of the Philippine Writers Association and in 1927 of the University of the Philippines National Writers Workshop, which put out the *Literary Apprentice*, also helped encourage literary production. Among the significant publications of this fertile period were: *Filipino Poetry* (1924) by Rodolfo Dato, *English-German Anthology of Filipino Poets* (1934) by Pablo Laslo, Jose Garcia Villa's *Many Voices* (1939) and *Poems of Doveglion* (1941), *Poems* (1940) by Angela Manalang-Gloria, *Chorus for America: Six Philippine Poets* (1942) by Carlos Bulosan, Zoilo Galang's *A Child of Sorrow* (1921), the first Filipino novel in English, and *Box of Ashes and Other Stories* (1925), the first collection of stories in book form, *Villa's Footnote to Youth: Tales of the Philippines and Others* (1933), *The Wound and the Scar* (1937) by Arturo Rotor, a collection of stories, *Winds of April* (1940) by N. V. M. Gonzalez, *His Native Soil* (1941) by Juan C. Laya and *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife and Other Stories* by Manuel Arguilla.

India : Indian literature in English with thousands of writers in every genre, one Nobel prize, (and in the second India has its share;) six Booker Prizes, the Booker of the Booker, several Commonwealth Prizes and millions of readers, need no introduction here as elsewhere. India has to play a key role in South Asian literature. India can be both a cementing and a dispelling force. No doubt India is trying hard to develop greater social, economic and cultural ties among South Asian nations. Others also claim the same. Still it is far from being a force to reckon with. Still despite all homogeneity and proximity why has it not evolved as a cohesive group? To me reason lies in India's natural

position as a big brother economically, culturally, politically, strategically or in terms of literature. Other countries of the group fall too short of India. This breeds a feeling of apprehension, suspicion and fear. Political disturbances in these countries and the political relation among them have hampered the growth of the sub-continent and of a literary group. Rajiva Wijesinha a Sri Lankan novelist investigates the reasons behind the poor growth of the sub-continent. He refers to the partition of India, cozy relationship of Sri Lanka with the British ruler, Sri Lanka government's measure to disenfranchise the Indian Tamils from the tea estates, Indo-Pak wars India's hegemonic ambitions in the subcontinent and finally the 1987 Accord between Indian and Sri Lankan government gave rise to the feeling of apprehension and suspicion in the people of the subcontinent. Rajiva Wijesinha's novel *Days of Despair* recaptures the horror and blood bath that his land witnessed when the Indian Army took on the Tamil tigers. India was and is viewed as an ally of the Lankan Tigers. Much before it in 1981 Richard de Zoyasa, a Sri Lankan poet had professed this doom in his poem "Apocalypse Soon".

Divide and rule. And pendulous to the North
Hangs jambudvipa, stained with her own blood
Bleeding heart red as ripe pomegranate
And bitter as the damson. All the fruits of hate
Quivering she holds. Waiting to drop
Into our gaping mouths. (P. 173)

In this poem Indian civil servants of the foreign ministry are viewed as birds of prey. Such resentment can be seen elsewhere, too. Identity groups based on language, region, race, religion, and individual and groups prejudices add to the chasm and created a cultural amnesia in which member countries are

forgetting their root. If we trace their roots-either linguistic or cultural-they all belong to the same root, but living in a rootless present.

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Editor...

Mohsin Hamid on a Literary Pastime

Dr. Ram Bhagwan Singh

It took Hamid six years after *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to write *How to become Filthy Rich in rising Asia* (2013). Perhaps he was basking in the acclaim of his previous novel; hence a pause, giving himself a relaxed interregnum. The restful creator unburdened by compelling thoughts thought of some light and amusing proposition how to become rich particularly in a developing world. From an acclaimed novelist a help book in the garb of a novel or otherwise can only be light hearted, funny and ironical. His own admission is that he jokingly said that his book would be a self help book. This mock-vein utterance materialised and he began his narrative in a self-help mode.

Experimenting with form is Hamid's recurrent obsession. His innovative urge prompts him with a passion to create something with a difference registering as it were a trade mark. His very first novel *Moth Smoke* begins with the historical anecdote about Shah Jahan asking a Sufi saint which of his sons was going to occupy the throne. The saint foretells about Aurangzeb as the next successor who in fact grabs the throne and gets his elder brother Dara Shikoh killed. This anecdote has a far-fetched correlation with the protagonist Dara who is made a scapegoat for the murder of a boy in a car accident due to the negligence of his friend Aurangzeb. But Dara himself is a drug peddler, an adulterer, an anti-hero. His ficelle Aurangzeb is a good son, a good father, a good husband and a good friend, too. The anecdote as a symbol does not carry the analogy far enough. In the second novel

The Reluctant Fundamentalist the protagonist from beginning to the end is addressing an unknown American. The entire narrative almost like a soliloque pours out the narrator's pent-up impressions, emotions, frustrations, ideas and reactions against several sets of circumstances having the same roots. The narrator is addressing a non-responsive, a mute listener as though afraid of retaliation. His only motive is to tell and not be told.

Hamid's third book *How to become Filthy Rich in rising Asia* claims to be a self-help book and its objective is to show how to get filthy rich in rising Asia. The counsellor is as unknown as the target man i.e. 'you' getting the advice. This 'you' is a poor boy shivering under his mother's cot on a cold morning. You is the third child with one elder brother and a sister living with their mother in penury in a typical miserable village somewhere in Asia. You's father works as a cook in a city who sends money home to maintain the family. As a country woman the mother feeds the buffalo, milks the animal and does all other household works.

The family is taken to the city and you is admitted to a school. His sister is engaged as a cleaner in a house to augment the family income. The brother works as a painter's helper. After attaining puberty the sister is sent back to the village. The school does not have sufficient number of stools; many boys have to sit on the floor. The teacher is semi-educated as he had failed the secondary school examination. In fact, he did not want to be a teacher. His ambition was to be a meter reader at the electric utility as the work has vast scope for manipulation and ill-gotten money. The boy You as an adolescent falls in love with a pretty girl though not a diva by the general standard. He has

joined a shop as a delivery boy who delivers pirated DVDs to customer's houses. The pretty girl's father is a notorious drunk and gambler who sends out his wife and daughter to earn. The daughter is an assistant in a beauty saloon. She usually meets the boy while returning from work. She asks him for a DVD and the boy steals one for her. More DVDs follow strengthening the bond between the two.

The pretty girl becomes the mistress of a marketing manager and enjoys life with him for sometime. Then she decides to leave her neighbourhood and enter the world of fashion as a model. Before leaving she calls You and seals her bond of love with sexual intercourse. So far the novel lists three tips to become rich— move to the city, get an education and don't fall in love. However, love doesn't come in the way to achieving their goal rather it works as a consolidating factor. The next tip is to avoid being an idealist. It is common knowledge that ideals and principles are philosophical concepts and very often at odds with the way of the world. An idealist is not likely to please the Mammon. He should rather adopt the principle of convenience to become rich or mightily

At the University You joins an organisation which sells power. It has the guts to get things done by hook or by crook. It provides accommodation and a monthly cash stipend to You. The master of the organisation is a second hand car dealer. You becomes his employee and in a short time learns the tricks of the trade. One day he attends a posh private club with an ex-school mate. There he meets the pretty girl he had spotted a few days earlier driving a small car. By now she is a person of some substance in the modelling industry and earns enough to afford an apartment of her own.

She is quick to notice You and start a conversation. You proposes to the pretty girl who doesn't say no. Both of them nurse in their hearts tender affection for each other.

You's mother dies of cancer and after recurring bouts of angina the father dies, too. You starts his own business, the bottled water trade which has a good potential. "The city's neglected pipes are cracking, the contents of underground water mains and sewers mingling, with the result that taps in locales rich and poor alike disgorge liquids that, while for the most part clear and often odourless, reliably contain trace levels of feces and microorganisms capable of causing diarrhoea, hepatitis, dysentery and typhoid." (99) The poor consume such water incurring risk to their well being while the well off have switched to bottled water. Hamid regards this as the ultimate symbol of development in rising Asia. The fact remains that the rising middle class in rising Asia has to make a virtue of necessity by opting for bottled drinking water. It certainly does not apply to villagers but most of the city folk can't do without it. You's water bottling plant is installed and a technician is engaged who, in fact, is a bicycle mechanic and his clansman like his runner.

One night the pretty girl rings up to invite You to a hotel. He buys very expensive jeans and nylon jacket for the rendezvous. The hotel is the meeting place for politicians, diplomats and business people. The admission is strictly restricted as it is said that in this hotel foreign women swim publicly in near nakedness and chic bars serve imported alcohol. The pretty girl, a filthy rich model appears and welcomes you with a kiss. Then they eat, chat and drink alcohol.

She takes him to her room and they enjoy sex. The pretty girl feels shaky about her future with her advancing age and decending glamour. She is thinking of joining TV as an anchor. The very idea of binding herself permanently to a man repels her.

The delivery truck of You is attacked and set on fire by the men of his rival in the bottled water business. And more, in the evening a motor-cycle-borne young man flashes a pistol and places the muzzle against his neck and threatens him to shut down his business. The rival is a wealthy businessman with enough political connections to demoralise him. You has already married his accountant's daughter, little less than half his age. She is a real beauty who well bargained her marriage agreement. She attached two conditions, first, that she be allowed to complete her law course and second that she not be tasked with producing any children while studying. Thus, she imposed her authority and declared her superiority to her husband. The news of his marriage initially surprised the pretty girl but she rationalised it and buckled down to work as a TV anchor presenting cooking recipes and new cuisine. Now, she lives alone in an elegant bungalow.

This attitude of the pretty girl smacks of her rational approach to love, love as just infatuation and shipboard romance. It is a love of convenience and not an enduring union of two hearts. The pretty girl takes the shock and frustration in her usual stride and messages You back wishing him happiness. She has her wits about her and minds her future course of life rather than ruminating on her lost love. By implication it seems to be the outcome of the novelists's advice not to fall in love to become filthy rich. But a close

scrutiny shows that the pretty girl's rise from rags to riches is not hampered by loving this young boy You. Likewise, You, too doesn't find love an obstacle in his way to gaining fortune. The writer's advice obviously falls flat. This is perhaps because their love is light-hearted and superficial having no commitment and devotion.

After the gunman's warning 'You goes to see the self-appointed local area commander who agrees to protect him from his rival on certain considerations like getting money, being a community man, a professed crusader for the under dog and finally not liking You's rival as he belongs to a different sect. He sends You a security guard with arms to stay with him round the clock. It is good for security reasons though it does intrude into his privacy.

Very soon You sees a truck with a gunman striding towards him menacingly. He alerts his guard who instantly shoots thrice and the gunman falls. The guard fires several rounds to confirm the death. The photo of the slain gunman is sent to the rival businessman and a cessation of his threats against You is agreed upon. You feels much relieved and his business prospers. However, the memory of the pretty girl persists causing in him indifference to his wife. And naturally his wife's love is seen slipping from his grasp.

The next tip is to befriend a bureaucrat for success in business and trade. Harnessing the state's might for personal gain is a thoroughly sensible approach. Bureaucrats and bankers are the two indispensable agents in this enterprise. One can overcome denied permits, failed inspections, meter miscalculations, audit orders by greasing the palm of some bureaucrat. Bribe works as nothing else does. The bureaucrat is

the main link in the chain of corrupt hierarchy. Having been pampered the bureaucrat favourably directs one to his political boss for final approval and the deal is done. Here the writer meticulously figures out the whole bribing apparatus operating in rising Asia mainly in the post-colonial parts. Needless to say the writer wants the reader to reason himself; no prompting needed.

You gets the municipal vendor's license to manufacture and sell bottled water. He engages his wife's brother in the business. Already his wife's father is working with him as his accountant. In fact, You had to marry his accountant's daughter under obligation. You visits the premier housing societies owned by wealthy MPs, who in his opinion are a subcategory of thief. A retired brigadier in-charge of such a posh housing society talks of installing a water subsidiary and needs a local partner. You wants to grab the opportunity. Elated he says, "We're thrilled to have a chance." (164) And a proposal is initiated then and there.

The business expands on borrowed funds. Then comes recession knocking on the door. You's wife's brother who is his deputy eggs him on to take on more debt. He fears that in two years, there won't be even a dozen water firms operating in this city and they won't be one of them. Still, You is not in favour of more borrowing but he agrees at last. The fact of the matter is that You's deputy has secretly skimmed enough funds from his firm over the last two decades. The deputy hopes to get sizable kickback if You buys another company which happens by pledging all his existing property; even his personal residence is pledged as collateral.

But fate is brewing against You. He has coronary artery disease compounded by a second heart attack in the ICU. A world famous expert operates on him, his ex-wife visits him and bears the cost of his medical treatment. You has become a bankrupt. However, he obtains a bail and moves to a modest hotel. His deputy has absconded. The chapter Dance with Debt ends as the pretty girl's assistant is attacked by a robber and the dies in a hospital. However, this is by no means a tip to become rich rather a dance with debt finally boils down to bankruptcy in the case of You and even the pretty girl is cut to size.

After the setback to the major characters like You, the pretty girl and her assistant the novelist takes a break and ruminates. He wants to confess "to certain false pretenses, to certain subterfuges that may have been perpetrated here, certain of-hands that may have been um sleighted." (201) However, he wants at this stage to maintain his innocence or at least the non-justiciability of the guilt in his prescriptions. Despite loss of wealth to You there remains the narrator's audacity to claim that his advice is unaffected, a tongue-in-check indeed ! From giving tips to become filthy rich, he is now advising how to cut costs. And there again he advises nothing ingeniously new. Every Ram, Shyam and Mohan knows it- live a simple life by cutting your coat according to your cloth.

At a pharmacy You comes across the pretty girl and the ex-lovers' intimacy renews itself. Since then they meet frequently at coffee shops, restaurants and parks. They both share each other's diminished glow and enveloping loneliness crying for togetherness. And one night after movie in a theatre the pretty girl invites You over to her place. They have a drink and copulate

though the encounter is feeble. Neither of them reaches the finish but emotionally it is warm, cosy, pleasurable and fulfilling. They have a hearty laugh of love.

The last section is titled *Have an exit strategy* but in fact, the main characters have to compromise with the situation rather than choosing their own course. Options they have none. So, You goes to live with the pretty girl in her flat who cares for him and herself. You's son visits him and tells about his mother, the ex-wife of You. The old and sick pretty girl dies of cancer and You follows her soon thereafter. Before dying he has a vision of the pretty girl holding his hand. The novel ends in death, happy death as the hero dies in blissful vision of his beloved and has a sense of satisfaction to have loved his parents, brother, sister, son and his ex-wife.

Well, then, is this a romantic novel ? Is this a help book ? First, I would like to consider it as a help-book since the very title is *How to become Filthy Rich in rising Asia*. The title consists of certain epithets like filthy, rich and rising Asia. A close examination shows that none of the main characters becomes filthy rich by following the narrator's tips or otherwise. The hero comes from a poor family, goes to a city, becomes a DVD delivery boy, gets educated, joins an influential organisation, sells second-hand cars and finally starts a bottled water enterprise. He has to face a rival and seek settlement at some cost. He has money enough but he has to take loans to expand his business. Then there is recession and his deputy manager appropriates the company funds. You loses his business and runs away a poor, impoverished man. He is never seen luxuriating in money. In short, he does not become

ever filthy rich. Again, the narrator's dos and donts are not wholly pragmatic nor foolproof. For instance, his advice "Don't fall in love" proves ineffective. You loves the pretty girl but she never comes in his way to success rather her love consoles and sustains him in times of adversity. Some other tips like going to a city, getting education, working for self, shunning idealism, learning from a successful master etc. are common knowledge. A better tip would have been to have a big ambition for riches. In the novel the hero does not dream of being filthy rich. Whatever he does is just to pull on in life. No doubt, his success as an used car seller propels him to go for bottled water enterprise where he meets his waterloo. The narrator's advice to dance with debt is fairly ambiguous. Does it not suggest to make merry and shine in borrowed feathers ? That reminds me of what Charwak had said, ".....rinam kritwa ghritam piwet" (enjoy life on loans). Here the hero has no such luck. Loans become a big liability and all his assets are confiscated. In fact, he falls a victim to circumstances and his kinsman's fraud.

Moreover, the novelist's tips to become filthy rich in rising Asia leave me asking myself- are such tips Asia-centric ? Do they not apply to other peoples ? To my mind, there can be possibly two things- either he is joking or he has no idea how people in other countries make money. It's a fact that being filthy rich demands one to be self-centred and exploitative. Idealists are fated to fail. Scamsters, no doubt, amass a lot of wealth, the crooked Swiss bankers, for instance. The Gandhis are destined to don the loin cloth. No doubt, Asia is rising as a big economy and poses a front if not a challenge to the developed economies at large. It is no longer an area of darkness mired in poverty, filth and illiteracy. From space

technology it has nuclear capability. India's Mars mission is a case in point.

The novel claims that the bottled drinking water is the ultimate symbol of the modern South Asian city which is miles away from the truth. The fact is that more than the bottled water a modern city in South Asia sports the mobile phone and the TV. The cellphone has proliferated every nook and cranny, every town and village atleast in India, I can affirm. But even such a city today has around forty percent people living below the poverty line. They can hardly afford the bottled water except only when they are on bus or train journey. A man like our novelist sitting in a cosy corner of his AC chamber can imagine or entertain the vision of such a city. I frankly have in mind a city like Delhi, Lahore being no different where bottled drinking water is a compulsion commodity and not a development symbol. It is, in reality, a sad reflection on the city administration not being able to supply safe drinking water to its inhabitants. The novel itself hardly refers to any such habit of the city folk using bottled water as a normal course. Wine bottles are there, even the smuggled ones but not a single water bottle in sight.

Another aspect of the novel is the story of romance between You and the pretty girl. The pretty girl is an assistant in a saloon, where she carries towels, handles chemicals, brings tea, sweeps hair off the floor, and massages heads, backs, buttocks, thighs, and feet of women of all ages who are either wealthy or wish to appear wealthy. While coming back from work she usually meets You as her shift ends when You's shift starts. They become friends. You gives her stolen DVDs and she enjoys them. Later, the pretty girl leaves the

place but before leaving she consummates her love with sex. Once again after a long time they meet in a party and their love is renewed. The girl has become a model and pretty rich. But there is no explicit sign of the girl's sustained love and yearning for You but on chance meeting the surely has sex with You. After You has lost his business and family he is reunited with the pretty girl and the two old and helpless souls come together to spend the rest of their life. Theirs is the love of convenience and not a burning passion. Never do they seek each other; only the chance does. However, such a situational romance matures into spiritual togetherness and unity. Their love blooms late. They are blessed in death. Thus, they deserve more pity than admiration.

The novel has other remarkable facets, the most striking being the innovative format. Throughout the story there is not one named character. The narrator is nameless, so are the characters. The nameless narrator relates the story to the nameless second person protagonist. The other main character has also been presented as the pretty girl without a personal name. It appears that the narrator is just a commentator relaying the spot action and events. However, this namelessness is neither a help nor hindrance in the movement of the story. Though it leaves little room for interaction between the characters and their innermost feelings and impressions.

But it offers an optical, photographic image of things, persons and their modes of behaviour in the present scenario. And thus the novel is the picture of a city in Asia rising and developing and increasing the gulf between the rich and the poor. The poor struggling

for existence and the crooks in league with the bureaucrats are calling the shots. The novel is also a satire on the manners and morals of all sections of people- inefficient teachers, corrupt meter readers, tax collectors, bureaucrats and politicians, expired goods sellers, impersonators in examinations, insensitive rich men, incompatible marriages and cheats etc. The city is described as "a wealthy nucleus surrounded by an ooze of slums." (20) Without making bones the narrator calls wealthy civilians a sub category of thief. His heart goes out for the poor suffering humanity. In a way he cautions the greedy guys who want to become filthy rich overnight by any means that avarice does not pay in the long run. The story of *You* reads like a parable whose story is virtually a story of loss- loss of family, loss of wife, wealth, health and happiness. The mad rush for money lands one in ultimate loss. Money is evanescent but love sustains.

The present novel, so far, is the latest work of Mohsin Hamid and is supposed to be the most mature and refined of all the three. However, the novel belies our expectations as regards the theme and purpose. The first novel decidedly is concerned about the present day youth addicted to drugs. They are the moth lured by the tantalising smoke of brown sugar and other narcotics. The second novel, too is a purposeful indictment of the West, particularly the U.S. for their prejudice against the Asians as being inferior and a threat to them. The present novel in a help book format is at most a realistic novel with hardly any helpful message. The beauty of the story is that it is simple and common, one of those we usually see about us. The telling is laboriously made unusual for the sake of novelty and freshness, a slight variation from the

mode adopted in the previous novels.

Hamid's sense of humour and irony adds flavour to the tragic tale of the hero. Some flashes of humour are quite remarkable, for instance, "a moment adored by mosquitoes" (145), a gurgling fart during a passionate embrace" (154), "scented with marijuana" etc. And a tongue in cheek in in the race between death and destitution, you can look forward to the former emerging victorious". (202) Regarding his language I think, one word would be sufficient enough to say, his English is English, local imprint washed out with a dash of dettol or phenol.

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James Goonawardene's *One Mad Bid For Freedom : An Evaluation*

Chhote Lal Khatri

"Freedom alone constitutes sentient life." – Swami Vivekananda

Saints and seers of all sects have been in seclusion from the humbug of worldly life in their quest for freedom - freedom from the agonies of life, from the cycle of life and death. But once they are dead they are dragged into the humbug of crowd again by their so called disciples, friends and followers to build an elegant edifice of their ambitions and aspirations, perhaps even to meet their worldly desires of popularity and prosperity. And more often they quarrel over their rights on their Gurus much against the will of these saint's souls. Sometimes these elements of our society invest sainthood on an abnormal man after his death taking his abnormality for a sign of sainthood if it meets their end. This process of mystification, of legend-making and how it operates for ulterior motives with sham, hypocrisy, rivalry, intrigues is well reflected by James Goonewardene in his fifth novel, *One Mad Bid For Freedom*.

Korala, the hero of the novel, is in the centre of the discussion; and all actions revolve round him even after his death. He is an abnormal, eccentric primitive naturalist whose knowledge of the lives of the sea and commitment to their study were greater than any professional biologist. His knowledge was more practical than theoretical. He was a more serious and devoted researcher of marine lives than his committed biologist friend Van Hulft. "Though Van Hulft was conspicuous for this dislike of human beings, he holds Korala in a singular respect "...Korala had a vast knowledge of tropical marine life.... it was not bookish. It was knowledge that had come from a long and

intimate contact with the creatures he studied..... Van Hulft in the end, had to acknowledge that Korala was a good scientist, untutored though he was." (pp. 8-9)

Though Korala did not belong to a fisher's family, he was interested in 'tropical fish' from his childhood and started with a couple of fish tanks' with a few tropical fish in them. This interest developed in a business of fish and then of snakes. He dived deep into the sea to collect fish and thus metamorphosed himself into a fisher of the fishers.

The profit in the export of snakes is compared with huge money in being 'a political stooge or a crooked policeman, crooked lawyer or a crooked doctor.' (p. 13) Snakes being a symbol of danger and poison and the allusion of its business with pious services of these professionals throw an effective sarcastic remark on the prevalent practices in the society. It also implies that the crooked practices involve as much risk as the trappings and exporting of snakes do. But the crooked ones are there in the business, too, and they (his partners) bring bearish trend in the business. He turns bankrupt and his partners turn into 'human sharks'. In a desperate bid to free himself from their clutch he takes 'nomadic journeys' and finally settles at a forlorn beach in the southern tip of the island which is still free from man's destruction. Another aspect of this tribulation is that it enriches his knowledge of marine lives, of rocks and stones and of human stupidities. He comes to learn "new types of shells, molluscs, crustaceans and never-before-seen fish, rock fish...." (p. 14). Above all, this gives him a drive for "..... studying each new species of plant life....., diving into sea.... for new forms of marine life, pondering on the wild plants and hoping that these coasts would continue to stay safe and free from man's misuse and plunder." (p. 15)

Men in this novel are visualised as 'human sharks', as polluter and exploiter in the modern form and as savior and friend of Nature in the primitive form which Korala represents. Korala ransacks animal kingdom to designate man's nature, "I want all this to disappear so the slippery, slimy toads and fleas and bugs don't go crawling all over them leaving their soggy, pasty deposits behind, fouling my hard work," (16). He doesn't want to get his notes and observations into order and leave behind him.

Ecological concern is also felt in the novel and it is for this that Van Hulft and Korala come to detest human beings and seek release from their company. The sea liberated him from being with other humans : "Humans had made a mess of the earth they had inherited" (p. 8). They came to believe that the greater they (human beings) acquire education the greater is the danger on human species. The reason for their flight into sea lies in its being uninhabited by men :

No people inhabited the sea - that was what good about it no half-baked scholars and university professors could live in the sea - wasn't that great?" (p. 86)

The sea is used as a symbol of the primitive stage and a source of freedom and the expanse of knowledge. The whole enterprise of Van Hulft and Korala for freedom can be termed as "Romantic escapism" in our literary jargon. It is an escape from the world of reality to the world of the primitive in a mystic anticipation of involution : "Evolution is taking its full circle.... the earth to its original state..... there only be the sea..... and terra firma....." (p. 17). However, the objectives of Korala and Hulft in the indepth research in the marine life are different. The former is doing all this for his own "secret, sinister pleasure in the tradition of *Swantah Sukhaya* while the latter for a Ph.D. degree from a foreign university and for the benefit of the

people. Korala's attitude can be interpreted in a different way, too. Behind the apparent layer of despair and pessimism, somewhere there is a lurking hope of regeneration that keeps him going in his research and teaching. Korala leads a life a hardship in his secluded shack along with some tramps towards the end of his life.

One day after a brief illness Korala dies. With the death of Korala begins the unconscious process of mythification. The poor tramps feel his presence even after his death : "They continued to feel him around them. They thought they heard his voice, his laughter" (p. 1) and believe that "you can't keep a man like him buried for ever" (p. 2). Korala is invested with divine power he was capable of anything. He would return just to plague his friends and relatives who have stolen everything from his shack. They recall and conjure up their experiences with him to show how exceptional he was. Another step in that direction is to declare his sack "a haunted shack" and his speech as one of a prophet. The third person omniscient narrator traces the development of mythification in these terms :

They had lived in fear and awe of him when he was alive..... A man like him could not cease to exist; he could not just pass into air and become nothing.... This is how the legend grew and the search for the truth about Korala was begun; but that was much later, after the tramps were long gone from the shack.... (p. 2).

The news of Korala's death spread like fire and his friends Gihan, Cally, Conny and others who were looking for short-cuts after deserting Korala assembled there in utter confusion and helplessness. Their condition is compared to stranded dolphins :

They could not believe such a man as Korala could be lying there in such a helpless condition. Physical

distress and ailments of the body, they thought, occurred only to people like themselves. Korala was immortal..... he could turn into an *arahat* or a spirit and disappear, but not die. (89)

The simple death is interpreted in metaphysical terms like Nirwan, Samadhi, Moksha, and in Sinhala 'turning into an arahat'. Such euphemism aims at glorifying death and putting the departed soul on a higher pedestal, and investing him with super-human stature. Korala's unconventional manner and charisma are felt more keenly and reverentially after his death and soon he becomes a messiah to people who have drifted out of the mainstream of society-drunks, dropouts, fishermen, savants, out-laws. After a long deliberation they decide to rebuild has shack and christen it as "The Korala Marine Research Station" under the leadership of Conny. Their ineffectual efforts to build the memorial and ups and downs in this process, attack on the memorial, and their flight constitute the core of this hilarious novel. But it is not simply hilarious. Deep rooted in it is their awareness of the Western design to drive away "the islanders from the island". At the same time it also reflects islanders' fears and misgivings about the modern science and technology. Conny recalls how Korala's tirade was against ignorance being perpetuated by the colonizers among the islanders when they politicalised the language issue :

They promised a twenty-four hour shift of the power-center from English to Sinhala. They promised a return to the language of the people....., and that poor bastard, the common man was still being sold down the river three generation later" (p. 4).

It shows the novelist's deep insight into and clear understanding of the social problems the country is facing and the alien rulers' design to sow seeds of separatism in the name of language. Unfortunately it

kept Srilanka haunting even after independence and chasm between the Sinhala, the Tamils and the Burghers kept widening and fueled the Sinhala's feeling of being beleaguered minority despite their numerical strength and supplanted religion as a divisive factor. The proposed Research Station was Conny's endeavour to continue Korala's fight against ignorance. He is constantly reminded of Korala's words : "You want to stay free, then stay with the truth..... An ignorant people are a shackled people" (p. 32).

Turab, Cally, Kadalay, Peiris and some others pledged their devotion to Korala in mournful numbers and then forgot about it. This ritualistic pledge is laughed at with the help of animal imagery :

They made their vows of dedication, lifted their heads, wagged their tails and they went. What a sight it was to see those faithfully tails wagging bravely like the flags of the nations....." (p. 39).

It invokes laughter but invites serious scrutiny of unpredictable human behaviour. In this third chapter of the novel Korala is recalled lashing out at his so-called students and followers ruthlessly for their mimicry. Korala's awakening to the truth about his students and followers is given a legendary status by comparing it to the revelation attained by Ramakrishna, Lao Tse, St. Paul and others. This band of ridiculous mimics makes him flee into self-exile for his freedom and laugh at such terms like 'common bonds' 'honest seekers after truth', 'fighters for freedom'. But they soon trap him, compel him to be with him and when he is back they sell his notes, works, his new discoveries to Mardana, the bookseller, who sells them as an original of 'a seedy old professor' and all of them share the booty.

We are shown how mean mammal phylum-man can be. When Conny fails in his plan another gang of

his old friends takes over the charge of resurrecting his shack but for their own sinister purposes :

There was Demos, sunk in secret world of schemes for luring his unsuspecting cronies into the traps..... Vanigay, dreaming of the dishes and delicacies he would concoct.... and Peter..... cavernous depths of the seas he was so fond of probing for that giant predator he would love to see wriggling at the end his spear gun.... (p 43).

This unpredictable betrayal by the close confidants of Korala is anticipated in his almost misanthropic attitude in which he refers to Erich From who opines that 'Only man kills in lust; only man has descended into being killer that kills creatures of its own species.... (p-44). These friends of Korala from time to time assemble at the shack to pledge their loyalty to him and to drink to Korala's memory. And what they do after getting tipsy reminds us of the scene in Tolstoy's 'The Imp and the Peasant's Bread' in which the drunk peasants behave like foxes, wolves and pigs.

We come to know through flash-backs that Korala in his self-exile, is declared mad by the two reporters in the two newspapers. The report of his madness makes his friends abandon him which Korala has been longing for "Korala was at peace, at last, and his only friends were the fishermen, and the fallen men and women he found cast aside on the margins of civilized life." (p. 75) He lives there till the end. However, this news-reporting episode serves a dual purpose : one as an aid to the development of the story and another to lambast the yellow, spicy journalism to bring quick success : "The two apes... were summoned... The ape from the Ceylon Watchman was promoted to the post of chief sub-editor." (p. 71)

Despite preliminary set-backs and concerted resistance of his friends and enemies. Conny pursues his project of Research station with a missionary zeal

and the shack rises out of the debris. As the work progresses, the opposition of the idea grows, too. Enemies of Korala infiltrate the original group to take hold of the situation so that they can wash away the impact of Korala on the imagination of the people. The internal bickering is already there. But the faithful few take heart by reminding themselves of Korala's words: "The moment any one took up the cause of some important truth.... it produced hostile forces and destructive elements..... Yet if these forces had not existed there, then, could not be any meaning in man's struggle for freedom....." (p. 90).

In wilderness of imagination they fancy the memorial to be Kuje a cathedral, the Statue of Liberty, the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids. Their dream faces several violent attacks. Their dream was shattered once for all in a violent assault made by the Tamil militants one evening when they were fast asleep under a heavy dose of arracks. It was reportedly done in defense of "a homeland for the Tamils of Srilanka". And in this way the novelist makes room to scorn the Tamils movement equating them with "the Hun and the Nazi extermination squads" who opted "an orgy of killing for the glory of all homelands, motherlands and fatherlands". (P. 95)

But the most deadly blow was given to 'the gang of Korala' by the militants of the Bhasha Peramuna and the National Poets' Society. The Bhasha Peramuna held the time-honoured belief that the Srilankans were the descendants of a lion race against the new found 'Ape Theory' propagated by Korala. Both these societies took it as blasphemous for the purity of blood, race and heritage of the Srilankan people' (117) and felt it necessary to nip it in the bud. Ice Mudal Li Amaray of Bhasha Peramuna and Chitrananda of Poets' Society with his henchmen infiltrate in the meeting organised by Conny and his men and attack them with bombs,

knives, *Kathis* and kill three stalwarts: Hurricane Harindra, Kadaly Peiris, and Gihan. While others fled away. On the other hand Van Hulft preferred the destruction of the shack to letting it go in the hands of enemies like Mikhail, the then head of the shack, who had planned to eliminate the supporters of Korala from the shack. At the same time some of his supporters under the leadership of Cally were busy with the idea of procuring liquor license in the memory of Korala.

After a few days normalcy returns in the island; and Conny, Gallay, Van Hulft and other stalwarts assemble near the ruins of the shack. Conny draws parallel between this assembly and that of the disciples of Jesus after his crucifixion. They pay homage to the dead, recall the past and talk on both funny and serious matters : Conny's and Hulft's explanation for Buddhist monks flight to Ratigala. For Coony they fled to escape "the gory lethal suicidal wars going on among the folk", and funnier still is Van's explanation: "These monks fled to this mountain to escape the Dutch. When my ancestors, the Dutch, arrived, the people fled like rabbits." (p. 139)

Nevertheless their assembly and inconclusive talk hint at the continuation of their bond and the quest for the eternal truth and freedom. This slim novel, *One Mad Bid For Freedom*, ends with a pertinent question that gives meaning to the past struggle and a new direction to future studies in sociology and History.

Who was it who lived up in the mountain of Ritigala and passed on by word of mouth and by example the eternal truths they discovered... and died as silently as they lived ?" (. 139)

Korala rightly calls upon the people to discover the truths about them and "discover the truths about this island....." (p. 138).

This is true about every nation. It reminds me of Vivekananda who once declared such silent meditators in the recesses of the mountains as the first rank saints of the world.

One Mad Bid For Freedom is the saga of ineffectual struggles to build, Korala Memorial Research Station to immortalize a modern sage - Korala and his work so that they acquire legendary proportion. The story involves "assaults on its defenders, their state of confusion, the stalemates, sudden acts of aggression.... acts of madness, the advances, the retreats, and the final rout...." (p. 89)

The novelist casts this story in the contemporary mould of his country to expose, ridicule and laugh at the ills and odds of Sri Lankan society. He addresses himself to almost all burning issues in the country with a sense of humour and an insight into the problems.

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A Golden Age From Gestation to Delivery of Bangladesh

Dr. Brajesh Prasad

Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* is her first novel and a first major Bangladeshi novel about the travails the new nation has to undergo until its delivery. It covers the nine months' period from March 1971 to 16 December 1971. It is a chronicle of pre-independence Bangladesh, the story of people's thwarted aspirations, political subjugation, economic exploitation and cultural asphyxia. The people of East Pakistan are disillusioned as the religious tie is too weak to hold together incompatible linguistic and cultural divergences. In just two decades of its separation from India the eastern wing has seen untold tyrannical oppression and injustice. Even after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League has won the election, General Zia is not ready to hand over power to them. Naturally people, particularly the youth have risen against the discrimination of West Pakistan and are demanding a separate Bangladesh.

The novel revolves round the heroine Rehana, her son Sohail, daughter Maya and their freedom fighter group- Joy, Aref and Partho. When Mr. Sengupta asks Sohail he says. "It's been two months since Mujib won the election. They should have convened the national assembly by now and made him Prime Minister, but they keep delaying. Some of the students are urging Mujib to take more drastic action." (p. 28) Regarding exploitation he says further. "....West Pakistan is bleeding us out. We earn most of the foreign exchange. We grow the rice, we make the jute, and yet we get nothing- no schools, no hospitals, no army. We can't even speak our own, bloody language..... What we have

is an emergency. There is no possibility of reconciliation now. Mujib should have declared independence." (p. 29)

The general impression is that East Pakistan has been given a step-motherly treatment by the government. Students at the Dhaka University are up against this ill-treatment and are protesting vehemently. Even Rehana sees no sense 'having a country in two halves, poised on either side of India like a pair of two horns. She ruminates,

Ever since '48 the Pakistani authorities had ruled eastern wing of the country like a colony. First they tried to force everyone to speak Urdu instead of Bengali. They took the jute money from Bengal and spent it on factories in Karachi and Islamabad. One general after another made promises they had no intention of keeping. (p. 33)

Almost every day they take out procession the roads and shout slogans like 'Joy Bangla ! ' Death to Pakistan', 'Death to dictatorship !' (p. 42) Strikes and Martial law are the order of the day. It is for this reason that when Rehana's husband dies, Faiz wants to take her children away to Lahore for safety. Police atrocities are increasing day by day. Indiscriminate killing of women and children has created an aura of fear and uncertainty. Unmarried girls in particular are not safe. In such a situation Mrs. Chowdhury wants to marry her daughter Silvi then and there to Lieutenant Sabeer.

Curfew has become more frequent. People hear the rat-tat-tat of the machineguns and shrink away from the streets. On trucks the army through megaphone threatens,

'Bengalis take down your flags. Take down your flags. Take down your flags. Flag-bearing is illegal. You

will be arrested. Take down your flags, you bastard traitors. (P. 61)

However, the protestors, the freedom fighters are undaunted. They have joined Mukti Vahini and are consolidating their positions in every town and locality. And one day on their secret Bangladesh radio the announcement sounds,

I, Major Zia, provisional Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army, hereby proclaim on behalf of our great national leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the independence of Bangladesh. I also declare we have already formed a sovereign, legal government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I appeal to all nations to mobilize public opinion in their respective countries against the brutal genocide in Bangladesh. (P. 65)

Wild rumours circulated in the quiet. The army had dug a mass grave to hide the bodies. There was a warehouse somewhere on the outskirts of town where they tortured the prisoners. The animals in Mirpur Zoo, even the Bengal Tiger, had all died of fright. But no one seemed to know anything for sure. In the situation the butchers, the tailors, the milkmen, the rickshaw pullers, the boys who painted cinema actresses on the back flaps of rickshaws and even the young boys who made tea in rusting kettles on pavements- all left silently, sneaking out of the city with bundles on their shoulders, children cradled against their backs. (p. 70)

Mrs. Akram had become so hysterical, screaming about Kayamat, the end of the world that they had to tie her to the bed posts. The newspapers were mostly blank because of censorship. Giant banner advertisements for Tibet soap and Brylcream framed empty spaces. However, the movement went on. And

one day they heard there's a resistance across the border. All the Bengali regiments have mutinied. (p. 79)

The movement is gaining momentum day by day with more and more people joining the Mukti. Aref, Joy and Partho irrespective of religious considerations have reinforced the freedom struggle. Even college girl students have jumped into the fray. The Dhaka University is the epicentre of the struggle. Maya is determined to fight for her country like her brother Sohail. Even her mother Rehana after initial hesitation allows her house Shona to be used by the freedom fighters. They dump explosives and rifles digging the earth beside the rose bushes. Very soon Shona becomes the headquarters of guerilla operations. Sohail's friends are engaged in destroying communication links and power installations to obstruct the Pakistani army from looting and killing civilians. It is learnt that Sharmeen was gangraped and later killed by soldiers of Tikka Khan.

People are leaving their homes and crossing the border into India. Free Bangla Radio reports,

The number of refugees flowing into West Bengal has reached one million. The International Red Cross has stated that the refugee camps along the border between India and Bangladesh are overcrowded and suffer from a lack of clean water, sanitation and proper medical facilities. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has pledged her support for the people of Bangladesh stating that the freedom loving Bengalis would soon triumph over the fascistic regime of the Pakistani dictators. (pp. 98-99)

Maya has volunteered to serve in the Refugee Camp at Calcutta. She is in charge of a group of refugees and works day and night unmindful of her own comforts. She stays in a dingy hovel in a slum

area. When her mother visits her she is overcome to see her condition in that hovel. But the Refugee Camp has a sobering effect on her and reinforces her nationalism. She offers to sew mattresses and blankets out of old clothes for the refugees. She calls Mrs. Rahman and Mrs. Akram to co-operate in sewing Kathas for the refugees. Rehana also makes pickles for the war effort. Later she joins her daughter and helps the refugees. When she is suggested to go to Lahore and live comfortably with her husband's brother Faiz, she declines. She is determined to live and die for her own country. Dr. Rajesh calls her 'a true nationalist.' (p. 142)

The Pakistani army had let loose a reign of terror. Throughout June Tikka Khan's soldiers made their way across the summer plains of Bangladesh. They looted homes, burned roofs. They raped. They murdered. They lined up the men and shot them into ponds. They practised old and new forms of torture. They were explorers, pioneers of cruelty, every day outdoing their own brutality, every day feeling closer to divinity because they were told they were saving Pakistan and Islam, may be even the Almighty himself from the depravity of the Bengalis..... (p. 129)

The Bangalis resisted but their resistance was weak and sporadic. They just blew up a bridge here and had an army convoy ambush there or captured a railway station. But they had undaunted courage and determination. Despite Sabeer's torture and army atrocities, they fight with their back to the wall. Strangely enough, the Pakistani government does nothing to diffuse the crisis, perhaps because the time is over. The people have rejected the government in favour of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League. But the ruling leaders and bureaucrats still believe in

suppression and oppression to reign in the popular upsurge. They defend the army in the name of national defense. Barrister Faiz Haque believes, "The integrity of Pakistan is at stake.National integrity, religious integrity, this is what we are fighting for. We are the freedom fighters. (p. 179) But his brother's widow Rehana is all for the change over to a new regime of Golden Bangla. Towards the end of the novel we see Faiz with hands and feet cuffed. He begs Rehana to get him out of captivity. With folded hands he implores her, "One word from you and they would let me go" (p. 272) but Rehana doesn't forgive him.

The freedom struggle comprises Hindus and Muslims alike. In the novel we have dedicated freedom fighters like Partho, Senguptas, Dr. Rajesh, Dr. Rao along with their Muslim counterparts. Mrs. Supriya Sengupta helps and nurses the needy in the Refugee Camp. She has lost her husband and son Mithun in the freedom struggle. The fact is that a counter nationalism has emerged based on linguistic and cultural integrity. The much cherished our Golden Bengla is an epitome of public aspirations and a secular identity. Politics there is, no doubt, but mellowed with democratic norms. For obvious reasons India supports the freedom fighters and gives shelter to millions of refugees. BBC World Service rightly says, "....if Indira Gandhi intervenes, the war will surely be won for the people of Bangladesh." (p. 212)

The Pakistani army tortures Lieutenant Sabeer as he is suspected to be in support of Bangladesh. He is sent to jail where they beat him, break his ribs. They make him stare at the sun for hours, days. They burn cigarette holes on his back. They hang him upside down. They make him drink salt water till his lips crack. They tear out his finger nails. (p. 215) Sabeer

has been crippled. When Rehana some how gets his release, the man is unable to walk because of his broken ribs. He is carried like luggage on to a rickshaw. Mentally and emotionally, too, he is totally broken. He dies after a few days.

At long last the Pakistani army surrenders. With a sense of satisfaction Rehana recalls and addresses her dead husband,

The war will end today. Niazi will sign the treaty and I will walk into the streets. Your daughter will hold my hand. There will be a pressing crowd on the pavement but Maya will elbow us to the front. A boy will sell flags for two taka and everyone will wave and crane their necks to see the road. Coloured paper will sail from buildings, fists will wave in the air; there will be dancing, a man on a flute, a woman beating a dhol slung across her shoulder. (p. 274)

Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* is multi-dimensional. It reads like a historical novel, a romantic novel and a domestic tale. As a historical novel it has recreated the East Pakistan's struggle for freedom and an independent identity. The novel covers the time span from March 1971 to 16 December 1971– the crucial period of Bangladesh War of Independence. It recounts the gradual progress of the freedom movement, the involvement of students particularly of the Dhaka University. Even the housewives take part in processions and slogan shouting against Pakistan. However, the common man's participation could be given more space as are given the refugees on a mass scale. Some more names of persons and places could add to the historicity of the narrative. It is also remarkable to note that though all people in general are in favour of Mujib, there is no mention of Awami League at any point in the novel. This is probably because the novelist wants not to glorify any political

party. To her what matters is the cause and the man who champions it. Hence, Mujib occurs at places to show what people want of him. However, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman doesn't appear in person as Gandhi appears in R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* or as the great leaders address the public in Amir Ali's *Conflict*. Again, though there are references to Pakistani army's atrocities on Bangladesh, the novelist has refrained from particularising them and giving them the look of actuality. Even the commonly known killing of Dhaka University intellectuals has been quietly by passed. Similarly we find a sweeping reference that the Bengali regiments have mutinied, no more than that. Likewise, Rehana says, "This isn't war. It's genocide' (P. 79) and leaves it to the reader's imagination to elaborate. The genocide is not substantiated with actual details. Again, Faiz alleges that Hindus don't treat East Pakistan as their own country– They were never a part of Pakistan but the allegation is not corroborated.

A most remarkable point is that the novelist has neither bouquet nor brick bats for India which is apparently intriguing. At one point she accuses India rather Mujib getting fat on his paycheck from India. In fact, Pakistani authorities call India expansionist and imperialistic in its design. Even Sheikh Mujibur's contribution is not adequately acknowledged. There is no reference to Mujib's imprisonment in an unknown place and his final release. The novel ends saying that the war will end today. Thus, Tahmima Anam has maintained deliberate aloofness from any controversial or prejudicial details. Also, too much historical facts might have told upon fictional sobriety and delicateness. As a romantic tale, the novel has in its core the conjugal love of Rehana and Iqbal Haque

which sustains even after the husband's death. Whenever Rehana is faced with a crisis, she recalls him for moral support. Infact, the novel begins with a letter addressed to the late husband. The wife addresses him whenever she is confornted with a shaky situation. She also recalls him to share the joy on winning the war. On the eve of independence of Bangladesh she addresses her husband to give him the first news. Such a conjugal love survives and again and again consoles and sustains the wife. The husband's spiritual presence is Rehana's guide, friend and philosopher. Spiritually and emotionally she is always with him. This unbroken chain of love is the quintessence of romance, the final word.

Then there is the love of Sohail and Silvi. Sohail loves Silvi and wants to marry her, but his love remains unfulfilled and under the circumstances Silvi is married to Lieutenant Sabeer. However, Sohail rationalises it. The story hardly delves deep into the inner recesses of the lover's heart. Again, there is the love between Rehana and the unknown Major, some sort of a circumstantial love. The wounded Major takes shelter in Rehana's house where like fungus love grows out of care and nursing the Major. In her letter to her dead husband Rehana admits loving the Major. She writes, " and yes, I loved him. For the smallest fraction of those ninetysix days, I loved him." (p. 274) But it is fragile like fungus. When the Pakistani Major Jabeen comes to Rehana's house in search of Rehana's, son Sohail, Rehana points out to her newly-grown lover who is captured instead of Sohail. Rehana is not apologetic. She says, " I let them think they had Sohail. That is what I chose. To let that man pay my debt." (p. 274) The mother realised her debt.

Seen as a domestic tale, *A Golden Age* is the story

of Rehana, her daughter Maya, her son Sohail and his three friends. They are the King pin of the whole narrative. They fight for freedom, they recruit freedom fighters, plan strategies, store explosives in Rehana's Shona premises and finally help the refugees in Relief Camps. This is virtually the story of Rehana's family. As a mother she sacrifices her new found lover, the unknown Major.

A Golden Age is acclaimed as the definitive novel on the Bangladesh War of Independence. The very title suggests that the freedom struggle has dawned a new age, a golden age, Sonar Bangla for the people of Bangladesh. In Razia Khan's *Draupadi* Bangladesh War of Independence occurs but not so thoroughly and intensively. The novel focuses on harmonious relationship between Sohrab, Arif and Nayon belonging to different religions. They also join the freedom struggle leaving their jobs in London. *A Golden Age* has been written from the woman's point of view. It has the slow, smooth pace of a ghazal and the tenderness of a loving mother and wife.

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The Balladry of the Bhutanese Lo-zey : A Critique of the Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi

Seema Murugan

Introduction :

Karma Ura's *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi : A Wind Borne Feather* is a translation of perhaps the most popular Lo-zey- an orally transmitted ancient, historical tale of Bhutan. It deals with a specific period in the history of Bhutan, i.e. 1875 to 1877, when there were intermittent wars between groups of shifting alliances. In those days, districts were controlled by *Zongpons*. The *Zongpon* was usually assisted by three prominent staff- the *Nyerchen* (Steward or Store Master), the *Zimpon* (Chamberlain), and a *Donyere* (Guest Master or Chief of Protocol in the *Dzong* or the Fortress). Military support and alliances were made on the basis of promises. Sometimes these promises were not kept. And these created further conflict. Most of these skirmishes were focused on the struggle for positions and power regarding the occupation of fortresses. And some of them tended to be fatal for either one side or the other.

In one of these conflicts, Chamberlain Pemi Tshewang Tashi was the leader of an expedition. It is perhaps in 1875 or 1876 that *Zimpon* Pemi Tshewang Tashi was defeated and then chased by the army of Pem Tenzin of Jakar (a district in Bhutan). Most probably, he was only twentyseven at that time. He had no personal interest in the conflict and had gone to battle only out of obedience to his higher Lord Angdruk Nim, the *Zongpon* (Fort Governor) of the

fortress of Wangduephodrong (another district in Bhutan). Although the command of his Lord weighed heavily on his mind, Chamberlain Tshewang Tashi was able to produce one of the finest Lo-zey ever composed in *Dzongkha*, the national language of Bhutan. This type of verse is known in *Dzongkha* as the Lo-zey which can be literally translated as products of 'clear or intelligent mind'. But there is also the possibility that it could mean 'ornament of speech'. It all depends on how it is spelt in *Dzongkha*, though it is commonly spelt to mean the former, i.e. 'clear or intelligent mind.'

After he lost the Battle of Chanmanyik in Tongsa (1875 to 1877), Pemi Tshewang Tashi was hounded and pursued down the steep incline to the cantilever bridge that spans the banks of the Mangde River. This chase continued further up the narrow, winding mule track overhanging the well - known and dangerous precipice. The Chamberlain was chased by enemy forces until he came to a point in Thomangdrak, as in a blind alley, where his enemies trapped him completely. But even in death, the brave Pemi Tshewang Tashi would not give them the satisfaction of killing story line in *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi*.

In this heroic tale, Pemi Tshewang Tashi - the Chamberlain, recites how he had been ordered by his master to lead a detachment to attack his master's foe. Although his heart is not in the quarrel, he places his loyalty to Lord above everything else, not caring for his personal likes and dislikes. Actually, he sets off with a premonition of disaster. The Ballad describes how he reflects with a sense of nostalgia and extreme emotions on the persons and places he is leaving behind him. Despite all this, he urges on his exhausted

men to continue fighting with vigour and vitality. But, ultimately, he is cornered and trapped by the enemy forces at the formidable cliff of Thomangdrak. In the conclusion of the Ballad, he asserts the unity of his faith and honour as one. He leaps to his certain death, while earnestly praying for a quick rebirth in his native hamlet of Kashizam.

The Balladry :

In his now classic and seminal *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams has mentioned "a convenient, short definition" of the Ballad as "a song transmitted orally, which tells a story. In all probability, the original composition was done by a single author" (Abrams, 13). And further, that "A literary ballad is a narrative poem written by a learned poet in deliberate imitation of the form and spirit of the popular ballad" (Abrams, 14). In the light of the background provided in the *Introduction*, we may therefore take Pemi Tshewang Tashi, the Chamberlain, as the "single author" and the translator, Karma Ura, as the "learned poet" of the "literary Ballad". Mr. Ura, comments thus :

At the end of reading the ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi, however, the readers will wonder about its true authorship. It is difficult to answer the question as to when the lo-zey originated, although fragments of the lo-zey attributed to Tshewang Tashi still recited by older people encourages us to believe that Tshewang Tashi was its true author. Among the Bhutanese, the true authorship of the ballad and the para-normal process by which it came to exist have never been questioned. (Ura, 14)

Continuing to discuss classification and authorship, another seminal work would be J.A.

Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. It mentions that :

.....the folk or popular ballad and the literary ballad. The former is anonymous and is transmitted from singer to singer by word of mouth. It thus belongs to oral tradition. The folk ballad exists among literate or semi-literate peoples and is still a living tradition in northern Greece, parts of the central Balkans, and in Sicily. Faroese and Icelandic ballad makers continue to add to the corpus of traditional ballads. The latter kind of ballad is not anonymous and is written down by a poet as he composes it (Cuddon, 69).

Following this definition, it appears that *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* is a curious mix of both. But there is another way to look at it- the unique statuses which may be accorded to the ballad in question- it is at the same time both a folk ballad as well as a literary ballad. Further J.B. Trapp in his *Medieval English Literature* defines Ballads thus :

Ballads are short, anonymous, narrative poems, preserved by oral transmission and sung, often with accompaniment and dance, before gatherings of people.Their subject is usually tragic, death by accident or by treachery in love or war, often with supernatural accompaniments, being the most frequent (Trapp, 425).

It is obvious that Pemi Tshewang Tashi is the "tragic" subject being the protagonist of this ballad. But the first part of Trapp's definition seems to be almost echoed by the translator Mr. Karma Ura, when he speaks of the *Lozey* (as a form of the Bhutanese Ballad) thus :

Lozey are generally heard in villages of Western Bhutan During gatherings, men, women, and children, who may not be able to read or write, contest either individually or in group in repartee of lozey. It is an oral tradition of western Bhutan where Dzongkha was spoken even before

it became the national language. Each side has to respond to the other instantly with excerpts or an entire piece of lozey Witty variations are introduced to suit the circumstances (Ura, 13).

Therefore the lozey *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* is a special kind of Ballad. Karma Ura, the translator (presently the Director, Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu), opines thus :

Its richness and depth is surprising considering that he was only about twentyseven when he went on the expedition. It is the most well known and longest verse in Dzongkha. Most striking parts of it have become everyday quotes. Extracts of it have also appeared in Dzongkha textbooks for educational institutions in Bhutan (Ura, 13).

It would perhaps not be out of context to mention here the basic difference between the Ballad and the Lyric as literary forms. The ballad differs from the lyric in being descriptive rather than impressionistic. The focus is on the telling of the tale and not the expression of a mood. And, technically it is simpler, more primitive, less wrought upon than as an art form *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* is thus unique in its lyrical qualities as this is an important reason for its continued popularity.

Now, moving on to bring out the ballad features of the subject in discussion, Cuddon elaborates on the basic characteristics common to large numbers of ballads :

(a) the beginning is often abrupt; (b) the language is simple; (c) the story is told through dialogue and action; (d) the theme is often tragic (though there are a number of comic ballads); (e) there is often a refrain. To these features we may add; a ballad usually deals with a single episode; the

events leading to the crisis are related swiftly; there is minimal detail of surroundings; there is strong dramatic element; there is considerable intensity and immediacy in the narration; the narrator is impersonal, stock well -tried epithets are used in the oral tradition,there is frequently incremental repetition, the single line of action and the speed of the story preclude much attempt at delineation of character, imagery is sparse and simple (Cuddon, 68-69).

It is not a mere coincidence that almost all these are also the defining features of *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi*. And whatever is not is because it is the license of the author/translator. These are separately discussed in the last section, or rather the "Conclusion" of this paper. The language of this ballad is simple and the story is told through dialogue and action. The theme is tragic in that the protagonist dies in the end. The single episode which the ballad deals with is already elaborated in the "Introduction". To exemplify the very first point, the ballad begins abruptly :

Towards the rising sun, among the eastern villages,
The hamlet of the lady of Kashi :
Like golden scripture its upper reaches
Like silver dish, its lowest stretches.
In the middle, within something of a palace :
Brother of one, festooned with coral necklace
A husband and companion of Phurchung Zam,
A great father, father of daughter Lhaden Zam,
The trusted son of mother Sonam Pem,
I, the chamberlain Tshewang Tashi -
Upper lip like a lotus petal,
Lower lip like a coral flower :
Between in what is like a temple
The boneless tongue can turn well. (Ura, 17)

Technically too, the translator has displayed a masterful control of the meter and rhythm of this orally transmitted tale. A sample of this from the text is this section :

To Chokhornyik for night halt, even if it is early
To Chokhornyik for night halt, even if it is late,
To Chokhornyik for night halt, even if we are tired,
To Chokhornyik for night halt, even if we are flagged,
(Ura, 49)

Similarly, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* comments on the ballad thus :

Ballads are dramatic. We are not told about things happening : we are shown them happening. Every artistic resource of this genre is pointed toward giving an intensity and immediacy to the action and toward heightening the emotional impact of the climax. Protagonists are allowed to speak for themselves, which means, of course, that dialogue bulks large in ballads. At strategic moments, dialogue erupts into the narrative. Such speeches are sparingly tagged; we must frequently deduce the speaker from what is being said (Preminger, 62).

There are at least some important points where this particular ballad diverges from the set track and these aspects are discussed in detail in the concluding section of this paper - "Conclusion". But then, a very touching and emotional extract from *The Ballad* justifies the above quote. It occurs when the protagonist is taking leave from his Lord's fort and setting off on the expedition with premonitions that perhaps he would never return to his loved family and village :

From his most propitious day,
There is, in the fortress of Wangdi,
No chamberlain for Lord Angdruk Nim,
He who is high above

No ornament in the antechamber that is in between
No chief for those companions down below
No share of lords for Sha Nayul
No elder brother for Saniay Zam
No bushand for Phurchung Zam
No father for daughters and sons
No luck at all for myself, the valiant hero.

(Ura, 35/38)

Stylistically, the ballad is a unique genre of poetry. This is mainly because it is very much like a folk song. But unlike other literary genres, it is in the oral tradition and survives because of it. Consequently, it preserves traces of some archaic mode of pre-literature. The story or the narrative element is the most important thing in it. And subsequently, all other artistic possibilities are subordinated. The language is plain and formulaic. A small stock of epithets and adjectives serve for all ballads in any particular language. M.H. Abrams opines thus :

Many ballads employ set formulas, such as (1) stock descriptive phrases like "milk - white steed" and "blood - red wine (2) the refrain ("Edward", "Lord Randal"), and (3) incremented repetition, in which a line or stanza is repeated, but with an addition that advances the story ("Lord Randal," Child Waters") (Abrams, 13).

Abrams opinion can be exemplified from the ballad being examined. The quote provided below is sufficient to that extent :

I am the son of Aum Kashizam,
I am the chamberlain of Lord Angdruk Nim,
My physique needs no description
Should there be a need to describe it
My upper frame is like a poised lion
How does the lion spring and lead ?
My lower frame is like a peacock :

The peacock with its iridescent feathers.
"My body is draped in priceless battle outfit
My waist is girdled by silken scarves of five colours
I need not tell the tale of my sword.
Should I tell the tale of my sword ? (Ura, 65)

As regards the grammatical elements of the ballad, we could refer to Trapp's statement that :

The ballads operate with "and" clauses not "though" or "if" clauses, with successive statements, not with statement followed by qualifications. Their imagery, even where it seems not fully articulate and is difficult to interpret fully, is simple and direct (Trapp, 426).

Generally, Ura's *Lo-zey* confines itself within these parameters. And if there is any digression, it may be explained as due to the translation process—from Dzongkha to English.

Since most of the extracts quoted in the present text have been of a repetitious nature, may be something could be said as to why this happens, particularly in the ballad :

The heavy amount of repetition and parallelism one finds in the ballads may appear to be merely decorative rhetoric, but is not so. Repetition in heightened passages was brilliantly explained by Coleridge as the singers' efforts discharge emotion that could not be exhausted in one saying. Much repetition is mnemonic : in a story being recited or sung crucial facts must be firmly planted in the memory since the hearer cannot turn back a page to refresh himself about a fact that slipped by in a moment of inattention (Preminger, 62-63).

The repetitious lines and phrases abounding in the poem give it a specific type of rhythm and at the same time advance the story. Sometimes they might

exist for other reasons, such as providing a vivid description of something, or laying stress on what is being said.

In conclusion, perhaps these last few lines from the ballad would be a classic example of the balladry of this Bhutanese *Lo-zey* :

If I must die, let me make prayer before death
If I remain alive, let me make my will :
Gliding for the face of Lhaso's Jowa
I, the mighty lord, cannot offer,
By taking off my waist the sword with silver scabbard
Out of it forge and fashion a crown for Jowo
In the hand of southern and eastern forces
I, the mighty lord, will not give up my life.
Through the luminous space of blue sky
Like an eagle gliding and fiving
My consciousness like a *wind borne feather*
In the luminous space, let it be rended. (Ura, 67)

Conclusion :

Despite everything, there are certain aspects in the poem which are not, properly speaking, the characteristics of a ballad. And, then there are some characteristics of ballads which are absent. Firstly, for example generally in a ballad little attention is given to describing settings. Indeed, circumstantial detail of every sort is conspicuously absent. But in *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi*, there are detailed descriptions of the surroundings as Pemi Tshewang Tashi leads the expedition. Descriptive passages like this one below are aplenty :

The crests of Phanyulgang are like Tibetan hills;
Tibetan hills and plateaus are reserves of gold.
The foothills of Komathang are like Indian places;
Indian places and plains are reserves of silver.
Up in the lap of Khujuk mountains

Down on the neck by Sumthuet bridge
Where Dzongothang has been leveled
Where Thangochoten has been constructed
Where chorten and mani, are circumambulated
Where the mani, in clockwise direction, is rotated
Where gayshing is in profuse blossom
Where the blossoms are offered to gods
Where the tail of the dzong ends on cliff (Ura, 18)

Socondly, in a ballad the events leading to the crisis are related swiftly. And because the emphasis is on a single line of action precipitously developed, there is no scope in it for careful delineation of character or for extensive research into psychological motivation. The single line of action and the speed of the story preclude much attempt at any of these two aspects. But somehow, in this case, a lot of attention is focused on the psychological turmoil of the protagonist as he is torn between duty to lord and the premonition of impending defeat and subsequent death.

Thirdly, as most would agree, the narrator in a ballad is generally impersonal. He tells the story through dialogue and action without expressing his personal attitudes or feelings. But in *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* certain sections focus on how the protagonist had a great affection for his mother Sonam Pem, who is mentioned both at the beginning and the end. In fact her second name is used as part of his own name as an indicator of this strong sentiment. Therefore, underlying his dream to be reborn in his hamlet was the desire to be reunited with his mother and family for there could hardly be any purpose in coming back to his native village if his friends and family members had died by that time. This is Pemi Tshewang Tashi's last wish as he takes off from the cliff to his death.

"Taking Off" from the high cliff is the appropriate term here as the protagonist strongly believed in the dualism of the body and consciousness. For him, the body was simply a vehicle for the consciousness, which was about to take off and land in another place to continue its existence in another form. The vivid imagination/picture that his flesh, blood, and bones would be strewn and scattered at the base of the cliff was made less unpleasant by something else. And that was the faith and hope that he would be soon reborn in his happy hamlet of Sha Kashi. In actuality, this might mean re-entering the world in a new pattern of social relationships.

Lastly, the stanza form of this lo-zey has no similarity with that of a typical ballad. Generally the most common stanza form in a ballad is a quatrain in alterante four - and three-stress iambic lines, in which only the second and fourth lines rhyme. But this poem has an irregular stanza length. Some times a stanza is as short as four - lined, sometimes as long as twenty six lines. Another important point is that there is no particular rhyme scheme which is followed throughout the text.

All these differences that the Bhutanese lozey has we reserve as the distinct qualities of the Bhutanese people who revere it as the uniqueness of the lo-zey, their literary oral art form. Moreover, it is only due to its popularity that this lo-zey has luckily survived till date. Otherwise, like so many other lozey(s), it would have faded into oblivion. And for the former, we have to put off our hats to the translator, Mr. Karma Ura. Technically, he has demonstrated a masterful control of the meter and rhythm of this orally transmitted tale. Perhaps we may conclude that he

has also made substantial contribution to the body of literature. And that by adhering to the ballad form in his classic and widely popular *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi*.

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The Aesthetics Of Desire in Kamala Das's Poetry

Tauqeer Fatima

Kamala Das is one of the most aggressively individualistic of the new Indian poets like Mamta Kalia, Margaret Chatterjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Deshpande, Sujatha Bhatt, Imtiaz Dharker, Tara Patel and Eunice De Souza whose poetry is marked by a shift from the old stereotyped Indian society. Kamala Das alias Kamala Suraiyya has articulated the angst and alienation, the divided self of the Indian woman caught up between the gilded image of the pre-colonial past and the squalid post-colonial present. She displays a committed artistry that emphasized her gender specific presence in the Indian literary scenario and challenged the andocentric social order of Indian Society. Her poetry has her autobiography absorbed into it. She is said to be the first Indian Hindu woman to openly and honestly confess her sexual desire and love. Her poems are mainly characterized by what can be called the 'aesthetic's desire', which stems from an acute consciousness of her feminist psyche. Kamala Das's poetry is soaked with bold feminist stance. Her radical feminist approach, which establishes her as one the foremost feminist modern Indian women poets, finds its concrete manifestation in her poetry through the exploration of the forbidden issues, such as extra-marital affair, female sexuality and burden of masculinity, etc. As she sings in her poem 'A Journey with No Return':

Desire swims as a dolphin does
In the rivers of my blood tonight
Desire sports as a dolphin does
With sudden leaps and lurches.

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(Only the Soul Knows How to Sing, 56.)

Kamala Das's poetry is to be read in the cultural context of the traditional Hindu society in Kerala, where she was born and brought up. It is however, the presuppositions and orthodoxies of her community about woman that she has broken by disclosing what is conventionally regarded as dishonourable and undesirable, what is convinced to be unnatural immoral and unbecoming of a woman of her stature. She irreparably damaged the so called moral domains by articulating her sexual hunger in such verses as 'with every interesting man I meet/ I most deliberately /whip up a forth of desire/ a passion to switch the occasion' ('An Introduction') and 'In him I swim/ All broken with longing/ In his robust blood I float/ day of my tears' ('Suicide'). What is more striking is her expression of self-assertion which is always heard ringing in her poems. In "An Introduction" she defines her position and portfolio:

I am Indian. Very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English.
They said.
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human...
It voices my joys, my longings, my Hopes...
It is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears
And is aware.

(Only the Soul Knows How to Sing, 7-21)

She asserts herself as an individual and boldly

declares that a poet (in this case, herself) has a right to write in any language. The emphatic pronouncement came in the wake of challenges to Indians to write poetry in English. She is the first poet and perhaps the second Indian (first being Raja Rao, who in his introduction to Kanthapura, underlined the desire to write in English) to challenge the critics who maintained that Indians could not produce creative works (more so, poetry) in English. In this way defiance is perhaps the most enduring theme in Kamala Das's poetry. Her poetry, therefore, is poetry of defiance. Her soul (and poetry) cannot exist without her body (defiance) and vice versa. Defiance in Kamala Das's poetry is not to be conceived as a mere expression of a woman's sexual feelings. It underlines a politics, what Kate Millet calls 'sexual politics', a politics of gender in our culture. Female desire, therefore is a defiant act directed against repressive tendencies of the patriarchal system As she recollects her encounter with her male lover: 'I met a man loved him call/Him not by a name, he is every man/who wants a woman who seeks love'. (An Introduction', 40-43)

Thus it is Kamala Das's radical defiance which makes her advice husbands and wives to obey each other's crazy commands, ignoring the sane. She considers herself as 'a creature turned inside out'. She spreads her desirous thoughts like loud posters' seeking strangers ('Loud Posters'). She has a feeling that her selfish lover is denying her true love. In 'Sunshine Cat' the husband neither loved 'her' nor used 'her'; her desires were rather suppressed, and she is caged inside the house deprived of love and care. Poems like 'Looking Glass' expresses the honesty of her desire. She asks the womankind to gift what makes them woman, to their male lovers Krishna appears in many

poems taking the role of a lover. Krishna is the most sought after but the least available. She sings: ' Krishna I am melting, melting, melting/nothing remains but/ you' ('Radha'). Transgressing the world of her husband, the woman in the poem 'A Man, A Season wishes to 'mate with shadows' and seek ecstasy in others arms' the image of the exalted woman that Kamala Das presents embodies the apogee of strong feminine desire. She finds a prison in Krishna's body; she is blinded by his darkness: she shuts herself out from the wise world's din. Kamla Das, as a poet always swam against the current. She is striving hard to keep an identity of her own. She knows that she is different from others in sensibility and speech. This is a kind of intellectual frustration, which makes Kamla Das, a poet with a difference and defiance of her own. She was in the society but due to her strange behaviour, strange manner of dressing, she was outside the system. She was establishing and thrusting her individuality upon those who were not ready to approve and appreciate her:

...I am worn a shirt and my
Brothers trousers
Cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. (' An introduction' ,31-33)

The society has been demanding only one thing from her which she could not accept. It was 'Fir in Oh/ Belong, cried the categorizers' ('An Introduction'. 35-36) this alienated individuality only increased her frustration which finds expression in many things like her obsession with death and many imagined or real extra marital relationships. Her language that makes her an individual is in the system but still outside it. The reason she says is that she speaks, 'Three languages, write in/ Two, dream in one' ('An

Introduction', 5-6). But she offers no correcting measures. Take the world as it comes seems to be her motto. What is important is your identity. The world may cheat you, experiences may pain you. But put on a brave exterior. Keep yourself to you. Keep your language intact, for it is what makes you, you. It is so unconventional, so hurtfully new, so outrageously anti-traditional. What the general readers reacted immediately was the bold and frank confessional tone she wrote in a broad imagery seeking to convey the hurts and humiliations she received in her personal life. It is true that personal voice is very strong in her, and from one point of view it provides a very limited scope. However, this voice is so strong that it extends beyond the personal world of anguished feelings and assumes wider significance:

I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours,
No aches which are not yours,
I too call myself. ('An Introduction', 44-47)

Such expressions, and they come on naturally, so forcefully, cannot be dismissed as expressions of a fevered mind or a warped personality verging on nymphomaniac tendencies, as has usually been done. They are different tones and pitches of a voice articulating her deep mistrust of the conventional. The conventional modes in Indian English poetry have been unable to convey reality; rather they have only glossed it over.

Kamla Das confronts reality in its brutal and ugliest forms. Her poetic techniques and language coalesce with her mood and with her experience content. Her most notable strength lies in confronting the reality of her experiences which in poem after

poem becomes symptomatic of the general suffering of countless women. What Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Judith Wright, Margaret Avison, Rosemary Sullivan and Susan Griffins are doing in British, American, Canadian and Australian poetry, was begun by Kamla Das in Indian English poetry. These women poets' gesture of defiance and self assertion snowballed into a movement first and later on genre. It took Kamla Das here to say without mincing words:

I am not yours for asking
Not because morality
but because I don't feel the need.

Kamala Das's poetry embodies agonies of post colonial women emerging from that state of subjugation and bondage, and seeking to establish their identity and the self. Obviously, this is not an easy and uncomplicated process, as this involves discarding a lot, adopting a defiant attitude and probing the bruised self that expresses itself in so many different moods ranging from despair and dejection to anger and bewildered sense of rootlessness. This is best expressed through felt emotions in an intensely personalized idiom. It is easy enough to see in such a stance a dislocated mind suffering the nightmares of a shut-in life devastated and laid bare by a hyper-sexed, self-willed and schizophrenic woman. This is precisely what prevailing critical attitudes to her poems highlights, which is not only lamentably lop-sided, but indicative of an alarmingly impoverished angle of critical outlook in Indian English Criticism. In a vein which issues from this dominant critical approach, her poems are seen as the expression of the pitiable plight of a defenseless woman who needs love, consideration and sympathy and desires a loving husband, warmth and home.

Such an interpretation comes from, a reluctance to give up the traditional mental attitude, for what is more heartwarming than the return of the defiant woman to the conventional age-old mould of the 'categorizers'? It misses the basic point about her poetry; it is essentially a poetry of protest, of defiance and of emphatic assertion, all other moods ranging from weak feminine sense for happiness and shelter are different expressions of this basic Promethean spirit which is eager to break the rusted shackles and have its voice heard:

As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
of your body, dear love,
For I must someday find
An escape from its snare.

Whether she explores her sexual experiences and encounters or the seamy side of public life, cities, dwellings, and streets- there can always be noted the defiant, ironical tone in her poetry. No other Indian English poet employed irony to such devastating effect before Kamala Das- it is caustic, Virgilian, it is profoundly demolishing. It evokes pity and anger, sympathy and ire. Kamala Das's poetry presents Indian woman in a way that has outraged the usual male sense of decency and decorum. Kamala Das inaugurates a new age for woman poets by doing so, an age seeking to forge a new idiom, a new medium and newer modes of address, constituting a total rejection of the conventional modes of poetic expression of dominant culture.

In this way her medium is a passionate inflamed assertion of that being which has remained mute, suppressed and battered through nameless centuries.

She is not celebrating unbridled sensuality, but projecting the stereotype of a wronged woman and at once asserting the need to establish her voice and identity. As a critic has observed, we see in her 'the calm centre of the storm, the triumphant surge of affirmative projection that comes with a clear perception of despair by an energetically creative spirit'. Those who naively condemn her for her unpretentious frankness and bold portrayal of the living fabric of the passionate man-woman relationship defaced and distorted by aberrations coming from socially-culturally determined attitudes, fail to see the basic force and drift of her poetry. With Kamala Das it is essentially a matter of attuning our critical vision to 'the hidden vistas' of her inner world which has so much to offer to our perturbed, questioning minds. For her poetry is not 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'. As she says in *My Story*, 'A poet's raw material is not clay or stone; it is her personality. I could not escape from personality'. And again, 'One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one who has decided to travel inwards, will realize that his route has no end'. Only, Kamala Das's inner world has not remained her personal defense, it has acquired profound symbolic significance for all bruised and battered womankind (Bhatnagar, 9)

Kamala Das has a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world. Of course, the endless reiteration of such hurt, such disillusion, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into a mannerism. But one hopes- and her exceptional talent offers the ground for such hope- way to a season less trying than summer and a world

other than the 'unreal' city of the dreadful ghosts, (Iyengar, 680)

When we go through the love poetry of Kamala Das, there is every possibility that we might misinterpret it. Some critics have called her poetry confessional and others find too much indulgence in sex in it. Some call her unconventional and other immoral. Such remarks are dangerously misleading. In poem after poem, Das seeks love and through different persons she tries to look for an eternal lover. In doing so, she never intends to be disloyal and faithless to her husband. She tries on the other hand, to inherit a tradition, i.e., the Gopi Lord Krishna Love-play, as available in our mythology. Her search for the eternal lover through different lovers continues but the mind is set for Ghanshyam (Lord Krishna).

Kamala Das transcends lust and the hunger to fulfil it by constantly keeping in mind the eternal lover. A question may arise that if she is a spiritual in love, why she talks of body. The answer is that 'love must not be but take a body too'. As Das rightly says 'Bereft of Soul/My body shall be bare/Bereft of body/My soul shall be bare.' The love poetry of Kamala Das may be called a poetry of paradox. To cure the sickness must grow worse. Similarly, Das talks of love, lust and boldly defies that she has hopped forty steps to knock another man's door. Rebellious, angry and confused, Das turned to others for affection. Her husband's willingness to let her have her sexual experiences was a further blow to her ego. What he saw as freedom for a writer she saw as a lack of caring? Her relationships with other men rather than the husband are frowned upon by readers and critics alike. But looking back to our mythology, we find ample reasons to defend her. If the poet could be accused of adultery,

what about the sixteen thousand gopis who pined for and sought the love of Lord Krishna. The poet like one of the sixteen thousand gopis seeks the eternal lover (lover Krishna) through different persons, without being disloyal to her husband. It is here that her profane love is transcended and becomes sacred. Her journey is from the finite to the infinite, from body to soul, from ordinary human lover to the eternal lover (Lord Krishna) or how else one accounts for the mention of soul in so many poems? The myth she revoked and made use of is wellknown in our country.

Kamala Das's persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply 'every woman who seeks love'; she is 'the beloved and the betrayed', expressing her 'endless female hungers', the muted whisper at the core of womanhood'. She may 'flaunt... a grand, eternal Eve proudly celebrating her essential femininity. If she lets her 'mind striptease' and finds that 'I must extrude/Autobiography,' those are only attempts to understand and articulate what I was and by learning, to learn to grow',. Several faces of Eve are exhibited here-woman as sweetheart, flirt, wife, woman of the world, mother, middle-aged matron- the psychological processes behind both feminity and masculinity. She has her moments of romantic claptrap and sentimentality also but the total impression Kamala Das's poetry at conventional attitudes is to reveal the quintessential women within. (Naik, 209-10)

Thus in the light of the above discussion, it is safe to conclude that despite being constantly blamed by the critics for its unconventional theme, Kamala Das's poetry is soaked with bold feminist stance. Kamala Das's radical feminist approach, which establishes her as one of the foremost feminist modern Indian women poets, finds its concrete manifestation

in her poetry through the exploration of the forbidden issues, such as extra marital affair, female sexuality and burden of masculinity, etc. Therefore, despite being mediocre at many levels Kamala Das's poetry is remarkable for the aesthetics of desire.

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Cyril Wong's Poetic Corpus

Dr. S. Radhamani

This paper is a modest attempt on Cyril Wong's poetic corpus, viewing upon select vital aspects of themes and technique, compressing the entire process within the precincts of the title, its scope being 'Cyril Wong's poetry: not flesh and bone alone but Reason, and Voice of Silence, silencing us.'

Cyril Wong, noted poet of Singapore, multifaceted personality (born on June 27, 1977) polymath writer of repute has to his credit, twelve volumes of poetry, a novel and a collection of short stories as well. Widely published and anthologised, his themes cover the spectrum of air and Nature, bridges and bowl, clouds and boats, family and matriarchal affinity, grass and garden, love and soul, Art of Poem, the process of writing, life's quirk turns and twists, loss, loneliness, future time and endings that turn a predominantly unique, individualistic perspective to his writing oeuvre. A feel like gurgling sound of water, optimism of fins of fish, a mood of diving into air, his strength and what he calls enlightenment can be felt in his poems. This could be possibly his holy, religious, penchant note. In a poem "Why I Sing", he envisions to carve out a "clean path through the air". He is much enthralled to enter into a world of song, becoming one with that mode diving up in the air, when every word takes him to a lighter zone than air. He also touches upon the philosophy of world's making, with the essential component of air. In "Why I Sing", he reasons out some vital aspects of his inner self, and change. It is a world of serenity he encounters, a world of enlightenment he sees. Self, song, change and serenity:

At the end of an open road
of a teacher's instruction, I began

to achieve some perspective, able
to pull every possible breath
to the centre of my body, gathering
of strength before that sustained
blow of a note punched free
from between my eyes, angling
a clean path through the air,
as if air was all
the world was made of, or, at least,
the treacherous fog of its concept. (Like A Seed with

Its Singular Purpose)

The poem, its writing process :

"The poem" is another lovely write of personalised vision, of his unique writing process which speaks of sudden twist the writing mode takes, its sudden endings, loneliness which he feels: also admits that even it stops, poem will go on in its pace, and the readers obviously construe that his poem, here is synonymous with life. There is sadness, loss, philosophy and awareness that something special in that living room where his poem begins and it is ongoing process, creative fluidity which nobody stops.

The poem begins in this living room,
where half a man is writing the poem
that has never been his to write....
And when he writes:
the poet is lonely and weary of love,
he will believe these feelings are true
and his life will be a poem about loss.
Now as the poet writes about the poet
who has to get ready for school,
something holds him at the table where
this is now written, a word about loss
after which he can never stop writing.
Even as he would rather stop, while
the very poem goes on writing itself
beyond the false horizon of the final line,

this poem that is everything, and all there is. (The End
Of His Orbit)

It is a recordation of many aspects of the person's life intertwine with the writing process, as the above mentioned though lengthy quotes essentially enunciate. In the concluding lines, "this poem that is everything and all there is" could imply a summed up finale of his experiences, a compendium of feelings ready for release and compression, riveted in his writing mode. Also, could be adorable, a noble veneration for the Muse.

Music :

Music is another realm akin to that of poetry which enthrals most of us, enriching our lives' motto and the poet opines it is a source of nourishing, flourishing activity. Music is not merely the source of love as the ancient bard envisages, but as observations have testified, trees grow, tuned to the Rapturous melody of music .The poet in the title "Dear Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan" extolling the vibrant notes of the singer, takes us through many links, such as trees, chanting, peace and finally making us aware of a "new infinity within us".

The first sounds of the tabla
like a god's knuckle gently
knocking against the heart's
resounding door, then your
voice...
each high note
sewn into a chord vast and
dense as the canopy of trees,
then a peace as when the wind
pauses in its marathon across
the landscape to catch its
breath, then begins again to
go, trees shrug off their awe,
Shaping a new infinity within us. (Like A Seed
With Its Singular Purpose)

In another poem "Accelerando" he depicts Love, wait, and human craving of flesh in a poetic way. A minute descriptive mode in which, body and flesh and meetings and crave dominate.

On Love and lovers, could be, the poet's imagination takes to such dizzy heights that he weaves memory and crowds and loneliness all in one single rope of thread, perhaps. Hence some practical philosophy too. "Living is an endless piece of rope".

The lovers wait to lose their balance. They would dive gratefully into the half-dark, picking fingers, thighs, lips and tumescent parts. The lovers are jaded funambulists, steady gait slowed by the weight of loneliness. But legs quiver now, the bait already cast. And whose heart is not a hungry fish? (Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light)

"Bridges "another remarkable poem, the poet forays multiple meanings such as secrets not maintained, Truth mangled, betrayals, also a personalised approach between two entities discussing how yearlong trusts, faiths flouted, despoil relationships could affect a lot. The crux lies here "how bridges are falling" taking us into unfulfilled zones, sad dictum prevailing, mind torn between agility and angst. Again falling bridges are haunting Symptoms of loss and memory painful and sad. The ones nearing incompleteness signify something, gnawing, crumbling leading to a fall. Symbolically Man's fall in esteem and dignity.

A secret kept even from ourselves:
how bridges are falling
between the imagined word
and the spoken one,
between what I say
and what you actually hear.
If you could slow

time down, perhaps you might
Even hear them falling (Unmarked Treasure)

Again the concluding lines make us read and re read the poem delving into its metaphorical connotations, applicable for life's tricky situations.

Maybe it is
this moment of our lives,
when the bridges
left standing are the ones
we miss,
when the ones we did
not mean to build
we built
from betrayal, regret, guilt and loss. (Unmarked Treasure)

Southeast Asian Review of English appraises his work thus: "an art that works simply from a personal plane, and from within such a plane we have some of the most sensitive, articulate probing into the nature of one's self that have never been seen before in all of contemporary Singaporean verse." (Jeyam, Leonard. "The Poetry of Personal Revelation: Reviewing Cyril Wong's Unmarked Treasure." SARE No. 47 Apr. 2006/07. 99.)

His confessional write :

Next, "Arrival" is another contribution from a confessional poet of Singapore, as Cyril Wong is called today. It is not merely a poem of two souls scribbling of confessions of paper, but emphasising the symbols of "love" and "like" improvising upon the woman's body of map. Poets and writers of recent have elongated upon woman's body as a map of treasure, possibly a postmodern metaphor. Cyril's confessional boundary most of the times, has limitations, does not trespass its jurisdictions.

During our first few dates, we scribbled our confessions on paper, sending them like fast-forward letters back and forth across the table. Then you relented and taught me sign-language, demonstrating how "like" is the drawing forth of an invisible string from the centre of your chest like a loosened thread, freed from the constraining fabric of your body, while "love" is the crossing of both arms in an act of self-defence and a warning, or simply that "X" which marks the point of arrival upon the very treasure map of you. (Below: Absence)

It is worth recalling a quote regarding Cyril Wong's take on love and related issues. He is a confessional poet according to some critics and the term has undertones of connotations.

Named so, "on the basis of the brutally candid sexuality in his poetry, along with a barely submerged anxiety over the fragility of human connection and a relentless self-querying; but the label understates Wong's constant evolution." Toh Hsien Min. "Wong, Cyril (1977-). The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry in English. Ed. Jeremy Noel-Tod and Ian Hamilton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 662.

His keen eye for niceties and necessities in a space, of a living room in a narrative form with lyrical beauty is seen in the poem "Before The Afterlife", A Confessional one.

"Before The Afterlife" is a vital example of how Cyril has a keen eye for setting up anything nice and wonderful. The persona addressed to in the imaginary till possibly be his life companion, the poem vividly

brings out the relevant details of the apartment, right from the furniture of the living room down to the plants he needs to water. The first section comprising eight stanzas of double lines, typify a sense of beauty, duty, piety, calmness, Nature with “potted plants” and interest in literature.

Before our afterlife, I begin to envision its warm-hued, easy-to-clean furniture in the living room with its kitschy water-feature in a corner, plastic koi frozen in mid-swim; the altar where you will bow and reiterate our gratitude to your cherished deities; our bedroom blessed by the faint chords of wind chimes above our door each morning when we come awake in each other's arms, the shelves where our books — mine on art and literature, yours on politics and history — would have found a home; the balcony that is half the size of the apartment, weighed down by potted plants I must never fail to water, its roof extended for shade, a pair of parallel deckchairs angled toward the sun. (Like A Seed With Its Singular Purpose)

Comprising nine sections, with its lyrical beauty, there is love, sex romance, conversation, but before it all happens, there is this “I am lost in this dream, this waking present”. In a dramatic situation later on Cyril comes up with Sheo, another character, exchange affirmations of love between them .But before that the persona appears to affirm, you are determined to set the stage of our apartment for a play of happy endings in countless, interchangeable acts.

Again in a stern confessional mood, the persona recalls how his mother would react on a situation like this. In the process of his self exploratory confessional statements there is evincible guilt, conscience,

helplessness, reconciliation, content and despair too.

What would my mother say if she came to visit, only to be assailed by such images in a pitiless row on the study-room wall, something else to splinter her delusion that you and I are nothing more than friends? (ibid).

There is, as already mentioned guilt and confession in a passage respecting full matriarchal lineage also, reflecting fear and apprehension. The poem gives a sudden conclusive turn for the readers, when the speaker, in a mood of grievance, in a mood of reprieve, admonishes, self. Greatness lies here in his bringing out a subtle distinction between apartment/home. Shift in the scenario.

There is nobody in the apartment.

The apartment has not yet become a home. (ibid).

And finally the turn is more for a suave, gentle, also ironic passive turn, imbibing air .A very admirable poem dovetailing many aspects that surpass the bizarre notes. Gentle, confessional go together.

And just outside, the dinner table set for the company of ghosts, or more invisible even, for the anticipatory absence of ourselves, as if the air itself was beginning to make room for us. (ibid)

The following pithy comment qualifies this poem with a plethora of takes and moods.

One Critic has termed his poems "acerbic and tender, ironic and meditative", (Cheong, Felix. “Out in the City.” The Edge, Singapore. 28 July 2003. 45.)

Affection for his mother: His God is his mother :

In an exceptionally worshipful mood, Cyril

considers his mother, as God, in the poem "God Is Our Mother" and throughout the poem he equates the good attributes, sacrifices of his mother in terms of Godly, saintly, sacrificial qualities. The poet faithfully extols, recapitulates all the daily rituals of his mother. It is a sad, painful, ironic rendering.

God is our mother
and does not exist
without her children
who are leaving;
without her husband
who has already left
through the backdoor of their marriage
into a backyard of indifference.
We are the atheists,
who do not believe in her love.
Yet we hear about it
all the time. (Unmarked Treasure)

Here is a poet who with his observant eye has observed his mother's wary concern, affection and caring nature scrutinising that his children should not go astray. She is the embodiment of gentleness and limitless concern for her children. The poet virtually rehearses a mood or scenario when the mother does not openly reprimand, she only sees her wards in distressed guilt covering their faces, she only sighs of dispensing grief and partially relief.

God is our mother
who creeps into our rooms at night
while we are sleeping to check
that we have not sneaked out of the house
to meet friends she despises
because they have no curfew.
God is waiting
at the window, resisting sleep.. (ibid)

"God is our Mother" is emotionally steeped not

only for the persona and the mother, but even for the readers, a well told poignant rendering, touching all of us.

According to Time magazine, "his work expands beyond simple sexuality...to embrace themes of love, alienation and human relationships of all kinds." (Tharoor, Ishaan. "Merlion Heart." TIME (Asia Edition). Dec. 10, 2007.)

As far the formative influences, we have the following insightful observations. "the succinct, confessional styles of American poets Sharon Olds and Raymond Carver as his most direct influences" (Tharoor 48).

If...Else:

"If ...Else " another remarkable poem in which vibrancy runs throughout with, condition, clause, empathy, Questions , statements, introspections, consolations, prose ,poetry and meaning intertwine, and the statements ending with a pause. The refrain like "if you look hard enough..."appears in the initial stage.

If, iffy.

If you look hard enough, I am writhing out of absence into form.

If introduces a condition, a supposition (eg. "If thou be the Son of God, command

that these stones be made bread.")
If can sometimes create ambiguities.
If I were called out of a pool of dark by a larger
hunger like birds plucking worms
from the earth.

If I were lost in a poem; not killing, not a thief, not hurting anybody I loved. (Like A Seed With Its Singular Purpose)

“If “similarly undergoes many variegated vagaries of love, mood, grief, colour, and almost all the aspects of life if the life I chose is the life I chose. If myself is a shadow, at least I made a dent in the light. (Ibid)

The final lines affirm the poet’s life of verdict, his solace, his positive attitude, and his ability to draw sustenance and inspiration from gloomy dark into light.

Philosophy and meditation and mythical fervour: After all the contours of body, flesh, skin and sleep, sleepless nights, pain and pathos, we have a philosopher in Cyril who views things with a practical eye of the world, combined with religious fervour and questioning realm of pain and relief, silence and noise of the relentless past, solitude and strength. The poem “Practical Aim” forays into these aspects in vibrant notations of self searching for a solution.

After great pain, what would the body
learn that it does not already know
of relief?

Does solitude offer strength over time, or
is denial of it the only practical aim?
when all light finally
forsakes a room, do we take the time

to interrogate the dark, and to what end? (<http://www.cortlandreview.com/issue31/> (Wong .html)

These questions transcend the barriers of Time and space and achieve a tone of universality.

Death:

In a language akin to that of paradox, Cyril describes Death in his own way revitalising the seed of Death. He construes Death as a process not of dying, but that we should be conscious of the process of dying, it is non-happening, when there is only the dying. A meaningful spin and take on dying. He implies, the

pain, sacrifice, the urge, the cause, more than that the physical death and the awareness of that surrounding pall of gloom. In his poem “Blanchet’s Death” Cyril views Death, mentioning about Blanchot’s role thus:

To die without dying, without knowing that we died; since it could have been anyone, Blanchot became everyone after facing the Nazi firing squad and was told to run; the happiness of not being immortal, he writes; still dying, never dead; no relief either, as who was the survivor, the past that floats away; who dies, if dying is even possible the second it occurs never to recur; maybe we cannot die, when there is only the dying; when death is a non-happening, the word fragmenting like flowers at a funeral; the error of injustice, Blanchot suggests, remembering guilt; someone has to die, so why not let it be me; since nobody dies, so why not let it be me. (Straw, Sticks, Brick)

It may be allied to war situation, but Death, only Cyril alone can imagine, “when death is a non-happening, the word fragmenting like flowers at a funeral;” wonderfully penned in heightened language.

The Technique:

Cyril Wong mostly writes in a personalised, first person conversational tone, and a characteristic mode of Modern writing in most writing milieu. He has a remarkable penchant for minute details of observation as if dipped in soothing, scented fragrance of flowers. It is like infinitesimal and ticking of the clock silent and sure. In the amphitheatre of his poetic arena, there are rapid moving rehearsals interspersed with metaphors, meaning, images, sometimes dragging on in the mosaic of his poetic throbbing with prose passages too. Interlacing of life’s irretrievable stages of strain, loss, memory, fear, imagining self as a straw-

house, in the poem, "Straw, Sticks, Brick", Cyril Wong, spins upon the "word", giving it different dimensions. That "word" undergoes many overtones in varying situations. It could be the embodied title, metaphor, recurrent meaning.

Possibly the metaphorical ambiance would be to imply the body with its pervasive desires and the world of fear leading to a place of straw. Meaninglessness of life, awareness of transience of this existence, cloying love and affection veering around this body, yet enjoying a childish prank for the moment. This is life, the word, image and metaphor throughout possibly.

What was that word again: the ensuing frustration, that long clawing across the inside of a skull; and what if the word is not the only loss; memories, people, affections; would it be terribly important to mourn; the body still dreaming to become a hoop the world jumps through; an execution swift, but barely memorable; how long before we accumulate again; the self as a straw-house; now sticks, now brick; and then the word returns--unendurable relief, everything else flying back into place; straw, sticks, brick; bursting invulnerability, the gentlest return of fear; unsettling beneath the surface, a tremor; hairline fracture behind wallpaper; yet are we not gleeful for the moment, prancing like children with arms weightless against the ceiling? (Straw, Sticks, Brick)

"Boats" is another poem, in a conversational tone, signifying departure. In an admirable way Synchronises with the theme of reconciliation, the loss as Cyril depicts in a mood of resignation. The image of boats, developing into metaphorical ambiance, carries us through viable links such as voyage, vessel, passengers, tractable waves.

You and your photographs of boats;
that repeated metaphor for departure,

or simply the possibility of a voyage?
What you cannot tell me, you tell me
with a vessel and its single passenger,
eyes fixed on some skylit conclusion.

The speaker is in a mood of despondency and defeatism. The persona addresses the other party is always for withdrawal. The dejected persona accepts his loss, his resignation demure.

The boat is narrow
like the width of my heart after
impossible loss, cruel resignation;
this heart you ride in. Love, if this is how
you choose to leave me, let me let you. (Below:
Absence)

Love and loss and let leaving love, all explored in a beautiful metaphor of boats, experimented here. It is worth quoting the observations by C. Day Lewis, "We find poetic truth struck out by the collision rather than the collusion of images." (qtd in Harries 71).

Sometimes Cyril is an expert in giving an expression in weaving images of impossibility, weird like and striking with a note of imbalance. For example in the poem "Calm Embrace Of Bone" the persona explains in poetic terms, while viewing his body in the mirror, "the skin unmoved in its calm embrace". a strange, solid immobility in its stand.

Curiously whole, as if
unshatterable by loss,
by absence. I scrutinise
myself for what feels
like a long time, almost
amused at how grief
can be hidden; the skin
unmoved in its calm
embrace of bone

In furthering the description of his hair, violent, impossible, ready to vanish like, images arrest our curiosity and attention, coupling with their swiftness in action.

Clutching my hair, then
letting it go, it falls readily
back against the cooled
basin of my brow, instead
of rising to shake like blades
of grass in a hurricane, or
singing like flames - dyed
red, its colour is merely
ironic. (The End Of His Orbit)

The terms hurricane/flames imply symbolically his distressed emotions and colour of red adding to the tempo, of “unshatterable loss”.

Conclusion:

As has been mentioned in the introduction of this paper, it is the voice of Silence empowering his write. Cyril also firmly believes our own voices are our best dictates, inherent for the harmony. It is the voice of Reason, voice of Silence, silencing the humanity in doldrums, ringing in his poems. In a poem “Bowl”, Cyril views this Silence and Music, weaving different themes, holding in a bowl at once, of a metaphor and meaning of silence.

there is little we cannot accomplish
without hearing our voices
the music of not hearing voices
not music but an atmosphere of existence
a bowl of still water with white yellow orchids
curled in a gesture of tenderness across its open
mouth
silence over original silence
which invites the hum of phenomena (After you)

There is tender gesture, meditative curve that gives a flowery touch to his poems.

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Multiculturalism and Political Protest in the Singaporean Novel *A Candle Or The Sun* by Gopal Baratham

Nandini Kumari

The Singaporean novel focuses on the challenge(s) that a novelist faces in the literary representation of a multilingual environment. Singapore is an influential state in the affairs of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Three- fourths of the people are of Chinese ethnicity and the rest are Malays, Indians and others. It offers preview of the various cultures which came along with the immigrants from all parts of Asia. Amartya Sen states that:

At the broader level of 'Asia' rather than India, the separateness of 'Asian Values' and their distinctions from Western norms has often been asserted, particularly in east Asia- from Singapore and Malaysia to China and Japan. (Sen, 123)

Born in 1935 of Indian parentage Gopal Baratham was an Indian Singaporean author and neurosurgeon. Baratham began his passion for writing and never stopped writing throughout his medical career. His most successful novel, *A Candle or The Sun* was published in London and not in Singapore due to its controversial nature in the conservative city state. Much like the post-colonial history of Vietnam and the Phillipines, Singapore, according to Baratham, suffered through a period of oppression from its own government immediately after it struggled to achieve its political freedom. The novel was loosely based on *Operation Spectrum*, the case of the so- called Marxist conspiracy, a group of Catholic activists, whom the Singapore government had declared to be communists

and subsequently arrested. Baratham consistently assumes a subservice role, revealing the effects of repressive politics upon the individual. Questioning received views of Singapore's regulated and pragmatic democracy, his fiction shows how even an efficient political system has many weaknesses.

The novel provides insight into the tensions and challenges besetting the portions of the Indian and Chinese Diasporas that have fetched up in South East Asia and that at times treats the concerns of the marginalized in the metropolis as an emblem for all postcoloniality. The novel implicates and resists a postcolonial governance mode that relies on hypostasizing cultural and ethnic differences, both internally in its national setting, and externally, in the imaginative geography that it proffers, one that unifies the entities East and West. Some argue that the shared values are Asian/ Eastern values, in opposition to Western values, although such values remain capitalistic. In this context Milton Friedman states that:

Economic freedom is an end in itself. [It] is also an indispensable means towards the achievement of political freedom. (Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, P.8.)

Analysing the role of state capacity and mechanisms of state control, the author argues that institutional, rather than cultural, explanations are the determining factors in Singapore's continued authoritarianism. Asian values emphasize discipline and order- rather than liberty and autonomy, as in the West. Amartya Sen states that:

By concentrating on the authoritarian parts of Asia's multitude of traditions, many Western writers

have been able to construct a seemingly neat picture of an Asian contrast with 'Western liberalism'. In response, rather than dispute the West's unique claim to liberal views, some Asians have responded with a pride in distance: 'Yes, we are very different - and a good thing too!' (Sen, 286)

The question remains a tension between individualism and communalism, west and east, multiculturalism and national cohesion. Baratham's novel broaches and negotiates the twin dangers of enclavism and assimilationism. His work draws on his personal experiences of colonialism, racism, nationalism, industrialization, modernization, globalization and renaissance longings. He addressed themes such as the stratification of Singapore society, fate or choice and certainty and wrote about political and moral issues. Gopal Baratham's *A Candle or The Sun* is peopled by Indians, Chinese, Malays, Eurasians and Europeans. He portrays characters which are perverted by a political culture of concealment and containment and have assumed the negative characteristics of dissimulation and exploitation. The novelist depicts a tyrannical government that will use any measures to preserve the status quo of Singaporean society.

In Singapore, multiculturalism is defined and promoted in the city-state through a decidedly secular constitution, although communal factors have become increasingly realized by the predominantly Chinese ruling party. Singapore, Malaysia and China, appeal to the differences between 'Asian' and 'Western' values to dispute the importance of civil rights, particularly freedom of expression in Asian countries. This negative delineation has been presaged by an earlier scene in the novel involving Chuang, who had a habit of making

Hernando Perera re-do the displays that he puts up:

"Chinese say pupil's supremacy is master's reward. He smiled to himself and bowed slightly to acknowledge my gratitude. The times I spend for you in your junior days not wasted now, ah. So tiresome I became that sometimes I could not stand, but not wasted, see." (Baratham, 7)

The story portrays the life of Hernando Perera, an aspiring writer who manages the furniture department of Benson's, the largest department store in Singapore. As the story progresses he became a government writer wherein he attempts to beat an oppressive government. The critical predicaments of society which mirror social reality, racial brutality, and multifaceted impact of apartheid which can be substantiated through Hernie Perera's words:

I was trying to fashion a man so totally, liberated that he had nothing to do with events outside his imagination. Without friends, job, family, needs, his mind was freed to roam where it pleased. My man would hear sounds but have no need to speak. The images that filtered through his eyes he would distil into their essences and with these he would build his visions. Gradually he would shed all, the body's demands- hunger, thirst, lust- until he was pure awareness, enjoying consciousness for itself. (Ibid, 7-8)

Hernie Perera, a successful store manager, finds his comfortable life shattered when a government minister forces him to spy on his young mistress Su-May. His childhood friend Samson offers him a position writing for the government. Unfortunately, to prove his loyalty to the government he must expose the "Children of the Book" Christian sect, a group of which his lover Su-May is a member. He will act as a mock-

subversive for the government, deliberately attempting to invoke fear into the minds of Singapore's citizens so that they will ignore the street papers:

Once I accepted Sam's job I was sure I would have to do things I found distasteful. In my writing, I would support causes of which I disapproved, distort reality if my masters wished, suppress truths inimical to their purpose. I suppose this loss of self-respect is what distressed me. It must be something that all whores grappled with. (ibid, 85)

He knows the type of writing and propaganda he would be asked to do. At the same time he felt a kind of gladness that he had never experienced before, but still there is something that worries him as he says:

It wasn't relief. Relief is emptiness, a temporary draining of fears, ill humours, suspicions. What now I had was fullness, now a sense of satiety, but a welling up of something inside me that made me want, if not to sing out out aloud, at least to hum under my breath. (ibid, 79)

Hernie realizes that he would have to sacrifice his integrity in order to perform his duties as a national writer, or as he would refer it, "whore" himself to the government. He tries to resolve his dissonance between enjoying the act of writing and writing about things he does not enjoy:

Now, forced by circumstances a throw in my lot with Sam and his people, I realized that my insulation was not enough to protect me from an awareness I found extremely disagreeable. I had decided to compartmentalize my life, to live in sealed rooms that had no communicating doors. But words made this impossible. They crept like mildew along the walls, spreading from one room to the other, connecting them.

(ibid,109)

The most trivial publication "street Paper" is a very specific indictment of the culture of compliance in Singapore, denouncing the exchange of the right to freedom of expression and assembly for:

Good housing, safe streets, good hospitals, schools for your children and ... enough [pay] for three square meals a day and a colour TV. (ibid, 56)

It was full of references to People's Action Party policy, being given:

Your masters kennel you in neat boxes, doctor your females, control litter size according to pedigree and tell you what names you can give your pups. (ibid, 56)

Politicians have corrupted and crippled the system filling it with dirt where ethics and truth are absent and thus, the people suffocate and die in the hope of a new system. Hernie's friend Samson offered him a job writing for the government and to this he told Sam that he should read them before they get published. Samson waved both hands about wildly, and said not to tell him what it's about, and let mammy's Sammy guess. Hernie says,

It's about the cool we've jazzed up worker-management relations. . . . No, it's more romantic like yeah? Ah geddit, ah shore do. Multiracial harmony's the beat right? It's about an Indian chick slurping with a Chinese guy, right? I must have shaken my head, for he said "Wrong". (ibid,18)

Then, Samson outrageously making him relinquish his disc-jockey affectation, he continued:

There are a million things to write about in this multiracial, culturally plenipotential society that retains tradition without losing flexibility. There are our leaders. Merely to recount their

historic struggles would be an epic. And you write about smell! (ibid, 18)

Hernie, finds himself caught between proving his loyalty to the government and betraying Su-May. Indeed Hernie cannot compartmentalize his life, and he decides to help Su-May and Peter escape after he himself had exposed them. He lets his sentiment to take the best of him, and he writes in his short story "Dutch Courage" that "*whichever of us allowed sentiment to affect his judgement was doomed*". (ibid , 165) Hernie's words are prophetic for he is subsequently arrested and beaten by government officials.

The novelist had a great penchant for India's cultural pluralism and narrates through the character namely Lu Shan. She says:

I'm crazy about India, and anything Indian really.....I'm a Singaporean Chinese. My name is really Lu Shan, but I think of myself as Shanti. (ibid, 91)

She further continues to say about nation's cultural multiplicity:

"A land of contrasts and contradictionsShe talked of the thread of Hindu culture that ran through and united it.She waxed long on a religion that identified in its Gods, Brahma, Siva and Vishnu, the primary forces of consciousness, change and preservation, then gave them a thousand names and human faces so they were the more easily worshipped....She had travelled the land, often on foot, of how she had been warm beside a lingam of solid ice in a Himalayan cave. She spoke of Kanya Kumari, where the land ended and one could see sunset and moonrise on the same horizon, and seeing this had come to understand that pain and solace, frustration and fulfillment were possible

in the same moment." (ibid, 91-92)

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Hernie's conception of himself and his role in life is closely tied to his understanding of himself as an author. Hernie uses his stories not only as an outlet for creative expression, but also as a means of facilitating his understanding of and progression through the events in his life over which he increasingly feels he has no control:

My stories were indulgences. They were my designs for experiencing an inaccessible world in the only way possible: with words. They were discoveries not parables. (ibid, 82)

He further says:

It was then that I decided that I would begin writing the story of Cornelius Vandermeer; that I would pen his life to paper, and in the process remove him from mine. I was reluctant to do this. The Captain had for such a long time participated in the goings- on of my life that it was difficult to imagine him enjoying a circumscribed existence on a few pages. My father's dying was but one of the several things happening to me. I knew that in Cornelius's life I would find answers to some of the others. (ibid, 147)

It is predicted that Hernie feels either out of control over or unable to fully comprehend the developments and changes taking place in his life. In reference to the Captain, Hernie says:

But he had thought this whimsically, without fear. With a pang Cornelius remembered that there had been no doubts then, no thoughts of death; only a confidence that he would reach the mainland, join the resistance, carry on the fight. (ibid, 163)

In relation to the Captain, Hernie again says:

It meant that he would enter into one big decision in my life but would be denied participation in all the others that lay before me. (ibid, 147)

Cornelius Vandermeer, became a role model for Hernie, the way in which he does this speaks to the way in which he envisions the concept of control as it relates to both his writing and his life:

It had finally dawned on me why I was unable to write about the captain's last days. I had had, for some time, the feeling that the events in my life had been taken out of my control, that a path existed along which I was tracing some pre-ordained course. This was correct. In elucidating the [the Captain's life fully, I was taking control of my own. (ibid, 157-158)

When Hernie betrayed Su-May and the children to Sam , he says:

I believed I had finally taken control of my life. This was not true. All I had done was to follow convenience one step further. I now saw that to be genuine, actions must be at variance with convenience, possibly even inimical to survival. It was this understanding that separated the creature of choice from that of chance. (ibid, 157)

For the Asia leaders to compare the Asian values to the International Human Rights is almost a sign that the government is not willing to adopt and accept the international human rights instruments. What they should claim was an assertion of legitimacy of authoritarian political model, economic success and the unity of ASEAN community. This is because all states in that particular region focus on the level of national ideology, with the deprivation of the rights

and freedom of their citizens. In the context to the novel Baratham, conveys the noble message through the protagonist Hernie being influenced by Cornelius Vandermeer:

Near the end he had he had realized that concern for the well-being of others is the only defence we have against terror and death. The Captain had learnt this from the circumstances of his life; I, by fabricating them. The pages of "Dutch Courage" lay before me, a blueprint for what I had to do. I began reading them to confirm I had got their message right. (ibid, 158)

Independence ushers problems such as the need to create organization, focus, and direction. A revolution suffers from the possibility of breaking down into anarchy. New governments therefore sometimes use excessive measures to control its population and to restore a sense of order. Anuita, Samson's lover, expresses the government's viewpoint in a conversation with Hernando:

Oh, Hernie, you poor, thing! Did you not recognize that culture is a matter of security? . . . Did they never tell you that on this island paradise of ours trade is a matter of security, education is a matter of security, health is a matter of security, how you wash your underwear is a matter of security. (ibid, 104)

Further he inquired from Anuita how Samson would go about making the street papers ineffective:

Simple, she said. We run our own streetpaper. Swamp the market with it. We'll make outrageous, impossible, dangerous suggestions. Create a bit of violence here, a bit of racial trouble there, and no one will pick up a page of typescript from the streets if you paid them to. (ibid, 104)

Gopal Baratham attempts to depict the struggle of the seemingly ordinary Singaporean man living under a repressive government. With his character Hernie, Baratham makes a statement about the way in which people who are afraid to stand up for change construct their lives to create their own, safe reality. As Hernando constantly escapes into typing room to write stories and concoct fantasies, he escapes his dilemma between change and fear and creates a world where it is easier to think and to act:

“While unhappy about the way in which Singapore was run, I was disturbed at the prospect of upheaval and uneasy in the company of people who proposed it. This was partly due to a natural conservatism. But there was a more important reason for it. I snatched images and sequences from my head, matched them against a well-ordered world and between the two concocted a reality essential to my well-being. Anything that threatened this process frightened me”. (ibid, 132)

The publication of the first street-paper evokes a surprising response in Hernie. He claims that although he himself is not bothered by the rigorous governmental control in Singapore, it is indeed possible that others might be affected. Therefore he began almost at once to yearn for something he had never needed:

Singaporeans were denied essential freedoms and I who had never had anything in common with the mass of people around me, was beginning vicariously to share their deprivation. (ibid, 58)

But the real truth is that Hernie is as much a member of the street’s target audience as any other Singaporean :

You are unhappy and you dare not this to

anyone. Certainly not to your masters in the government. After all you have no right to be unhappy...(ibid, 56)

Hernie, engages in a series of betrayals which ultimately allow him the possibility of redemption. Hernie struggles with this fear throughout the entire story, as he takes small steps out of his safety net and into his political environment :

Fear is a strange and mysterious thing ...To begin with, it’s dazzling, painfully bright. A fierce and unavoidable force. Then we grow used to it, make ourselves excuses and find room for it in the secret places of our lives. Yes ... we are indeed a flexible and accommodating people. We swallow our pride, we swallow our self- respect, not with difficulty, not as though it were broken glass, but smoothly, like shark- fin soup. (ibid,133-134)

He is confronted with a choice between the life he has just chosen and somehow achieving a form of redemption by helping Su-May and Peter escape the havoc he himself has unleashed. In all accounts of paranoid governments, the heady excitement of subversion is crushed when the secret police bang on the door.

Therefore, the author of this analysis argued that; for the society to survive injustice and human right violation, freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and freedom of political participation must be accepted to the extent of International universal standard. Limitation of accepting the rights of individuals will post a great challenge to all human being because the States authorities have not yet acceded to other key international human right instruments. They

emphasize on the principle of respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the non-use of human rights as an instrument of political pressure.

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Sri Aurobindo's 'Man ... the Image of God': A Testament of Hope and Faith

D.C. Chambial

I know, O God, the day shall dawn at last
When man shall rise from playing with the mud
And taking in his hands the sun and stars
Remould appearance, law and process old.

Then, pain and discord vanished from the world,
Shall the dead wilderness accept rose
And the hushed desert babble of its rills;
Man once more seem the image of God.

{Sri Aurobindo's Action 44.11 (November 2013): 8.}

[This extract is of lines 55-62 from Aurobindo's Short Poems: 1902-1930. "The Meditations of Madavya: Two".

Sri Aurobindo is the most venerated name among the mystic poets of India. He is not only a poet but a school in himself, who dedicated his life to raise India, poetically, to the highest level in world. His epic *Savitri* is one of the most renowned works read, admired, and critically explored for its inherent beauty and mystic excellence. It narrates how Savitri, the protagonist of the epic, brought back to life her husband Satyavan from the clutches of Lord Yama, merely on the strength of her faith and restored his life even by challenging the dictates of fate.

This short poem, which appeared in Sri Aurobindo's Action, in fact, an excerpt from Aurobindo's 'The Meditations of Madavya: Two Short Poems: 1902-1930, as cited above, is based on Aurobindo's faith in man and his future vision of humanity: "the evolution of the human mind and its time and environment" (Panda 197). He is optimistic and confident that the clouds of contemporary inhuman actions are short-lived and very

soon will disperse and a very clear day of human perception will dawn.

The excerpt has only eight lines written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. The very first line makes his optimism manifest when he prays to God with confidence: "I know, O God, the day shall dawn at last". It suggests that the bright future of humanity is not far away. This line comes forth as if he were talking face to face with the Almighty. The clouds of darkness and human ignorance will soon be over like the dark night that comes to end with the dawn of day. At dawn, the light begins to increase and bedims the gloom of night. The phrase, "I know", emphasizes Aurobindo's faith and optimism in the light of knowledge and God, who is behind all creation. He perceives that the light of knowledge is temporarily shadowed by the clouds of ignorance and mistrust in God and His all embracing nature. The apostrophe - "O God" - makes him rest his faith in the Almighty that it is only He, who is the Creator and every thing happens at His behest. The present state, of amoral actions and loss of faith, is not to last for long: the chaos is to end for good. It has to terminate finally. The reign of darkness ends and the aura of light begins to encompass the whole humanity. The poet confidently asserts: "the day shall dawn at last". His hope is thick with certitude. He holds that the future-time will usher humanity into a new heaven of bright knowledge and all present misconceptions, about faith in Him and true knowledge, will come to an end.

The second line: "When man shall rise from playing with the mud", is an adverbial clause of time and envisages that currently man is "playing with the mud" - it has connotations of man's indulgence in activities that malign not only man's image, but also humanity as a whole with his appalling activities. Such deeds do not behove him as a true human being. The verb

"shall rise" reinforces the poet's faith in man's evolution from wickedness to goodness: some time in near future when he, the man, will give up all his nefarious activities and reverts to reputable actions. Certainly, at that time it will be a bright day for humanity. He, the man, is not to revel lastingly in despicable activities - "playing with mud" - that tarnish his image. Even in the present chaotic circumstances, he sees a bright ray of hope, for every cloud has a silver lining. So, the hope is not lost. The time itself will teach man that his present wicked activities and his love for them are neither good for him as an individual, nor for humanity in general.

The third line of the excerpt - "And taking in his hands the sun and stars" - shifts the scene from man's "playing with the mud", the earth, to heavenly heights where sun and stars exist. One has to reckon that the sun and stars are trillion and trillion light years away from the earth. So, it is not an easy task, even if they happen to be harmless objects, to take them in one's hands. This part of the sentence, which continues from the first line through the second and goes on to the fourth to complete the sentence, connotes arduous struggle on the part of man to rise from his trivial and iniquitous deeds of "playing with the mud" and to establish his capability and superiority over other living beings, though the poet hasn't stated it apparently, but it is implied. This line also suggests that this task, though very difficult, is not impossible. Such human beings, who venture to improve humanity morally and spiritually, nothing is unworkable.

The fourth line and the last part of the sentence, "Remould appearance, law and process old", pertains to the imagined end, deeds of man that he has to accomplish after hard struggle: he has to "remould appearance" not only of the world but also of humanity

and reshape and revitalize his psychic strength. This is the higher end, which the poet imagines, for which he exhorts humanity. He has to transform his mundane and humane character into divine character. Not only this, he has also to alter “law” – the law of human existence on this earth and also in the society to make it a heaven for all beings to live. It’ll result in the decimation of suffering from the surface of this earth. Besides, “process old”, which has continued since the emergence of cosmos and humanity, also needs improvisation and transformation. This “process old” is the orthodox course of man’s growth towards divinity – a practice of development from earth to heaven and from human to divine. Man’s march towards divinity is continuous but, at the same time, strenuous. Man cannot take rest until he attains that spiritual height towards which the poet points. Our scriptures also teach that human life is the only life in which one can try for his salvation from this cycle of birth-death-birth that haunts an individual indefinitely. Man’s highest goal is salvation or divinity. Once he reaches that state of mind, all other states are relegated and become purposeless. Thus, in these four lines, the poet, nay, Maharishi Aurobindo calls upon man to give up his wicked and mean actions and work for the elevation of himself from his lower self to Higher Self.

The fifth line, “Then, pain and discord vanished from the world,” points to the prevailing pain and misery in the world. Most of the humanity is suffering from poverty: they find it hard to get bread to keep their flesh and bones together. People suffer from a variety of diseases and have no money to get them treated. People fight for power and control of material and mineral wealth. Even in small villages brother becomes his brother’s enemy over a little piece of land and, at times, commits murder; this, in fact, puts him in further trouble and brings him under the grip of the

law of land. A momentary flush of passion makes one suffer throughout one’s life. The poet, as a visionary, in this line envisions a state of the humanity when all such “pain and discord” that make life miserable on this earth are abolished and pave way for a better world of mutual harmony and all round happiness. In such a world man will love man as his brother and help him in all his endeavours to make this world worth living. One cannot fail to notice the importance of the adverbial conjunction “then” placed in the beginning of this line and joining it with the foregone part of the sentence. It clearly hints at some time in future. It is possible only after man embraces virtuous life by giving up his sinful existence. When such a state comes to exist, the poet, in the next line, asks: “Shall the dead wilderness accept the rose”?

In this line, the sixth, the poet is a bit sceptical about this imagined change. He wonders if the existing order will welcome this change. The key words in this line are: the phrase “dead wilderness” and “rose”. Here, the poet hints at the present state of human existence and compares it to “the dead wilderness”, and his proposed/imagined changed state as “the rose”. The dictionary meaning of wilderness is: wilds, backwoods, rough country, or the wasteland. It is interesting to note that the poem has been printed below the picture of Thar Desert, Jaisalmer (Rajasthan), in which a caravan of camel riders is moving on in the heart of the desert, but where? nobody knows. This explains, one can visualize the kind of wilderness suggested by the poet. Far miles and miles there is no trace of vegetation or life: the “dead wilderness”—a wasteland that does not generate life—reigns supreme. However, in such an environment that has been there since eternity, the poet asks when such an ambience accepts (the very question shows poet’s doubt) “the rose”, something new, beautiful and better will result

from this change. The noun, “rose”, here implies life and beauty juxtaposed to the “dead wilderness” of desert. The poet emphasizes his view through the poetic device of contradiction inherent in “dead wilderness” and “the rose”. The poet’s thought is centred on the good of whole humanity and the world.

The poet’s hope for the world is also suggested in the seventh line, “And the hushed desert babble of its rills,” in conformity with the verb “accept” in the previous line. This line can be read as: Shall the hushed desert [accept] the babble of its rills. Now the poet talks of whisperings due to the blowing of wind and the silence that rules over the desert. He brings in, in his imagination, the sweet, mellifluous sound of the brooks that flow down the hills. The same doubt also lingers here about the acceptance of melodious sound—“babble”—of the flowing of “rills” in “the hushed desert” where “dead wilderness” abounds in totality. One can easily presume the beautiful transformation and the solace that it gives to such a depressing background. It will, for sure, be a welcome step. Such a situation will transform the world and the man from the present iniquity and impiety to future opulence. Amidst this positive thought of transforming the existent time-worn ideologies to refreshing and enlivening ones in the future, there also lurks suspicion in the poet’s mind.

“Man once more seem the image of God” binds up the poet’s thought, in the present excerpt, by hinting at the imagined notion of the world and man. It also strengthens the idea that “God created man in his own image”. Man lives by fights and quarrels, wars and battles killing man for his personal or national benefit. The personal benefits lead to murders, and national interests to battles and wars: The nations of the world have vast armies and wage wars against the neighbouring countries with a view to enlarging

their physical boundaries or acquire control over material/natural wealth. This amounts to heaping pain on humanity. However the poet is of the view that if man continuously works for the constructive change from the present wickedness to future human prosperity, man will, certainly, evolve to “seem the image of God.” The sole objective of the poet has been to work for the human evolution from man to divine. This, in fact, subscribes to Aurobindo’s poetic view that poetry is Mantra (The Future Poetry 11) and “can sustain manhood only when it can fuse indissolubly the highest intensities of rhythmic movement and verbal form and substance with correspondingly revelatory vision of reality” (Panda 194).

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D.C. Chambial, Poet, Critic, editor: Poetcrit, Maranda - 176 102 (HP)

Major themes in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

Dr. Purnendu Shanker
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Michael Ondaatje, born in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), later moved to University of Toronto to receive an undergraduate degree and after that acquired a Master's degree from Queen's University in Kingston. He is one of those writers of diaspora who is originally a poet, acclaimed for his poetry book *The Collected Works of Billy, The Kid* but later on, he turned his attention towards fiction writing producing his best acclaimed novel *The English Patient*, a novel set in World War II, Italy.

The novel, which is a work of historical fiction, has been set in the hills of Tuscany during World War II and it handles a number of themes, of identity and nationality, of the ability of true and sincere love to transcend time and space, its healing, changing and renewing power and that about death in a holy place.

The novel alternates between the present actions in the Italian villa and flashbacks to memories of a mysterious desert romance, showing a different narrative structure. It explores the much explored subject -national identity, the connection between body and mind and love that heals and renews. Ondaatje blends prose and poetry and his words translate "real experience into symbolic experience" by appealing to memories that involve all the readers' senses.

He has amply focused on the history, nationality and identity and has interlaced them forming an inalienable identity. Almasy, desperately tries to elude the force of nationality, living in the desert, where he creates for himself an alternate identity, one in which

family and nation are irrelevant. Almasy forges this identity through his character, his works and his interactions with others and exemplifies that national identity can be erased. The desert and the isolated Italian villa serve as such places where national identity is unimportant to one's connection with others.

Ultimately, however, the characters cannot escape from the outside reality, that is during war time, national identity is prized above all else. This reality invades Almasy's life in the desert and Kip's life in the Italian villa. Almasy's identity follows him even after he is burnt beyond recognition. Hana clearly locates this fact,

"She looks in on the English patient, whose sleeping body is perhaps miles away in the desert being healed by a man who continues to dip his fingers into the bowl made with the joined soles of his feet, leaning forward, pressing the dark paste against the burned face" (Ondaatje, 37-38)

For Kip, news of the atomic bomb reminds him that outside the isolated world of villa, western aggression still exists, crushing Asian people as Kip's brother had warned. National identity is then, an inescapable part of each of the characters, a larger force over which they have no control.

The other major theme is the ability of true and sincere love to transcend time and space. Love, if it is truly heartfelt, transcends place and time. Hana feels love and connection to her father even though he has died above, far from her in another theater of war. She refuses to return to Florence or Rome and would remain with the one burned man they called 'the English patient'

"She wanted to save him, this nameless almost faceless man who had been one of the two hundred or so placed in her care during the invasion north." (Ibid, 54)

Almasy desperately maintains his love for Katherine even though he is unable to see her or reach her in the care. Likewise, Kip despite leaving Italy to marry in India, never loses his connection with Hana, whom he imagines thirteen years later and half-way across the world. Such love transcends even death, as the characters hold onto their emotion implying a larger message – that time and place themselves are irrelevant to human connection. We see this especially in Almasy’s connection to Herodotus, whose writings he follows across time through the desert. Maps and geography are mere details; it is only the truth of the soul, which transcends time that matters in the novel.

Dying in a holy place is perhaps another important point that the novelist is out to emphasize. The characters in the novel frequently mention the idea of “dying in a holy place”. Katherine dies in a cave, a holy place to ancient people. Patrick, Hana’s father dies in a holy place, a dove cot, a ledge above a building, where doves can be safe from predatory rats. Modox dies in a holy place by taking his life to a church in England. This idea recurs throughout the novel, but the meaning of “holy place” is complex. It does not signify a place that is ‘holy’ to an individual. Katherine hates the desert, Patrick hates to be alone and Modox loses his faith in the holism of his church. None of these characters then dies in a location that is special to them but the figurative ideas of “holy place’ touches on the connection between actual places and states of emotion in the novel. Emotionally, each of these characters died in a “holy Place” by remaining in the hearts of the people who love them.

Throughout the novel, reading has been used as a metaphor for reaching beyond oneself to connect with others. It recurs in various forms and capacities: Hana reads to Almasy to connect with him and tries

to make him interested in the present life. Katherine reads voraciously to learn all she can about Cairo and the desert and Almasy consistently reads The Histories of Herodotus to guide him in his geographical searches. In each of these instances of reading, the characters use books to inform their own lives and to connect the other place to time.

Apart from the themes discussed earlier, Ondaatje has one more important suggestion to make. He differs from George Eliot’s view that the novel is “a mirror held up to the society”. For him, a novel is “a mirror walking down a road”. (Ibid, 97) He clearly wants to reflect the reality of life and has been successful in fusing romantic exoticism and multi-culturalism in this work of fiction. Besides that he has strictly adhered to his own statement made in a radio interview that he uses his prose to create a “tactile landscape for his choreography”. In “The English Patient”, he has been successful in creating such a landscape to suggest his themes.

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Taslina Nasreen's *No Country For Women* : A Feminist Reading

Ram Niwas Sharma

In regard to the issue of representation, Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) expresses doubt whether a true representation is ever possible. If all representations are embedded in the language, culture and institutions of the representer then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth' which is itself a representation (Said, 272). Despite the inherent pitfalls involved in a representation it is incumbent on an intellectual to mention the issue in proper manner.

From time immemorial patriarchy has imposed on women the idea of what they should be and how they must behave. Even myths have been created as well as interpreted from the male point of view. Whether they are queens of the Royal families or the mothers and wives from ordinary households, the images of women have always been fashioned according to the male imagination. The women writers today are exploring these myths to interrogate them and to provide articulation to the marginalized and repressed. In this process, popular patriarchal texts are rewritten and challenged from all possible perspectives.

Feminism, though is a literary movement, finds its origin in the women's movement in 1960 that was a political force. Some writers like Mary Wellstone Craft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1972), J.S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Friedrich in *The Origin of the Family* (1884) debated the role of women

against oppression. The political movement aimed at the equality of sexes, the practitioners of Feminism as a literary movement focused on the importance of canon of women's writing. The image of women always appeared in the writings of male authors. The women writers felt a need to uncover the ideology of patriarchal society in literature and art. The main practitioners are Virginia Wolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchel, Ellen Moers, Elame Showalter, Elizaretsky and Helen Cixous. A woman is always perceived as an adjunct to the male.

The social condition, biological destination and sexual position make a woman a woman and resultantly she symbolizes weakness, fragility, feeble mindedness and patience. Virginia Woolf in her work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) analysed the gender biases. Patriarchal institutions deny text to a woman, and when a woman decides to write, she is compelled to use the language and its structure used by male authors. According to Simone de Beauvoir a woman has no identity of her own.

The literacy movement of Feminism presented a forum for women and promoted sisterhood. But there was a complete silence on the issue of non-heterosexual relations. Homo-sexuality is treated as a criminal activity and heterosexuality is regarded as a norm. Politically a lesbian was always marginalized. Lesbians were victimized and harassed. The Lesbian and Gay studies has its centre in USA and now it has become a liberating movement. Its origin begins with the Stonewall Riots in 1961, when the police raided the Stonewall Tavern in New York. Many lesbians fought for their right. In London, at the London School of Economics, on Nov. 13, 1970, Gay Liberation Front

decided to fight against legal and religions oppression.

The movement of Feminism paved the way for lesbian theory. The publication of *The History of Sexuality* by Foucault presented the radical aspect of sexual performance and homosexuality became a good subject for academic discussion. The writings of Gloria Anzaldú, James Baldwin and Cherrie Moraga became good texts of the movement. The radical feminism produced radical lesbians. Taslima Nasreen has been advocating for the cause of homosexuality and participating in Gay Pride Parade held in New York every year. She sees it as a movement related to feminism and human rights. She, too, has been a lesbian. She polemically argues:

It is not true that girls become lesbians because men fail to make them contented. Girls become lesbians out of love for girls. How many men know how to caress with love! What men know extremely well is how to rape. If the mantra of patriarchy had not been artificially injected into their brains, if uncivilized cults and prayers had not blinded them, then most girls would have been lesbians. I too have experienced lesbianism and I can swear that in those days I was perfectly happy and contented, free from all worries and satisfied both within and without. (Nasreen 162)

It is love vs. sex, and love is always superior to sex. It is not that Lesbian is something new. Nasreen traces it back to 350 BC when “Sappho, the woman poet, expressed her love and sexual attraction for other women.” (Nasreen, 163)

The patriarchal mode of thinking aims at the domination of the male and the subordination of the female. The patriarchal theology teaches women to

internalize this concept in the process of their socialization. It brings to the fore the concepts of gender which are man-made. According to Simone de Beauvoir the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She says ‘one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.’ It is civilization as a whole that produces this creation.

This theological discourse on women’s subordination and exploitation in this patriarchal society is audaciously and openly illustrated by Taslima Nasreen in her non-fiction *No Country for Women* through pieces of her autobiographical memoirs like “My Lovers”, “I Am Proud to Be Wilful”, “A Room of my Own” and by taking up fundamental issues concerning equality of rights for women. She used the word to be ‘wilful’ for women. She said they should decide their own will power. It means to be determined to act according to one’s wishes. Such activity if made practical by women meant ‘wilful’. She claims why others should decide for women. She rejects another’s intervention into one’s life. Taslima firmly believes that women are capable of taking decisions for themselves; and it is their right and means of liberation. She raises a fundamental question: “ Do we exist for society or does society exist for us? It is human beings who make the rules. Again it is human beings who break the rules....It is my life. I shall decide what to do and what not to do.” (Nasreen 35) She vociferously opposes the orthodox system of patriarchy that enslaves women’s mind through social and religious conditioning. They were/are taught to become ideal daughter, “ideal wives and ideal mothers,”(Nasreen 5) and that their world is confined within four walls as they are fragile and vulnerable of sexual outrage

and libidinous desires. The patriarchal society has coined the terms chastity and virginity as supreme virtues of women. Women are made prisoners of her own virtues and glories assigned by the hierarchal society. The patriarchal society which banned all kinds of freedom that are required for women to enjoy equal rights. She revolts against those taboos which incurred to women in their life. She struggles for truth, for equality, for justice. She says "I have to be wilful if I have to carry on this struggle." (Nasreen 36) As we see her proclamation of justice, equality, liberty always pretends effective action in her creation. Women must be free from all restrains.

Taslima asks why man has to control the society. She revolts against any kind of restraint or taboos which may lead to inferiority against women. Her emphasis upon wilful act enables the reader to understand her commitment for women's total freedom in decision making. They should understand or can well comprehend the meaning and worth of life. Her approach to freedom proposes to be "a mentally strong, economically self reliant and morally independent person". (Nasreen 37) She claims that "Men do not like such power in a woman. They want to have woman in the palm of their hand, so that they can crush her beneath their feet." (Nasreen 37) Men do not like such behaviour of women. Men oppose such wilful women.

She candidly expresses the view that women whether educated or illiterate, are oppressed. This is because religion, culture, patriarchy and society are against women. She emphasized education to women for better understanding of rules and regulations of patriarchy as well as the laws of the land. Even

educated women are not liable to get permission for employment. Even employed women are not self-reliant. A rotten culture still keeps the women under the men. Robin Morga defines rape is the perfected act of male sexuality in a patriarchal culture which acts as the ultimate metaphor for dominance, violence, subjugation and possession. She advocates for abrogation of master -slave relationship between men and women and for the end of patriarchy.

The institution of marriage is viewed as a patriarchal mechanism to subjugate women and regards wives no better than prostitutes and calls for the end of this system. The greater divorce rate in the west is attributed to greater consciousness of freedom in women. In the western countries the divorce rate is more than 50 percent while in India it is 1.1 percent. To her it is not the satisfaction index, rather "patriarch holds much greater sway."(Nasreen, 141) Very few rapists have escaped from the clutches of the western feminists. In the west they have fought this abominable, hateful form of oppression of women for a long, long time. They never let off anyone. Today, in western countries where women can live in almost complete freedom it is natural for women to take the initiative in love and sexuality. She exercises her desire and is a more active partner in the sexual act.

Some feminists say that there is no need for women to achieve sexual rights. Women need education and self reliant. But it is called indigenous brand of feminism. Taslima counters such view saying that educated and self-reliance women also become sexual slaves of men and nourish patriarchy to keep the system alive and fresh. She quotes the example of Aishwarya Rai who is educated, self-independent and

wealthy and still she “has to sacrifice herself in the scaffold of her husband’s wishes.” (Nasreen, 148) In fact the value that is attached to a man’s earning is not attached to a woman’s earning. Women are still prisoners of the system. They may be educated, self-reliant but have the duty to serve their husbands and obey them. Hence it is the system of patriarchy that continues to victimize the women of the world. Men have protected this filthy ugly system for ages. Men have made all arrangements so that women do not dare to free themselves.

So the gateway to the real freedom for women, she believes, will come through sexual freedom. For the so called modern women crazy about look, sexy appeal and boyfriends she says they don’t know what freedom is and they are cultured prostitutes. She says that women are the only oppressed group who live very closely with their oppressors. She stands as a misandrist and misogynist with her outburst of venom against men and marriage:

“Men are, actually, all alike. There is hardly a difference, between men from the East, or the West, or the South, or the North. Whatever difference exists is from the exterior.” (Nasreen, 154)

She further adds :

“Being immersed in the extreme form of patriarchy, they (men) can become anything but human beings.” (Nasreen, 157)

She concurs with Gloria Steinem, the famous feminist writer who said, “I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and career.” (Nasreen qtd). In the decade of 60s slogan that was in immense popularity was coined by Gloria: “A woman

without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.” (Nasreen qtd.) As a fish does not need a bicycle, so a woman does not need a man. One may conclude that Taslima Nasreen is a man hater. Yes, she is contemptuous of male of her experience and not of a race. She defines her concept of male: “I want to use the word ‘male’ as synonym of the words like inconsiderate, narrow-minded, ungrateful, selfish, greedy, avaricious, inferior and envious... I want to abuse those boys and girls who have those traits.” (Nasreen, 108)

She is essentially a humanist, and her feminism is humanism. She writes:

“A feminist is one who considers both man and woman as complete human beings and believes in equal rights and privileges of both.... The faith in equal political, social, economic rights of men and women is feminism” (Nasreen, 109)

He reiterates this view time and again in this book and elsewhere. But she spares no one, either the progressive ruler of West Bengal or Sheikh Hashina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

“Hasina is a woman. Everybody will now argue that she is a woman. True, but she is representative of men. She is an accomplice of fundamentalism, an accomplice of religion. An accomplice of patriarchy. There is not a single ‘man’ like Hasina in Bangladesh. I know that women are the carriers and bearers of patriarchy. But I never knew so sharply that any woman could be such an atrocious and outrageous anti-woman ‘man.’ (Nasreen, 129)

She reports that West Bengal scores over other states in atrocities against women and ardently advocates for common civil code in India: “It is

imperative to replace Shari'ah laws by a Common Civil Code... But there are no laws or movements in India to save Muslim women from harassment, indignity, insult and even death." (Nasreen, 67)

She has grown up in a highly restrictive and conservative environment. Taslima says that there is no place which belongs to women. They are required to fight for every inch of ground to get their rightful place. Her critics have called her a misandrist. She denies, but asks, who is 'Guilty man or Patriarchy?' She argues that women, are exploited, molested and raped. Hence they are not regarded as a human being :

"We are being oppressed inside and outside the home. Patriarchy and religion prejudice and domesticate life customs, and purdah, tradition and culture in this society; all these are anti women. Woman is nothing but a sexual commodity in this society. Woman is meant to serve man and his cult and prayer. A revolution is needed to smash this religious, patriarchal, rotten, old prejudiced society and create a new society in which there will be no discrimination against women." (Nasreen, 235)

Taslima says that there is no place which belongs to women. She said that they should fight for every inch of ground to get their rightful place. It is hard to involve them in the further struggle for gender justice though women continue to suffer unbearably years after years. They are the victims of gang rape, violent attacks, murders and atrocities of all kinds. These are the faces of patriarchy. They are treated as things of men to make better use of them. A man is known for his work, but a woman by her appearance. She criticizes such situation of women. She says that women are not toys, but human beings of flesh and

blood and should be judged by their education, their achievement, their proficiency. She cries for the consciousness of their rights in them. What she is trying to do is to deconstruct the 'androcentric unconscious' embedded in men and women alike and evolve an egalitarian society free from prejudice, patriarchy and exploitation.

One can conclude that *No Country for Women* is a collection of Taslima Nasreen's essays both personal and impersonal with her usual incisiveness, emotional intensity and bitterness born of her lived experiences and they form part of her manifesto of radical feminism.

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Dr. Ram Nivas Sharma, Jehanabad, Bihar.

Monsoon Blues

The cloud messenger, poet Kalidas's Meghdoot
Sent a mail to the heart's in-box
The message was blank and the responses bounced
back
Monsoon clouds darkened the screen
Thunder rumbled and lightning streaked
As the hollows of the heart awaited the downpour
Welcomed with such cheerful uproar
A chorus of voices sang and swirled wildly
Shimmering liquid silver rained down into every pore
The peacocks danced as they always have
A green light glowed from every tree
As a thousand unseen sitar strings
Resonated with the strains of Megh-Malhar

In the month of Sravan, Meera became sadder
As elusive Nandkishore irked her more
Nightlong and through the endless day
Lovelorn Meera looked up at the skies
Looked into her lonesome heart
To see a single scented glistening jasmine
Wet with a raindrop of hope
Longing so desperately for the One
So mysterious and mercurial
So cruel and irresistible
Meera and Radha became one
Dancing in the monsoon rain, sad eyes raining tears
of mirth
Monsoon sadness, midsummer madness, clasping
hands.

Sullen summer days of furious Bhairav
Blazed and burnt the enduring earth
Cracked open, split apart and parched every blade of
grass
No water anywhere, not a drop to drink
Not even the sound of water
Only stinging drops dripped and trickled
In the arid eager heart, desperate desire for the longed
for drizzle
Streaming from the unseen reservoirs
Dry earth breathlessly awaiting the healing touch
Then suddenly the moist rejuvenating elixir
Poured from the blue-black skies above
As Rain God Indra flooded the thirsty terrain
With torrential rain

Meera's single string ektara
Sonorous, like ten thousand strings in a concert
strummed at once
Or sometimes her sad and lonely finger on the speak-
ing string
Accompanied her intense anthems of devotion and love
The bright rain washed white fragrant monsoon flow-
ers
Ketaki, Juhi, Kamini and Rajanigandha
Meera wove into a garland of hope
Singing in rapturous joy and pain
Yearning for a glimpse
Of the relentless tormentor-lover
Rain drenched Meera sang on-
A lifelong hide and seek game it is
To be in love with the irresistible flautist Giridhar.

Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata

Durga

O gorgeous grand Goddess
Durga- evil annihilator
Mother of the meek and weak
Challenger of deceitful demons

A warrior Goddess
Disarming the doubters
Arms and the woman
Taking up arms against
A sea of troubles

A mother too
A strange homecoming
Flanked by adult children
Durga resplendent in arms
Shining scimitar, fearful trident
Astride on the back of the king of beasts
Unerringly driving the spear head
Into the heart of evil

Durga blows the conch shell
That resonates through centuries
Stirring the sleeping seeds
Within the bosom of the earth
Urging them to sprout
Fearlessly in the pristine earth
As the Mother Goddess
Cradles and rocks in her arms
The young and helpless earth

Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata

Beware Man ! Beware

In his first decision to make the first man
God thought:" I would make him
The greatest creature in my Creation.
He will win the most dominant position
On the earth and under the sun.
I will give him the most fertile brain
To conceive and contemplate. He will rule
The world with his head.
He will tame the little ones
In accordance with his wish."

But again God cursed man:
"Though I give you all the capital might,
Might of both physic and psyche,
You will yourself be the very cause
Of your own destruction.
Your own enormous skills
And your gigantic power will one day
Annihilate the entire earth.
Your own tomato-potato qualities
Will bring plague in your life.
Your own paltry-peevisish deeds
Will threaten your breath.
You will yourself be the cause
Of your gloom and doom.
Your own choice will one day hurl you
Into the ever-trembling gossamer."

So on that day of Creation
God sprinkled beware! beware!
Into the head of man.

- Mandal Bijoy Beg, Orissa

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Book Review

***Allow Action to Dominate* : Dilip Kumar Ojha, Kalpaz Publications C-30, Satyawati Nagar, Delhi- 110052, pp. 102, Price Rs. 140**

I have before me Dilip Kumar Ojha written *Allow Action to Dominate*. As I turnover the pages, I am reminded of the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nahru who had said, "Thought without action is abortion and action without thought is folly." This book is an endorsement and reinforcement of action and execution of one's plans and thoughts. To buttress this very idea the writer has formulated a series of dos and don'ts. Like a self-help book it tells us certain points which can go a long way in achieving one's target in life. His express suggestion is to learn to detach from the past, never worry about perfection, don't lay waste your ideas without taking action on them because learning or thinking alone will not help you. Therefore, allow action to dominate. Be a doer rather than just a dreamer or planner because you will not get a second chance in life.

This book is a bundle of tips on how to be a success in life. For this first of all, his advice is to reduce one's expectations. Overestimating oneself is not a good policy. To quote "Our expectation level should be moderate and reasonable or else we will get disappointed very often." (20) The next advice is to be a doer. One must implement one's ideas and plans otherwise the ideas will fade away. Again, one should not wait for an auspicious time to start something. The present time is the best time for any action. Similarly, one should be optimistic and self confident. He should learn to count his blessings, i.e. the merits

in him. On his own merits a man can evolve new and practical ways to solve the problem before him. He should be equally prepared to take the risk. Equally important is to practise self-control, to empathise others and earn others' goodwill.

The writer's sincere advice is not to procrastinate and put off for the next hour. Nobody should worry about perfection. One should do one's best and keep on trying to better the best. The important thing is to feel responsible, responsible for one's choice of job, partner, principle, ambition, values in life and the strategy adopted for success or failure. The writer also advises to maintain secrecy about one's plans, create one's distinctive image and be bold enough to fight stress and tension. Sometimes one feels discouraged to see other's success. In fact, other's success should work as a motivating force. It has been said, "what man has done, a man can do." So, failures can surely be pillars of success. The writer also advises like APJ Abdul Kalam that one must have a high ambition. He should "aspire big" and work hard to transform his dreams into reality. A very important suggestion is to learn the art of communication. One should be a good listener as well as an effective talker. One must speak with conviction and logic. Only then he can convince others. And finally one should have faith in God. He should feel that God is inside him and will always help him, for which he must first help himself. In short, one should carve one's own future by one's own effort.

This is a good guide particularly for young people. The book has practical suggestions for success in life. The language is simple, straightforward and effective. It's a valuable help book.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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Indian Literature and Universal Oneness- PCK Prem, Authors press, Q-2 Hauskhas Enclave, New Delhi- 110016, (2013), pp. 294, Price Rs. 900

The author PCK Prem is a man of parts. He has made his mark as a bureaucrat, teacher, academician and writer. He is at once a novelist, poet, story writer, essayist, critic and thinker. He has received several literary awards and is currently working on ancient literature so as to reinforce people's interest in ancient wisdom and philosophy.

The book *Indian Literature and Universal Oneness* is an attempt to show how India's ancient literature through parables and fables taught the people the eternal truths of life as well as universal brotherhood. The Indian Literature refers to the *Mahabharata*, *Kathasaritasagar*, *Srimad Bhagvata Mahapurana*, *Panchatantra* and *Baital Pacheesi*. The author has dived deep into them and picked certain simple, pragmatic and edifying stories and episodes from them to illustrate certain truths and model way of life. In this age of haste and hurry, TV and consumerism we have lost sight of our ancient literature. Religion matters little, God matters less. It is now matter that matters most. The aim and objective of life has changed which has resulted in material opulence and spiritual hollowness. Happiness is eluding in spite of all scientific achievements and technological conquests. They have failed to bring in peace and universal oneness. It is time to look back on our ancient Indian literature and seek the panacea to present day ills.

The book has nine episodes from the Mahabharata meant to highlight the life of dharma, karma, penance, knowledge and devotion which make a man's life complete and perfect and merger of these virtues leads

him to light and divine bliss. They illustrate the nature of suffering, attachment to karmas and fruit thereof resulting in pain physical and psychological. Our scriptures tell us the role of Prakriti and Purush, the significance of Yajna, Vernas or the categorization of society, in short, they are a treasure of eternal wisdom and they are all the more required today.

The tales from the *Mahabharata* include the tale of *Lord Indra and Brahmin Kashyap* which shows the power of intellect. *An Insect's Salvation* tells us that by following the principles of virtue, he is delivered from the sufferings of life. *A Mouse and Cat* underlines its contemporary relevance in the sense that it endorses the view that there is no harm if in times of calamity one strikes a mutually satisfying bargain with an enemy for the sake of protecting one's life. *The Dynasty of King Saryati* is about a man of *tapa* and it reveals that the Supreme knows what goes on in the mind of his devotee and that nothing can be hidden. *A Princess and a Weaver* takes us to a land of love, magic, fantasy and adventure. *The Trial of Holy Trinity by sage Bhrigu* says that even gods are fallible and do commit mistakes. *Yayati* tells about a man of dharma and a man of the world. All such stories have direct or indirect bearing on human life.

There are seven episodes from *Srimad Bhagvata Mahapurana* that recount the story of king Parikshit how he defeated Kali, the god of adharma and untruth. It tells the story of king Rahugana and Jadabharata, a brahmin who voluntarily carried the carriage of the king. Later they exchange words of wisdom. Also there are stories of king Saryati, the legendary Nabhaga and Ambarisa, destruction of Vatsa, Baka and Aghu, Yavana and the king Muchukunda, and the trial of the Holy Trinity by Sage Bhrigu. Each of these ancient

tales has some message to convey, some mystery of creation to unveil, the perennial struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of the good i.e. dharma.

Similarly, the four stories from *Kathasaritasagar* recount the story of sage Uttanga's curse and Bheembhat and Sridutt and the divine gifts. There's the moral story of friendship between a prince and the son of a businessman. The story of the virtuous woman is equally entertaining and edifying. The love story from *Panchatantra*, the story of a princess and a weaver told by Pundit Vishnu Sharma has been very popular with other stories and fables in the book. Equally enchanting are the stories of Baital Pacheesi, still very popular. These are all moral tales told in a simple way in the oral mode suitable for one and all. No doubt, they have the element of romance and also the role of the supernatural.

On the whole, PCK Prem's book is an attempt to revive people's interest in ancient Indian tales full of moral messages and age-old wisdom. The messages and instructions apply to one and all belonging to all times and climes. They embody in them universal truth, eternal truth. The cultural and social Renaissance in India started in the 19th century needs a booster dose. In the present day consumeristic set up and market mania the basic human values have been eroded and replaced by rivalry and selfishness. As a conscientious person the writer feels concerned about the degradation of humanity and wants to sensitise the people and regain their lost paradise. A must book for one and all.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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Adieu : Dear Rimi, Pronab Kumar Majumder, Bridge-in-Making Publication, Kolkata- 700089, p. 68, Price Rs. 250

Here is the 19th collection of poems composed by the well-known poet Pronab Kumar Majumder. Having written on various themes like time, nature, life, philosophy, ecology, humanity, patriotism, love, peace, violence, women, relationship etc. here he has opened up the treasure of love so long waiting for ventilation. He claims that Rimi is symbolic of his encounters with all the women in his life. In his old age he has tender feelings of love towards his unrealised lady love. He addresses her in different roles of an ageless beauty. Her image is permanently impressed in his inner, consciousness. Therefore he claims that though age has changed him "but her unchanged, unstained image" is a boat for him to sail through.

The poet's lady love has motherly warmth and affection. This Rimi in the form of mother, just a vision or impression of her has been occupying his mind and extending a sublime embrace. Rimi like Wordsworth's Lucy is unknown to the world but she is the poet's constant companion. The poet recalls Rimi as a jeans-clad young tarjan girl facing rowdy boys. She is single but a powerful fighter. Rimi is seen in another role as a leader demanding power, prestige, justice and freedom for all people. She is another Nirvaya. She is neither a professional nor an NGO owner. But she has a mission and determination to reach her goal like Mother Teresa. Again, Rimi appears in a book store in her T-shirt with moderately uplifted front and looks smart. She is seen as a volunteer who lifts a child up from sliding hill side risking her own life. Similarly she averted a major accident at an unmanned railway crossing.

Rimi's interests are well diversified. She prays in a temple dressed like a traditional Bengali woman devotee. She is present in a poetry session. She is a singer. She is a saviour. "She combines the society, humanity and modesty. She is a paradigm of bravery, a role model of honesty. Rimi is apostle of peace". (p. 33) Rimi is omnipresent. Naturally the poet asks and himself gives the reply.

Should we compare Rimi with feminist poet
Kamala Das ? Perhaps not, for quest
Of the two completely different. Kamala was obsessed
With her own confession which unnecessarily disgraced.

Such a rare personality belonged to all and again to none. Rimi is a myth even in her life time. She is sure to go down in history as future inspiring refrain. (p. 34)

She belongs to the whole world/the whole world belongs to her. (56)

The poet administers a word of caution, "Women are not commercial products. Do not "Ad" them, sometimes semi-clad/sometimes less than that (19) women are not for sale. Regarding Rimi's faith the poet writes,

Rimi never bowed down to temple deity
She rather bows down to the down trodden identity
She believes God never stay there
God with everyone everywhere. (35)

The book is a humble tribute to the symbol persona a called Rimi. The ideas are noble and sublime and proclaim their sublimity even at the cost of poetic art.

- **Ram Bhagwan Singh**

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Eternal Quest : S.L. Peeran Bizz Buzz, 2, 1 cross Road, Bangalore- 560050 pp 111, Price Rs. 150/-

Eternal Quest is S.L. Peeran's thirteenth collection of poems. The book contains 92 poems, 71 quatrains and 27 haikus showing the poet's prolificity and thematic diversity. Peeran is an established figure as a poet in quest of morality and ethical values. The poet again and again assumes the role of a preacher and guide. The poems in this collection reinforce his self-experienced truths of life; the eternal truths, the essence of eternal quest.

Matthew Arnold held that poetry could be a substitute for religion. It could sensitize, civilise and moralise humanity. Peeran's poems substantiate and consolidate the same belief. On the one hand he exposes the vanities, incongruities and evils in contemporary life with an implied message to eschew them. Thus, he says,

To save ourselves from elimination,
Man needs to elevate his mind and soul,
By subduing ego, anger and pride.
Ever humble himself and be simple. (p.2)

However, the poet is conscious of the elemental instincts and passions of human beings. He knows "Sin is the second nature of man. Goodness being its first and last." (p. 14) By reigning one's evil instincts one can bring in peace, co-operation and compassion. The poet believes that "magnetic fields emanating from saintly beings have cleansing effect on other beings." (p. 13) He maintains that "a word which will shine like a sparkling diamond, like a pearl etc. etc. (p. 22) but he doesn't spell out that mysterious word. I suppose it is perhaps 'love' as the Hindi poet Kabir has said that millions of people read millions of books but nobody became wise except the one who read and grasped

the meaning of the word 'love'. No wonder, "they are all cattle and beast of burden, having not a thought of deep import." (p. 26)

The poet grieves at the unhappy rich people's lives who are the victims of material prosperity. To quote,

You own AC Salon, Mercedes cars
Your profuse, enormous wealth has upoet
Your minds and ways of wise living.
With all the pleasures of the world,
Your mothers, sisters and wives
Are shedding tears of blood. (P. 50)

And more,

You are changing your partners like bed coverings.
.....Arrogance has become a bane. Therefore, his sane advice is "Be logical, loyal to your own soul. Bring world peace and brotherhood." (p. 50)

The poet lists some more virtues like patience which according to him is the mother of virtue. (P. 51) However, he is conscious of the limits of patience which breaks out as a tsunami when too much tried and tortured and suppressed. The poet's heart goes out for the toiling-moiling rustics whose life is a series of pain and privations. They have none other to console and sustain them than God.

Literature by its very nature beams back contemporary consciousness, the current trends in the day to day life. Peeran is right to call it "disjointed times with materialism gripping the minds. "Consumerism is the order of the day, competition has become a way of life, the door is open for rat race, man is bereft of compassion sympathy, man has turned against man, love and affection withering away, charity has melted in the thin air." (p.66) Such a perception is neither new nor revelatory. Long ago William

Wordsworth echoed the same feelings when he said that the world is too much with us.

The poet feels helpless as he prays to God for guidance and mercy. He says, "O Lord ! lead me to light and straight paths.O Lord ! Befriend me; take me in your fold. Don't leave me in the grip of traitors." (P. 56)

The quatrains, too, are a variation on the same subject matter – the barometer of the times as it were. The poet speaks of hypocrisy and pessimism and calls for readiness to fight the odds in life. The Haikus at places shine like will - o' - the wisp. For example, the lingering past / Reminds of our lovely friends / Fragrance of roses. (p. 106)

On the whole, *Eternal Quest* can serve as a prayer book. The thoughts and ideas are sublime and sincere. The only thing is the thoughts are bare; they would be more shining and reverbrating with some tapestry of imagery and veiled beauty.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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***Sunrise in Slums* : Padmashree Ravindra Rajhans Partridge India, Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd. 11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi-110017 (2013) pp. 124**

Here is the latest literary produce of Padmashree Ravindra Rajhans who is a retired professor of English and a celebrated poet in Hindi. Dr. Rajhans is better known as a satirist remarkable for his striking imagery and uncommon wit. A satirist is the conscience of the contemporary world with sincere social concern. Behind the exposure of incongruities of the age there runs the undercurrent of passionate provocation for correction and reform.

The book contains 60 poems in Hindi with their offside translation in English by the learned professor Dr. Madhusudan Thakur. The original poems as the very title suggests are all related to slum children, the marginalised flock, the underdogs as they are called. No doubt, they are bereft of sunshine, the sunshine of civilised living. Nobody knows when there will be sunrise over the slums, but one thing is clear, the clouds of ignorance and complacency are receding giving way to awakening and ambition. The poet contributes his bit by feeling one with them and voicing their concern.

The first poem *किस चिड़िया का नाम है बचपन* has been translated as *The Unfortunate Children* who like lambs are treated only as trees of wool for the shepherd. Metaphorically the children are the prospective coolies and labourers to serve others. They are valued for their labour potential. The poet remarks that William Wordsworth would not have written *The Rainbow* had he once seen such unfortunate children. In *The Baby Show* the poet juxtaposes the slum children with the affluent ones to bring out the contrast in their conditions of life. As udder-stimulators to cows the poor children are to society. Society lets them lick the skin of civilized living and immediately they are weaned away like the calf from the cow. The satire is aimed at the society, the cruel, callous and prejudicial system. In the same strain the poet writes that the blind, the deaf and the dumb are blessed as they don't have to watch ugly and hideous scenes and hear insults and abuses and respond to filthy taunts and abuses. Obviously the poet suggests that such people are subjected to all such cruelties.

The poems in this collection belong to two main categories – those that express the multiple sufferings

of the slum children and those that express their awakened consciousness plus the poet's advocacy for them. 'A Beggar's Music' is a soulful expression of the painful sensations of the beggar's skin as the blind beggar sings in a railway coach giving varied turns and twists to his hips and mouth. The tea-leaf picker woman with a baby saddled on her back sings a sweat-soaked sad sweet song. 'Platform Number 4' is a biting satire on the hapless children's fate, the sons and daughters of railway coolies regularly working on the platform carrying the passenger's luggage. This platform is virtually the children's home, their father, their mother where the train lies like a sow feeding her young. Metaphorically the children go on sucking her breast as the deluxe train arrives, they pounce upon the leftovers in AC coaches to get by chance a bit of a chicken leg, a few grains of pulao, the little bit of ice-cream stuck to the walls of the cups etc. The poet's calling it a 'beggar's banquet' is a shameful bombshell on our democracy.

The same is the story of rag-pickers who find the dustbin a blessed store of a broken comb, stale bread, an abandoned toothpaste tube, empty water bottles etc. Recounting the life cycle of slum children the poet compares them to a horde of cockroaches coming out of old trunks in dark and dingy lanes without toilets and baths. In an ironical way the poet calls their hovels their Disneyland. The poet must be grief-stricken while writing that in the 21st century the slum children's childhood has been lost in the wilds of present day civilization like a ball lost among grass and shrubs. Nature would stop her benedictions unless such children are well treated. It is unfortunate that small children are employed in hazardous jobs in a fire works factory, in a bangles factory to undergo open risks to

health and life. Similarly, children are made soft targets for abductors and terrorists. They suffer for the misdeeds of their parents who amass black money and earn rivals. Moreover, the TV generation children glued to cartoon serials are in danger of becoming cartoons themselves. In short, slum children are treated like the scum of the society, no better than pigs and cockroaches.

But times are changing. The poet's observation has been summed up as follows :

These children have just come out of the
Womb of darkness
As the chicks come out of eggs,
With soft rosy skin
Balancing their tiny legs on the ground,
Tottering they move on with confidence
(*Germination of self-confidence*, p. 53)

They are poised to take off one day. These children, may be, out of fashion at least, call their father and mother *Mom* and *Dad*. When a washerman's child addresses his parents like that the customer feels, "what a change ! these low-class folks are aping us, trying to acquire a new social identity." (15) Moreover, the poor girls are going to school marching with the boys. They are getting aware of social realities as a result of education. "None can check their advance now.... None can confine her to the kitchen alone. None can reduce her to a child producing machine only. The shackles of their legs are finally broken." (54) Even the female foetus cries out of the womb not to kill her in the labour room. She will be an asset to the family as a sister, wife and beloved to someone. She will stand on her own legs. The new generation is asking pinching questions regarding irrational traditional values and systems. A militant and smart child asserts, "No ! I won't be a servant for ever saying

yes sir, yes sir, yes sir !" rather I will hear others say to me like that.

The poet sitting in judgement feels for the unfortunate children who are desperately trying to come out of the traditional maze, pronounces, " O let them return to the open, their home !" (6) In *O Dronacharya !* the poet pleads for equality and fraternity and not to repeat the prejudicial favour allowed to prince Arjuna. Without making bones he says, "Get free of your Arjuna-complex,

Just listen, O Acharya, times are calling ! (25) The poet's stern warning is that these slum children belong to a country of Lord Hanumans. They might devour your sun one day.... How long shall they wait for the sunshine to light up their life." (48) Therefore, the poet's advice is to adopt such children out of love. And finally, he prays to the Admighty that all the children were like Dhruva and Prahlad who are not harmed by evil doers. Such a normative note suggests the design of *Sunrise in Slums*.

Translation of poetry is a delicate affair. Change of language imposes its own shades and textual diversions. The translator tries to approximate to the feelings and ideas he perceives in a given text hopefully substituting for the figures and frills of the original. Poetry is poetry since the ideas and feelings are encased in effective images and metaphors. The translation of *Sunrise in Slum* is a hard task even though the theme is pretty obvious. The poet's feelings and sympathies are explicit just as well. Thus, I find the translation of certain poems like Blessing in Disguise, Return them their sky, Reactions of a domestic maid's son, Platform Number Four, Out of dark tunnel, The shoeshine boys, Children as soft targets and the TV generation has been meticulously done. The feelings

and ideas have been conveyed appropriately and meaningfully. In certain poems the translation has been overdone and outstripped for example, in the leaf plate lickers, Ramua, Pleasures of penury and The voice of new generation. I think, the real problem before the translator occurs when he is faced with local lingo, the colloquial Hindi. It is not possible to find their equivalents in English. Moreover, the tone and tenor of the original can hardly be rendered in a different language. However, the translation is very close to the original.

On the whole, the book is a fine collection of poems memorable for their compassionate design and witty style which happens to be the trade mark of Prof. Rajhans. Congratulations to both the authors !

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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Dr. Christoday Raja Jayant Khess : *Train of Nostalgia : A Collection of Poems Paintings*, Kalpaz Publications C. Satyawati Nagar, Delhi- 110052, pp. 168 Rs. 360/-

The book under review is a collection of 105 poems and 36 paintings. All these paintings evoke the poems of the same titles. The poems are categorized in seven heads starting from childhood's observation to the pensiveness born of disillusionment in the matured phase of life. The seven heads are : 'Childhood Days, 'Observations', Inspiring Notes', Beautiful Moments', 'In a Lighter Vein', 'Love songs', 'In a Pensive Mood', and the concluding 'Epilogue.'

Supple sensibilities, statements of facts, wise sayings, motivating general truths and ironic observation constitute his poetry in this volume. "Childhood Days" consists of poems on a child's

response to what he encounters, for example his visit to a railway station captivates his mind.

The savage of beauties on the tracks,
Are reminiscent of those childhood days;
When the sight of advancing trains,
Captivated our young brains;

The poet feels that small things in life inspire a child be it train or truck, toys or shoes, the rooster crows or the beetles which may sound insignificant and trite to an edderly person. "Ode to the Beatles" strikes the chord of the young :

The Beatles were preparing to hit the road,
Play incredible music like never before,
Inspire an entire generation to love
Forget hatred and concentrate on rock.

Truly we can fight many odds with 'rock', music, song and poetry. However, these poems do not evoke any feeling of nostalgia about childhood.

The second section "Observations" constitutes some of his finest poems giving wings to his imagination and teeth to his ironic wisdom in his random observations on certain things like cheetah, tiger's hypnotic eyes, the battle of Plassey, Himalayas, sainthood, Birsa and others. Here we have intellectual ironic response to things of the past and of the present that stir the poet. He questions "Who will sit on judgement. "On those who dropped the Atom bomb..." in the context of Nazis's trial by the Atomic bombers. The artist's imagination finds a perfect poetry in a cheetan on the run or at rest in the poem "Cheetah at Rest" and imagines hypnotic eyes of a tiger, the real strength of the predator. In "Holier Than Thou" he scathingly strikes at the practice of spending some time in the Himalayas or deep forest as a recluse and then coming back to the world as a saint :

So, whatever you do in the end,
Please do not comeback as a saint.

However, some poems like 'Himalayas', 'Moved by the Railways', 'The Adivasi' with matter of the fact observations fail to satisfy the poetic art.

"Inspiring Notes' as the title suggests are short and crisp motivating talks in verse and some of them constitute the general truth we are familiar of and have their worth besides poetry as for exmaple 'Don't Cry', 'Never Give up', 'Facts of life' 'United They Stand'. The poet is at his best when he presents a case study and makes us read between the lines or respond to the call as in "The Last of the Braves" and "Fall of a Mighty Sultan". "A Tribute to Heroes of Kohima" calls for :

Spare a thought, when alone,
For those who fell by a tennis court
Make amends, before it is late,
And pay tribute to those heroes.'

"Beautiful Moments" includes seven poems of haunting beauty of tender and soft feeling with lingering effect. In the poem "Haunted" the girl like Wordsworth's Lucy leaves behind a trail of mysterious desire in slow moving rhythm. In the next poem 'Untamed Spirit' man is symbolised by 'unbridled filly.' 'A Celebration of Beauty' is a good composition in which he presents his vision of three beauty in the depiction of a scene but leaves it bare in his final judgement "Beauty cannot be overshadowed / By those who paint themselves/To hide the lines of eye." "Remembered" begins superbly. 'How many might have toiled/In the scorching heat of day'. But the second stanza could not build upon it and reads prosaic.

Very few poets have written poems in lighter vein.

Dr. Khess must be commended for being creative enough to compose humorous, non-serious poems with serious undertones. Some of the poems are in sing-song rhythm and all are light, bright with dizzy heights.

'Love Songs' shows the poet in different mood and flavour of language and we enjoy the difference. They are lyrical effusions of personalised experiences of tender moments and situations. They are focussed on boy-girl relationship with sensuous images :

So every time you spot my put belly,
Your legs may not turn to jelly.

They are experiences of proposal, confession silence, ecstasy, joy, tender emotion, fiery emotion, sexual act and wantonness. Poetic embellishments like simile, metaphor, symbols, images etc are beautifully used here more than ever before :

Hypnotized by her passion,
He is frozen into a statue,
Stiff like a ramrod.

"In a Pensive Mood" carries poems on some personal angst and matured wisdom on existential issues with food for thought and prompts us to revisit the issues like life, death, quest, despair, or the country which have always been dear to poetry.

On the whole the book covers a wide range of subjects and experiences neatly categorized in different heads for readers' convenience and the poems are short, crisp and simple in language. It is a happy leisure read. The production is really of international standard.

C.L. Khatri

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Ranu Uniyal : *December Poems, Kolkata, Writers Workshop, 2012, pp. 51, Rs. 100/-*

To me the first requirement of a creative work is to hold the reader's attention and keep it alive till the end. On my part I read a few pages of a book and then leave it to the book to keep me going or make me drop it. Ranu Uniyal's *December Poems* made me read the whole book in one leisurely sitting and some of the poems tempted me to re-read and I came out of it murmuring two blessed expressions – "thank you" and "love you" (At Fifty 48-49)– mantras to avoid loneliness and grief in old age. The beauty of her poems lies in her existential and transcendental quests to articulate the life as it comes to her. The poetic expressions of very personal and intimate experiences that stired the Muse within her leave behind a lingering effect on the readers as they partly reveal the poet and partly hold back. This is not incidental but part of her craft.

She manipulates the so-called 'masculine' or 'colonial' tongue to serve a feminine sensibility. One can easily discern from her poems a female voice :

"Every night I sit on cushions of hope.
My bed moans for comforting hug
and I know you are not for from me."

or her poem born out of Damini's case in Delhi :

"and Dileep raunchy with mischief
howled caste no bar, colour no bar
sex baar baar !"

Another beautiful poem of feminine sensibility is
"A woman has no dreams."

Nights
Hang on like soiled dreams
Of failed lovers bonded in defeat
Whose love was robbed of all its finery.

She often articulates her female persona through images of 'night', 'bed', 'kitchen', 'bathroom' 'Draupadi', 'Anasuya', soiled dream, 'maffled sobs of the wide beach', 'flesh', 'stone' and above all of December 'the time to freeze'. We have well crafted poems on woman's love, her failed love, soiled dreams, aspirations, frustration, her fetters– 'To think of anything but moksha is a sin', her 'repression and servitude', her trial coming down from the ancient age of the *Mahabharat* (Draupadi) to the contemporary age which demands change in her perspective to get rid of her perennial problems, her resistance and defiance and above all her prayer born of her conviction :

The prayer will be my song
And the heart will never cry
True love will always reign
And the life is blessed again"

She aptly demonstrates that the English language is a flexible tool rather than a rigid masculine verbal symbol and can be manipulated in either ways or by any social, racial and political divides. It only needs a manipulator and Ranu Uniyal is clearly an efficient manipulator of the English language as Kamala Das was or Meena Alexander is. The mythical references in the poems initiate a critical dialogue with the readers and in this process lies the possibilities of different perceptions to be born. However to me 'Draupadi' is the most powerful poem in this collection. It is remarkable that she restrains herself from lapsing into sentimentality and gives full vent to poetic art by making judicious use of poetic embellishments. No doubt Ranu Uniyal is likely to emerge a significant signature in Indian English Poetry. It's a treat to read this book. Try it.

C.L. Khatri

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Mahesh, Sangeeta. *Ocean of Thoughts*. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2014. Pp. 63 Rs. 195/- ISBN: 978-81-7273-861-7

Sangeeta Mahesh has entered the realm of Indian Poetry in English with her maiden poetry collection *Ocean of Thoughts* which, in the age of materialism where humanity is lost somewhere, attempts to awaken people's inner selves to some extent, and for this she asks for the blessings of Lord Ganesha so that she may have ability "to sing songs for the welfare of the world" and strength "to raise voice / for the sufferings of the mankind" (17). As she wishes to sing the songs of humanity, she requests Lord Kaveesha for making her and her poetry "natural, melodious and sweet" with the divine rhythm. The moralist in the avatar of the teacher seems to be more dominating than the poetic avatar in Sangeeta Mahesh, who talks of saving rivers, earth and space from pollution in order to enrich the world. She seems to be more cathartic than poetic while composing poems.

Though the colourful fish of materialism attracts her through its songs of power, money, physical beauty and lust, she knows well how to come out of the "whirl of illusions" and, hence, she dives deep into the ocean to find the fish of love and compassion. She asks the reader not to quit or lose hope but to face all adverse circumstances like Hanuman, who "used His wit and force / removed the hurdles and reached the shore" (20). The need is to change the perception otherwise "joy can nowhere be found" (22) and, so, she advises "to work hard and live in present" and not to "ponder over loss or gain" which will give pain.

She does not know whether she should feel proud of free India where people die because of starvation even today. She does not consider it freedom; she

dreams of free India—India when she "will get freedom / from hunger, poverty and malnutrition" (26). It is tragic that even today people lead "a fearful life." She finds her motherland being wounded and, so, she realizes that she needs "the ointment of compassion, honesty and trust." Like a teacher, she exhorts her countrymen thus: "Nurture your mother and respect your mother / Regain its dignity and make it great / Make it really the 'heaven of freedom' / Where all can live with joy and grace" (28). She cries when she finds "humanity hiding itself behind the veil" because of the shame, which she feels over "the heinous crimes of rapes / and brutal acts of acid attacks / on innocent females" (29).

Besides social issues, she also composes poems on her mother, father, son and daughter. She knows the value of relationships and, so, she cries when she sees relations being broken because of money. She touches the strings of her reader's heart, which certainly feels pain at the tragic tale of Nirbhya along with the wailing of the female foetus, which narrates the reality of abortion. She also makes him aware of the wolves, who are "more poisonous than the poison" and moving here and there in the disguise of saints. She believes only in one religion—the religion of humanity. Hence, she asks the people to make humanity their religion because "Service to mankind is the service to God" (41). Whenever she feels grieved, she comes to Nature and asks her to teach harmony, which is the world's greatest pleasure.

Life is a journey—journey full of uncertainties which come on the way where no one except soul is "the sole light", which gives insight that helps one, who is alone while moving to the unknown path. Though she is grieved to trace out social evils and the dead humanity, she is still optimistic in her faith. She knows

that “setting of sun is not the end of light” (50). What she can do is to fight against these evils. She is a poetic bird with “strong wings / of determination” and, so, she dares “to fight with the adverse winds / of difficulties and despair” (49).

Despite being the first poetry collection with 35 poems, *Ocean of Thoughts* is deep enough to have the gems of contents, which certainly strike the heart of the reader, who ponders over the contemporary scenario dotted with social evils, caused by the adverse effects of the materialism. But, what it lacks are the pearls, which could appeal through their images and metaphors. The fusion of thought and feeling becomes out of the track. But, being the first poetry collection, it is rich enough to raise the curiosity of the readers with its contents, and it is hoped that in future she will become mature enough to fuse the content and form to produce a better effect. She is on her poetic journey with various destinations in view, and certainly *Ocean of Thoughts* is her first milestone, which will inspire her towards her goal of “doing the good deeds of kindness / and by making everybody laugh” (48).

Sudhir K. Arora,

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River in Impasto: Rout’s Palimpsest on South Asian parchment of poetry in English Collected Poems: River in Impasto Poet: Tarun Kanti Rout, Publisher: BirdNest: Bhubaneswar (2014) ISBN-9788-1920-8431-7

The tradition of washing parchment using milk or oat bran and filling the space with newer versions has been revived in Tarun Kanti Rout’s collection of poems entitled *River in Impasto* (2014). While the book comprising 64 poems seeks a “narrow path of the surge in the blur of fables” (Walcott 11) on an epigraphic

substructure provided by the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott who had his epigraph quoted from Césaire in 1964, the thematic journey appears far more de rigueur for the lifeworld against the South Asian scenario of multiplicity of languages sheltered in a home of over one fifth of the world’s population.

Unlike the unclear identity of the South Asian writing in English, Rout’s collection of poems steers clear of muzzy ideas about a river, its journey from ‘infantile amnesia to misgivings of parthenogenesis in an unbroken flow’, (Rout, Preface) the ever-ready canoe for the poet to map the journey from pre-colonial days to present interpellation and a woman as outrigger whose growth is synonymous with the river itself.

South Asia may not be a coherent geopolitical region, but the writing in English emerging from its ever churning tradition has always been getting richer with more and more outpourings, thus piling up palimpsests growing staggeringly before our eyes. Rout says in one of his poems entitled *A portrait of retrogression*:

If you ever tried to disabuse me of my fanciful notions

I would seek an anodyne question escaping your lips in moments of usurping the throne of celibacy. (50)

Such usurping of the throne in a post colonial scenario appears like a palimpsest and if ‘a cowherd can be God/ somewhere between your placatory deal and my revolt,’ (66) the voice of the subaltern can be heard clearly notwithstanding diverse responses of the south Asian poets in English. Yasmine Gooneratne, Nissim Ezekiel, Omer Tarin, Ejaz Rahim, Tahmima Anam, Shadab Zeest Hashmi – all get converged in this impastoed canvas of post-colonial discourse.

The poems grounded in South Asian culture,

specifically Indian culture, are replete with relics of the past. The river has been painted in this book in such a way that it evokes emotions: spontaneous, powerful, varied and sublime.

In the beginning, Rout echoes the words of Derek Walcott that baffle the minds of the instinctive lovers of poetry:

Now, when the mind would pierce infinity.
A gap in history closes, like a cloud.

Walcott's words are Monalisa's smile – enigmatic; words point to a kind of experience that is transcendental and enlightened.

Rout deals with various issues relating to basic human emotions and relations. Complex relationship arising between nations lies rooted in an ignoble human emotion like jealousy. Rout pictures jealousy in the poem *Damage Limiting Persuasion*:

Jealousy is like a cousin once removed
returns off and on
all through life
to claim lost properties in damage limitation.(95)

Beautiful lines, indeed, to ponder over the source that embitters the relations between South Asian nations! *Persuasion* fails when jealousy affects.

In the lyric *I am from Balasore*, the poet speaks of diseases that infect the people living in conundrum of colonial rule.

I have seen them all in the relics
of a forgotten graveyard
where a small girl had died
of Asiatic cholera
much before you were born, unheard. (72)

Gwyneth Harold Davidson, the Caribbean fiction writer in the foreword to the book remarks that 'Rout

gives us calm surface scenes, but underneath is emotional force.' In fact, the poems can be befittingly and dexterously analysed in the light of tensions that arise in the South-Asian countries. Rout bemoans the sad plight and death of famine-stricken people and the apathy of the colonizers in the poem *Erase that scowl now*:

That year the drought carried off millions
despite mild protests from village women.
Carcasses of cattle and dogs blocked roads
when government officials came with legal shards
culled from dusty cabinets and racks
of colonial museums
established in eighteen sixty six-your year of birth.
(85)

Impasto technique in painting advocates for thickness of paint on the canvas so as to arrive at a rich texture. The river like the thick paint appears to be debouching into the reader from the book when the pages are flipped through. And Rout, the poet and the artist, lays down a different paradigm for the post colonial discourse with the help of three images – the river, a canoe and an outrigger.

To sum up, '*River in Impasto*' is a novel experiment with poetic language and substance. Rout falls in love with words that 'suggest more than mean'. In the twenty first century in the Indian subcontinent when many a poet is experimenting with language and message of poetry Rout emerges as a new Indian poet of substance and possibility; his poems go to the sources, of the issues that rock the nation, family and society.

Dr. Kali Kinkar Pattanayak, Orissa

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ANUKSHAN : Kamla Jain ,Rajsurya Prakashan, Delhi (2013),pp.120 , Rs. 200/-

The poetic prose of Anukshan is inspired by an inner vision and the social context gives this inner vision form. It is rightly dedicated to Truth .

The ambition to create a longer poetic or prose work is an interesting and exciting force behind a lot of literary works at present. But Kamla Jain aspires to create aphoristic prose which reads like poetry. The sentences are short, crisp and contain weighty thoughts. The subject matter of these aphorisms is derived from life and the author looks at almost all aspects of the contemporary Indian world. The experienced reality, however, does not remain merely Indian but universal.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is very appropriately entitled “Individual in Society” and the second is called “Society in Individual.”

The first part concentrates on the individual self-the inner life of an individual. We can call it that face of a man where there are no masks . without these various masks that we wear to confront others , it becomes difficult to confront the real self too. This is brilliantly expressed in the following lines : “can we develop the courage to look at our own self from the eyes of an outsider.”

A deep brooding pervades lines like these : “ Entry of people in our life may not be a great experience , but their going out of our life could be an experience of loss or emptiness “To meditate on such subtleties, one has to listen to them or read them attentively. However, even the very first reading of this book makes us realize that we are not standing with a stranger on the artificial shoreline of a passage of

water we knew nothing about. The words come in a steady stream and touch a chord in our heart. All that it had needed was this trigger point where the art of Kamla Jain set it all alight.

The second part- “Society in Individual “ presents the individual in relation to society. Here the individual is not confronting his inner self but now, his challenge is to confront others. The “selves” are made in a dialectical social process of interrelationships among selves. In Hegelian terms we can call the first part “being for self” and the second part “being for others”. While the first part is more concerned with the psychic, the second expresses a moral vision .

A mild irony, such as a pin pricked through a cushion , pervades these poems. For example : “Consumerist society gives us lots of glittering toys but it does not provide us the time to play with them.”

Or the following lines: “morality is too much of a luxury for the poor and a redundancy for the rich.

The vision is neither male nor female. No gender conflict is raised here. It may be termed a humanistic vision.

As a bilingual writer, Kamla Jain deserves our praises. Her chaste Hindi comes like a stream of fresh water in the wilderness of “Hinglish”. She surprises us by her complete mastery over English.

For me each line of this book is a diagram of becoming.

Kudos to you Kamla.

- Asha Viswas, Varanasi

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