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**Vol.6, Issue 1, May 2022**

A Journal of the Department of English,
Berhampur University, Odisha, India

**[Special Issue: Commemorating 100 years of *The Waste Land*]**



AUTHORS PRESS

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# EDITORIAL

Death said, 'your son I shall take'
The bandit said 'I will your wealth'
Destiny said, 'I will take all that you call your own'
And the critic said, 'I will snatch away your name and fame '
But the poet gently smiled, 'Which one of you can take away the felicity of my words?'

Rabindranath Tagore (*translation ours)*

These lines were written by Rabindranath Tagore, the bard of India, nearly a century ago yet their reverberations are felt even today. The Covid 19 pandemic has devastated humankind and indeed brought in its wake death, bandits and destiny that Tagore wrote about. Quite a few of us have lost some of our dear ones; human relations, finances, education, trade, tourism and sustainable development projects have all undergone a kind of change like never before. Even before all the people could be vaccinated and Covid 19 eradicated; before the world could get back on her feet economically and psychologically, the world has again been thrown into a crisis, this time manmade, in the shape of Russia 's war on Ukraine . This is starkly reminiscent of another gruesome pandemic and another devastating war exactly a hundred years ago. Scabs have been removed and memory is translated into reality where anxiety of existence and trauma of separation have become bedfellows with a weird new normal. Yet, this is the juncture where the wordsmith creates and great literature is born. C.S. Lewis once said, "You can make anything by writing" and this could not have been truer than at the time of this global humanitarian crisis. Writers have indeed made literature , addressed the wounds and affected healing by mixing "memory and desire"; desperation and hope and subjugation and rebellion. In 1922, was published one of the greatest modernist poems of our times, *The Waste Land*. Nicolas Tredell has rightly argued at the outset of his essay "*The Waste Land*: Trauma and Healing", included in this volume of *Literary Oracle*, that "T. S. Eliot's great Modernist

poem *The Waste Land* was first published 100 years ago, in 1922, at a time when the world was trying to recover from a global trauma, or rather two combined traumas of a kind with which we are all too familiar today: war and pandemic". Pradipta Sengupta, with the help of gaze theory, interestingly highlights Eliot's involvement with visual culture and the avant-garde art movements of the twentieth century in "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock", a precursor of *The Waste Land*. A. N. Dwibedi's essay "Indian Philosophy in Structuring *The Waste Land*" analyses the structure of the poem to expose the elements of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy that have gone into making the poem. Indrani Deb on her part argues about the currency of *The Waste Land* today and contends that the success and sustainability of the poem is because of its multicultural multi-religious nature. Devanshi's essay offers a new dimension in looking at the poem. She claims that the predicament of humans portrayed in the poem is a result of systematic technology induced dehumanisation. Kasturi Joddar makes a comparative study of *The Waste Land* and Arun Kolathkar's *Jejuri* positing the contemporary relevance and scope of *The Waste Land*. We hope that in future our contributors and other scholars will contribute more to T.S. Eliot scholarship.

Despite dark clouds of anxiety and uncertainty and a difficult limping back to normalcy through a new hybrid work culture in the cruel April heat, the Editors and publisher of *Literary Oracle* decided to bring out a special issue commemorating the hundred years of the publication of T.S. Eliot's magnum opus, *The Waste Land* while paying homage to his other poems too. We have worked hard and brought together scholars from across the globe and encased their erudition within the covers of our journal to 'make' a memorable special edition by paying homage to the greatest modernist poet T.S. Eliot, on occasion of the centenary of the publication of *The Waste Land* (1922) and also including research papers in varied areas and retaining our 'Interdisciplinary' and 'International' identity. We sent out a 'Call for Papers' when the third wave of the pandemic was raging around the world with the 'Omicron' fear shutting the doors and confining people again. We are honoured and humbled by the huge response of researchers as papers poured in from all the corners of the world. Scholars from United Kingdom, France, United States,

Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and India reinforced our faith in our mission to create sustainable literary and social criticism that will help budding students, teachers and scholars alike. Aditi Jana's essay interrogates gender in the poems of Rupi Kaur and Tishani Joshi as they promote the disregard of margins and peripheries in the quest for self-identity. The double marginalisation of women in the Arab countries as they are subjected to multiple forms of violence and subjugation is the central core of discussion by Debabrata Das as he discusses the works of Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Fakir. Dipankar Parui provokes the reader to delve deep into the fundamental questions raised by Amitav Ghosh in his landmark non-fiction work *The Great Derangement* regarding the lack of interest and concern over the serious ecocritical apocalypse in the world of literature. Khum Prasad Sharma presents an insightful analysis of Gita Kesari's path-breaking novel *Kasingara* which relates the tragic tale of a young girl, Maiya Saheb who is victim of patriarchy. The lack of sensitivity in the portrayal of disability in the Hindi film *Zero* is the topic of Manirul Islam's article and it also highlights the deprivation of disabled actors who enact the drama on celluloid. Claude Omhovère's thought-provoking paper discusses how landscape writing enhances the literary economy of the novel *Fire in the Rain* by Anita Desai. She argues how two landscape painting traditions that were a millennium apart- the *Shanshui* style of the Chinese and the Renaissance tradition of the West – were used by Desai in an interplay of pictorial traditions that upset static views of an eternal India steeped in tradition. The art of translation, its uses and difficulties have been delineated by Sukriti Ghoshal as he posits how translation interrogates the power structure and embraces internationalism. Suparna Roy's paper examines the peripheries of women as subjective objects in *Nobody Can Love You More* by Mayank Austen Soofi. The subjugation, ensuing depression and the inherent fortitude of African women that enables them to survive, is the central point of discussion by Thomas Jay Lynn, where he analyses the novel *Half a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

The scholarly papers and book reviews included in this issue address a vast gamut of multi-disciplinary deliberations that are relevant, thought-provoking and will surely add substantially to the

knowledge bank in related fields of inquiry and will serve to broaden the readers' awareness.

*Literary Oracle* welcomes suggestions from her readers and wishes them a happy reading experience.

**Shruti Das,**
**Sharbani Banerjee**
**Deepshikha Routray**

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# RESEARCH PAPERS

## SPECIAL SECTION ON THE WASTE LAND

# 1

# *The Waste Land*: Trauma and Healing

**Nicolas Tredell**

University of Sussex, United Kingdom

**Abstract**

The Waste Land was first published a century ago at a time, like the present, of global trauma due to war, a pandemic, and a host of other perturbing problems. This essay examines key aspects of the innovative structure and style of the poem, such as its fragmented "jump-cut" technique, its use of allusion and direct, but unsourced, quotations and translations from world literature, its wide range of cultural, linguistic, geographical and temporal references, and its vivid but economical evocation of a variety and multiplicity of fleeting situations and characters. It considers the forceful objections to these features and the justifications for them offered by Eliot and by sympathetic critics. The essay goes to relate these features to The Waste Land's sustained engagements with individual and collective physical, social, moral and spiritual traumata and to explore its tentative but often beautiful intimations of the possibilities of healing and hope.

Keywords: Trauma, war, transformation

T. S. Eliot's great Modernist poem *The Waste Land* was first published 100 years ago, in 1922, at a time when the world was trying to recover from a global trauma, or rather two combined traumas of a kind with

which we are all too familiar today: war and pandemic. It was four years after the end of what is variously called the Great War or the First World War, which lasted from 1914 to 1918 and claimed the lives of over 9 million soldiers. The Great War began in Europe but spread to encompass Russia, the USA, and the countries of what was then the British Empire, including India, which supplied around 1.3 million soldiers, of whom more than 74, 000 died in the conflict. Soon after the Great War came a global pandemic of influenza that lasted, in successive waves, from February 1918 to April 1920 and that killed more people than the First World War, perhaps between 50 and 100 million. But it was not only the huge death toll of these two events that was traumatic; there had been murderous wars and lethal pandemics in previous centuries. There was also a sense of epochal change, like the change in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; a feeling that an old world that had endured for centuries, since the Renaissance in fact, was breaking up and that life – and art – would never be the same again. This was highly disturbing but not wholly negative; there was also the feeling that it liberated energies, freed people from constricting patterns of behaviour and constraining artistic practices. In the arts, this was evident in those changes that we have come to call Modernism – or today, we might prefer to say "Modernisms", in the plural, to stress that there were many varieties of artistic modernism in many different parts of the world in this period. Modernist innovations appeared across the traditional arts, in poetry, fiction, painting, sculpture, music and dance, and the new medium of cinema, if not yet fully accepted as an art form, was an innovation in itself. For some of those familiar with traditional art forms, modernist innovations could be shocking but to others they could seem exciting.

The initial reactions to *The Waste Land* when it first appeared in 1922 illustrate these mixed responses. Some more traditional readers of poetry found it incomprehensible and rejected and condemned it, just as people rejected and condemned the Cubist paintings of Picasso or the music of Stravinsky that pulverised traditional symphonic form; others, particularly younger readers and artists, found it exciting. The reasons for these different reactions to *The Waste Land* lie in the form of the poem itself. There are two lines in *The Waste Land* that, in a sense, sum up its technique, though they

were not designed to do so. Line 22 of the poem uses the phrase "A heap of broken images" and line 430, which is the fourth line from the end of the poem, says "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"; and *The Waste Land* can indeed seem like a "heap of broken images" or a collection of "fragments". Compared to earlier English examples of long poems, such as Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) or William Wordsworth's final version of *The Prelude* (1850), *The Waste Land* is quite short – it consists of 433 lines in all, divided into five sections – but it covers an enormous amount of geographical, historical, psychological, social and cultural ground. It moves very quickly from one time and place to another, using a technique akin to what came to be called, in the new medium of cinema that was developing at this time, a "jump-cut", an abrupt transition from one scene to another that asks the audience to make the connections between them. This technique of "jump-cutting" in *The Waste Land* also anticipates the way in which, today, in the digital era, people surf the internet, on their laptops or iPads or mobile phones, moving almost instantly from one site to another, googling terms that come to mind or clicking on hypertextual links.

Much of *The Waste Land* is set in 1920s London but the poem also takes in Margate on the southern coast of Kent in England, Munich in Germany, unnamed but strongly evoked desert and mountain landscapes, the river Ganges, which the poem calls "Ganga" (l. 395), and the Himalayas, which the poem calls "Himavant" (l. 397). The poem goes back in time to Elizabethan England and ancient Greece and India. It is written mainly in English but incorporates words, phrases and sentences, mostly untranslated, from German, French, Italian, Latin and Sanskrit; Eliot had studied Sanskrit at Harvard, though not in great depth. *The Waste Land* also includes quotations from a wide range of sources including the ancient anonymous Latin poem *Pervigilium Veneris*; the Christian Bible; the Upanishads; Dante's *Inferno*; Shakespeare's *Tempest*; poems by Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, Paul Verlaine, Gérard de Nerval; and the libretto of Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. These quotations are not sources within inverted commas, which is the usual means, in an academic paper for example, by which one author indicates that he is citing the words of another author. This was a further element of *The Waste Land* that shocked some of its first readers; the poet seemed to be

cheating, plagiarising without acknowledgement. Eliot, however, was unashamed about this and indeed, in a pre-emptive way, he doubled down on it (as we might say today) in advance, declaring, in a 1920 essay on Philip Massinger: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different" (Eliot 1941, p. 206). Now Eliot, when he "stole" lines from Shakespeare or Spenser and put them into *The Waste Land*, would not have thought that he was making them into something better, but he would have seen that he was making them into something different by inserting them into a different context. As he goes on to say in that same essay, "The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn" (p. 206), and he adds that the good poet's sources will usually be the texts of "authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest" (p. 206). This is what he does in *The Waste Land*.

As well as its direct quotations, the poem also alludes indirectly but widely to Eastern and Western literature, philosophy, mysticism and religion. Along with Sanskrit, Eliot had studied Indian religion and philosophy at Harvard, and it had fascinated him; in *After Strange Gods* (1934), for example, he said of Indian philosophers that "their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys" (Eliot 1934, p. 40). *The Waste Land* evokes a wide range of situations and characters, sometimes in a few lines, sometimes in a more extended way, as if you were quickly dipping into, or surfing through, a succession of novels and short stories – or perhaps as if you were listening to a radio and turning the tuning control so that you heard snatches of dialogue and declarations from a wide variety of sources. It is through different voices that the different characters in *The Waste Land* emerge.

This raises a question, however, that concerned some early critics of *The Waste Land*. If the poem has these sudden jump-cuts, if it has this range of quotation and allusion, if it breaks at key points into foreign languages, usually without translations, which not every reader may know, if it offers you glimpses of a lot of characters and situations without following them through, if it is such a heap of broken images or fragments, is it not too complicated, too abstruse, too obscure, to speak directly to people? Eliot further complicated the

problem by adding a series of notes at the end of *The Waste Land* that gives the sources of, and apparent rationale for, certain lines; it is by no means a complete series of annotations and parts of it can seem misleading and sometimes satirical, as if Eliot were mocking an academic approach to poetry; nonetheless, Eliot's notes have become almost a part of the poem. People reading, studying or writing about *The Waste Land* in a sustained way will be aware of, and often refer to, those notes, as this paper will. It might be said, however, that if you need notes to appreciate and understand a poem, particularly if the author supplies them himself, this shows that the poem is not really successful; surely it should be able to stand alone?

We can answer this objection with another well-known quotation from Eliot – he was quite good at creating, in his insightful and influential literary criticism, a justification for his practice as a poet in *The Waste Land* and elsewhere in his poetry. In his 1929 essay on Dante, he declared: "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood" (Eliot 1941, p. 238). In other words, we do not need fully to understand a poem for it to convey something significant to us, even if we cannot readily put it into words. If we think of encountering a poem in a language that we do not know or with which we are only partly familiar, especially if that poem is read aloud, we can often grasp something about it, because poetry works through sound, through rhythm as well as through the kind of meaning we can paraphrase, put into words. *The Waste Land* is an erudite, allusive poem; but it also communicates on the level of sound, of rhythm, of rhyme, of repetition, of variation; it goes back to the primal roots of poetry in ritual, in song, in chant, in dance; and in this sense its sound does support its overall meaning, because *The Waste Land* indicates that, in order to heal the global traumas of its time, and perhaps of our own, we need to reconnect with these ancient roots that once seemed to bind society together.

Some literary critics have tried to extract a coherent narrative from the fragments of *The Waste Land*, treating the poem as if it were a puzzle to be decoded that would eventually reveal an integrated pattern. Those attempts to find a coherent narrative can be very interesting but they are not finally convincing; critics have always come along with new interpretations. The sense that it is an example of one of the most ancient forms of narrative, the quest narrative, is

useful, but it is not a quest that has a coherent protagonist, a clear itinerary and a definite ending; it is not, for example, a twentieth-century version of the quest for the Holy Grail or of an ancient vegetation ceremony designed to ensure the renewal of the annual crops on which life depends, although looking at it in those ways can be fruitful to some extent. What we will do here is to look at *The Waste Land* in terms of two interrelated categories: trauma and healing; the poem assembles a range of examples of trauma and offers, not a cure or a complete recovery, but intimations, hints, "aethereal rumours" (l. 415) of healing possibilities.

**Trauma**

We can start with the poem's very first line: "April is the cruellest month". In other words, April is the most traumatic of months. This subverts a much more familiar formula in English poetry, in which April is not the cruellest but perhaps the kindest month because it is the beginning of spring, the season when life starts to reawaken after the long chill quietude of winter, the renewal of hope. If we go back to the very dawn of English poetry, the General Prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* opens with these lines, here in the original Chaucerian English, Middle English:

> Whan that Aprille with his shoure**s** soote,
> The droghte of March hath perc**e**d to the roote,
> And bath**e**d every veyne in swich licóur
> Of which vertú engendr**e**d is the flour.

We might cast this into modern English along these lines:

> When April with its showers so sweet
> Has pierced the drought of March to the root
> And bathed each vein in liquid of such power
> That has the force to engender the flower.

At the very start of *The Waste Land*, however, April is the cruellest month. Why? The poem does not ignore the life-quickening qualities of Spring, as we see if we follow it across the next three lines, which include the present participles – "breeding", "mixing", "stirring" (ll. 1-3), giving a sense of active, animate life in process, and mention "[l]ilacs" (l. 2), which are fragrant and visually beautiful, and "spring rain" (l. 4), which is refreshing and life-giving. How can this be cruel? Because it awakens "[m]emory and desire" (l.

3), because it makes you recall the past and long for things in the future, and, this is painful, an agonising rebirth. In contrast, winter provided security, keeping us warm, covering the world with "forgetful snow" (l. 6), maintaining a minimal level of existence. We find here what we might now think of as a classic response to trauma: you try to limit the damage, of whatever kind, by shutting down your system, your consciousness and memory, your psychological and emotional pain receptors, and it is painful to awaken from that. Nonetheless, the awakening, while one continues to live, is necessary, perhaps inevitable.

In *The Waste* Land, however, it is, at first, an awakening to nihilism, to despair: we shift into a barren, arid desert landscape of stone and remorseless sunlight. The only shade is beneath a "red rock" (l. 25), but this is a place for a frightening and nihilistic display: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (l. 30). The imagery of drought, physical and spiritual, is important in the poem, and is counterpoised by the contrasting imagery of water from natural sources, of rain, rivers, and the sea. In the section in Part I of the poem in which Madame Sosostris lays out the fortune-telling Tarot cards, she finds a card that shows "the drowned Phoenician Sailor" and she interprets this as a warning: "Fear death by water" (ll. 47, 55). But there is also a suggestion that "death by water", in the sense of a ritual cleansing and purgation, may be necessary for rebirth, for escape from the Waste Land.

Then comes, at the end of Part I of the poem, the vision of post-World-War-One London as an "Unreal City" (l. 60) – a phrase that will recur. In lines that incorporate a translation and partial adaptation from Dante's *Inferno*, the speaker of the poem at this point (whom we should not identify as Eliot himself) sees the crowd flowing over London Bridge as living in a kind of hell, consisting of dead people walking, animate spectres taken over by the automaticity of modern urban life. "I had not thought death had undone so many" (l. 63). In light of the Great War, these might be seen as dead soldiers returned to a phantasmal life, or as a hallucination of these, or as living people who are haunted by the memories of comrades and loved ones who died in the conflict.

The second part of *The Waste Land*, "A Game of Chess", contrasts two other kinds of trauma; on the one hand, there is the fashionable upper-class lady in her boudoir, caught in a tense relationship, bored, discontented and highly anxious, rapping out her demands in staccato fashion, wanting her partner to stay, to speak to her, to know her thoughts. The scene then shifts to a group of working-class women in a London public house where one of them is telling her companions about her conversation with another woman called Lil (who does not seem to be present herself at that point); Albert is Lil's husband. Here Eliot employs the vernacular and conveys quite well, if with more than a tinge of snobbery, a demotic London accent and register. From what the woman says, we thus infer that Lil is a woman with five children who nearly died giving birth to her last child, who seems to have got rid of one baby by abortifacient tablets that have aged her prematurely, and who is apparently at the mercy of her husband's desire. So, the romantic and sexual relationships that might be expected to bring fulfilment and fruitfulness are traumatic; emotionally and sometimes physically painful and damaging.

It should be said that Eliot has been criticised for the attitudes implied in this section and elsewhere in the poem, charged with being too negative and for indulging a strong streak of misogyny – it is the women who are shown as neurotic and damaged and demanding, not the men – or at least when the men are shown as demanding it is accepted as an inevitable part of life. "Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said" (l. 163). These criticisms are true to a considerable extent: *The Waste Land* does offer a largely negative view of human existence and women are sometimes portrayed as demanding and hysterical or sadistic and self-satisfied. But it is not the whole story. In regard to its portrayal of women, we might observe, from a twenty-first century perspective, that *The Waste Land* is particularly aware of sexual violence against and the sexual exploitation of women. A key motif in the poem is what it calls in Part 2 "[t]he change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced" (l. 99). This refers to an ancient Greek myth that exists, like most ancient myths, in several versions; but the one to which *The Waste Land* alludes tells us that King Tereus raped Philomel, his wife's sister, and cut off her tongue to try to stop her from calling out

violation: this is still a very powerful image of the forcible silencing of sexually abused women. In the myth, Philomel is eventually changed into a bird, the nightingale, who sings, as *The Waste Land* puts it, "with inviolable voice" (l. 101). This is the paradigm for several other key examples of such violence in the poem. In regard to the more general charge of negativity, the poem is indeed quite negative in its vision of human existence and human relationships, but it does also offer hints and intimations of other, more fulfilling relationships and ways of living, even if these are no more than glimpses that seem difficult or almost impossible to realise in actuality.

Part 3 of *The Waste Land* is called "The Fire Sermon" – the Sermon preached by the Buddha against lust, envy, anger and other passions that consume human beings; but it is lust on which the poem focuses here, and on men's sexual exploitation of women. Again it is set mainly in London and evokes the end of Autumn when the illicit couplings in the open air on the banks of the River Thames have ceased and what the poem calls "the loitering heirs of city directors" (l. 180), wealthy, idle young men who possess young women on the banks of the River Thames at night have departed leaving "no addresses" (l. 181) – so that if any of the young women became emotionally involved with the men and wanted to continue their relationship and/or became pregnant, they would have no way of contacting them and could not expect the fathers of their babies to offer any support. Moving from the upper-class heirs to the lower middle class, *The Waste Land* goes on to evoke the "young man carbuncular" (l. 231), a clerk who thrusts himself upon an unresisting but indifferent typist in her bedsitter: their uninspiring carnal exchange leaves her with the vague thought: "Well, now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (l. 252). The poem then shifts back in time to allude to the dubious relationship of Queen Elizabeth I and her courtier the Earl of Leicester and returns to the present and to a young woman who is seduced, or raped, in a canoe floating down the Thames. Towards the end of "The Fire Sermon", the poem, so to speak, flows down the river Thames and out of London to the Thames Estuary and to the seaside resort of Margate on the English South Coast in Kent and evokes a sense of fragmentation: "I can connect / Nothing with nothing" (ll. 301-02). As it concludes, this part of the poem mounts in intensity; having invoked the Buddha's Fire

Sermon in its title, it now invokes a passage from the start of Book 3 of the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (354-430 CE): "To Carthage then I came" (l. 307). The full passage reads, in the translation Eliot gives in his notes, "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears" (p. 84, n. 307). The last lines of Part 3 become incandescent and almost incoherent: one line consists only of the present participle "burning", repeated four times with no punctuation (l. 308), and a desperate, fragmented plea for rescue by divine agency follows this (ll. 309-10). The final line of "The Fire Sermon" presents just one isolated word, "burning" (l. 311), repeated for the fifth time; we have moved away at this point from any conventional sentence structure: there is a breakdown of language suggesting a psychological breakdown and the breakdown of a culture and a society.

The fourth part of *The Waste Land*, at only ten lines much shorter than the other sections, is called "Death by Water", so that it metaphorically extinguishes the fervent, frantic fires, which burnt so intensely in the previous section, but also opens the possibility, to which we shall return, of renewal and regeneration. When we move, however, into the fifth and final section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said", we return to the arid and barren desert landscape of the second section of Part 1 of the poem. The desire for water becomes desperate and desolate and is expressed in an unpunctuated and fragmentary passage that repeats the words "rock" and "water". This unassuaged thirst then extends into a more general vision of fleeing peoples, calling to mind the refugees of the 1920s and the 2020s, and offers a roll-call of the successive destruction, represented by the image of "[f]alling towers" (l. 373) of civilisations, represented by their capital cities: "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London" (ll. 374-75). In this perspective, London, the "[u]nreal city" that the first and third sections of *The Waste Land* have evoked (ll. 60, 207) is the latest in a line of cities doomed to decay. Eliot is writing when the British Empire is still very powerful, dominating a large portion of the globe, but after World War One, the cracks are starting to show and the poem registers this.

## Healing

Later in the fifth section of *The Waste Land*, however, there is, not a complete healing of these traumas, but tentative signs of this. Before exploring this, however, we can go back and trace some of the earlier intimations of healing, of ways out of trauma, in the poem. We can start with the lines in Part 1, "The Burial of the Dead," that evoke "the hyacinth girl" (ll. 35-41). This appears to be a dialogue that gives a fleeting glimpse into a romantic relationship. At first, it seems like a fragment of a lyric poem evoking the girl with her arms full of hyacinths and with wet hair. This appears, however, to produce almost a kind of dumbness and blindness in the other participant in the exchange, who, after his initial glimpse of her, can no longer speak or see. That might sound negative, but we could also see it as a prelude to a heightened state of consciousness: the speaker enters an interzone between life and death and knowledge breaks down. This breakdown of ordinary cognition and perception, however, results in what sounds rather like a mystical vision: the speaker found himself "[l]ooking into the heart of light, the silence" (l. 41). This is akin to the kind of vision described in mystical texts, the kind of state that those who, for example, practise long and intense meditation can attain, although in this case, it seems to have been produced by romantic love, which can of course sometimes generate exalted states akin to mystical ones. As we have already noted, "nothing", used here in the phrase "I knew nothing", is a recurrent keyword in *The Waste Land* and can have very negative connotations; but here it is implied that knowing nothing, reaching a cognitive limit, can also be the prelude to spiritual illumination.

Soon after this in Part 1, the poem introduces the idea of "death by water", when the fortune-teller, Madame Sosostris, warns that it to be feared (l. 55). But as we have already suggested, death by water may also stand for a process of ritual cleansing, transformation and regeneration. *The Waste Land* contains two key references (ll. 125, 191-92) to Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1611), which is set on a small, barely inhabited island in which some of the characters are believed to have been drowned in a shipwreck. In the play, however, all the characters who are apparently drowned turn out eventually to have survived, and everyone on the island undergoes some kind of

transformation. It is summed up in the lines that the spirit, Ariel, sings to Ferdinand, who believes his father has drowned:

> Full fathom five thy father lies.
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange. (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 399-404)

Shakespeare's image of a "sea-change", a term that we still use in modern English to denote a fundamental, large-scale transformation, is very significant in *The Waste Land* and it encompasses both trauma and healing: trauma may open the way to transformation of a positive kind, a change into "something rich and strange". In the section in Part 2 of *The Waste Land* that we discussed earlier, in the exchange between the upper-class lady in her boudoir and her interlocutor, there is an insistent emphasis on that key word in *The Waste Land*, "nothing", repeated here no less than five times in four lines, with its nihilistic connotations of emptiness, the void; but, as we saw in the use of the word "nothing" in the dialogue with the hyacinth girl, experiencing nothingness may also be a prelude to illumination: and in this section, the fifth occurrence of the term "nothing" is immediately followed by "I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes" – and "Those are pearls that were his eyes" is, as we saw above, a quotation from *The Tempest*, an example of a transformation "into something rich and strange". So there is a hint, even in the very fraught situation evoked in Part 2 of *The Waste Land*, of a possible positive transformation.

"What the Thunder said", however, the fifth and final part of *The Waste Land*, offers the most positive possibilities in the poem and it is significant here that Eliot goes East – that the poem cannot find, in the Western culture of its time, sufficient resources for hope and affirmation. Clearly there is a significant element of Orientalist and Imperialist appropriation in this movement away from the Occident, the Westerner turning to an idea of the East as the place from which to raid spiritual resources; but there is also an acknowledgement that the East may offer elements that have been forgotten, obscured, repressed in Western culture; and in that sense the movement of the poem is anti-imperialist, challenging the notion of Western

superiority. The penultimate section of the last part of *The Waste Land* moves to the East, to India, to Sanskrit. It opens with the invocation of "Ganga" (l. 395), that is, the sacred river Ganges – waiting for rain as the black clouds assembled and thicken above "Himavant" (l. 397), a holy mountain in the Himalaya range. There is a sense of tension, of expectancy in the jungle, which is imagined as a crouching beast, silent and still, waiting to pounce. Then the thunder speaks, and it speaks in Sanskrit, in three words that the poem then glosses, after each word, in English: "*Datta*"; "*Dayadhvam*"; "*Damyata*" (ll. 401, 410, 417).

Eliot's notes translate the first, "*Datta*", as "Give" (p. 85, n. 401) and illustrates this with the example of an impulsive action that can never be retracted. The idea is by casting off your inhibitions, giving yourself to forces larger than yourself is a hazardous enterprise that may nonetheless generate an intensity unavailable in a more cautious existence. The second term, "*Dayadhvam*" is translated in Eliot's notes as "sympathise" (p. 85, n. 401), though some other translations render it as "be compassionate"; but Eliot links it with the idea of being imprisoned in oneself, in one's own ego as in a prison. Eliot's notes translate the third term, "*Damyata*", as "control" (p. 85, n. 401), which, if we think of it as applied to other people, is a questionable term at this stage of the twenty-first century; for example, we speak of a "control freak" to indicate a person who seeks to dominate and coerce others. Alternative translations, however, render "*Damyata*" as an injunction to restrain *yourself* or control *yourself*, which would eliminate or reduce the element of controlling other people, but the example of "control" that *The Waste Land* gives does seem to involve controlling another person: it could refer to some botched erotic opportunity, perhaps with "the hyacinth girl" evoked in Part 1 of the poem (l. 36): the implication is: if I had been as skilful with her as I had been when steering a boat, she would have responded gladly; the phrase Eliot uses in this section, "controlling hands" (l. 422), could sound rather creepy today; but it could also indicate an aspiration to a consensual relationship in which one person willingly yields to another. We have an area of ambiguity here and, as with the many other ambiguities in *The Waste Land* it is more rewarding to acknowledge and explore it as such rather than to try to revolve it into one unitary unequivocal meaning.

The last eleven lines of *The Waste Land* are a kind of microcosm, a demonstration in miniature, of the technique of the poem as a whole: they mix together English, Italian, Latin, French and finally, once again, Sanskrit; they include the refrain of a nursery rhyme for children and lines or fragmentary quotations from Dante, from an anonymous pre-Christian Latin poem, from the nineteenth-century English poet Tennyson and from the nineteenth-century French poet Gérard de Nerval, and from the Upanishads. They start on a note of tentative hope and end with a temporary but deep peace. The first two lines imply that the speaker of the poem has crossed the Waste Land – the "arid plain" is *behind* him (l. 424) – and that he has reached the shore of a sea that may offer the possibility – no more than that – of what Shakespeare's *Tempest* calls "a sea-change / Into something rich and strange" (Act 1, Scene 2, ll. 403-04) of positive transformation; in the meantime it is possible to take some provisional action, symbolised by "fishing" – searching for psychological and spiritual nourishment – and "sett[ing one's] lands in order" (l. 425) – taking stock of one's present and future resources. The prospect of apocalyptic collapse is still present, signalled in the line from the nursery rhyme, "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (l. 426), which refers to a literal historical reality of the eighteenth century. London Bridge, which had been the capital's only bridge over the river Thames until 1750, was indeed "falling down", top-heavy with houses and shops and with its structure crumbling. Here *The Waste Land* takes an example of imminent collapse from the past and applies it to early twentieth-century London, the latest in the succession of "falling towers" (l. 373), of great cities cracking up and collapsing and also, we have suggested, the harbinger of the break-up, across the twentieth century, of the British Empire. But the nursery rhyme from which Eliot quotes does go on to say that the bridge can be built up again, more solidly, with wood and clay, bricks and mortar, iron and steel, silver and gold – although each of these is also ultimately perishable. Nonetheless, the nursery rhyme does adumbrate the possibility that a structure that has collapsed may be built up again more strongly than before. The following line in the last section of the *Waste Land* is from Dante's *Inferno*, "*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*" (l. 427) and means "Then he dived back into the fire that refines", so we have, as in

earlier sections of the poem, the idea that fire, like water, may be destructive but can also ultimately be purging, purifying and renewing.

In his original note to the last three words of *The Waste Land*, "Shantih shantih shantih", Eliot said: "Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The Peace which passeth understanding' is a feeble translation of the content of this word" (Eliot 1971, p. 149, n. 433). Thus in 1922 he is saying that Western Christianity can offer nothing equal to the profound meaning of "Shantih". Later in his career, however, after he had become an Anglo-Catholic Christian, he altered the last part of the note so that it read: "The Peace which passeth understanding is our equivalent to this word" (Eliot 1974, p. 86, n. 433) – that is, he later juxtaposes "Shantih" and "The Peace which passeth understanding" as equals that mean pretty much the same thing and carry the same force. But that was not his original view. For Eliot in 1922, Christianity could no longer supply the answer to the problems *The Waste Land* poses. This does not mean that it could not be the answer for some of his readers and critics; but it is the readers and critics who supply it, not the poem. *The Waste Land* does not finally suggest, then or now, that there is some big, complete positive answer: but neither is it wholly pessimistic. It painfully explores trauma but it does offer tentative and often beautiful hopes of healing.

Abbreviations in references: l. = line; n. = note; p. = page.

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# 2

# The Play of Gaze in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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**Abstract**

Eliot's strong ties with visual arts and his undeniable affiliation with many avant-garde artistic movements of the twentieth century are exemplified and illustrated in his poetic canon. Given such deep affiliation with visual arts and modern artistic movement, it appears seemly to attempt to analyse his poems from the theoretical perspective of Gaze theory. Dwelling on the varied offshoots of Gaze theory, this paper proposes to analyse Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" from the insights derived from them. This paper would attempt to substantiate how the split in Prufrock into subject and object is effectively conveyed through and buttressed by the play of gaze. This paper would also claim to establish how this poem subverts and dismantles the popular notion of "male gaze" proposed by Laura Mulvey and chiselled by patriarchal social structures, and illustrates the play of "female gaze" proposed by Eva-Maria Jacobsson.

Keywords: Eliot, visual, art, gaze, "male gaze", "female gaze", Prufrock

"The hero smiles; in my best mode oblique
Rolls toward the moon a frenzied eye profound,

T.S. Eliot ("Nocturne")

"This charm of vacant lots!
This helpless fields that lie
Sinister, sterile, and blind –
Entreat the eye and rack the mind,"

T.S. Eliot ("Second Caprice in North Cambridge")

Researching on a poetic maestro as T.S. Eliot in 2022 is indubitably a daunting task simply because of the wide ken of research attempted

on him, exhausting and embracing almost all the possible territories as cultural, aesthetic, and theoretical criticism. In fact, so much has been said of Eliot that finding an untapped territory for exploration seems difficult. Yet, it will be my humble attempt to look into one of the widely read and most popular poems of Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", from a perspective hitherto unexplored. In this rather short essay, I propose to offer some preliminary ideas on gaze theory, and try to illustrate how Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" may be read from the insights derived from those theoretical perspectives. My further claim in this essay is to substantiate how the split of Prufrock's self into subject and object is buttressed by and conveyed through the play of gaze. My final claim in this essay is to illustrate that Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" dismantles and subverts Laura Mulvey's concept of "male gaze", and illustrates the exercise of "female gaze" enunciated by Eva-Maria Jacobsson.

Eliot's attachment to art and artists is a well-known fact. Eliot would frequent the Vorticists and artists affiliated to the Bloomsbury group. Eliot also had a deep and genuine appreciation for artists like Pablo Picasso, Edward Wadsworth, Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, among others. And yet, rather than make direct references to these artists in his poems, his poetic canon bristled with the illustration and application of avant-garde art movements of the twentieth century in terms of textual-visual explorations. He had a life-long penchant for Cubism, and also frequented the tea-parties of cubist artists. Eliot studies History of Ancient Art, among other subjects, during his Harvard years. Eliot's affiliation with visual arts accentuated since 1920s when Faber and Faber issued six of his poems[1] with illustrations. Eliot's paintings made by a few famous painters also reinforce his affiliation with visual arts: Wyndham Lewis was supposed to have painted him twice, in 1938 and 1948; Eliot was painted by Patrick Heron in 1949 and by Cecil Beaton in 1956. Finally, *The Waste Land* is supposed to have impacted upon many contemporary artists, including the famous R.B. Kitaj. The two major canvases made by Kitaj – *Tarot Variations* (1958) and *If Not, Not* (1975-76) – were products of the influence of *The Waste Land* on him. Given such deep affiliations with visual arts and artistic movements, it is only seemly that one may

venture to illustrate his poems with the insights derived from Gaze theory which broadly explores the visual and the scopic. This paper would, however, focus on one seminal representative poem of Eliot's early phase, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", which is highly amenable to such a theoretical discussion never attempted hitherto.

## II

Although there is no such distinct theoretical school as "Gaze theory", theorists of Film Studies in particular have explored the subtle nuances of gaze along with its varied ramifications to probe into human psyche. Before one proceeds to examine some of the major offshoots of gaze, one must be aware of the distinction between look and gaze. While "look" is a purely biological act, enacted through the act of visualising someone or something through an essentially sensory and physical participation, gaze is a look endowed with some intention, purpose or meaning. Thus, a baby's looking at the moon is just an instance of "look", while the suspicious look of a detective agent or the angry glare of a person is a particular kind of action related to the purview of Gaze. In other words, while "look" operates mainly at the sensory level, "gaze" is a sensory action steeped in certain pre-existing, preconceived mental impressions. And these mental impressions are conditioned by personal, social and cultural parameters. Thus, the notion of gaze is caught up in the tangle of socio-cultural, personal and psychological network.

In his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972) John Berger points out that our looks are largely actuated by our pre-existing notions and our likes and dislikes about certain things or persons. Berger categorically projects men as the surveyor of women who thus assume the passive roles of being surveyed. As Berger puts it:

> Men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated. (46)

Berger categorically hints at the role of passivity to which women have been consigned by being objects of male gaze:

> [*M*]*en act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed

> female. Thus she turns out to be an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (47)

It was Laura Mulvey whose seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", published three years after Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, subscribes to the same notion of women being treated as objects of 'male gaze' in a strictly patriarchal social structure. Mulvey argues that the patriarchal society has maintained a sort of "sexual imbalance" in which "pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/female" (19). Mulvey follows in the toes of Berger to reinforce the suggestion of women being projected as passive objects rather than the active subjects in this exchange of gaze:

> The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously to be looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (19)

In fact, it was E. Ann Kaplan who in her *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (1997) offers a distinction between 'look' and 'gaze' by arguing that the term 'look' suggests "a process, a relation", while the term 'gaze' suggests "a one-way subjective vision" (xvi). For Kaplan "the subject bearing the gaze is not interested in the object per se, but consumed with his(*sic*) own anxieties, which are inevitably intermixed with desire" (xviii, Kaplan's interpolation), and as such, gaze is primarily preconditioned by one's subjective intentions and notions. Kaplan tries to relate the centrality of power inherent in 'imperial gaze' to that prevailing in 'male gaze', arguing that the imperial gaze "reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central as much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject" (78).

Taking his cue from David Levin's *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (1988), Martin Jay in his excellent research *The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*(1993) makes a distinction between what he calls 'assertoric gaze' and 'aletheic gaze':

> The former is abstracted, monocular, inflexible, unmoving, rigid, ego-logical and exclusionary; the latter is multiple, aware of its context, inclusionary, horizontal, and caring (275).

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan argues that "[t]he eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopicfield" (72). The gaze, for Lacan, was just a symbolic projection of our inner experience projected outward. Lacan repudiates the concept of a pre-existing gaze put forward by Merleau-Ponty, and brushes aside the latter's claim of a transcendental subject amenable to the power and privilege of all-visibility. Rather than an examination of the world by a conscious subject, we are consigned to the position of objects or "beings that are looked at" (1979: 74-75).

The pleasure of looking at someone has led to two significant offshoots of gaze: voyeurism and scopophilia. Significantly, while both voyeurism and scopophilia lead to sexual stimulation in the beholder, there is a fundamental difference between the two. Voyeurism is essentially a clandestine act, and the role played by peeping Toms. The person looked at by the voyeur remains unaware of the voyeur's presence. A host of popular voyeurs may be adduced from literature: Roger Chillingworth in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Miles Coverdale in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Dr. Tertius Lydgate in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Gabriel Oak in Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Roger Lambert in Updike's *Roger's Version*, among others. Scopophilia, on the other hand, is an overt act in which the person looked at becomes fully aware of the subject who looks at him/her. In the words of Richard Allen[2], "Scopophilia describes a pleasure derived from looking. Voyeurism can be distinguished from scopophilia on the grounds that pleasure of the voyeur is derived from looking at a person who is unaware of the voyeur's presence…." (130). For example, in Updike's *Roger's Version* when Roger Lambert delights in the deliciousness of looking at Verna in her bathrobe, she becomes fully aware of his presence, and his act of scopophilic relish.

Another variant of gaze is the concept of "hate stare" proposed by Michael Argyle and Mark Cook in *Gaze and Mutual Gaze*. Argyle and Cook suggest that the intrinsic prejudice of the white Americans towards the black Americans results in this kind of "hate stare" which is conditioned by such racial and political factors. Another significant insight of gaze was provided by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Taking his cue from Bentham's concept of "panopticon", Foucault warns us of the presence of invisible

panopticons in our society. Broadly speaking, the panopticon is an apparatus of exercising power through the very act of surveillance. The basic purpose of panopticon was, Foucault argues, to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assumes the automatic functioning of power" (201).

Recent interesting research on gaze may be found in Eva-Maria Jacobsson's concept of "female gaze". Taking her cue from Mulvey's concept of "male gaze", Jacobsson interrogates Mulvey's concept by asking whether it is still fair to treat women as objects of "male gaze". Jacobsson turns the tables on Mulvey, and argues in favour of having a "female gaze" in which the woman becomes the active onlooker, and the man becomes the object of "female gaze". As Jacobsson puts it:

> Can the male gaze be reversed, i.e., is there a female gaze? Is it possible to argue for a female gaze in contemporary movies, where the woman would be objectifying the man to a subject of their desires and pleasures of looking? (8)

Reflecting on the encounter between Dan and Alex in the movie *Fatal Attraction*, Jacobsson observes how

> Alex is watching him intensely, with desire in her look. She is adopting the masculine traits and the masculine position as a bearer of the gaze. The gaze could be said as being feminine in this scene. The object of desire is not a female character, rather a male, Dan. (13)

Thus, Jacobsson claims, "Alex could be said as defining this female gaze through her actions and the movies presentation and package in the initial part" (16).

## III

Composed during 1910-1911, Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" offers a brilliant critique of a man's self-analysis through psychic unravelling. The dual influences of Jules Laforgue and Henri Bergson are writ large in Eliot's treatment of Prufrock. Eliot was supposed to have derived the idea of unravelling Prufrock's inner self from Bergson's *An Introduction to* Metaphysics (1913), translated by T.E. Hulme. As one finds in Bergson:

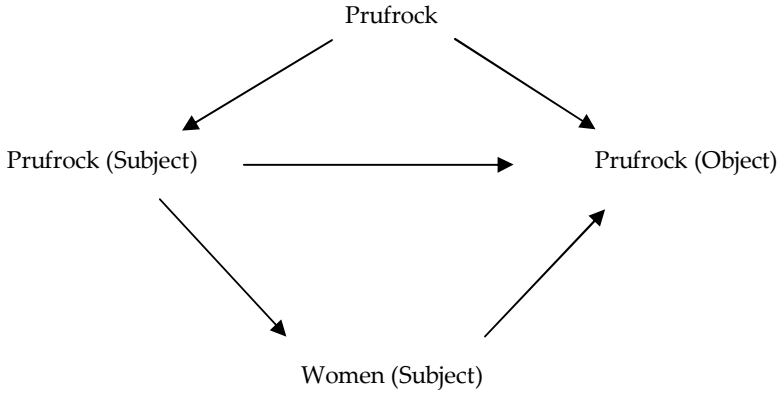
> The inner life may be compared to the unravelling of a coil, for there is no living being who does not feel himself coming gradually to the end of his role; and to live is to grow old. (qtd. in Southam 46)

Eliot's commentators[3] have referred to the fact that Eliot was influenced by Jules Laforgue's *dedoublement* of personality which believes in the split of the same person into subject and object. Prufrock is both the subject and the object, both the surveyor and the surveyed, both the actor and the spectator. If one the one hand his eyes keep on rolling on the women in the restaurant; one the other the women also size him up with their scrutinising gaze. As a subject Prufrock casts his wary looks on "the evening spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherised upon a table", on the "sawdust restaurants with oyster shells", on the "Streets that follow like a tedious argument/Of insidious intent", of the slow movement of yellow smoke and fog, and of almost everything around him that come under his ken(Ricks & McCue 5-9).Like the blind man who "sits delaying in the vacant square" in Eliot's "First Debate Between the Body and the Soul" (240), Prufrock sits lazily at the restaurant gazing at the women and toying with the "overwhelming question" of proposing a particular woman. And unlike that old man's "blind inconscient stare", Prufrock's is a conscious and curious gaze suffused with his scopophilic desires. Interestingly, and paradoxically, from the same subject position Prufrock examines himself as an object, and offers us a punctilious detail of his looks, his preoccupations, his thought-process, his intention, and the static quality of his thought and action. But while these commentators have rightly pointed out how this split in Prufrock into the outer Prufrock and inner Prufrock led to his choice of interior monologue, what none of them has pointed out is how this split manifests the wonderful and complex play of gaze. While Prufrock's objective inner self is the passive listener of his outpourings, his inner self acquiesces in the gaze of the outer subject self, and contemplates on the series of daily chores that constitute his small cosmos. As Robert Langbaum puts it: "Prufrock's other self-figures as the auditor who *watches* Prufrock's performance at the tea party and to whom Prufrock tells what he learns through the performance about his life" (190) (Emphasis added).

Furthermore, Prufrock, the subject, in a way, tries to control the gaze of the women – or what Eva-Maria Jacobsson has termed "female gaze" – through which he has been projected as an object. When Prufrock dwells on his own physical features, his emerging

signs of physical decrepitude, and his concomitant anxiety induced by it, his daily routine of measuring out his life "in coffee spoons" and his whereabouts, he examines Prufrock, the object, from his subject position. But when Prufrock imagines himself to be objectified and displayed by the women, it clearly illustrates the play of "female gaze". Even the female gaze and its concomitant responses are suited to Prufrock's escapist strategy of tarrying and parrying, of dilly-dallying and shilly-shallying the "overwhelming question". By deliberately situating himself as the passive object of "female gaze" rather than the active subject of "male gaze" proposed by Mulvey, Prufrock wants to buttress and reinforce his delaying tactics and dodging strategies. His very propensity for delaying the act and evading it altogether, makes him shift from this active subject position and to the passive object position, through a simultaneous shifting of the play of male gaze to female gaze. And this shift from activity to passivity perfectly dovetails into the mental inertia prevailing in Prufrock, and so wonderfully evoked through the image of the patient anaesthetised with ether at the very beginning of the poem.

The following diagram will help understand how the entire poem illustrates a brilliant shuttle and scuttle of gaze, of the same Prufrock who assumes the dual roles of subject and object, and how the same women initially looked at by Prufrock as objects assume the role of another subject position to cast their female gaze to relegatehim to an object position.



Prufrock's curious gaze follows the movement of the women in the restaurant:

> In the room women come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo. (5)

One may be reminded of "pacing to and fro" from James Thomson's "In the Room", a poem which was so favourite to Eliot. One may also be reminded of the lines from Eliot's poem "Afternoon", depicting a similar situation of assumed cultural elitism:

> The ladies who are interested in Assyrian art
> Gather in the hall of the British Museum.
> The faint perfume of last year's tailor suits
> And the steam from dying rubber overshoes
> And the green and purple feathers on their hats
> Vanish in the sombre Sunday afternoon
> As they fade beyond the Roman statuary
> Like amateur comedians across a lawn
> Towards the unconscious, the ineffable, the absolute. (267-268)

In both "Prufrock" and "Afternoon" there is a discrepancy between the assumed pretentiousness of the ladies and their actual knowledge of art. Suffice it to say, in both the cases Eliot pricks the bubble of their presumptuousness and lays bare their inner hollowness. Seen from the angle of the spectator's gaze, as in a cinema, the spectator gets deluded by the assumed identity presented through the deliberate choice of the ladies.

If gaze explores the scopic drive, the preponderance of the scopic characterises much of this poem. The detailed movement of the yellow smoke and fog, presented so wonderfully in scopic terms, synchronises with Prufrock's gaze which, like a videographer, takes a faithful cinematographic recording of it. Eliot's finesse lies in his presenting the entire scene in the present tense which conduces to the cinematographic effect among the readers who assume the role, as it were, of the spectators.

Prufrock's alibi that "there will be time/To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" exploits the scopic in general, and theatrical metaphor of preparing one's face before acting in particular (6). And it is this scopic drive that opens up the horizon in which the gaze of Prufrock and others strike each other. The very notion of preparing one's face or masking the real intention under a veneer of suavity and

respectability presupposes the assumption of a pseudo-gaze – synchronising with the assumed disguise – to mask his inner self, and by so doing, to read the inner self of others. One may be reminded of travellers moving towards "early coffee-stands/With other masquerades" in "Preludes", and of the hollow men's desire to wear "deliberate disguises" in "The Hollow Men" (15, 82).

Even the idea of mooting a question to drop it later has been conceived of in scopic terms:

> That lift and drop a question on your plate; (6)

Any perceptive reader may notice how the gaze moves vertically, and as such, is a slight variation of Martin Jay's concept of "aletheic gaze". Jay's distinction between "assertoric gaze" and "aletheic gaze" actually borders on the distinction between fixed gaze in the case of the former, and mobile gaze in case of the latter. Seen from this angle, when the ladies in the restaurant project their female gaze to fix Prufrock within the straitjacket of "a formulated phrase", it may also be interpreted as "assertoric gaze"; but when Prufrock's gaze shuttles across the women's coming into and going away from the restaurant, or when his gaze follows the motion of the yellow smoke and fog, or when it follows the putative motion of the lifting and dropping of a question, in each of these cases it illustrates the play of "aletheic gaze".

Keenly conscious of his nascent old age and evanescent youthfulness, the emerging signs of his old age are offered to him, not so much in a direct way as through lens of the female gaze of the women who, he thinks, mock at and sadistically relish at his bald head, his thin hair, and his thin arms and legs. One may be reminded of the lines from Eliot's "Spleen":

> And Life, a little bald and gray,
> Languid, fastidious, and bland,
> Waits, hats and gloves in hand,
> Punctilios of tie and suit (239)

Prufrock, the hitherto subject, gazing at the women prompted by his scopophilic desires, is relegated to the level of Prufrock, the object, by the female gaze of the same women who are now elevated to the subject position. One does not fail to notice how the play of

gaze also conduces to the continual shifting and see-sawing of positions, from subject/centre to object/periphery, and *vice versa*.

Prufrock's curious gaze which thoroughly surveys his other self as a pathetic victim of emerging old age – a fact deterrent to his putative desire of proposal – frantically tries to find out means to stave off the staleness of decrepitude, and assume a polished, snappy, snazzy appearance:

> My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
> My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin – (6)

Ironically enough, the "firm" collar and necktie "asserted" by a pin are the external concomitants of a man who is intrinsically infirm and who lacks assertion. One also does not fail to notice how "Prufrock" illustrates Prufrock's continual attempts at role-playing: from active spectator to passive actor, from the subject to the object, from the real clumsy self to the assumed polished appearance. "The compulsive role-player", John T. Mayer argues, "risks psychic division, splitting the self among its roles or into public masks and private selves" (117). This conscious role-playing affords Prufrock with greater facility to exercise his gaze as a conscious subject to pander to his scopophilic desires. And yet, his inner self does not fail to notice the futility of such an attempt, inasmuch as the same women whom Prufrock gazes from a subject position subvert the entire dynamics of gaze, as it were, and consign him to the marginal object status through the proactive play of their "female gaze".

Perhaps the most powerful exercise of female gaze occurs when Prufrock feels that the gaze of the ladies fixes him "in a formulated phrase" and project him as an object of public display. Prufrock feels himself to be as miserable as a helpless creature "sprawling on a pin" and wriggling on the wall" under the public gaze (7). If Prufrock is fixed by the female gaze, the hollow men are equally fixed by those eyes they are scared of meeting even in dreams. Similarly the objectification of Prufrock's subjective mental pattern – "But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen" – is enacted through the scrutinizing female gaze of the women(8).As Prufrock rotates the lens of his scopophilic gaze on each part of the women's anatomy, and as he zooms in his gaze on the braceleted, white, bare arms of the women, his gaze does not fail to notice how the "light

brown hair" on them undercuts the romantic sensuous expectation of his scopophilic end ( 7).

The love-song Prufrock attempts to compose is couched in scopic terms, as he imagines himself having "gone at dusk through narrow streets/And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes", and directs his gaze on visual contemplation (7). Unable to sustain this visual contemplation to a successful end, his mental gaze contemplates on the possibility of being transformed into a crab "[s]cuttling across the floors of silent seas" (7). The sudden reduction of his fatal attraction towards the women – from an appealing sensation to an appalling anxiety – leads him to choose "the floors of silent seas" rather than the busy restaurant where he might be under the powerful gaze of those women. One does not fail to notice how Prufrock's evasive strategy corresponds to his avoidance of gaze throughout the poem. From the very beginning Prufrock's one half seeks to concoct devices to avoid the gaze of the same women his other half, spurred by his scopophilic drive, wishes to feast on with his eyes. Images of turning back and descending the stair, and a woman's "turning toward the window" (8) before her final rejection of Prufrock are symptomatic of this evasion of gaze.

## Conclusion

Finally, one may note that the psychology that precipitates Prufrock's fear is sexual. Richard Allen argues that according to psychoanalysis "the female body evokes castration threatening the authority of the voyeuristic gaze" (137). Although Prufrock's gaze is indisputably scopophilic, rather than voyeuristic, inasmuch as the women are very much aware of his presence, he nonetheless is haunted by a fear of sexual insecurity, if not that of castration. As John T. Mayer puts it so wonderfully:

> Prufrock fails to act as a lover or speak as a prophet because of a fear that is fundamentally sexual: if he plays John the Baptist to "disturb" his world, the women play Salome and will behead him (castrate him). To avoid this fate, Prufrock denies himself a sexual existence and the prophet's role, and withdraws to the half-life represented by his "prepared face". (34)

To offset this fear Prufrock resorts to continual role-playings and compromises – from the surveyor of women to the object survey by

women, from human being to a crab, and from a clumsy middle-aged guy to an assumed snappy stylish younger self, and finally, by whisking off from the world of reality to that of fantasy in which he replaces the busy restaurant by the lonely sea-beach, and meets the same women transfigured as mermaids. This psychic fear and precariousness of Prufrock is also affected through his inability to maintain a steady position (either subject or object) and its corresponding gaze (either casting his active male gaze or being the constant object of female gaze). The oscillation of Prufrock's mind synchronizes with corresponding flitting of gaze in and around his cosmos. Interestingly, enough, a poem whose title and epigraph primarily presuppose the play of the auditory trope, actually turns out to be a wonderful text where the visual trope predominates over the auditory to create a discourse on gaze. Long before the advent of gaze theory, Eliot anticipated, as it were, some of its offshoots in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", as also in a host of other poems, creating a discourse in which that varied forms of gaze clash, interchange, interact and coalesce with varied semantic implications.

## NB

All the quotations from Eliot's poems in this essay are from Ricks, Christopher and Jim McCue, eds. *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

## Notes

1. Four "The Journey of the Magi", "A Song of Simeon", "Marina", and "Triumphal March" were published with illustrations by Edward McKnight Kauffer, while "Animula" was issued with wood engravings by the famous Gertrude Hermes. Much later, David Jones made the illustrations for "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees".
2. See Richard Allen, "Psychoanalytic Film Theory", in Toby Miller and Robert Stam, eds. *A Companion to Film Theory*. (Blackwell, 1999), 123-145.
3. Mention may be made of George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot* (Syracuse University Press, 1953); John T. Mayer, *T.S. Eliot: Silent Voices* (Oxford University Press, 1989); Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, eds. *The Poems of T.S. Eliot* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Manju Jain, *T.S. Eliot: Selected Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1992); and B.C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot* (Faber & Faber, 1974).

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# 3

# Indian Philosophy in Structuring *The Waste Land*

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**Abstract**

Indian philosophy is one of the diverse sources employed by T S Eliot in structuring *The Waste Land* (1922). Buddhism and Hinduism constitute the bedrock of Indian philosophy. In his Notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot has acknowledged his indebtedness to these two sources. Out of five Sections comprising *The Waste Land*, two Sections (III & V) are directly based on Buddhism and Hinduism respectively. The title of the third Section, "The Fire Sermon", is derived from the famous Sermon delivered by Lord Buddha to the assembled priests at Sarnath (Varanasi) on the sufferings of human beings arising from the reckless pursuit of passion and sensuality. The last lines of this Section collocate the two representatives of Eastern and Western asceticism – Saint Augustine and Lord Buddha – to suggest a way out of 'burning' cauldron. The fifth Section of this long poem, "What the Thunder Said", takes us to the *Brihadaranyak Upanishad* (5.1-3) for a meaningful message to 'the erring humanity'. The Thunder peals thrice the same word – 'Da Da Da' ('Datta Dayadhvam Damyant'). The cryptic word carries the exhortations of Prajapati, the father-preceptor of gods, men and demons, to control, to give and to be compassionate in that order. The poem concludes with 'Shantih shantih shantih' which is the need of the present-day tension-ridden and war-torn world.

Keywords: Buddhism, Hinduism, structure, passion, peace, order.

It is difficult to imagine that one who pleaded for 'the unity of feeling and thought' so forcefully in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) should be negligent to providing a proper structure or shape to his long poem *The Waste Land* (October 1922; first published in *The Criterion*). In that famous essay, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) had coined the phrase "unification of sensibility" as distinct from "dissociation of

sensibility" (Eliot 288) to express 'the unity of feeling and thought' which is much required in poetry. Eliot had lauded Donne and Chapman for achieving this wonderful unity, but they had chided poets like Tennyson and Browning for their inability to 'transform their thoughts into sensations'. Such a conscious poet-critic as Eliot could have hardly sidetracked the issue of structural unity when he came to composing *The Waste Land.* Critics like Conrad, Aiken and Hugh Kenner who doubt the unity of the poem regard it as "a set of diversities" (Smith, 48). But a noted critic like Grover Smith disagrees with them, and remarks as follows:

> All art is in some measure heterogeneously composed, and certainly it is possible for a work to fall short of unifying itself. But, though the structure of *The Waste Land* presents the difficulty of the unconventional, what is not obvious, it is certainly visible in the poem... (48)

The heterogeneity of *The Waste Land* about which Grover Smith speaks above can be guessed from the various sources employed in the texture of this poem, – six languages, several popular songs and thirty-five authors, and Sanskrit being one of the languages used in it (Diwedi 32). Sanskrit is the bedrock of Indian philosophy and culture, and its rich tradition of religion and wisdom is reflected in the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagvad-Gita* as well as in the two great Hindu epics, the *Rãmãyan* and *Mahãbhãrata*. Of all the diverse sources that go into the making of *The Waste Land*, Indian philosophy, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, constitutes one of the essential sources, and this fact will form the focal point of my present paper.

Before I start analysing *The Waste Land* from the viewpoint of my topic, I would like to draw the attention of readers towards what Eliot says in this "Notes" on the poem about its 'unity' achieved through the omnipresence of Tiresias, the central character in it. In his "Notes", T.S. Eliot informs us thus:

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, sellar of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. (Eliot, 1962, 82)

Thus, according to T.S. Eliot, Tiresias as a seer is one of the unifying forces of the poem. Eliot also acknowledges two more explicit sources that have clearly impacted the structural plan and design of *The Waste Land*, and these sources are Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge), and Sir James Fraser's book *The Golden Bough* on the vegetation myths (80).

Now, returning to the subject of this paper, I am to focus on the use of Indian philosophy in structuring *The Waste Land*. The poem, as we know, consists of five Sections in toto which are: 'The Burial of the Dead', 'A Game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water', and 'What the Thunder Said'. Out of these five Sections, two are directly based on the teachings of Lord Buddha (i.e., Buddhism) or on the instructions of the *Upanishad (Brihadãranyak Upanishad)*, an inalienable part of Hinduism.

But the first thing that catches our attention is the title of the poem. The title indicates that modern man is living in 'The Waste Land', a parched land, a sterile land. For removing the sterility and barrenness of the land, water is badly needed. Water, in the *Rig Veda* and the *Dhammapada*, stands for metaphysical quest, and the barrenness of the land can't be removed without spiritual search and metaphysical pursuits. Composed in the backdrop of the horrors of World War I, *The Waste Land* delivers a message to modern men/women to liberate them from the lustful living and to pursue the metaphysical way of life.

The *Rig Veda* as well as the Grail legend has a reference to the Waste Land. The seven rivers (or *saptasindhus*) in the Punjab are lying looked up. Ahi or Vritrasur is very powerful and has locked up the rivers. The gods are in a great panic, and they approach the sage Dadhichi[1] and urge him to give his unbreakable backbone which, because of his enviable asceticism, has the strength of a *vajrãyudh* (i.e., a club of concrete), so that they might strike Ahi or Vritrasur to get the waters released. The king of gods, Indra, used the *vajra* and succeeded in freeing the much-needed waters.

The *Dhammapada* might have given a clue to T.S. Eliot to choose the title of *The Waste Land*. A Thai Buddhist monk's translation[2] of the *Dhammapada* under the title "Growing the Bodhi Tree in the Garden

of the Heart" rearranges the text in ten sections with a Prologue which is called The Waste Land. It is likely that the translator gives the title to the Prologue with an eye on Eliot's poem However, even Eliot might have picked up the title of the poem getting hints from the *Dhammapada*. Since his school-days, Eliot was deeply impressed with Buddhism. He kept with him a copy of *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold. In his essay, "What is Minor Poetry?" Eliot has remarked, "I must have had a latent sympathy for the subject-matter, for I read it through with gusto, and more than once" (Eliot, 1969, 42). And' the subject-matter of *The Light of Asia* is the life and teachings of Lord Buddha. At the time of writing *The Waste Land*, as the distinguished English poet Stephen Spender avers, T.S. Eliot was in a firm grip of Buddhism. Spender remembers Eliot as under:

> Incidentally, if Eliot's own views are to be considered, I once heard him say to the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral that at the time when he was writing *The Waste Land*, he seriously considered becoming a Buddhist. (Spender 60)

From Spender's above statement it is clear that Eliot was inescapably caught by the asceticism of Buddhism, and that 'a Buddhist is as immanent as a Christian' in the structure of *The Waste Land*.

Out of a total of five Sections forming *The Waste Land,* two Sections (III and V), as hinted earlier, are based on Indian sources. Now, the third Section showing Eliot's indebtedness to Buddhism invites immediate attention. The title is obviously derived from the famous Sermon delivered by Lord Buddha to the assembled priests on the sufferings of human beings arising from the reckless pursuit of lust and sensuality. According to T.S. Eliot, the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon' (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry Clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation* (Harvard Oriental Series). Mr. Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident (Eliot, 1963, 82).

Thus, Eliot puts the Fire Sermon at par with the Sermon on the Mount (in Christianity). The text of the Fire Sermon as Lord Buddha tells the assembled priests, partly runs as follows:

> All things, O priests, are on fire. And what, O priests, are all these things which are on fire? The eye, O priests, is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire; impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent, originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, that also is on fire.
>
> And with what are there on fire? With the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair are they on fire. (Warren 352)

The text is surely longer than the extract quoted above, but the given extract throws sufficient light on the gist of the Fire Sermon. Eliot has amply succeeded here in giving universality to the theme of passion. Lord Buddha believes that passion or lust is the main cause of human suffering (*dukha*). If man is free from passion/lust, he is "no more for this world". (353)

In the concluding lines of Section III, the poet collocates the "two representatives of eastern and western asceticism" and hastens to tell us that the collocation is "not an accident" (Eliot, 1963, 82). These lines (given below) are highly valuable from India's philosophical viewpoint:

> To Carthage then I came
> Burning burning burning burning
> O Lord Thou pluckest me out
> O Lord Thou pluckest
> burning
>
> (*The Waste Land*, Lines 307-311)

The obvious reference here is to Saint Augustine, who like Lord Buddha saw mankind 'burning' in the fire of passion and lust. St. Augustine, like the Buddha again, suggested that asceticism alone can pull mankind out of this 'burning'. Both Lord Buddha and St. Augustine had the same kind of experience in regard to the 'burning' of the world in the fire of passion. In the third Book of *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, the great Christian saint has recorded his experience thus: "To Carthage I came, where there sang all around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves"(36). The reader may mark that Eliot begins the poem with the title directly drawn from Buddhism, but he ends it with the experiences of the Christian saint in the city of Carthage. Cleanth Brooks aptly remarks in *Modern Poetry and the*

*Tradition* (1939) that "The wisdom of the East and the West comes to the same thing on this point"(157). Here it must be pointed out that without the inclusion of Buddhist preaching, *The Waste Land* would have, structurally speaking, lost much of its force and fire.

From "The Fire Sermon" we jump on to the fifth Section of *The Waste Land*, namely to "What the Thunder Said". The third Section is full up with references to the *Upanishad*. The title is derived from the *Brihadāranyak Upanishad* (5.1-3). The Thunder peals three times: '*Da Da Da*', the Sanskrit word proper hinting at the exhortations of Prajapati, the father-preceptor of gods, men and demons, to his threefold offspring in the *Brihdaranyak Upanishad* (5.1-3). The entire episode of the teacher-taught dialogue is recorded beautifully in the following translation of this *Upanishad*:

1. The threefold offspring of Prajapati, gods, men and demons, lived with their father Prajapati as students of sacred knowledge. Having completed their studentship, the gods said, 'Please tell (instruct) us, sir'. To them then, he uttered the syllable *da* (and asked) 'Have you understood?' They (said), 'We have understood, you said to' us '*damyata*', 'control yourselves'. He said, 'Yes, you have understood'.

2. Then the men said to him, 'Please tell (instruct) us, sir'. To them he uttered the same syllable *da* (and asked) 'Have you understood?' They said, 'We have understood, you said to us 'datta', 'give'. He said, 'Yes, you have understood'.

3. Then the demons said to him, 'Please tell (instruct) us, sir'. To them he uttered the same syllable *da* and asked, 'Have you understood?' They said, 'We have understood, you said to us '*dayadhvam*', 'be compassionate'. He said, 'Yes, you have understood'. This very thing the heavenly voice of thunder repeats *da da da*, that is control yourselves, give, be compassionate. One should practise this same triad, self-control, giving and compassion. (Radhakrishnan 289-90)

The threefold message of the Thunder is, evidently, highly evocative and suggestive. It suggests that the practice of self-control, 'giving' to others at the time of need, and compassion by man "will preserve, promote and enhance the values of life" (291). Some

thinkers like Sankarãchãrya are of the view that "there are no gods or demons other than men" (290), and hence all the three virtues enjoined by Prajapati and pealed by the Thunder are actually meant for man only for his spiritual elevation.

What is important here is the fact that T.S. Eliot has changed the order of the Upanishadic words to suit his purpose. In the *Brihadãranyak Upanishad*, the Thunder's commands appear in the order: *Damyata*, *Datta* and *Dayadhvam*, but in structuring *The Waste Land* Eliot slightly changed the order and put it as *Datta*, *Dayadhvam* and *Damyata*. The Upanishadic order apparently gives importance to Self-Control in the development of the individual. The change is prompted by the poet's desire to render the third element "the most emphatic" (Mayo 175).

Before we come to a discussion of *Da Da Da* and its relevance in the structure of *The Waste Land*, we have to consider a very significant poetic passage in it. The passage is:

> Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
> Waited for rain, while the black clouds
> Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
> The jungle crouched, humped in silence
> Then spoke the thunder (ll. 395-399)

This passage shows the poet's sound knowledge of Indian culture and tradition. The words 'Ganga' and 'Himavant' clearly indicate it. The passage also paints the grim picture of rainlessness in the holy land of the Hindus, which can be equated with the situation obtaining in the Waste Land. Water or rain is a symbol of spiritual insurgence, while lack of water/rain signals spiritual crisis. Only a great spiritual power can rend open 'the black clouds' and make the rain possible.

We now take up the meaning of *Da Da Da*. Before Eliot uses the threefold message of the Thunder, he paints the situation of utter drought prevailing in the Waste Land. In the context of the grim drought, the poet recalls the message of the Thunder. The first *Da* pealed by the Thunder means 'giving oneself away' at a time of emotional crisis – 'blood shaking my heart'. There are moments in a man's life when hesitation or prudence is out of place and willy-nilly he has to surrender to the dictates of his clamouring heart:

> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only, we have existed.
> (ll. 403-405)

This kind of 'giving' is, as George Williamson puts it, "a surrender to passion, not to love"(Williamson 151). It is not to be found in 'obituaries', memories' or wills, as Eliot clarifies in the lines to follow. Commenting on 'giving, Prof. V. Rai makes the following observations:

> This 'giving' to the insistent demand of the great occasions has contributed the real life of humanity; it has been behind all revolutions, all adventures of body and mind; it has sent martyrs singing to the flames and patriots to the gallows and has given even to Satan 'courage never to submit or yield' even though the field has been lost. (Rai 134-35)

Passion is perhaps the root-cause of all existence; sex is the source of all creation. Sir James Frazer is of the view that "ruder races in other parts of the world have consciously employed the intercourse of the sexes as a means to ensure the fruitfulness of the earth" (Frazer 179). But the sexual relationship was also associated with "many a serious peril", and hence some primitive tribes resorted to "abstinence" and "asceticism" (182-83).

The second command of the Thunder follows immediately after the first one – *Da* (*i.e.*, *Dayadhvam*, Be compassionate). Compassion is a commendable virtue that shares the concern of others. But the modern man has become totally selfish and egotistic:

> each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

The modern man is leading a life of imprisonment or self-exile, like Count Ugolino in Dante's *Inferno*. Living in self-exile, modern man does not share the woes and buffets of others. He walks in his dark cell like 'a broken Coriolanus', the helpless, hapless Roman soldier.

The Thunder peals for the Third time – *Da* (*i.e.*, *Damyata*, Control yourself). This time the message underlines the need of regulating the heart which was so long given over to 'blood' or impulsive living.

To the controlled heart even the natural elements, like the sea, give way:

> The boat responded
> Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
> The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
> Gaily, When invited, being obedient
> To controlling hands. (ll. 418-422)

Obviously, here the poet emphasises the controlling of impulses or passions. This passage has been called a "great short passage" full of meaning (The Times Literary Supplement, 1960, p.760).

The protagonist of the poem now realises the true ideal of life and sets about putting his lands in order: "Shall I at least set my lands in order" (l. 425). Clearly, the protagonist at this point is the Fisher King, who is depicted as a fisherman now in action. The great curse of the inhabitants of the Waste Land is inaction (akarmanyatã). According to Jessie L. Weston, the Buddha is sometimes portrayed as a fisherman in the Mahayana scriptures: "... the Fisherman who draws fish from the ocean of Samsãr to the light of Salvation" (Weston 126). The Fisherman has to set his land – 'the arid plain' – free from its aridity. The surroundings are none-too-happy: the Unreal City around, the London Bridge falling down, and Hieronymo appearing in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy having gone mad again. Against such a backdrop, fragmentary quotations from various sources, especially languages, are shored to represent the broken culture of the West. Ultimately, T.S. Eliot is left with no option but to turn to the East for redemption of man from the sterility of the Waste Land:

> Datta, Dayadhvam Damyata
> Shantih shantih shantih
>
> (ll. 432-433)

We have already examined the literal and symbolic connotations of *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, but the last line of the poem – *Shantih shantih shantih* – calls for comments.

Western scholars like Elizabeth Drew have generally failed to understand the full implication of the word *Shantih*. Elizabeth Drew thinks that "it is impossible to feel peace in the concluding passage. It

is a formal ending only" (Drew 116). F.R. Leavis considers the employment of Sanskrit words as merely 'ironic'. He says further:

> The Sanskrit lends an appropriate portentousness intimating that this is the sum of wisdom according to a great tradition, and that what we have here is a radical scrutiny into the profit of life. (Leavis 102)

Eliot's note on the word *Shantih* does not reveal its real value in human life. He says that it is "a formal ending to an Upanishad" and that its Christian equivalent is "The Peace which passeth understanding" (Eliot, 1962, 86) *Shantih shantih shantih* is not only a formal ending to an *Upanishad but an integral part of the Vedas. The Yajurveda* (36.17) offers the full text of the *Shantih mantra* – "*Aum dyauh shantih antariksham shantih prithvi shantih apah shantih ousadhayah shantih ... Aum shantih shantih shantih*" (*The Yajurveda* 333-34). In fact, this *mantra* is recited on all auspicious occasions for the Hindus such as marriage, occupation of a new house, offering of prayers in morning and evening. It is also recited at the time of the burial of the dead (note the title of Section I of *The Waste Land*). The poem under review begins with an elaborate description of the ritual/burial of the dead (Section I), moves through a depiction of the ruined domestic life (Section II) and a portrayal of the sterile life in terms of society and civilisation (Section III), revives the hope of rebirth/redemption of man (Section IV), and ends with the vision of peace and order (Section V). It is wrong to think, as F.R. Leavis does, that the poem begins with chaos and ends in chaos. It rather begins in chaos and disorder and ends in peace and order. For restoring peace and order, T.S. Eliot seeks refuge in the hoary wisdom of India, in the great cultural tradition of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

Prof. V.A. Shahane maintains that the structure of The Waste Land is "circular rather than linear" (16). He remarks:

> The poem's shape continually connects past and present, life and death. The journeys or quests undertaken by the characters in *The Waste Land* do not grow in linear directions; in fact no real end is in sight. There is no hope of reaching a destination at all, no expectation of fruitful arrival or reunion. (16-17)

Prof. Shahane's arguments are only partly tenable, and it is suggested that the emphasis should shift from 'fruitful arrival or reunion' to 'perceptive vision or rebirth' (my own coinage). Prof. Shahane is, however, near the truth when he states that Eliot directs

his technical devices to "the prime necessity of exploring the basic theme and articulating his vision of a waste land" (20). The basic theme is the quest of the Fisher King, as in the Grail legends, for rain to remove the barrenness of the Waste Land and the vision is inspired by spiritual insights of the *Upanishad*.

Even a scholar like F.R. Leavis advances the same kind of theory – that the structure of *The Waste Land* is cyclic rather than linear – "... the poem ends where it began" (Leavis 103). The poem was written, as we know, in the background of the horrors of World War I. To put the world on the right track, an atmosphere of peace and order was much needed. For the poet, it became inescapable and he resorted to Indian philosophy, the only hope for breaking the spell of rainlessness. Hence the fifth Section of the poem unavoidably uses the wisdom of the *Upanishad* to show to mankind that this is the only way out. Structurally, Sanskrit and its sound philosophy is in place to strengthen the shape of the poem; it constitutes a part of the poet's global vision.

To conclude, the above discussion convinces us that the poet has deliberately made Indian philosophy an essential ingredient in structuring *The Waste Land*. Ezra Pound, who scrutinised the Facsimile edition of *The Waste Land* wrote a letter to T.S. Eliot in December 1921 like this: "One test is whether anything would be lacking if the last three words were omitted," to which Eliot replied in January 1922 thus: "Criticisms accepted, so far as understood, with thanks" (qtd. in Cox and Arnold 22-23). It is evident that Eliot did not carry out the suggestion of Pound and retained the last three words. It demonstrates Eliot's favourable attitude towards Indian philosophy pleading for universal peace and order. Those Sanskrit words are needed even from the structural viewpoint; they in fact, fit in there.

## Notes

1. Mark the first two letters 'Da' in Dadhichi which recur in the final section of the poem, as though the great sage represents all the three virtues enjoined in the voice of the thunder.
2. This translation was done by Bhikku Khantpalo and it was meant for free distribution by the Buddhist Association of Thailand, 1966.

--- I read all about this translation from Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah's article "Notes towards an Indian Response to T.S. Eliot's Poetry", *Indian Response to American Literature*. New Delhi: USEFI, 1967, pp. 113-137.

Also, I read Prof. Narasimhaiah's article "An Indian Footnote to T.S. Eliot Scholarship on *The Waste Land*,'' *The Literary Criterion*, X, NO. 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 75-91.

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# 4

# Towards the Wasteness of *The Waste Land*

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**Abstract**

*The Waste Land* is a poem that is as much applicable to the present age, as it was in the year 1922, when it was first published. Embedded in the sense of meaninglessness and degeneration of the years following World War I, it projects this social and moral disintegration on various levels that are both individual and universal. To do this, the poet brings in various mythical and historical references that serve to illustrate the basic idea of futility and barrenness, and also serve to universalize the condition of waste-ness. The poem, however, does not end on a note of despair, but of hope and regeneration, and the ending is the most positive part of the poem, referring to ancient Indian texts for its philosophical basis.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Tarot cards, the Fisher King, Tiresias, the Upanishads.

*The Waste Land* is a poem that is both embedded in the sense of despair and futility of the years following the First World War, and is universal in its projection of the barrenness and meaninglessness of modern life. Degeneration and disintegration of values is expressed on various levels of the poem – the subjective level of Eliot's own depression ("On Margate sands./ I can connect / Nothing with nothing" [*The Waste Land* 300-302]), the objective level of the war-ravaged condition of Europe; the sociological level and the political level; the intellectual level and the emotional level (witness the line "Well now that's done and I'm glad it's over" [*The Waste Land* 252]); the ethical and the moral levels; the past and the present. It is applicable as much to the present age, as it was a hundred years ago. The main instrument with which the poet does this is by making use

of myths and by expressing the theme through the "heap of broken images" [*The Waste Land* 22] of modern society.

An allegory of a world laid waste in the post-war era, *The Waste Land* teems with images of death from the very epigraph itself, where the Sibyl is asked "What do you want?", and she replies "I want to die". There is death in the titles of two of the five parts – "The Burial of the Dead" and "Death by Water", and death in the imagery is used throughout the poem. Even the crowds of people moving in the first part of the poem are like zombies – lifeless and ghoulish. However, the poem is not merely about death. It is also about resurrection, and new life that will emerge after the death of the king – an image dealt with in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and in the image of the Fisher King, taken from Jessie Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance*. There are also resurrection images in the death of the god, such as Osiris, and Christ himself. The basic method which Eliot uses is the mythical method, which consists of "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" [Eliot, *Ulysses, Order and Myth,* 483]. Through this method the poet uses ancient myths and legends in juxtaposition with contemporary life, thus bringing out a linkage between them. It is a method of "controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy, which is contemporary history" [Eliot, *Ulysses, Order and Myth* 483]. In a way, the mythical method is also connected with Eliot's famous theory of the objective correlative, which he defined as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which acts as a formula for some particular emotion of the poet, so that when the external facts are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" [Eliot, "Hamlet and his Problems" 100]. *The Waste Land* contains a series of impressions and emotions expressed through the objective correlatives of the mythical waste lands, both pagan and Christian. The ancient customs and rituals act as symbols for his emotions and ideas, and they also serve to universalize the feelings expressed. What is happening today is not peculiar to the present age; it is the result of a definite spiritual decay, which leads to the same results in whichever age it occurs. That is why the myths not only connect the past with the present; Eliot also connects them together, showing the concept of waste lands in fertility rites, in Greek myths, and in Christian myths, too. Myths also enable the poet to telescope within a

short framework the entire tragedy of contemporary society – the spiritual barrenness that is its essential characteristic. The miscellaneous, chaotic material is ordered into a complete whole, bounded by a single theme.

The spiritual death of man is expressed through a succession of images in the cinematic technique of "montage". For example, in the first part of the poem – "The Burial of the Dead" – there are a string of images pertaining to the barrenness of the land. The bare stones, the dead trees, the lack of water, the hot sun – all add up to the intense spiritual aridity of the time. The "broken images" are the wreck of ideals and values. Yet, all through this passage there is an undercurrent of Christian faith. Eliot himself draws the reader's attention to the Book of Job, where a man's roots are withering in the mire of sin – "So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish" [OT, Job, viii, 13]. The Christian Church is referred to in the line – "Only / There is shadow under this red rock" (*The Waste Land* 24-25) – and the only hope of humanity lies in seeking its shelter. Christ himself is described as "the Spiritual Rock" in the Bible. There is also a reference to the Book of Ezekiel, where Ezekiel was taken up to the top of a mountain by an angel to survey the barren scene around. It is as if the modern man is also invited to survey the scene of desolation and futility around him.

Adding to the spiritual barrenness of the modern world is the theme of guilty love that emerges several times in the poem. In the first part of the poem, Eliot quotes four lines from the sailor's opening song in Wagner's famous opera *Tristan and Isolde*, a tale of guilty love, where Tristan loves the wife of another. The other extract from this opera ("Desolate and empty the sea" [*The Waste Land* 42]) is placed at the end of the second episode, signifying the commonness of the theme between them. This episode seems to be the recollection of an intense, passionate, almost mystical moment of romantic love. At the same time, however, there is also a sense of guilt and failure implied by the word "yet". Eliot himself suggests that all the women represented in all the books of *The Waste Land*, including the German Countess and the Hyacinth Girl, merge into one another, evoking the feeling that their condition is at bottom the same. Love, being guilty, brings a sense of boredom and futility, rather than fulfilment, even though it does have its moments of ecstasy – "I was neither / Living

nor dead" [*The Waste Land* 39-40]. It is the same in the second section, "A Game of Chess". The aristocratic lady referred to in the opening passages may be equated with the Lady of the Rocks in the Tarot pack of cards and the entire passage is intended to bring out the artificiality and superficial glamour of her life. In the very first line of this section, the phrase "the Chair she sat in" reminds one of Cleopatra in her barge, and the description of her dressing table, cosmetics, etc., reminds one of Belinda's dressing-table in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. There are also hints of Imogen's bedchamber in *Cymbeline*, and the festal hall of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*. But this lady has nothing in common with Dido and Cleopatra, except their guilt, and their greatness and intensity of passion is contrasted with her pettiness and triviality in love. These ideas are reinforced by the use of the Philomela story, too. Over the fireplace is carved the story of Philomela, and of how she was transformed into a nightingale with the golden voice. But to the "dirty ears" of the modern man, the melodious song is only a meaningless "Jug, Jug" [*The Waste Land* 103]. The people of the waste land fail to understand the real significance behind Philomela's story – purification and transformation through suffering. Philomela, indeed, is mentioned in the third section and the final section, as well, therefore serving as a unifying myth in the poem. John Crowe Ransom has pointed out that the violation of sex has always led to spiritual degeneration, both in the past and in the present. Similarly, the other figures carved on the wall also lose all meaning, and become mere decorations, useless relics of the past – "withered stumps of time" [*The Waste Land* 104].

And then footsteps are heard on the stairs – the lover for whom the lady has been waiting, has finally arrived. However, the fragments of conversation recorded by the poet are meaningless and incoherent, a measure of their mental vacuity. Victims of boredom and ennui, they cannot even keep up small conversation. Even death is devoid of significance –

> "I think we are in rats' alley
> Where dead men lost their bones"
> [*The Waste Land* 115-116]

The very life of these people is a living death to them, and as such, death carries no hope of transformation. The repetition of the line "Those are pearls that were his eyes" [*The Waste Land* 126] is

significant here. The line suggests the regeneration of the body through drowning – the idea behind the concept of the drowned Phoenician sailor or the Fisher King; but in the waste land there is no such regeneration, only an empty knowledge of the pearls without really understanding their meaning. The line, being taken from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, also reminds us that the chess game alluded to is played not only in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, but in *The Tempest*, too, by Ferdinand and Miranda. But there is an ironic contrast here, for in the poem it suggests trickery and hypocrisy, whereas between Ferdinand and Miranda it suggests love and harmony.

Eliot says in the Notes to *The Waste Land* – "What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" [*The Waste Land*, Notes p.28]. It is the figure of Tiresias that permeates the poem, for, though he is not really a character, his is the consciousness, neither male nor female, through which the poem is filtered. We see Tiresias in person for the first time in the third section, "The Fire Sermon". Eliot himself emphasizes Tiresias's bisexuality, quoting specifically from the Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, where he is shown to have lived successively in the shapes of both man and woman. Apart from this, he is given prophetic powers at the same time that he is struck blind for having seen Athena bathing, and is blessed with longevity, connecting him with the Sibyl of the epigraph. Also, the staff that he carries in his hand connects him with "the man with the three staves" [*The Waste Land*, Notes, p.26] in the Tarot pack. He is also sterile – "Old man with wrinkled female breasts" [*The Waste Land* 219] – and this links him symbolically with the Fisher King. Tiresias, moreover, is also connected with the idea of a waste and barren land, for he is the blind, withered prophet who had prophesied that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother. When his prophecy was fulfilled, the kingdom of Thebes became a waste land with the onset of a terrible plague, and not until Oedipus was made to atone for the terrible sin, was this condition rectified. Tiresias, therefore, apart from being the consciousness behind the poem, is also symbolically linked with all its themes and central ideas.

Tiresias is shown in connection with several scenes of waste and desolation in the third section of the poem. "The Fire Sermon" section begins with Tiresias surveying the Thames scene in autumn. The

river is deserted now, after the summer months, when ladies and gentlemen went there in search of momentary pleasure. The river is now strewn with empty bottles, cigarette ends, and other pieces of garbage as reminders of their activities. Though water is a source of purification and regeneration, the degenerate modern man never ceases to defile it. The pollution of the river, therefore symbolizes spiritual degeneration. Tiresias is shown "fishing in the dull canal" [*The Waste Land* 189], where he laments this pollution, and sees the slimy rats creeping by, the naked dead bodies floating on the river, and bones scattered around – all testimony to this degenerate age. Memories from all ages crowd round him, for he has seen it all – Bonnivard in the prison of Chillon, or the captive Jews weeping by the rivers of Babylon. He identifies himself with the Fisher King, fishing for the regeneration of his brother, and with Ferdinand, mourning for the death of his father. Tiresias is also taken to fashionable hotels by the degenerate Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant (who can be identified with the one-eyed merchant of the Tarot pack). These hotels were the hotbeds of corruption and homosexuality during the War and its following years. Tiresias also moves in the quarters of the poor of London, who are impure not merely from sexual perversion, but from poverty as well. Here we have the songs of the three daughters of the Thames – the poor girls living on the banks of the river. They first sing together of the polluting of the river water – the oozing out of oil and tar, showing that modern civilisation is as dirty and impure as its morals. They also sing of the illicit love-affair of Queen Elizabeth, through which they tell of the impurity of the ruling class. They then sing separately of the loss of purity and virginity because of the brutality of man.

All these associations of water – regeneration and degeneration – are brought together in the fourth section, "Death by Water", the smallest section of the poem. However, the theme of death and resurrection is becoming more and more important as the poem draws to its close. The fourth section brings together all the motifs of death by drowning – the drowned god of fertility cults, Alonso's supposed shipwreck in *The Tempest*, Ophelia's death by drowning in *Hamlet*, the Fisher King, etc. There is also, perhaps, a parallel here with Frazer's and Jessie Weston's description of the cult of Adonis (or Thammuz), the Greek deity of Phoenician origin. In Alexandria each

year, an effigy of the head of the god was, like a ritual mourning, thrown into the sea, and was borne within seven days by a current to Byblos, where it was welcomed with rejoicing. This ceremony enacted the death and resurrection of the god. "Death by Water", however, emphasizes death, not resurrection, for Phlebas dies, but cannot be revived because of the moral degradation of humanity, of which he is a part. Phlebas, in fact, parodies the resurrection of the fertility god, as instead of moving forward into a new life, he goes back in time through the stages of age and youth. Eliot here uses the device of *memento mori* as a reminder of human mortality

The final section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said", winds up all the themes and symbols used in the poem and bring it to a satisfactory close, with the theme of resurrection being emphasised. In his note to this section, Eliot stated that in the first part of this section, he has used three themes – the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, and the present decay of Eastern Europe.

The story of the journey to Emmaus is told in the Gospel of St. Luke. Two disciples were journeying to Emmaus on the day of Christ's resurrection, when the risen Christ joins them as a hooded figure, and explains the scriptures to them. However, the disciples do not recognize him until he blesses them and disappears. The fifth section, however, begins with Christ's crucifixion – his agony, arrest, and finally, death. The colour red denotes violence and terror and Christ's death. The death of all that is good and beautiful and restrained means also the death of humanity – its spiritual and moral death –

> "He who is living is now dead
> We who were living are now dying".
> [*The Waste Land* 328-329]

But Christ rises again, and this resurrection is obliquely evoked in the passage in which the two men found one more among them. Eliot in his notes refers the readers to an Arctic expedition undertaken by Sir Ernest Shackleton in 1919, when the explorers reported a peculiar hallucination that there was always one more member among them than could be actually counted. Eliot also tells us that he always equated this hooded figure of Christ on the journey

to Emmaus with the Hanged Man of the Tarot pack – which is a way of equating him with the fertility rites on the death and resurrection of the god. Thus, Christian and Pagan significations are brought together here.

The approach to the Castle Perilous, as referred to by Eliot, is a part of the Grail legend, which acts as a unifying motif throughout the poem, and which is the primary subject of Jessie Weston's book, *From Ritual to Romance*, which influenced him so greatly in the conception of the poem. The episode of the Castle Perilous occurs in the final stage of the Grail quest. The knight and his followers reach the mountain on top of which is the Castle Perilous, in which is kept the Holy Grail. There have been no rains for a long time, and the scene is of desolate barrenness. The rocks have cracked, and the dryness has affected even the silence, for there is the unpleasant noise of the wind passing over dry grass, the sound of desert insects, and the clap of thunder without rain. The inhabitants here live in mud cracked houses, and their faces, red with heat and dryness, snarl and peep out at these strangers. Such is the experience of all those who have set out in search of truth and spiritual salvation. The repeated cry of "water", "water", brings out verbally the intensity of the thirst felt by the waste land.

The two journeys referred to here – the journeys to Emmais and the Castle Perilous – were originally journeys with a definite purpose, and ended in success after trial. In the modern waste land, the journey of humanity is merely aimless wandering.

The third theme – the present decay of Eastern Europe – also remains unresolved. It is perhaps a reference to the Russian Revolution of 1917, which had broken up the existing political structure and social fabric, but had not built something better. The picture drawn by Eliot is terrible, cataclysmic. "The hooded hordes" [*The Waste Land* 369] symbolize modern humanity, "the murmur of maternal lamentation" [*The Waste Land* 368] may be the mourning of Europe herself over the pitiable plight of its people. Society is breaking up, civilisation is uprooted, and as far as the eye can see, there is nothing but barren plain and cracked earth. Eastern Europe seems to have gone mad. Such is the modern waste land. The loss of faith is indicated by both pagan and Christian imagery.

The poem, however, does not end with despair, but on a "mantra" of regeneration, which can be the key to a new life, if followed. Eliot recommends the wisdom of India for the spiritual salvation of modern humanity. He refers the reader to the Fable of Thunder in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The three-fold offspring of the Creator Prajapati – gods, men, and demons – approach him for instruction after completing their formal education. To each group he utters the syllable "*Da*". Each group interprets this reply differently – the gods as *Damyata* (control yourselves), the men as *Datta* (give), and the demons as *Dayadhvam* (be compassionate). Prajapati responds with "Om", meaning that they have understood. The fable, in fact, exhorts man to practise all the three injunctions, for it is suggested that there are no gods or demons other than men – a basic tenet of Indian philosophy. Eliot, too, sees them as pertaining to the human condition.

In the final section Eliot refers the reader back to the theme of the Fisher King in Jessie Weston's book, and the reference to the nursery rhyme on London Bridge falling down indicates the disintegration of civilisation and the self. The poet turns his back on the waste land, and sits fishing on the shore of the river – that is, he makes efforts for spiritual regeneration. He refers to some lines of Dante's *Purgatorio* and *PervigiliumVeneris*, which teach him that suffering results in self-purification. He cries – "Oh Swallow, Swallow!" [*The Waste Land* 429], referring again to the myth of Philomela, where Tereus's wife Procne, is turned into a swallow. It shows a great yearning for release and transformation. *The Waste Land* does not end on a note of despair; it ends on hope. That is why Eliot reminds the reader of "Da, da, da" – the teachings of the Upanishads, which show the way in which regeneration might come out of death and decay. "The Peace that passeth all understanding" [*The Waste Land*, Notes, p.31] is Eliot's translation of the Sanskrit word *Shantih*, and it shows the ideal to which the new world of regeneration might aspire.

In the modern world of the waste land, it is this *Shantih* that remains an aspiration, a quest. After *The Waste Land* was published, the world was overwhelmed by another, even more destructive World War, and innumerable man-made instances of death and destruction have shaken humanity since then. Time and again the world has come to brink of yet another nuclear war and universal

destruction. But Eliot shows the path to regeneration, peace, and faith. Mankind simply has to be aware of the man-made wasteness of human society, that has also undermined nature, and has to redeem himself and bring back *Shantih* to his own existence.

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# 5

# T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Romanticised Technology – A Study of Modern Discourse Network

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"It's over forty years since 'The Waste Land ' appeared and what once seemed to be a baffling poem is so no longer"

R.J Owens (1963,'Caribbean Quarterly')

**Abstract**

T.S. Eliot, the 1948 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, is one of the avant-garde modernist writers, who is highly distinguished as a poet, literary critic, dramatist, and editor and publisher. His *The Waste Land* ' is one of the most famous and influential poems of the century. While the origins of "The Waste Land '' are in part private, the voices seeping through it are universal. Although Eliot later denied that he had larger universal problems in mind, but, nevertheless, in "The Waste Land" he diagnosed the slow corrosion of his generation and indeed of Western civilisation in the 20th century. Technology plays an important role in degradation and corrosion of society as depicted by Eliot. The process of slowly coroding the foundations of society by technology when linked back to the concept of "Modern Discourse Network" by Kittler restates the poem as highly relevant even today.

Keywords: Discourse, Technology, subverted notions, modernity

## Introduction

Published in 1922, T.S. Eliot's ' The Waste Land' is the perfect example of a*vant –garde* modern literature" (Owens, 1963, p.3) which entered into the established order of literary works and permanently caused a shift in the perspectives. The poem, penned down when the world grappled with the aftermath of the First World War, harbours the

'feeling of dissatisfaction and a sense of strong sickening by the grim reality' as its core.

Back then in 1922, a few readers immediately recognised its greatness, but the larger reading public, baffled by its fragmentation, its polyglottal allusions, and its stream of consciousness, merging of identities and consciousness, reacted with hostility. Today the poem is the only work which is routinely taught as an integral part of curriculum all over the world. The poem, although it continues to baffle and madden students, is perceived not only as a part of modernist masterpieces about disintegration of European Culture after First World War but also as the 'greatest poetic vision of the 20th century contemporary politics, psychological and ecological conditions continue to reveal its 'prescient authority' (Schein, 2022)

## *The Waste Land* and Technology

'The Waste Land' assimilates an astounding variety of topics, fits together a multitude of images, and encompasses a multitude of languages and cultures. But a prominent theme that Eliot treats in detail in the poem is the role of technology and industrialisation in the degradation and subsequent collapse of Western civilisation. The paper focuses on the technological dependence and prediction of future by 'The Waste Land 'and to resituate it as a literary canon within the Modern (Post War) Discourse network of the period.

Friedrich Kittler's 'Discourse Networks 1800/1900' (originally published in 1985 under the title *Aufschreisysteme*1800/1900) defines *discourse network* as follows: "It's the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data. Technologies like that of book printing and the institutions coupled to it, such as literature and the university, thus constituted a historically very powerful formation" (Kittler.1900 p. 369) He pointed out that in the current 'discourse network', one should also take into consideration data storage, calculation in technological media and transmission. A 'discourse network' can therefore be rightfully annotated as a signification and a kind of unconsciousness.

An amalgamation of the concept of 'discourse network ' with Michael Foucault's theory of 'archive' (which has been widely

appreciated for its application to print material) pinpoints how the fundamental structure of the poem works on the notion that technology has contributed to the modern era fragmentation of society. The hardware of technology according to Kittler conjugates abstract meanings and notions to 'very real' tangible bodies of power, institutions, media, and humans. In a 'Discourse Network' the concept of sound plays a critical role.

The hardware and information discourse also works as a 'selective filter', it filters out some information as " noise" and lets others pass through as "substantial" or "vital". Moreover, a cruel twist lies in the fact that all the "substantial" information can never transcend boundaries of Geography and culture. Some "vital" information is allowed to pass through these boundaries while the rest of it is locked away in storehouses of institutions.

Critic Juan A. Suárez in her seminal study argues that Eliot almost mimics a sound recorder in 'The Waste Land'. A parallel of Eliot's poem to sound agglomeration art in the modern era by various experimental artists who joined together radio broadcasts and recordings reveals how the poem sprouts from swift zapping through an unconscious pre-recorded literary archive in which each work hums at different heights. 'The Waste Land's' structure derives itself from proponents of 'modern discourse network' – machines. The technology in the poem questions the already established foundations of society and the 'vital' tunes of the high and the low are recorded in a mush where one note can't be separated from another. As Suárez notes, "Once the channels are open, they carry any and all sounds…". The voice of Duke is juxtaposed and equated to the frequency of the working-class. This highlights the slow erosion of the supposedly permanent social institutions by technology. The haunting lack of a traceable pattern in the images in the poem mirrors the fragmentation of social customs and rituals after the war.

A thorough analysis of the content reveals how the ' gramophone ' has a haunting ghost-like presence in a substantial part of the poem; it represents a demonstrative and frozen-in-time moment of degradation of human society. The subverted invocation to decay in the passage "under the brown fog of a winter noon…" in

which the alien like Narrator receives a rather strange invitation which reads "Asked me in a demotic French, to luncheon at Cannon Street hotel" and the suggestively sexual encounter between the ' typist ' and the " small house agent clerk "happens all in grey and in a horrid city. But one common characteristic of all these ghastly occurrences is the cunning and omnipresent presence of technology, popular culture producing lifeless factories and a looming fear of death.

A stark contrast between pastoral and modern life (where technology is the new Duke) can be highlighted through a parallel analysis of the images dealt with in the initial and the subsequent sections of the poem. In "The Burial of the Dead '' section Eliot situates and paints images of a comparatively meaningful and peaceful life before the war. He speaks of the conventional upper class with contempt. Those classes before the war spent time at the "Archduke's, my cousin's …" and had dreamy lives in which they "read, much of the night, and go south in the winter". They search for the meaning of life in the quack "Madame Sosostris"s cards and among the mythological world crafted by classical music. Eliot juxtaposed their lives with the lives of the wretches in the mechanised and modernised world. The women at the pub in "A Game of Chess" and the typist in "The Fire Sermon." are his representatives of the modern world.

The residents of the modern world are contrasted with the rich strata of society who enjoyed their vacations in the dreamy mountains, whereas the typist is "named metonymically for the machine she tends, so merged with it, is the fact, that she is called the 'typist' even when she's at home". Her dehumanizing, mechanical work initially formed a part of her identity but now it is her entire identity. The typist is symbolically a person or figure who has been dehumanised by mechanisation via technology in the modern world. Her mundane and monotonous existence serves as a "commentary on the extent to which the Industrial Revolution has corroded the sense of purpose and fulfillment of human life and existence".

"The Fire Sermon" section of ' The Waste Land ' speaks volumes about the degrading effects of mechanisation. For example, in the lines preceding the introduction of 'Tiresias':

"At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting…."

Here, Eliot harbours a direct parasitic relation between the modern worker and the machinery. The human component manifests itself into the mechanised and absurd "human engine," and gradually reduces to the point where the typist is compared to a mere "throbbing taxi."

A never-ending continuous circle of labour is undertaken by the industrial labourers and office workers, which in turn snatches away their individuality and, as Eliot argues, "their human nature too". North points that "the figure of metonymy is used polemically to depict a metonymised society where the individuals are both at the same time dismembered and standardised'' (North, 1991). By employing this method, Eliot characterizes the "automatism and machine conditioning" of the new modern life as a major parasitic factor for the downfall of the modern human and society. Keeping in line with this thought and theme 'Tiresias' is subsequently introduced in the next few lines, the pessimistic view of modern society is further fostered and nurtured through Eliot's cunning observations.

The initial footnotes by the poet identified 'Tiresias' as the central figure in "The Waste Land", he introduced Tiresias using the first person, which emphasizes the importance of the character further:

"I Tiresias, though blind,
throbbing between two lives …"

The repetition of the word throbbing in subsequent lines link the 'Tiresias' to "the human engine" and is like a mythological gender-less state which allows 'Tiresias' to find significance with both sexes.

Eliot portrays how he, as an artist and poet, can construct a bridge between both the classical and modern world. As Reeves notes, "the first (throbbing) stresses the mechanicalness of the alienated 'human engine' which exists in terms of its parts …while the second reinvents the human engine with 'throbbing' humanity".

Therefore, keeping in mind, the correlation illuminated by Reeves 'Tiresias' is intimately connected to the modern human condition.

North agrees with the analysis of Reeves, and further expands onto it: "Eliot suggests a link between the reduced conditions of the modern worker and the mythical hermaphrodite who includes all experience" (North, 1991). The significance of the above proposition lies in the fact that it equates the humiliation of the worker to a momentous proportion and this humiliation is further of critical importance to the poem. The transgendered biological status of Tiresias serves as a bold highlighter of the theme of emasculation worked upon throughout "The Waste Land". As soon as Tiresias was emasculated, he was one with the modern worker, and eventually the modern worker was also subjected to the horrifying emasculation. In this way, Eliot shows that the "human engine" has corroded and emasculated humans.

Tiresias on other hand plays the important role of acting like a lens through which the reader can easily observe and ponder about "the typist". The typist's highly automatic and mechanical way of life, is a poignant example within the poem about the loss of purpose in modern life. The unnamed typist is also an archetype which Eliot employs to draw a presentation of all women within the industrialised society. As North notes, "The typist is horrifying both because she is reduced by the conditions of labour to a mere part and since she is infinitely multiple". Eliot provides minimal details regarding the typist and cunningly generalizes her in order to highlight the degradation of all women in modern era. Eliot further lays great focus on the differences between the typist's life and the traditional way of living by noting that she "lays out food in tins". And the clerk at the identical time, exemplifies the fashionable labour 'man' in an exceedingly similar fashion because the typist exemplifies the fashionable proletariat 'woman'

Eliot portrays the clerk as "one of the lowest" and Tiresias too mentions how he has "walked among the bottom of the dead". North employs this instance to ascertain a relationship between 'Tiresias' and the 'clerk', but the connection is surprisingly bilateral. The clerk is additionally at the same time linked to the "lowest of the dead," which additionally reinforces that modernity has hollowed the soul

of humanity. Additionally, the typist's indifferent attitude towards sex further focuses upon direction and fulfilment within the lifetime of Homo sapiens that Eliot focuses on. As Perry notes, "The typist is automatic in her job and in her love-making," (Perry, 2022) this accentuates the concept that modern humans are reduced to a form of "living machines". By employing the tool of generalisation, Eliot demonstrates effectively that the scene between the typist and the clerk isn't something out of Dante's " Divine Comedy" but these incidents occur daily monotonously within the modern city.

'Tiresias' on the other hand serves the important function of acting as a lens through which the reader observes "the typist". "The typist's" highly automatic and mechanical way of life, serves as a notable example in the poem about the loss of meaning from modern life. The unnamed typist is an archetype and Eliot employs this archetype to draw a portrait of all women in the industrialised society. As North notes, "The typist is horrifying both because she is reduced by the conditions of labour to a mere part and because she is infinitely multiple".

Eliot, by providing as few details regarding the typist as possible, generalizes her to show the degradation of all women. Eliot further emphasizes on the differences between the typist's life and the traditional way of living by noting that she "lays out food in tins". The clerk at the same time, exemplifies the modern working class 'man' in a similar fashion as the typist exemplifies the modern working class 'women'

Eliot identifies the clerk as "one of the low". Later, 'Tiresias' too mentions how he has "walked among the lowest of the dead". North uses this example to establish a relationship between 'Tiresias' and the 'clerk', but the connection is bilateral. The clerk is also at the same time linked to the "lowest of the dead," which further reinforces that modernity has eaten into the condition of humanity. Moreover, the typist's indifferent attitude towards sex further emphasizes the lack of purpose and fulfilment in the life of modern man that Eliot focuses on. As Smith notes, "The typist is automatic in her job and in her love-making," this accentuates the idea that modern humans have been reduced to a kind of "living machine". By employing the tool of generalisation, Eliot demonstrates effectively that the confrontation

between the typist and the clerk is not something out of Dante's *Divine Comedy* but these incidents occur every day monotonously in the modern city.

That particular episode from the poem occupies the center stage amidst the multitude of similar occurrences that occurred in the aftermath of the First World War is the presence of 'Tiresias' (a character from classic Greek literature and mythology who is a blind prophet) which serves as a major unifying figure in the poem. Having lived his life as both a man and a woman, 'Tiresias' is able to relate on a spiritual level to both the clerk and the typist in this scene. This scene is not, as Suárez remarks, "one more vignette of present-day decadence". Tiresias, who has "sat by Thebes below the wall", forms a link between the modern and classical world. This "building is a timeless myth in a modern setting". The encounter gets its meaning by its linkage with the chaotic present and simultaneously with the traditions of the past. This led to the creation of a pattern, which emerges from the disorder of the poem. Moreover, the mythological context of Tiresias' presence established that "The Waste Land" is not a perpetual and everlasting state; it has not always existed, and will not always exist.

On the surface of it all, if one looks closely, there is a small streak of meaning amidst the chaos of "The Waste Land", the poem is composed of several examples of locating a position in the middle of the polar extremes, such as 'Tiresias', positioning between the male and female genders. Here, Eliot gives the first sign that it might be possible to find a meaning in contemporary life. He also juxtaposed several key passages of the poem in a space which lies in the middle of the spectrum of night and day, for example the scene of the typist's occurs at the "violet hour". Eliot uses the concept of time to link this scene to the decline of the "unreal city". The description of the "unreal city" is repeated throughout the poem, and by labelling the modern city as "unreal," Eliot successfully differentiates between a modern yet degraded human condition and a true experience of human existence. A final and strong worded mention of the "unreal city" indicates that it is falling, Elliot writes:

> "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers …
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria …

Vienna, London …
Unreal"

The "violet air" and the "violet light" in the scene situate the events somewhere in the middle of the night and day. It is linked to the arrival of 'Tiresias' earlier in the poem. In this way, Eliot skillfully paints the startling images of human squalor in "The Fire Sermon" to function as the turning point in the poem. Suárez remarks that "the gramophone's sound closes the poem's bleak, necromantic first half. The poem begins the intimations of rebirth and redemption". If it is advocated that the images of "The Fire Sermon" portray a pessimistic view of the modern world, then Eliot does offer hopeful and small hints that the situation can improve by multitudes, and that meaning can be found all over again in life. Through the poem, Eliot bridges the gap formed between the depressing view of the present and an optimistic view of the future.

## Conclusion

While it is true that Eliot paints a bleak picture of human life in the modern world, at the same time he also indicates that meaning can be found in life through its intricate intermingling with mythology. Indeed, the mythological framework woven by Eliot gives a great deal of meaning to the poem's striking theme of the purposelessness of modern human life. In addition to the perspective provided by 'Tiresias'; the grim sexual encounter of the typist with the clerk is foreshadowed by the rape of Philomel in "A Game of Chess." At the end of the poem, the Fisher King remarks, "Shall I at last set my lands in order?" Eliot maintains his position somewhere in between a muted and depressed view of the present and hopes for a rebirth of civilisation. And the answer to this question is left ambiguous by Eliot. Just as the Fisher King may one day hopefully reclaim his lands, Eliot offers a glimmering sign of hope that humanity may recover from 'The Waste Land'.

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# 6

# The Thematic and the Structural Semblances: A Study of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri*

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**Abstract**

T.S. Eliot, the world-famous modern poet, has written *The Waste Land* (1922), one of the seminal works in the history of English literature. In this poem, he has portrayed a horrible vision of chaos and disorder seen after the First World War in Europe. He finds the outcome is deadly and macabre. Society has lost its harmony and coherence. Along with the impact of war on the socio-psychological sphere, the poet is also concerned about the spiritual vacuity, making the situation far more pathetic. People have detached themselves from divinity. They become hopeless and helpless. Eliot recommends only faith in God can restore the situation from this severe damage. Arun Kolatkar, a much-known face in the sphere of Indian English Literature, has written *Jejuri*, a wonderful collection of poetry on the pilgrimage site of Khandoba in Pune. But this poem is not written in praise of the deity. Instead, this entire religious establishment is treated very sceptically. With farce and satire, the poet investigates varieties disputes and controversies, very much discernible in the divine domain of Jejuri. Spirituality is found absolutely deplorable. It is also one kind of crisis detected by Kolatkar. Thus, despite the geo-psychological and socio-political differences, *The Waste Land* and *Jejuri* are found to share a common idea. Both the poems deal with spiritual sterility, a matter of concern for the entire world.

Keywords: Spiritual Sterility, Doubt, Distrust, Skepticism, Disbelief, Denial.

## Introduction

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), a widely acclaimed Modernist poet, play writer and critic, was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. His *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, is a supreme example of the modern poem, having an exclusive novelty in structure, style and content. It has explored the depression and degradation of the post First World War era of the western civilisation. Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004), a bilingual poet, writing both in English and Marathi, is a poet par excellence. He is one of the leading literary voices of his generation who has contributed immensely towards raising Indian English poetry to its present canonical status. He has received the distinguished Commonwealth Writer's Prize for his poem *Jejuri*. It is regarded as one of the great books of modern India. According to a critic, *Jejuri* is dealing with the images of "aridity and ugliness, decay and neglect, fossilisation and perversion". Both the texts are remarkable in their approach and appeal. They have made significant contributions to the literature of their respective countries. This paper tries to compare both the poems regarding their conceptual and constructional semblances.

A close analysis of both the poems reveals that they are basically a social and cultural scanning of the twentieth century's modern Europe and India. Of course, the background is different. *The Waste Land* contemplates the invalid and puerile human life in post-World War Europe. The outcome of the war-oriented devastation and destruction and its impact on the human mind are wonderfully pronounced by Eliot. At the same time, *Jejuri* examines the commercial world of India, where everything is going on in terms of cash and coin. In this poem, it is highlighted why religion cannot free itself from the vicious impact of money. But interestingly, *The Waste Land* of Eliot is not the saga of Europe only. It can be found anywhere in this modern world. Due to this easy connectivity, this poem is not strictly restricted to a particular domain. Instead, it becomes a mouthpiece of the world as a whole.

In *Jejuri*, the poet visits the holy place to know about its actual reality. He has scrutinised every aspect of this place so that truth becomes transparent. The result is heartbreaking. It shows how disastrously religious tradition and rituals are over-clouded by decay,

corruption and dilapidation. He is unhappy when he finds that everything comes under the control of materialism, commercialism, artificiality, hypocrisy and blind faith. He observes that it has completely deteriorated the old faith and beliefs. Scepticism has occupied the place of simple devotion. Doubt and denial cannot be prevented any more.

It is an experience of a place situated in India where the majority of the people are found as blind believers in God. They don't even know that they have shown their faith in a wrong place where only material gains matter. Their unconditional devotion has convinced them that everything is fine and absolutely alright. They fail to understand that they are not on the right path. The child-like simplicity of the devotees is taken for granted. Only ritual and superstition play a major role. Spirituality is poorly treated. A total mess has decomposed the entire system. The devotional activities seem artificial and fake.

This is not the picture of Jejuri only. It is found in many other temples in India. In these holy places, the actual meaning of religion is forgotten. Everybody is running after rules and rituals. The authorities of the temples cannot think beyond money. Commercial profit becomes their ultimate goal. The superstitious devotees don't raise any doubt and question. They have accepted everything as the blessings of God. Kolatkar tries to reveal this barrenness of the place and the spiritual hollowness of the people. He wishes to expose the meaningless practice of religion by the majority of his countrymen. According to him, the decay and the defect become so prominent that it needs immediate restoration. Otherwise, spirituality will suffer, and the devotees will be victimised. This weakness in the world of spirituality is seen not only in Jejuri but in many other places in India and abroad. It is a severe crisis faced by the entire world.

Religion, which is supposed to function as the great remedy of many social and cultural maladies, has lost its value and virtue very miserably. Consciously or unconsciously, the apathy to religion is encouraged by some people who are more interested in money rather than the blessings of Almighty God. This is reflected in both poems. Doubt and disbelief have totally shattered the concept of religion. Trust and commitment are conspicuous in their absence. Absolute

faithlessness has vitiated respect and regard. The situation is almost beyond the control. But, ultimately, in spite of so many objections, Eliot and Kolatkar have chosen religion and spirituality as the only refuge by which the sterility of the modern world can be confronted. According to them, it is the only option left for us that may arrange life in a much better way. So, it is the need of the hour to be attached to religion to survive in the present scenario. In *The Waste Land*, religion is shown to be overshadowed by libidinousness and lewdness, whereas in *Jejuri*, it is clouded over by power and pomp. Obviously, it has generated perversion and corruption. Spirituality is losing its meaning. People become more money-minded and mean-minded. The yearning to gain an unlimited profit and prestige does not care about religion. They don't bother about the sanctity of the divine domain. Honesty and purity become absent in the holy field. In the poem *The Priest* (*Jejuri*), the man is more concerned about "will there be a puran poli in his plate" when the bus arrives packed with pilgrims. It is a matter of utter shamelessness, which is absolutely unexpected in the sphere of religion. Obviously, spirituality is on the verge of extinction. In "*The Burial of the Dead*", there is a character "the one-eyed merchant" who has totally deviated from the path of religion in accumulating wealth. Consequently, he becomes spiritually vacant and void as he denies the existence of God. In *Jejuri*, we experience that a society–imposed – hierarchy is present even among gods. "*Yeshwant Rao*" is designated as the "second class God" whose temple is built outside the main building. This kind of perception is absolutely disgraceful and ugly. It is ridiculous and funny also. Unfortunately, religion is under the control of a few selfish and self-centred devotees of God. It becomes their personal property. By the name of God, they don't hesitate to play with the religious belief of the common folk. Both Eliot and Kolatkar have exposed this superficiality and hypocrisy in the sphere of religion. Eliot has shown how the economy dominates each and every aspect of human life. Nothing can be accomplished without the influence of money. Kolatkar has pointed out how religious rites and rituals have been influenced by the money and market. Everything is regulated by its monstrous impact. Both the poets highlight how and why religious faith gradually becomes irrelevant to the common people. They apprehend that the situation becomes so worst that very soon,

religion may be obliterated from this earthly abode. It is really disappointing that people are more concerned about daily comfort and luxury. They are running after earthly pleasure with a craving for a better life. The immense influence of spirituality is simply neglected. That's why Eliot and Kolatkar are not very hopeful about the future of religion. In *Jejuri (The Pattern*), religion is described as if it is like "smudges under the bare feet/and gets fainter all the time as/the children run." Similarly, Eliot also says that the faith in God will be drowned like Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor in "*Death by Water*" as he is engrossed with this world of "profit and loss".

Both Eliot and Kolatkar have portrayed a world where human being becomes hopeless and helpless because of frustration, confusion, loss and disbelief. Harmony and tranquility are not found in their life. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot advocates the need to avoid unethical sexual urges and cravings as it leads to inevitable calamity. By the word "waste" of *The Waste Land*, Eliot means chaos and disorder which are not confined only in the western civilisation. The oriental culture faces the same risk and insecurity, leading to disaster and disorder. It is found in the poem *Jejuri* also, where modern men are deviating from the path of religion. They are losing their faith and belief in God. Obviously, the balance and the stability appear inactive. In their absence, the people become confused and puzzled. They have gone far away from ancient beliefs, moral and ethical principles. Economic prosperity does not provide any relief to the dilemma and doubt of the modern folk. "The Railway Station" reveals the same scenario as is found in the world of *Jejuri*. Corruption and contamination are rampant. Ultimately, religion as a social institution is completely broken down. A similar thing is located in *The Waste Land*. Eliot has also shown how the lack of religious devotion can bring absolute degradation with the consequential arrival of various psychic disorders, criminal activity, and obnoxious attitude. People are found less conscious about the value of religion. They go on running after economic prosperity. Religion is considered obsolete and no longer required. They fail to realize that the present success is short-lived, not permanent. They rather need solid support that only religion can provide.

Despite all the allegations, religion cannot be overlooked negligently. Both the poets are found to be believers in God and his

eternal nemesis. They consider religion as the ultimate option, left for the entire universe. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot has found the solution from the oriental civilisation. He spreads the message of Upanishad's "Datta", "Damayata" and "Dayadhwam" as the only remedy to restore the wounded and injured human psyche. He concludes the poem with the words "Shantih Shantih Shantih". It is the quintessential truth of Hindu philosophy. Eliot believes these utterances can bring eternal peace to this disturbed and disordered universe. It can lead the human being to the path of sanity and sanctity. In this way, Eliot has prescribed how civilisation can be saved from the ongoing catastrophe. He feels religion will play a vital role in minimizing these hazards of human civilisation. It is the panacea waiting to be utilised.

In *Jejuri*, Kolatkar has tried to find the solution in his three "Chaitanya" poems and the three nature poems "*Ajamil*", "*Butterfly*", and "*Between Jejuri and the Railway Station"*. "Chaitanya" means spiritual consciousness, which the present society badly lacks. Kolatkar feels it is the urgently needed option that can minimize the maladies of human civilisation. In "*Chaitanya*" poems, the poet speaks about the conflict between the modern and the ancient perceptions of religion. He says rites and rituals are not the real faces of religion. God can be worshipped by the minimum requirements like honesty, purity and devotion. But the writer finds that modern men do not have any attachment to divinity. They lack belief and faith in God. Religion has become a man-made commercial institution. Kolatkar thinks it is time to detach religion from this narrow and confined mode. He appeals to the devotees of God to apply their sagacity and wisdom while practicing religion. Otherwise, it becomes impossible to free this social institution from insanity and derangement. Kolatkar has also talked about energy, joy, enthusiasm, spontaneity and freedom, which are seen in the cock and the hen dance and in the world of butterfly. But *Jejuri* and the railway station are deprived of this positive power. Instead, they are very much artificial and mechanical. The natural flow is obstructed.

In finding the solution, both Eliot and Kolatkar have shown their faith in the concept of the life force, the essence of the very existence of mankind. Lifeforce connotes something natural and normal. In the world of artificiality, it is an absent idea. In *The Waste Land*, the

disorder and the disturbances have been tried to be solved by the restorative rainwater, and the deficiencies present in *Jejuri* have been replaced by the powerful dance of the cock and the hen. The fish and the fisherman, the cock and the hen become the symbol of positive energy which can give relief to the individual from doubt and distrust.

Structurally, both poems have striking similarities. Their poetic style is mostly the same. They have several sections, but they are connected with each other very harmoniously. *The Waste Land* has five long sections, and *Jejuri* is a collection of thirty-six long and short poems. Each section deals with different things, but they have coherence and consistency presented with beautiful ease and comfort. They present a common vision through a thoughtful narration which is made recurrent and repetitive to highlight the main concept. Both the poets use striking images and symbols to explore the doubt and dilemma, disbelief and faithlessness, disbalance and dislocation of the so-called modern civilisation. In *The Waste Land*, there is no water. Similarly, in *Jejuri* also, "there isn't a drop of water" in the reservoir. Some words like "crack", "dry", "desert", "empty", "heap of broken images", "stony places", "stone language" are found to be repeated in both the poems. They have wonderfully described the crisis of the civilisation. Their very presence connotes that something wrong is happening where the loss is irreparable. Some sounds, found in both the poems, like "shatter", "clatter", "kick", "jug jug" are very much unpleasant and harsh. These bitter and blunt dictions hint that human civilisation gradually becomes dull and dry. Musical softness is no more to be found. In "*What the Thunder Said"*, the "empty Chapel" does not have windows and "the door swings". Similarly, in "*The Door*" (*Jejuri*), the door is broken and is "half brought down". Both Eliot and Kolatkar return to ancient myths and legends in order to restore the peace and stability that the present society urgently needs. Eliot narrates the quest for the Holy Grail, stories from the grail legend, Fisher King, fertility myths from the book "From Ritual to Romance" By Jessie Weston and Sir James Frazer's "Golden Bough". Kolatkar also refers to the messages of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the legend of the Horseshoe shrine and the story of Ajamil, who maintain stability and balance by following the principle of harmony in life. Both the writers refer to

many fables and parables. Reduction, exaggeration, distortion and juxtaposition are some of the stylistic features used by both of them. They have emphasised some unpleasant features like dilapidation, neglect and degeneration to portray the ugliness of modern civilisation. The poems present a wonderful graphic description of the socio-psychological features of the surroundings and the characters around them. Eliot and Kolatkar, with their superb observation power, have explored all the sensual and ugly details very realistically. The poems are splendid in respect of irony, satire and sarcasm.

## Conclusion

*Jejuri* was published fifty-five years after the publication of *The Waste Land*. But still, they have many common features. Particularly, *Jejuri* echoes many things from Eliot's poem. Both of them examine the causes why modern civilisation does not care about spirituality seriously. They are simultaneously concerned about the encroachment of science, industrial revolution and materialistic mentality into the personal and social lives of modern men. In both the poems, Eliot and Kolatkar reflect their own vision of "institutionalisation", "ritualisation" and "commercialisation" of spirituality. They openly attack the ongoing culture and custom practised by the fakes and frauds. With great social awareness, they dare to show why some changes are necessary in the present social structure. The poems appear as the journey of self-introspection. They both deal with traditional spiritual beliefs and modern urban scepticism. In these two poems, Tiresias and Manohar becomes the representative of Eliot and Kolatkar, who have experienced the bitterest struggle just to survive in the modern world. The poets are fearful that modern men do not have any solid support as they totally renounce the traditional spiritual force. They have felt that a vacuum is generated leading to a land of hollowness and faithlessness from where any return is not possible. They are also abundantly sure that this spiritual sterility has the full potential to collapse the entire human civilisation. *The Waste Land* and *Jejuri* are separated by culture, country and centuries. But Kolatkar echoes many things of Eliot like structural pattern, fundamental conflict and mood.

Mainly, regarding spiritual sterility, Kolatkar seems to recall the point of view of Eliot. The calamity and the catastrophe described in *The Waste Land* are found in *Jejuri* also. Like Eliot, Kolatkar is also apprehensive about the crisis of civilisation as religion, the premium social institution does no longer remain honest and pure. It is contaminated by a variety of meaningless rites and rituals. Respect and regards are no more found unconditional. All the time, it is driven by some intention and purpose. It has become more economical. It has transformed into a source of daily income in the name of God. Corruption is distinctly visible. Some people accept religion as the source of economic prosperity. This habit of accumulating wealth by means of religion is severely criticized by Kolatkar. Out of disgust, many start disbelieving in spirituality by showing absolute indifference and apathy. So, religion is now under some questions. Kolatkar's *Jejuri* deals with this socio-psychological aspect of religion. In *The Waste Land,* too, the same aspect is witnessed but with a note of the difference. Here also, religion is present with some fallacy. Faith is demolished in post-World War Europe. Under doubt and dilemma, people become less interested in religion. They don't want to share any attachments with it. After the bloody battle, everything becomes meaningless. Religion is found as a rejected and avoided social institution. But, to be safe and secure from this chaotic disorder, Eliot recommends restoring the belief and trust in religion, the only source from which peace and tranquillity can be derived. Kolatkar thinks about the same option as prescribed by Eliot. Despite denial and distrust, he, too, feels religion is something so needful that it cannot be ignored very casually. He suggests it is better to purify spirituality from the filthy-minded people and their dirty practices by which they occupy religion as their personal property.

Therefore, despite differences and diversities, *Jejuri* seems to deal with the spiritual crisis found in *The Waste Land* also. From this point of view, Kolatkar echoes the same risk and hazards by which Eliot is similarly distressed and tormented. Both cultures are poles apart. But the problems faced by both the society do not remain to be restricted to a particular place. Spiritual barrenness has become a universal issue. It does not have any specific location. It is common and general, talking about the pain and pathos of the entire world.

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## GENERAL SECTION

# 1

# Interrogating Gender and Empowering Women: A Study of Selected Poems of Rupi Kaur and Tishani Doshi

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**Abstract**

In my paper, I have endeavoured to examine some selected poems of Rupi Kaur and Tishani Doshi. Both of them challenge the gender stereotypes prevalent in society and address the feminist issues perceived through multiple avenues of life. The women in their poems are the crusaders of hope for the marginalised, peripheral women in the world. I have examined how they aim at transforming the world to create a better future for everyone. The women they presented in their poems are free thinkers. I have attempted to show how these two women poets projected women who assert their rights and might and prove their self-sufficiency leaving their silenced, suppressed, peripheral zone of existence. The women of Kaur and Doshi's poems question the lopsided societal norms which are preserved in gender-politics.

Keywords: Gender, Empowerment, Feminist, Women

Gender, the social elaboration of biological sex, constitutes one's sense of identity. It is central to our understanding of 'self'. In "Feminist and Gender Theories", *Scott* Appelrouth and Laura Edles say: "Gender is something we do and perform" (317). This stereotypical gender discourse triggers the "bifurcation of consciousness"[1] in women. According to Dorothy Smith, the

patriarchal women get trapped between the masculine–oriented, dominant abstract world, and the concrete world of mother and wife (qtd. in Appelrouth and Edles 321). Women are expected to adapt to a male-defined, male-dominated world. In this paper, I have selected some specific poems of two eminent poets named Rupi Kaur and Tishani Doshi to challenge the "matrix of domination."[2.] Breaking the silence and empowering women in literary space underscore a moment of insubordination to the myopic power structure. Their militant approach is a direct insult to the androcentric, lopsided society. Kaur's spokesperson refuses to be the "other" and claims to be a "unified subject" in a poem titled "home":

> I dive into the well of my body
> and end up in another world
> everything I need
> already exists in me
> there's no need
> to look anywhere else. (1-6)

Tishani Doshi's feminist approach is quite palpable in her poems. In a talk with Janice S. Rodrigues, on 4 Nov. 2017 in *The Navhind Times*, Doshi says, "Feminism is freedom, and freedom, to quote the great Nina Simone, is to have no fear. So, it's both those things- a life of freedom, a life without freedom" (Interview).

Following Hegel, Simone de Beauvoir gives a theoretical framework of gender discrimination. She says: "He is the subject; he is the Absolute; she is the other" (qtd. in Appelrouth and Edles 316). She uses the Hegelian terminology of "pour-soi" and "en-soi" to identify the man/woman binary. According to Hegel, men are moulded in the role of "pour-soi" i.e., for themselves. It is a continual process of self-realisation and creative freedom, while women are put into the role of en-soi i.e.in-itself, in which they consent to become an object (qtd. in Appelrouth and Edles 316). Beauvoir dismantles this traditional concept by urging women to decline to be "other". Her female readers are to develop their rational, masculine, faculties and critical power to reconstruct themselves as "pour-soi' or transcendental subjects. Being radically dynamic and experimental by nature, Indian English poetry addresses new challenges, embraces new theoretical tenets, and explores new horizons of thought for the readers. I have selected the poems of Rupi Kaur and Tishani Doshi as

the female protagonists they presented in their poems leave their passive zone of "silence" and turn out to be iconoclasts to empower women.

Rupi Kaur (1992- ), an Indo-Canadian poet has charmed the world by sending a message to society so directly. The Instapoet celebrates the world of women in all its forms. Kaur's collections of poems are anthologised in *Milk and Honey* (2014), *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). The poems in these are vivid, and realistic in their appeal. The multifarious nuances of a woman's life and her perceptions remain the areas of her poetic articulation. The woman in her poems stands for courage, bravery and strength. They are the independent spokespersons of the female world which throws away the age-old taboos set on them by male chauvinism. On 6 Oct. 2016, she posted a poem on Facebook about the assertion of the female voice in transforming the world. In today's world, women not only claim their rights, but they also become iconoclasts in reforming the world. The poem was published in the anthology called *Milk and Honey* (2014). The title is symbolic. It denotes the sustenance for thriving. Women are the source of creativity and reproduction. In Kaur's poem, success for the female protagonist means a happier society for all. The philanthropic note becomes conspicuous and inimitable in the painting drawn by the poem's side. The visual beauty of the beehive with the bees on it is suggestive and emblematic of the poet's efforts to reconstruct a beautiful, poverty-ridden world for all:

> of course i want to be successful
> but i don't crave success for me
> i need to be successful to gain
> enough milk and honey
> to help those around
> me succeed.[3] (1-6)

The poet's notion of the feminine is nourishing, soothing and life-giving. Their nature is synonymous with that of milk and honey, according to the poet. Her feminist perspective does not clash with her feminine nature. Though she is a feminist, her approach does not allow her to sacrifice her essential feminine 'self". Rather she protects it consciously in this poem. The women of Kaur's world resist the injustices inflicted on them with their essential self which is animated

with the humane qualities of love, mercy and compassion for all. Love and compassion oozing out of her feminine self-retaliates patriarchal aggression:

how is it so easy for you
to be kind to people he asked.
milk and honey dripped
from my lips as I answered
cause people have not
been kind to me.[4] (1-6)

The soft, mild, nurturing nature of the women is placed along with their destructive nature. Kaur is completely realistic in unveiling the bi-focal, antagonistic nature of the feminine self. In a poem from *Milk and Honey,* Kaur has beautifully exposed the contradictory nature of a woman:

i am water
soft enough
to offer life
tough enough
to drown it away.[5] (1- 5)

These lines invite comparison with the liquid, ambivalent nature of water. Women like "water" are both life-giving as well as life-snatching.

Since the very inception of the feminist movement, the feminists were struggling to establish the self-sufficiency of a woman. They opposed the very societal construct in which women had been confined, silenced and marginalised. They were meant to attain completeness in their association with men. But in the present century, emerging poets like Kaur prove how the binary between the world of men and the world of women is erased. Kaur's poems break the gender stereotypes and erase the discourse of "other" in a befitting way. She motivates the women:

the way you speak of yourself
the way you degrade yourself
into smallness
is abuse
self-harm.[6] (1-5)

Tishani Doshi (1975- ) is another important Indian English poet. Her important collections of poems are *Countries of the Body* (2006),

*Everything Begins Elsewhere* (2012), and *Girls are Coming Out of Woods* (2018). Unlike Kaur's, Doshi's poems are narrative by nature. I have two poems where the poet uses concrete images to delineate the sufferings of the women characters. In an interview with Janice Savina Rodrigues, she speaks of her feminist perception in *Girls are Coming Out of Woods* (2018): "These poems have at their centre the female body, questions about motherhood, mortality, gender violence and ageing" (Interview). I have selected the texts which focus on revealing the sufferings of women. Tishani Doshi's female protagonists are oppressed sexually. But they march onwards to subvert the construct of sexual domination. The poet celebrates the dynamic nature of womanhood.

In the poem titled "Girls are Coming out of Woods", the poet portrays the gloomy picture of the women abused sexually. The term "woods" carries the symbolic undertones in it. In this poem, the woods become the emblems of seclusion, isolation and deprivation. Generally, the sexually assaulted female victims cocoon themselves. The pain inflicted on them causes their shame. But Tishani Doshi's female protagonists take a militant standpoint. Instead of isolating themselves from society, they emerge out of the woods to share their story and cast aside their shame to protest. Instead of hiding themselves in the woods, they confront society to demand justice. The poet breaks the taboos related to the female body. She is comfortable in expressing the sufferings of the women protagonists in minute details. In the poem entitled "Girls are coming out of Woods", the poet portrays in minute detail the assertion of the victims:

> Girls are coming out of the woods,
> wrapped in cloaks and hoods,
> carrying iron bars and candles
> and a multitude of scars, collected
> on acres of premature grass and city
> buses, in temples and bars. Girls
> are coming out of the woods
> with panties tied around their lips,
> making such a noise, it's impossible
> to hear. Is the world speaking too? (1-10)

The poet is sarcastic about the silence of the world regarding the violence against women. The expression "multitude of scars" on the

female body reveals the inhuman tortures to which women are subjected. The scars are symbolic. These are more on their mind. The poet gets rid of any kind of inhibition in portraying reality. The lines "Girls are/ coming out of the woods, lifting/ their broken legs high, leaking secrets/ from unfastened thighs" (12-15) become an appropriate objective correlative in offering the exact images of brutality towards the raped. In an interview with Nicholas Wroe on 27 July 2019, she says that the idea of the female body has always been central to her work (Interview). The poet is ironically projecting the victim's demand for justice while the victim's family is trying to hide the fact. It is a slap on the societal silence over crimes. The scathing satire leaves the society unmasked most unsparingly and unapologetically:

> . . .all the lies
> whispered by strangers and swimming
> coaches, and uncles, especially uncles,
> who said spreading would be light
> and easy,… (16-20)

The untold stories of the raped are carved on their psyche. They try to question the society and its norms by emerging out of their cocoon to reveal the truth:

> . . . Girls are coming
> out of the woods, clearing the ground
> to scatter their stories. Even those girls
> found naked in ditches and wells,
> those forgotten in neglected attics,
> and buried in river beds like sediments
> from a different century. They've crawled
> their way out from behind curtains
> of childhood, the silver-pink weight
> of their bodies pushing against water,
> against the sad, feathered tarnish
> of remembrance. . . (24-35)

Tishani Doshi makes use of some telling images to present the stories of women in a vivid, realistic way. The graphic details of sexual violence inflicted on a woman's body" demand an immediate redressal. The poetry of Doshi is essentialised to raise social awareness or consciousness. The language she uses is bold, undaunting as her approach is.

The poem titled "Contract" is a message to her dear readers where she promises them to:

> turn her skin inside out,
> to reinvent every lost word, to burnish,
> to steal, to do what I must
> in order to singe tour lungs. (2-5).

Doshi's readers are left with a task to delve deep into her psyche and reformulate a new society which can be a haven for the women who suffer, protest and transforms. The poem is quite radical in its approach. Instead of lulling the readers into a passive acceptance of the injustices, the iconoclast here instigates them to change the mindset of the world so that it can be a better place for living. The enormity of pain cannot prevent her from telling the truth. The lacerated soul of the poet craves no solace: "I will forgo happiness, / stab myself repeatedly, / and lower my head into countless ovens" (6-8). The feminist in her turns militant in refusing the shackles of the society. Society becomes powerless to stifle her voice. The poet makes an appeal to her readers:

> Don't kill me. Reader,
> This neck has been working for years
> to harden itself against the axe.
> This body, meagre as it is,
> Has lost so many limbs to wars, so many
> eyes and hearts to romance. But love me,
> and I will follow you everywhere –
> to the dusty corners of childhood,
> to every downfall and resurrection.
> Till your skin becomes my skin. (19-28)

Conclusion: In this paper, I have tried to analyse and establish the fact that in the present century, the struggle for women's empowerment has succeeded in achieving a great height, as women are not defined by their three-fold roles of being a daughter, a wife, and a mother. Rather they leave their passive zone of remaining suppressed, oppressed and marginalised by the dominant section of the society. Today's women assert their rights and might. Kaur celebrates the unflagging, undying strength of women: "and here you are living/despite it all" (1-2)[7]. It is Kaur who says:

> what's the greatest lesson a woman should learn?
> that since day one, she's already had everything

she needs within herself. It's the world that
convinced her she did not. (qtd. in Bozeman)

Women in Kaur and Doshi's poems are free thinkers. They have liberated themselves from any kind of bondage which diminishes them.

## Notes

1. The term "Bifurcation of consciousness" is coined by Dorothy E. Smith. Smith used it to demarcate the split between the world as we experience it and the dominant masculine point of view to which we must adapt. See pages 320-321, "Feminist and Gender Theories", https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/38628_7.pdf Accessed 30 Mar. 2022.
2. It is coined by Patricia Hill Collins. In "Everyday World as Problematic", Dorothy Smith brings in Patricia's concept of a "matrix of domination" to "underscore that one's position in society is made up of multiple contiguous standpoints" (334).
3. The poem reminds us of Kaur's other poem on love and fellow-feeling. The poet's power to sympathise with others is beautifully woven there: "of hate/is an easy lazy thing/ but to love/ takes strength/everyone has/but not all are/willing to practice."
4. "A Quote from Milk and Honey." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8021335-how-is-it-so-easy-for-youto-be-kind-to.
5. "A Quote from Milk and Honey." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8021335-how-is-it-so-easy-for-youto-be-kind-to.
6. "A Quote from the Sun and Her Flowers." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9029792-the-way-you-speak-of-yourself-the-way-you-degrade.
7. "A Quote from the Sun and Her Flowers." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9015914-and-here-you-are-living-despite-it-all.

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# 2

# The Triumphant Cleopatra: Locating the Voices of Resistance in the Select Works of Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir

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**Abstract**

Women's writing often involves a kind of fighting in so far as it constitutes an act of assertion on the part of the gender subalterns who do thereby cross the bar of constrictions and constructions. The height of the bar is raised to almost an unassailable extent for women of the East, especially for women coming from the Islamic world. Besides voicing against religious fundamentalism, being practiced within their homelands for generations, they have to perform the role of cultural crusader against Western misrepresentation, in order to form an independent individual and communal identity. For Arab women, caught in the throes of a conservative patriarchy, this act of defiance is very difficult. It becomes doubly difficult for those who are forced to live their life away from home. They are subject to multiple forms of violence and subjugation, including cultural and linguistic ones, in the host land. The Western perception and treatment of these women is largely influenced by some preconceived notions and myths. Even the greatest of writers from the Western world, including William Shakespeare, are not free from the charge of deliberately misrepresenting the women of the East as mere objects of sexuality for obvious political reasons. So, when writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir write, become internationally acclaimed writers, and dare to deal with prickly issues such as gender, ethnic and cultural stereotyping, it becomes imperative on the part of the researcher to locate the link between cultural misrepresentation and imperialism, and also to identify the voices of resistance coming from within. The proposed article intends to touch upon all those issues which impact the process of individuation in a post-global world.

Keywords: Representation, Resistance, Gender, Culture and Identity.

## Introduction

Presenting the *Other* as cultural inferior in both literary texts and popular culture forms an inseparable part of Western imperialism. A successful strategy adopted by the European writers in promoting Western cultural superiority through literary texts is the portrayal of non-European lands as culturally infertile and, at times, as nations of necromancy; therefore, they are in dire need of colonial intervention to improve its cultural landscape and individual identity. This racialised as well as sexualised depiction of the "foreign" land has often been done by presenting grossly distorted images of the women of these 'dark' continents as idols of sexuality, incapable of having an agency of their own. The presentation of the character of Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen of Grecian descent, who, in multiple ways, represents her native land of Egypt, may be examined critically to evaluate as well as expose the Orientalist ideology of the West. Medium of presentation varies from literature to Hollywood films, to popular video games, to popular media but the Western discourse remains constant. In all such mediums, the image of the queen has been portrayed negatively. She is always a cunning, manipulative seductress whose identity is incomplete without her connection with/ relation to a man, a white European man.

Thus, the position of sexed subalternity informs the identity of the female *Other*, in a more general sense, the *Other* as a category. Against this motivated (mis)representation of the female *Other*, a group of Arab women writers in diaspora have been protesting through their writings since the latter half of the last century. Ahdaf Soueif, the British-Egyptian Anglophone writer, and Fadia Faqir, the British-Jordanian writer and activist, are two of the prominent faces of protest against this misrepresentation of female voice, especially voice of Muslim women from the East, in western literature. These two writers go far beyond the traditional dynamics of Islamic nationalism and/or Islamic feminism in countering the western representation of Muslim women and respond through their counter-narratives of sexual freedom, linguistic resistance and women empowerment in the Arab world and beyond. The chief objective of the present study would be to analyse the gender-identity interface as presented in the select novels of Soueif and Faqir. Role of culture in shaping female identity would also constitute the central

problematique of the current study. Herein, culture is perceived to be a framework of rules, norms and expectations, conformity to which may ensure acceptance and/or tolerance towards individuals or communities within the social space. At the same time, history and ethnicity inform the struggling women characters constantly, which impact their understanding of the society and people around them, both within their homeland and away from home.

**Revisiting the Western Myth**

Cleopatra, as stated earlier too, has been equated with her place of origin by William Shakespeare in his play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, with a definite motif in mind. By equating Cleopatra with Egypt, Shakespeare has added an element of exoticism to the character of Cleopatra. Egypt, or for that matter the entire East, has historically been represented as the land of sensuality and black magic. This part of the world has also been portrayed as the land of ancient myths and pagan gods. One such instance of equating woman with her land can be found in one of the speeches of Alexas in which she replaces Cleopatra with Egypt:

> Say the firm Roman to great Egypt sends
> This treasure of an oyster; at whose foot,
> To mend the petty present, I will piece
> Her opulent throne with kingdoms. All the East,
> Say thou, shall call her mistress. (Shakespeare 1993)

In this speech, Cleopatra's Egyptian identity has been foregrounded more than once and, at the same time, this identity has been placed vis-à-vis the West in order to establish the cultural superiority of the West, and also to highlight the exotic character of the East. This oriental touch is quite explicit in the use of the phrase "mistress of the East". The use of "opulent" in describing Cleopatra's "throne" is equally problematic. Her oriental origin is once again emphasised through the use of the phrase "treasure of an oyster". That Cleopatra has been referred to as a *slave*, and even a *whore*, shows the attitude of the white male author towards women of the so-called exotic land. More shockingly, she has been made to call herself the "serpent of old Nile"! Thus, the land of Egypt and its women have been reduced to mere signs of evil which pose a serious threat to the civilised West, represented by Rome in this case. John

Gillies provides a postcolonial interpretation of Shakespeare's presentation of the two 'worlds'. He writes, "the 'orientalism' of Cleopatra's court – with its luxury, decadence, splendour, sensuality, appetite, effeminacy and eunuchs – seems a systematic inversion of the legendary Roman values of temperance, manliness, courage and pietas" (Gillies 1994). This trend of creating binaries with the motif of *Other*ising the East and its people had been continuing since the time of Shakespeare and even beyond. Since most of the Western authors have used the women of the East to foreground their theory of cultural superiority and also to establish the inferiority of the Eastern continents and communities, the resistance against such motivated representations had to come primarily from the women writers of these continents and communities. Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir are two such writers from the Arab world who have successfully countered these Western discourses and provided the readers with an authentic account of the life and struggle of the *Other*ised women of the East.

The literary genius of these women authors chiefly lies in the fact that they reject this conventional Western strategy of misrepresenting a land through the portrayal of its women in such a way that both of them strengthen the cultural and historical stereotypes, and they present women characters as human individuals more than anything else. Their literature marks a paradigm shift both in terms of selection of theme and the human treatment of the characters, especially women characters. Women in the works of Arab female writers are distinguished by their ability to speak loud against patriarchal violence as well as cultural stereotypes. These new Cleopatras have their own agency, which empower them to fight their battle for a dignified life within their respective countries and also in the land of diaspora. Both Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* and Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma* foreground this exceptional qualities of Arab women who finally succeed in rewriting history by dismantling popular Western stereotypes about Arab Muslim women as docile bodies to be controlled by their male counterparts by way of imposing religious and sexual codes on them, and also by exerting their individual identities through their courageous acts of defying those traditional codes and taboos.

## Locating the Voices of Resistance

Egyptian or for that matter Arab female identities are generally shaped by the narrative acts that reflect cultural hybridity. This cultural hybridity is a key factor in forming independent identity, more especially when the Arab woman immigrates into a Western country and is being forced to negotiate with multiple layers of marginalisation in the new land of domicile. It naturally creates some sort of a cultural ambivalence in the woman in exile. This cultural ambivalence serves as the first step towards making postcolonial identity. Therefore, narrative acts become more important than the preconceived notions. Soueif, in *The Map of Love*, emphasises the theme of women's sexual silence and makes her female protagonist Ana and Isabel speak against this enforced silence. By exerting their freedom of choice in selecting life partners, these women defy both patriarchal codes of marriage and sexuality. This act of defiance on the part of her heroines generates a third space. Homi Bhabha calls this third space the 'liminal signifying space' (Bhabha 2004). He explains: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibilities of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (2004). Ashcroft et al. provide a detailed analysis of liminality in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*: "The importance of the liminal for postcolonial theory is precisely its usefulness for describing an 'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur: the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (Ashcroft 2000). This liminal space has been created within the text in order to signal a shift towards transcendence though the performance of sexuality by the leading female characters.

Interestingly, in *The Map of Love*, Anna's love affair is mediated through encounters with a number of women. The female author creates a gendered network of power within the text by giving sexual as well as cultural autonomy to women belonging to different generations. It creates a sisterly bond among the characters that are somehow entangled with one an *Other* in a number of ways. Here one woman lends voice to an*Other*, thereby creating a house of one's own where patriarchy becomes almost redundant. Even religious

strictures cannot influence their decisions; rather, those strictures have been turned into liberating ideals by these women. In the novel, Anna Winterborne's life constitutes a discursive borderline space and this discursive space ultimately leads to expression of independent identity. Amal and Isabel, two *Other* important female characters in the text, rediscover the suppressed voice of resistance raised by Anna almost a century ago. In fact, the narrative of Anna is incomplete without the narratives of Amal, Isabel and Layla. By clubbing these different narratives together, the author has worked out a complete Arab female consciousness which is fundamentally transgressive. Through this collective endeavour, the modern Cleopatras find true expression of freedom. This is perhaps possible only when the true Arab female experience is documented by a woman writer from inside. The added advantage of a writer like Soueif is she could see the Arab Muslim world both from inside and from outside the country. This also liberates the feminist discourse from the clutches of the white upper- and middle-class writers. It is a universal truism that the Western feminism have contributed to the subjugation of the colonised women of the East, by way of representing them from a Eurocentric point of view. Thus, they undermined the key issues of race, caste and religion which play a massive role in shaping the identity of the women of the East. Soueif takes special care of these crucial issues while presenting the women of the East in her works. This is exactly the reason why she has been able to provide an authentic and objective image of the land of Egypt and its women.

The historic encounter between Islam and the West has always been one of domination of the East on political, cultural, and religious grounds (Said 1978). Said criticises the West's representation of the culture and history of the East. According to him, the Western discourses promote the cultural superiority of the West and present the people of the East and their history as inferior. They have systematically targeted the women of the East to establish the uncivil and barbaric nature of the men of the East. They have also portrayed the Eastern women as symbols of sexuality and unbridled passion. Many Arab writers, especially women writers, have countered this Western narrative of cultural inferiority through the portrayal of women who do not hesitate to exercise their sexual right, with a view to rewriting the Western narrative of silenced Muslim women who

need Western intervention in order to be saved from Muslim men and also to be able to speak against oppression. Thus, their works constitute a strong response to the stereotypical and orientalist portrayal of the Muslim world and its women. Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* is one such example in which an Arab Bedouin girl Salma fights almost a lone battle against both Western prejudices and indigenous cultural peculiarities to liberate herself completely from the labyrinth of patriarchy. In this novel too, the central protagonist creates an ambivalent space which initiates her journey towards making an independent identity in a globalised world.

R.H. Latha emphasises the role of hybridity in the making of female identity in a postcolonial context. She writes: "Women's identities in postcolonial societies are characterised by hybridity" (Latha 2001). Salma's identity needs to be understood vis-à-vis the cultural hybridity that marks her postcolonial diasporic existence. As a woman of the Middle East, she is subject to cultural *Other*isation and psychological marginalisation in Britain. This state of marginalisation creates a sense of ambivalence in Salma which leads to the formation of her postcolonial identity. The author has shown this cultural ambivalence through the use of a unique linguistic strategy. Salma speaks in a hybridised language which mixes Arabic with English in such a manner that none of the two languages loses its linguistic integrity and power of communication. Even though she uses English expressions to communicate her present state of mind to English-speaking individuals around her, the language retains the syntax of Arabic. Fatima Felemban has emphasised this use of the technique of interlanguage by Faqir in *My Name Is Salma* to construct an independent Arab identity (Felemban 2012). Faqir has used this special vocabulary in order to help Salma create an ethnic space within Britain, which allows her to retain the Arabic self even when she interacts with the Europeans. The following conversation between Salma and her doctor shows how Salma exerts her Arab identity through the use of this special vocabulary:

> 'What can I do for you, Miss Asher?' …
> I ill, doctor. My heart beat, No sleep,' …
> 'Any physical symptoms?'
> 'Sick yes. Arms and legs see.' …
> 'It is psoriasis, that's all. A skin condition. Nothing serious,'

'Sweat, heartbeat, cannot sleep,' …
'If your heart is beating then it must be in good condition. That's what hearts are supposed to do.'
'What can I do for you, Miss Asher?' …
'But I ill. Please. Today alive, tomorrow dead me,' (Faqir 2007).

Though the medium of communication is English here, the style and syntax carry typical Arabic linguistic essence. Notably, the two most prominent verbs – 'to be' and 'to have'-- are missing in Salma's speeches. This has happened due to the fact that in her native language, i.e. Arabic, these two verbs are not in use at all. This linguistic liminality helps Salma exert her Arab identity in the foreign land. This is a courageous act of negating the British identity on the part of Salma. This process of negation can also be located in her refusal of the rigid Islamic code of sexuality, which was imposed on her by her Bedouin community. In selecting partners, both in Jordan and in Britain, she defies patriarchal codes of 'virtue' and 'purity' which puts her in immense trouble later on. However, she remains adamant in the face of tremendous torture and attempted 'honour killing'. This indomitable spirit and uncompromising ability to defy all traditional norms define the character of Faqir's female protagonists who are ready to fight the battle against all forms of marginalisation till the end of their life. She could have lived the rest of her life as Sally, the British wife, but she prefers to leave this foreign identity behind and die as Salma at the end of the novel which clearly shows that the West with all its hegemonic strategies and networks has failed miserably in its attempt to assimilate her into Western culture and identity. This act of upholding Arab identity, even in death, makes her the winner at the end. Her life bears clear testimony to the fact that the Arab Muslim women are capable of fighting their battle for justice and are in perfect position to shape their own identities independent of any whatsoever influence/s.

Conclusion: "History has been written without us. The imperative is clear: either we will make history or remain the victims of it" says Michele Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (Wallace 1979). Writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir chose to play the agents of change. They have rewritten the popular Western discourses from an indigenous point of view which has dismantled the Western myths about the women of the East. That the

Cleopatras of the Arab world have their own agencies and they can speak against all forms of violence and marginalisation on their own is established quite successfully in the novels of these women writers. But this struggle for making independent Arab identity by its women does not end with these novels. The process continues in their *Other* works too. In fact, as Stuart Hall emphasises in his *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, this process can never be complete as the quest never ends. He argues, "The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities" (Hall 1996). The primary objectives of further studies in this area must include the analysis of the various dynamics and positionalities that remain active in constructing these "unresolved identities".

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# 3

# Handcuffed to Nature: An Ecocritical Approach to Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*

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**Abstract**

Nature has become a constant source of stimulation for the authors for generations. Numerous literary creations have been associated with the faultless natural ambience of the universe. But unlike environmentalists, the writers of literary texts have little or no scope to raise a protest against the degradation of the environment. Very few writers have been preoccupied with the thought of environment in their texts and that is the main cause of the existence of an insufficient number of literary texts having environmental issues. In the late 1980s in the United States and later on in the 1990s in the United Kingdom, an emergent movement has started to study the intrinsic relationship between literary texts and the environment. This study is defined as 'eco-criticism' or 'green studies'. Ecocriticism analyzes the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific moment. In this paper, I would like to focus on the ambiance of the debate that propagated the acclaimed novelist Amitav Ghosh to write a new non-fictional work *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* in 2016. This is a marvelous volume from Ghosh that evenly assesses and demonstrates the confines of human consideration when it comes to the apprehension of environmental disasters. This is a grave issue that reflects our 'deranged' manners of socio-economic as well as political matters through several themes like history, politics, and literature. Amitav Ghosh tries to answer the relevant questions: why is serious fiction reluctant to deal with climate change and environmental issues? If it does, then why is it immediately classified as science-fiction or

relegated to subgenre literature? Answering some of the assumptions implied in Ghosh's discourse, it is possible to situate his text and the relevance of climate change within our literary and philosophical discourse and to re-think our cultural and environmental policies and instructive engagement.

Keywords: Environmental Humanities, Eco-criticism, Eco-materialism, Fossil-fuel, Climate change, Biodiversity, Environmental Advocacy, Postcolonial, Anthropocene.

The term eco-criticism is derived from two Greek words, Oikos and Kritis. The meaning of "Oikos" is "household", a tie of three-nature, human, and spirit. And the other word, "Kritis" means to judge, "the arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order" (Howarth: 163). Basically, it is the interdisciplinary reading of a literary text relating to ecology and the environment. It is the scientific analysis of the environmental issues and to find out a possible way out for the development of the environmental ambiance. The term eco-criticism was first used by William Ruckerts. In the 1990s, two seminal books entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) by Lawrence Buell published and practically heralded the terminology 'Eco-criticism'. In America, Cheryll Glotfelty is the acknowledged proponent of Ecocritics. Ecocriticism has initiated the interest for the last three decades as it is coupled with the interrelations between human beings and the natural environment. But the last part of the twentieth century has aroused a new universal hazard that is green disparity and ruin. Ecocriticism is the result of this new idea and awareness that in the recent future there will be scarcely anything attractive in the natural world to converse about unless we are cautious, careful from right now about our mother earth.

Of late, earth is approaching a catastrophe as the spectre of the climate crisis is hanging over our head relegating all of us to a mode of emergency where the utmost criteria is to save ourselves anyhow from this ordeal. The flora and fauna on the earth are finding a massive setback as climate change has been approaching towards its acme which is irredeemable. Earth is slowly dying down as several species are going to be extinct, the temperature of both the air and the water is soaring day by day, plastic pollution has choked the throat of the environment and slowly and silently we are approaching in the

direction of another world war and that will be fought among us due to the dearth of water and other natural resources. Different species of the next generation will face an imminent crisis of survival. To gain profits, greed-mongering and politically motivated powerful business tycoons are bringing crisis by destroying the climate and this environmental slaughter has never been properly assessed.

Till now, the authors, novelists are not vocal about global warming and its impact on life on this planet probably because the authorial imagination doesn't capture the storms, thunders, cyclones, tornadoes, floods as because they don't make a plausible ground for the emotional endeavour. The stories of these natural calamities do not come into the periphery of serious literary fiction and are relegated to the other literary genres as fantasy writing and science fiction, rather the limitations of the 'literary novel' are to highlight 'individual moral adventure' thereby dissociating the mental state from the susceptibility of its physical state, as it hardly allows the climate to aggressively encroach upon the customary routine and normal concern of a human being it prefers to portray. Here the author contends that the contemporary novel by utilizing the narrow parameter of time and space which could rarely surpass more than a human's lifespan. But Amitav Ghosh is a distinguished writer and a climate change activist. He has got a different outlook and is seriously concerned about the imminent danger and his non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) is proof of that. This entire work is concerned with climate change, the shocking effect of the changing weather patterns of the world and with a cutting insight, he analyses the limitations of history, politics, and literature to grab the magnitude of this climate change. This non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) began as a collection of lectures in the name of the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures and was delivered at the University of Chicago in 4 parts, starting from 29th September to 7th October 2015. Basically, the topic of degradation and destruction of the environment and the position of Asia in world history have woven the context of Ghosh's fiction. It concentrates on the nexus between economic imbalance and annihilation of the ecology and environment.

The objective of this paper is to make a detailed study of the ecocritical aspect of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. The analysis will focus on how Amitav Ghosh's eco-narrative portrays the description of "greening postcolonialism" as propounded by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Eco-Criticism*. This nonfiction highlights within the sphere of postcolonial eco-criticism and provided a different method of eco-narrative in contrast to eco-activism, eco-tourism, etc. Moreover, Material Eco-criticism focuses on the material phenomena which are tied to a great chain of profit-gaining business agencies and can be read and understood as forming a story or a narrative. "Developing in bodily forms and in discursive formulations the stories of the matter is a material mesh of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and non-human players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (Iovino, 1-2).

Amitav Ghosh's non-fictional enterprise is certainly an example of post-colonial eco-criticism that concentrates on the preservation of the bio-diversity and the hypocritical hollow rhetoric of eco-business. It also "highlights how postcolonial literature is rich in discursive formulations and the stories of narrative matter replete with their material mesh of meanings that can serve as signifying forces" (Vincent 2). Amitav Ghosh reasserts a new space of postcolonial identity through eco-narrative. This nonfictional prose enables us to identify and articulate resistance against colonialist and materialistic power. Ghosh ponders over the fact that the present generation is deranged. Here the author has probed the incapability of the current generation to understand the extent and aggression of the climatic degradation and postulates that it should be mirrored in the current literary texts, politics, and history. Amitav Ghosh posits his eco-critical fiction on the face of natural peril and peculiarity of the weather and shows that fiction is the best medium to deal with the pressing task of our time troubling the issue of climate change out of its scientific arena of meteorological studies to much broader areas of human culture and studies. Amitav Ghosh delves deep into the snarled nexus of the carbon economy and unfolds the reason behind the climatic change as an over-dependence on fossil fuels. It's a kind of derangement for us to say we desire a new different world but hardly try to change the deeds to make it realised perfectly. As per

Ghosh, the 'derangement' alluded to in the title means an advancement towards climatic disaster without any attempt to mitigate it and we just can't imagine what the unprecedented future holds, some portion of the essay is devoted to the imagination with a connection of rationalistic approach of the twentieth century novel with a scientific temperament.

The first part is a long chapter entitled "Stories" where he indicates the literary community for their collective failure to claim the issue of climate change as the 'principal preoccupation' of serious novels. He assumes that global warming will affect in such a massive way that the sea level will rise and it will devour the Sundarbans and the low-lying cities like Kolkata, Bangkok. Today's unthinkable connoisseur of art and literature will have to face an entirely transformed world for the legacy of the inheritors. And failing to search those, he thought what could be their expressions; rather they would conclude that ours was a time when most of the art and literary forms were tied to the means of suppression and cover-ups that barred all of us from identifying the reality of the actual predicament. These folks, as per Ghosh's vision of the 'readers and museum-goers' looking for and to understand how the authors of today deliberately hide away from the realities that certainly led to their descendants' terrifyingly bleak and dreary planet. With this viewpoint, Amitav Ghosh investigates the 'customary frames that literature has applied to "Nature"' (32) and ended up with utmost sorrow, that events like the transformation of climate change are too powerful, uncanny, serious, and dangerous to vie with the refined and sophisticated fictional language. Moreover, the essential terminologies are uncouth to listen to. Vocabulary like 'petroleum', 'fossil fuels', 'bitumen', 'naphtha' and 'tar', evoke a kind of nauseating feeling. Ghosh's ultimate winding up is that a new fusion of literary style will materialize and that may change the very act of reading. Here his revelation is that like 'the vast majority of human beings,' (54) his life is steered not only by cause and motive but by 'the inertia of habitual motion (54).' Despite this, "Stories" is a captivating literary contemplation about the environment and the canons of literary and science fiction including western classics as well as less known works of art from around the world.

This first part of this nonfiction engages on the motif of the climate crisis with the following views on non-human interlocutors like rising seas, storms, etc. Then these non-human aspects influence the thought process of the human beings which grows a massive interest to re-centre these non-human aspects. Then the uncanny intimacy of the humans with the non-humans is discussed, and then comes the instability of human existence. Then the author analyses the perplexity of the predator, the realisation of the European Enlightenment along with the middle-class expectations and revisions of thought process. Amitav Ghosh's contention is to analyse the conversion of the attitude towards nature and it is exemplified by the fact that human beings have started believing that planets and asteroids were inert merely three centuries ago. We are forced to awake "to the recognition of a presence" (6). It had moulded our lives. He writes that "the energy that surrounds us, flowing under our feet and through wires in our walls, animating our vehicles and illuminating our rooms, is an all-encompassing presence that may have its purposes about which we know nothing" (6-7). Awareness was forced upon us to be near to the non-human presences with the portents of alteration especially in the landscape "in the receding shoreline and a steady intrusion of saltwater on lands that had previously been cultivated" (7) or in the escalating level of toxic carbon in the air and atmosphere was "rewriting the destiny of the earth" (8) in this 21st century. Amitav Ghosh asserts that the landscape is "demonstrably alive" (7) as the protagonist in a "stage for enactment of human history." (8)

Part two of the book exemplifies the historicised psyche captured in a world that keeps on historicising itself, in this circumstance the past is persistently being outdated and human beings depend on the flawed technology to make out the sense of things. The historicised psyche naturally confesses the importance and priority to history and designates the superiority of historical division and knowledge. This has been exemplified by the terms which Ghosh uses like 'arc', 'trajectory', 'pattern' and 'process'. One has to remember how we came into existence and where we exactly are. In this part of the book, he tries to identify capitalism as a principal driver of climate change. Ghosh widens and intensifies the argument by staying away from the usual Eurocentricism with a

warning: 'the continent of Asia is conceptually critical to every aspect of global warming: its causes, its philosophical and historical implications, and the possibility of a global response to it (87).' It directs us to a remarkably callous and inconsiderate situation including saline water having devoured up more than a million acres of fertile agricultural ground in Pakistan because of the massive exploitation of the Indus resulting in its obstruction and free-flowing to the sea. India is on the brink of disaster where the country's most fertile land of nearly six thousand square kilometers may be inundated due to the rise of the sea-water level resulting in the forced migration of about 50 million people and the same may cause havoc in Bangladesh as well resulting in the evacuation and resettlement of approximately 75 million people. Apart from these perils, another concern of desertification of the arable lands in India and China has been cited by the author. China has incurred an annual loss of $65 billion due to the desertification of the fertile land (89). Moreover, the author emphasizes the acute and accelerating water crisis in the Asian continent as 47% of the world's total population resides here. Amitav Ghosh shows the essential disparity between the drying up of Ogallala Aquifer in the US and those that exist in north China and shows that only 2 million people depend on the Ogallala in the US, whereas the dependency of people in China is almost about 214 million. He not only mentioned the Water Diversion scheme from North to South but was designed to change the dependency on groundwater in the North and to lessen its dryness and barrenness. He referred to these statistics only to emphasize the comparative impact of the two dams as per dependency of the population.

These are a few instances of the crisis of global warming. Ghosh emphasizes by saying that only in the beginning of 1980s, Asia's swelling process of industrialisation 'brought the climate crisis to a head (91) [as] the only continent where the magnitudes of the population are such that they can move the planet (92).' The callous reality of Asia makes it plain and simple that:

> "every family in the world cannot have two cars, a washing machine, and a refrigerator … because humanity would asphyxiate in the process. Asia has also laid bare, through its silence, the silences that are now ever more evident at the heart of global systems of governance. (92)

In 1928, Gandhi also had anticipation of this and warned that if we had the three hundred million industrialised as the west has, then "it would strip the world bare like locusts (111)" again U Thant, the Burmese statesman, grieved over the fact that 'smog across our poisoned waters' since we 'ran out of foresight and air and food and water and ideas [and] went on playing politics' until the world collapsed (113). Ghosh is distressed and bewildered about the cultural world's lassitude or incapability to bring in the limelight, the concern of the transformation of the climate, but he is fully aware of whom to lay blame for its happening. Every person who is ever born on this earth has a contribution to climate change which according to him is "the terminus of history". The reasons for this climate change like hurricanes, floods, desertifications are 'the distillations of all of human history: they express the entirety of our being over time (115).' The author caught in between this historicised perception, employs the term 'Anthropocene' which means the 'age of man' as an idiomatic use to designate the annihilation of terrestrial and climatic disorders. This coinage signifies a new geo-historical epoch and by using it Ghosh assigns to an account of augmentation of human expropriation of this earth. Anthropocene is the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. It is the latest historicisation that formulates the existence of humans as a thing of the past. "Anthropocene presents a challenge, not only to the arts and the humanities, but also to our common sense understanding and beyond that to contemporary culture in general" (135).

In the last part, numbered III, "Politics", Amitav Ghosh again mulled over the shocking reality of apathy by the creative community to introspect on the imminent danger of earth and atmosphere, we are already put in. Only a handful of writers like Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Barbara Kingsolver, Mc Carthy, Boyle have evoked something about the world environment. Amitav Ghosh sensed this apocalyptic doom and includes himself among this category of writers. With a morose heart, he observes that the issues relating to religion, gender, caste have been taken up for discussion with priority but the issue of environmental disaster has been relegated to the rear as a political issue in South Asia. He questions whether the reason is for individual concern rather than the collective moral

adventure. Ghosh uses the word 'trapped' (135) in an individualizing imaginary as we are the dwellers of the Great Derangement. Here, the prevailing importance of numerous politicians is given to connect strategies to control or to wage a war against climate change as an assault on 'our way of life' (137). The crazy happening continues with endless consumption of oil as fuel making the debate more political than realistic. Present-day politics has almost no command to duly address 'the commonweal and to preoccupy in joint action for the sake of humanity's survival. According to him, 'extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heave waves) will increasingly disrupt food and energy markets, exacerbating state weakness, forcing human migrations, and triggering riots, civil disobedience, and vandalism' (140).

Ghosh cites that only America's military front which is the single biggest consumer of fossil fuels is now vigorously seeking and searching for an alternative energy route. Perhaps, Ghosh tries to point out if the army front has considered all aspects of the transformation of climate activism and appropriated its strategy to form a policy of action by using vigorous campaigning to bring about ideological change regarding climate, then why not we? Moreover, in this calamitous condition, "Ghosh finds a ray of hope and, astonishingly, it is Pope Francis' letter, Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home, which he contrasts favourably with the Paris Agreement on climate change. Both are published in 2015 and are grounded in an acceptance of the science of climate change" (Abbott 371).

Climate change is wearing away conceptions of indisputable human authority over the earth and propelling us to mete out the possibility of universally achieving the belongings of materialistic middle-class life. 'This conception of human flourishing into which we have been beguiled is consuming itself' (Leskanich). In this part, Ghosh condemns the narrow opinion of political concern and Ghosh doesn't merely advocate a technocratic 'fix'. In searching for a vague hope in the 'sacred', he thinks that the 'religious world views' might inspire mass movements and will subsequently rise above any individual and nation-state. One may understand that Amitav Ghosh is entreating a hidden God, Deus absconditus to scoop us out of the prison.

In all his writings, Amitav Ghosh explores the challenge that civilisation is confronting in the age of Anthropocene, a new geological era that dawns on humanity a new role to play for reshaping and reorganizing the globe and preserving it for the generations to come. According to him, human beings as ecological agents change the most basic physical processes of the Earth and at the same time, Anthropocene presents a challenge to our commonsense and understandings. Still, we find it hard to deal with climate change. Amitav Ghosh argues that "the climate crisis is also a crisis of the culture and that of the imagination". He desires that the authors of the present generation should discover fresh types of literature and art that divulge the dilemma at hand. Ghosh while presenting his understanding and experience says, "…… these are, of course, nothing other than instances of exception……..it is through this mechanism that worlds are conjured up, through everyday details, which function 'as the opposite of narrative'" (183) and again he is reminded of the fact that "we are confronted suddenly with a new task: that of finding other ways in which to imagine the unthinkable beings and events of this era" (197). Ghosh's literary output is related to the schemes of environmental and social advocacy and serves as "a catalyst for social action and exploratory literary analysis into a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique" (Huggan and Tiffin 12). *The Great Derangement* tells us about our relationship with the earth which cannot be entirely and truly described within the traditional western scientific paradigm. We, as the readers meet an array of voices that articulate the troubles and tribulations that the globe is confronting today and determine an abundance of topics that vociferates the urgent need to emphasize and implement a "green" paradigm free of racial and social prejudices and injustice. This attempt to mingle up environmental advocacy and aesthetics of imaginary fiction is one of the attributes of the postcolonial eco-criticism that looks for an endorsement of environmental and societal integrity and justice in the postcolonial world today. This non-fiction is an anxious and upsetting reminder that without a pressing, sustained, and universal change in human attitude and behaviour, we, the ill-fated species on the earth will be doomed and will be the survivors with immeasurable horror and dismay. Amitav Ghosh envisions the "postcolonial Green" that

campaigns for the transformation from 'red' to 'green' politics and the need to play the role of responsible inhabitants with a belief in global justice and sustainability on our planet.

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# 4

# Maiya Saheb in *Kasiṅgara*

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**Abstract**

*Kasiṅgara* (2034 BS) is the debut novel of Gita Kesari, which traces the story of Maiya Saheb. The essence of the study lies in exploring how the novelist has mapped the journey of Maiya Saheb from her young age to middle age, thereby highlighting the different trials and tribulations she was exposed to. The reason behind her sufferings was that, she in her youth gave birth to a baby boy out of wedlock. She was afraid of the humiliation and social taboo she might have to face, so she abandons her newly born baby. The study focuses on how Maiya Saheb transforms from being a meek, submissive woman into a woman who questions the societal structure and gender bias deeply rooted in patriarchal societies.

Keywords: feminism, gender, gender role, liberal feminist, patriarchy.

## Introduction

Gita Kesari's debut novel *Kasiṅgara* (2034 BS) depicts Maiya Saheb as a woman who bears the brunt for breaking the cultural code of the society in her youth. The novel also examines the troubled life of Punte, the protagonist of the novel, who was born out of marriage in a feudal Nepali society. Maiya Saheb, the biological mother of Punte abandons her newly born baby as her unmarried status does not allow her to keep the child. Though her upper caste boyfriend who after knowing her pregnancy runs away, she decides to give birth to the child. Puna Maya, a street sweeper adopts the child and raises him. Punte suffers poverty, social exclusion and other atrocities because he belongs to the lower caste. The story of Maiya Sahab revolves round the chain of cause and effect in a patriarchal society

where women are not independent. Feminist critics have been continuously advocating that the female characters be given independent agency and an individual context that exist outside of the patriarchal world (qtd. in Belsey and Moore 114). Therefore, *Kasiṅgara*, has been selected to study the women characters created by a woman writer.

Kesari's characterisation is unique in its feminist consciousness which eloquently articulates her voice. The author questions the traditional normative roles of male and female within a patriarchal society. Arundhati Roy posits, 'a feminist is a female who negotiates herself into a location where she has alternatives '(*An Ordinary* 32). *Kasiṅgara*, portrays Maiya Saheb as a more enabling and empowered woman by overturning gender roles and explaining the restraints of masculine rules. And in doing so, Kesari triumphs in redefining conventional gender roles appointed to women. She tells in her essay "On Female Identity and Writing by Women": "Women's experiences differ from men's in significant and regular ways". (178).

Gita Kesari's choices validate the perspective of Kriszner & Mandell, "the vantage points from which events are presented" (222). Judith Kegan Gardiner, a feminist critic, believes that 'due to gender differences they live differently; as a result, their works reflect these gender variances.' She in addition elucidates, being a man in a male-dominated culture means not being like a woman. As a result, the behavior considered appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and polarised (189). She trusts the mentioned alterations within the understanding can be reflected in the texts. Elaine Showalter states, 'Gender marks all reading and writing by men and women '("Introduction" 2). To investigate, advance and excavate the ways in which women are represented, feminist theory is used especially the liberal feminist theory. 'The overarching goal of liberal feminism is to create a just and caring society in which freedom thrives. Women and men can only prosper equally in such a society' (Tong 13). To analyze images of women, the theory is quite relevant and as there is no particular method that a feminist critic can use, she can opt for any method. Guerin points: 'masculine writers appear to be more interested in deeper relationships, but female authors frequently react with open endings. Feminine logic in writing is generally associational, whereas male logic is sequential and goal-

oriented. Female subjectivity puts male objectivity to the test.' (201). Thus, a feminist approach is the best one to analyze woman's work. Undeniably, rather than sticking into a particular theory this study has applied an eclectic method.

*Kasiṅgara* is written in Nepali language, so my transliteration and translation are used.

## Maiya Saheb in *Kasiṅgara*

The novel primarily centers on Punte and Maiya Saheb plays a vital role to highlight the issues of women in the novel. She becomes the victim of patriarchy because she transgresses its values; steps out of the boundary set for her as a woman by having premarital sex and then getting pregnant. Under patriarchal tradition, premarital sex is prohibited, and a girl is expected to remain virgin before marriage. Indeed, virginity is so much valued and if a girl is found not being virgin in marriage, she is sure to be sent back to her parents. Similarly, motherhood outside marriage is condemned. Katrak aptly notes:

> From birth to death, traditions inform and control women's lives. When women confront customs, they frequently have to negotiate and operate within the constraints of patriarchal structures such as marriage: straying outside of tradition sometimes leads in severe repercussions on the female body, which may be exiled and outcast in society. (208)

She breaches patriarchal tradition by violating the values of chastity attached to female body. Not only her body has become profane, she is a matter of shame for the society; and as a fallen woman she will be ostracised provided her identity gets revealed. Though the baby has no role in it, he too will be troubled in different ways. Thus, the mid-wife, an experienced woman reminds her about the troubles that she will have to face because of her transgression and persuades her to abandon the baby. She obeys her in the hope that someone might find the baby and raise him. This justifies Millett's assertion that women who are disobedient to the restrictions imposed on them would be intimidated. She asserts intimidation is universal in patriarchy. The streetwise woman recognizes that she must act feminine if she is to thrive in patriarchy, or she will be subjected to "a range of cruelties and barbarities." (qtd. in Tong 52). It

also shows the violation of rights of women in the garb of culture under patriarchy. Susan Moller Okin mentions, 'Many breaches of women's basic human rights occur within families and are justified by cultural, religious, or traditional reasons' (33). The cultural aspects associated with the purity of women's body forced Maiya Saheb to abandon her baby. 'Since the maximum cultures we are acquainted with are patriarchal' (Bunch 251) women have no right to their body until now.

Maiya Saheb is an educated woman and appears to be courageous with a strong will power. However, she negotiates with the situation for the sake of social security. Tyson points 'if a woman wants to survive, she must play the part of a good girl, a virgin who will be an ideal wife and mother in the future; a promiscuous woman with a bad moral will not only be rejected from marriage but will also be socially outcast' (89). Being afraid of the social exclusion, Maiya Saheb abandons the baby, goes to her parents inventing a fake story that she has been sick and residing in a friend's house. Katrak asserts that 'being educated, thinking, and literate does not automatically enable women to confront patriarchal dominance over female bodies' (239).

Maiya Saheb is loving, kind and affectionate one. Being married to Major Dambar Bahadur she plays the role of an ideal wife; remains loyal and charitable to the poor. She loves and cares her son, who is now growing up in poverty and misery as the son of the street sweeper, Puna Maya, though she cannot expose it explicitly. In the eyes of the society, she remains only charitable to him. Katrak quotes a fictional character who remarks, "In marriage a woman must sometimes be a fool. A good woman does not have a brain or a mouth" (218). Exactly, she acts as if she is unaware of the fact that even if Punte has got shelter, he is deprived of the basic needs. She cannot revolt against the social injustice and raise her son on her own. Because of her performance of the ideal feminine role, she is able to lead a respectful live as the wife of Major Dambar Bahadur. To be socially acceptable, women in marriage are required to exhibit particular characteristics like submissiveness, kindness, self-sacrifice, and perseverance. She embraces all the qualities of a virtuous wife. Her role justifies Beauvoir's claim, "Woman as Other" opines, man may conceive of himself without the presence of a woman. She can't

imagine herself without him. And she is just that man's edict; as a result, she is referred to as "the sex," implying that she appears to men primarily as a sexual entity. For him, woman is sex – pure and simple sex. (209-10). She has embraced the idea that wedding for womenfolk need to be protected at all expenses.

Maiya Saheb is now enjoying wealth and status. After five years of marriage, she delivers a baby girl and her rice-feeding ceremony is celebrated. The narrator mentions that it has been a much-awaited occasion for Maiya Saheb to get the recognition of a mother. "*kasale āsa rākheko thiyo ra unko gharmā pani yo kshāḍa āũcha bhaner*?" ["Who has expected that such celebration would be made in her home"] (13)? The birth of the baby girl rescues her from the charges of a sterile woman. In many traditional communities, as Katrak' observes, 'a woman without a child is considered a failure, not a full woman; infertility is considered unpleasant, even a curse' (209). Her married life gets accomplished with the birth of her daughter, Usha.

As a sensitive and thoughtful woman, Maiya Saheb minutely observes the paradox of motherhood under patriarchy. She questions to herself how many mothers have got the chance to celebrate the birth of their children and remain happy. 'Patriarchal ideology paradoxically constrains and regulates women by exalting motherhood. The expectation and accomplishment of motherhood governs women's lives' (Katrak 213). The novelist juxtaposes the birth of the two children by the same mother: one within the marriage which brings happiness and respect to the mother, and another outside the marriage which is a matter of shame for the mother and her life may be accursed if the truth is revealed. She needs to comply with the patriarchal norms attached to motherhood. In this regard Katrak mentions, 'because they are denied an autonomous life and identity, women succumb to and absorb the exact male-dominated beliefs that work against them' (237). Despite her love for her son, she cannot hold him because, "The mother can deliver a child however cannot provide her child a social identity. She is a 'soil' into which man 'sows' his seed, and therefore can claim the child as his" (Dutta 84). To be a mother one should be an official wife to someone. In this context, in her essay "Male Hegemony and Colonisation of the Female Body," Rayamajhi questions, "Does not a woman have the right to make a choice about her role in reproduction" (7)? Not being

able to procreate a (male) child she constantly feels guilty. The hegemonic discourse of motherhood subsequently transforms her into a psychologically alienated victim. Her alienation is caused due to the social ideology that perceives motherhood as essential for feminine identity. It shows how women are entrapped in their own body by the patriarchal notion of motherhood.

Maiya Saheb, despite her affluence and charitable nature cannot support Punte as much as she desires. She all alone bears the pain and agony on seeing her son suffer. After Punte runs away from his home and nobody knows about his whereabouts, she falls sick. However, she cannot express the truth. She is represented as a moderate inclined, pragmatist, affectionate and considerate person. She is empathetic in the sense that she does not intrude her viewpoints on others. As a good mother envisioned by patriarchy she guides and cares for Usha and reminds the fact that even a minor mistake of a woman may destroy her whole life. Women must pay a high price for defying convention. Tradition defines female duties within patriarchal frameworks and limitations, both within and beyond the home. 'Women are valued for their roles as wives and mothers; unmarried women, lesbians, and widows experience prejudice' (Katrak 157). Well acquainted with the working of society, she as the mother of a grown-up daughter reminds her:

> *siddhānta ra byābhārikatā bhanekā duitā chuṭṭachuṭṭai hun [. . .]. swasnīmānisako jīwanamā sāno bhūlale pani ṭhūlo hāni lyāũdacha.*
>
> [Practice and principle are two different things [. . .]. A minor mistake of a woman may cause her a great trouble.] (43)

Maiya Saheb critically analyzes the psyche of the society. Though in principle the society emphasizes on women's independence in practice it does not applaud empowered ladies. It shows that marriage is mandatory for the girls for the social security.

Trouble keeps on harassing her. Punte, who has run away from his home, makes his fortune in the Indian Army as Captain Jit Bahadur. Major Dambar Bahadur unknown to Jit Bahadur's real identity fixes his daughter's marriage with him. Though Usha and Jit Bahadur are siblings, unknown to the truth, have been living happy married life as a husband and a wife. But the circumstance brings them to know the truth after Usha meets her mother-in-law. After

knowing the truth Jit Bahadur (Punte) decides to murder Maiya Saheb for he thinks that because of her his life has been ruined. For Jit Bahadur, Maiya Saheb is a cheat, hypocrite, and fallen woman, who to save her false honor, has abandoned him. He questions what right she had to throw the infant into the bush: "*ke ma unako śarīrako kasiṅgara hu*̃? [Am I the dirt from her body?] (87).

Maiya Saheb too gives her statement. She questions the validity of the biased sexual understanding of people as nobody blames the boy's father. Is she only to be blamed? Without a male, how can a female be pregnant?

> *[. . .].ke duniyā*̃*mā binā logne swasnīmānisale baccā pāu*̃*chan? tara khai yasapratiko pani praśna? chorāle cinyo ma janma dine kalaṅkinī āmā hu*̃*[ . . .]. tara khai dekhiyeko patita puruṣa, khai chorāle sodheko patita bābu mero ko ho bhanī?*
>
> [Is it possible for a woman to deliver a baby without the participation of a man? My son has recognised me as an immoral mother [. . . ] but why the corrupt father is not seen, why the son has not asked about his corrupt father?] (88)

Maiya Saheb accepts her mistake, the one mistake that she did in her youth was her inability to differentiate between love and lust that resulted in unplanned pregnancy. But, because of the single mistake she did while she was young, does she deserve the lifelong suffering? She has lived with guilt and remorse throughout her life, and now in the old age she has to see that her children, the siblings tied in matrimonial relation. What could be the harder stroke than this to a mother? But nobody cares for the boy's father. If she had not the fear of social shame; if the society had accepted unmarried mothers no mother would abandon her child born outside marriage. The feminist dimension lies in her questioning the working of patriarchy. She is blamed as a characterless, cruel woman who has abandoned her innocent baby just to save her honor. But she asks, is she alone to be blamed; what about his unidentified father? This shows her transformation from a silent suffering woman to a confident and assertive woman who is commendable of her conduct. As a round character, she gets transformed in the course of action.

Maiya Saheb's suffering, enveloped in the guise of prosperity and the status of a married woman, is known to her only. The novel shows how motherhood at the same time is valorised and ostracised

within patriarchy. Motherhood is accepted within marriage but outside marriage it is feared as it pollutes the society. Though women give birth to children they cannot experience motherhood on their own. Because "motherhood is 'sacred' so long as its offspring are 'legitimate'" (Rich 42). Patriarchal double standards to motherhood forces Maiya Saheb to abandon her first baby born as an illegitimate one. But, after she becomes pregnant as a wedded wife to Major Dambar Bahadur, her pregnancy is celebrated and her daughter's birthday is celebrated with fun fare. This reveals the paradox attached to women's body in patriarchy.

## Conclusion

Maiya Saheb as a victim of patriarchy suffers throughout her life. She delivers the baby outside marriage and has to abandon the child; forced to live with the hidden secret. Again, after the marriage, she has the fear of getting revealed of her pre-marital sex, along with remaining infertile until she delivers the daughter. She compares the fate of her children, Punte and Usha, first born outside marriage, the latter born within marriage. Punte was abandoned, whereas Usha is valued as the Goddess Laxmi. It shows how a woman's body is censored and constricted in the name of marriage and motherhood. The focus of the novel is on marriage and motherhood. As a critic to patriarchal double standards to sexual norms for women and men, she demands women's autonomy to their body. In Nepali literature, Nepali women novelists have tried to raise female awareness by making their female characters as revolutionary ones as Maiya Saheb. Kesari has raised different issues of women, and has also advocated women's right on their bodies. She has illustrated confrontation between the female characters and the society which is biased towards the female gender. Her female character, Maiya Saheb though suffered by the society in the novel, is found to be quite progressive. Here, the aim is towards inclusiveness and towards equal participation of both male and female for the prosperous society. Novel as a literary genre has converted into an influential means for the Nepali women to explore their experiences as well as to correct the biased societal norms

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# 5

# Representation of Disability in Anand L. Rai's Film *Zero*

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**Abstract**

The term disability has come to be associated with social discrimination and injustice. Different forms of art have often brought to the fore the inhuman treatment meted out to the disabled persons by representing various types of disability, but their treatment has not been unquestionable. In films belonging to this category the disabled characters are more often than not treated with a patronizing attitude on the part of the so-called physically 'abled' persons. One such example is the latest Bollywood film *Zero* (2018), directed by Anand L. Rai. This paper tries to show how the much-hyped film fails to do justice to the sensitive issue of disability. The very title *Zero* bluntly suggests that the disabled protagonist is worthy of nothing. The name given to him is Bauaa, the Hindi equivalent for a dwarf. The girl he meets and falls in love with is Aafia who suffers from cerebral palsy and is frequently referred to in the film in most derogatory terms. Another disabled character in the film is Bauaa's friend Guddu Singh who is presented in a comic banter. No wonder, these characters either make us laugh or move us to pity, but are never looked upon with respect and dignity, which is farthest from a desirable representation of disability in any form of art. The paper also touches upon the issue of the deprivation of the real-life disabled actors to play the roles of the disabled characters and questions the popular trend of the films on disability to project the disabled characters mostly with shades of white or even as superheroes.

Keywords: Disability, Art, Bollywood, Film, Zero, Bauaa, Vertically Challenged

## Introduction

Cinema, as a powerful form of art, has represented disability of various types. If the West boasts of films like *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *My Left Foot – The Story of Christy Brown*(1989),and *Scent of a Woman* (1992), the Indian Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, has to its credit Gulzar's *Koshis* (1972), Rakesh Roshan's *Koi Mil Gaya (*2003), Aamir Khan's *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) and Karan Johar's *My Name Is Khan* (2011) all of which deal with some kind of disability or the other. The latest addition to this is Anand L. Rai's *Zero*. The makers of all the films of this category may honestly seek to address the issue of disability in positive terms and try to sensitize the audience to it, but unfortunately this aim is rarely achieved. They present the disabled persons either as objects of fun and ridicule or as possessors of superhuman qualities, but certainly not as common human beings.This paper tries to show how the film *Zero* just strictly follows the stereotypes related to disability, and ends up being a failed attempt. But while doing so, it will mainly take into consideration a few Hindi films on disability with occasional reference to some other films made in Indian regional languages.

## The Story in Brief

The film starts with the protagonist Bauaa Singh, a man of 4 feet 6 inches' height, having a dream about his heroics against a villain (the villain in his dream is none other than his father). This antipathy towards his father continues in real life, too, when in the very next scene he counterattacks his father's charge of wasting money by saying that it was his flawed lifestyle that was responsible for his short height. However, this charming Bauaa has his moments of almost frenzied happiness whenever he finds himself in the company of the filmstar Babita Kumari, whether onscreen or offscreen. He is almost mad about her, and can go to any extreme for her. But at the same time, he also realizes that he is 38, and needs to get married as soon as possible. So, he pays regular visits to a matrimonial agent who one day sends him to Aafia Yousufzai Bhinder, a scientist who suffers from cerebral palsy. They meet, fall in love and decide to get married despite differences in their social and educational background.

Life takes a surprising turn for Bauaa when he gets a chance to spend a whole day with the queen of his heart Babita Kumari by winning a dance competition. After a tussle with himself to choose between an ordinary life with Aafia and a dream-like one with Babita, he prefers the latter and runs away just before getting wedded. Quite impressed with Bauaa whose joviality and liveliness provide at least momentary relief to her pangs of a broken relationship, Babita Kumari allows him to stay with her for over a year. But gradually he gets disillusioned with the apparently glamorous film world, finding himself a misfit there. All his dreams get shattered when Babita Kumari severely insults him after coming to know from his own confession that he has broken a girl's heart, and he feels compelled finally to go back to his 'pathetic life'.

When Bauaa returns to Aafia, he discovers that she has given birth to their baby. Aafia who is still unmarried does not pay heed to Bauaa's pleadings. Instead, she focuses more on her mission to send a chimpanzee to Mars. The chimpanzee that Aafia thought was perfectly ready to be sent to Mars shows some strange and unexpected behaviour. So, they decide to send a human in its place. They invite applications for selecting a physically and mentally tough person who would be able to successfully undergo all the tests required for that mission. Quite predictably Bauaa comes out as the fittest of all candidates. Aafia has to tolerate Bauaa's presence for months during his training and trial at the research centre, and her dislike and even abhorrence for Bauaa gradually die down. Breaking an engagement with a fellow scientist, she professes her love to Bauaa only before moments of his flight, and promises that she would wait for him. Bauaa leaves for a new planet with a proud feeling of victory over all.

**Name of the Film and the Protagonist**

The title of the film *Zero* leaves us pondering over the very drive behind making a film on disability. If the objective of making such films is a respectful representation of the disabled persons, titles such as this, needless to say, do very little justice to it. Mathematicians may argue that zero is as important as any other number, but in common parlance it is equivalent to nothing. Naturally, the title *Zero* is more likely to establish in the audience a notion that a disabled person is

worthy of nothing. One might also argue that the title ridicules such people who consider disabled persons worthless. But then, there is the counter-argument that the majority of the audience of a popular film is quite different from the readers of a literary text, and is most likely to miss the irony associated with this title.

If the title of the film is a derogatory one, the name of its protagonist is no less belittling. Disabled persons are generally referred to in most abusive terms that constantly remind them of their deformities. But this happens only when they are in the company of notorious people, mostly friends. In places where people are expected to show some civic sense, their official name which is supposed to be as good as that of anyone is used. In this context it is quite surprising to note that the makers of the film have failed to even find a proper name for the protagonist. His name, the only name to be particular, is Bauaa Singh. The term Bauaa in Hindi means a 'dwarf'. For anyone with knowledge of the Hindustani language, the very name is evocative of a sense of disrespect and even insult. It only leaves to our imagination to consider the degree of humiliation the character may be put to each and every time he is called by that name. Moreover, the way the protagonist Bauaa Singh has been described in numerous reviews of the film has drawn flak from various corners. Instead of being spoken of in terms of common human characteristics, he has been most unjustly referred to as one who is 'vertically challenged'. Words such as these endorse a patronizing attitude under the garb of political correctness. The very mention of these words suggests the superiority of a person over the other. Again, the association of the word 'vertically' relegates a person to the status of a non-human. This, again, is a very negative way of dealing with disability and disabled persons.

**Portrayal of other Disabled Characters**

Apart from Bauaa there are two other disabled characters in the film – Aafia Yousufzai Bhinder and Guddu Singh. The first is, as we have already come to know, the one who ultimately helps Bauaa find a meaning in his life and the second his closest friend and confidant. Aafia is a patient of cerebral palsy while Guddu Singh suffers from nyctalopia. The disabilities in all these characters may be of different types, but their representation is the same having little or no respect

in it. If Bauaa is looked upon with an air of ridicule, pity and compassion are what Aafia's character evokes in the audience. Though a scientist of immense repute, she is made to look a most pitiable character when she feels elated after receiving a marriage proposal from Bauaa's family. On the other hand, Guddu Singh's night blindness is presented mostly in a comic banter. Thus, his character lacks any individuality, and he ends up looking more like a clown.

**One Dimensional Portrayal of Disabled Characters**

The idea that the worth of disabled persons is not measured in the same yardstick used in cases of others is endorsed and established in films dealing with disability. In almost all the films of this category the disabled persons have to achieve some extraordinary feats to gain social acceptance, as if securing a decent livelihood normally is not enough for them to be considered with respect and dignity. If we just rewind our memories of such films made in India in the last ten or fifteen years, we will see that this has been the commonest and the most bankable practice of the filmmakers. If Rohit who plays a character with developmental disability in *Koi Mil Gaya* connects with an extraterrestrial being through his father's computer, the dyslexic Ishaan in *Taare Zameen Par* has to beat everyone and match his teacher's skill in a drawing competition. Similarly, in *My Name Is Khan* Rizwan Khan who has Asperger's syndrome has to fight all the odds to meet the US President and deliver his message. Anand L. Rai's *Zero* is no exception in this regard. Here Bauaa manages to win the hearts of two ladies by different skills. He gets an access to the world of film stars represented by Babita Kumari by proving his excellence as a dancer. However, he has to bring out the best in him to undergo all the tests to be declared fit for the Mission Mars. It is only then that Aafia feels convinced of his worth**,** and decides to wait for him.

Another aspect of the films on disability is that there is an inherent pressure among the directors of these films to portray the disabled characters with shades of white. Complete inclusion can never be achieved unless and until the film makers show their flaws too. Radha Mohan, the director of the critically acclaimed film *Mozhi* (2007), expresses his concern over this issue. He says, "Most popular

films scream for sympathy. If I write a story in which the disabled person is a serial killer, people should not take offence. I am treating him as any human."

**Plentitude of Abusive remarks about Disability**

Anand L. Rai's *Zero* makes abundant use of abusive remarks against the disabled persons in the film. When rebuked by his father for his short height, Bauaa blames him for that: "*Sperms chhote padh gaye tumhare…"* (Your sperms had been insufficient). One can hardly think of a more humiliating remark than this one to refer to someone's short height. But quite ironically this remains the most publicised line in the teasers of this film. Aafia, a renowned scientist, is introduced in the film in most derogatory terms: "*Ladki khoobsurat hai, padhi likhi, achchhe khandaan se hai, itni badi naukri hai iski, bas ek mechanical problem hai…technical dissonance…"* (The girl is beautiful, educated, from a good family and has a good job. But she has a mechanical problem – some technical dissonance.) The same tone of objectifying disability continues when the manager of the marriage bureau reminds Bauaa of his deformity: *"Aap kaunse hoor ke pare hain, inki taange kursi se zameen tak to pahunchti nahi…"* (You are not someone out of the world, your legs don't even touch the floor while you sit on a chair.) When Aafia comes to Bauaa's house with a marriage proposal, his father is seen telling him: *"Kismatwala hai ladki mil rahi hai tujhe shaadi ke liye, tujh jaise ko to launda na miley…"* (You are lucky enough to get a girl for marriage, otherwise, you don't even deserve a boy.)

More surprisingly, both Aafia and Bauaa make fun of each other's disability, giving an impression that it is quite okay for a disabled person to ridicule another. When Aafia mocks Bauaa by saying, *"Tumhari akal tumhari height se bhi chhoti hai…"* (Your intelligence is even less than your height.), Bauaa makes a most insulting comment: *"Chhote chhote se sahi, haath paun kaam to karte hain humare. Inse hilne ke alawa hota kya hai?"* (My hands and legs, though short, at least work. What can she do except moving constantly?) It is quite obvious that comments such as these, when circulated widely through a popular film, worsen the situation for the disabled persons instead of sensitizing the people to their plights.

## Deprivation of Disabled Persons to Play the Roles of Disabled Characters

One more criticism against the film *Zero* is its failure to feature real-life disabled persons to play the roles of disabled characters. However, this is a strongly established practice in any film industry which very few film-makers dare to challenge. There is none denying that disabled persons with their better understanding of the psyche of such people will be able to do more justice to the characters. Again, the portrayal of disabled characters by such persons will lead to an immense gain in the awareness of people about disability and in turn their social acceptability. Yet, the number of films featuring disabled personsis pitiably low, P.K. Sreekumar directed Malayalam film *Shabdam* (2018) and the Tamil *Anjathe* (2008) and *Naan Kadavul* (2009) directed by Mysskin and Bala respectivelybeing some of the rarest examples. The pangs caused by such deprivation are quite manifest in the words of Virali Modi, an aspiring actress with disability as well as a disability rights activist:

> "I have given auditions for side and main roles many times and the only barrier that comes up is my disability. Why cannot a person with disability play these roles? Take Guzaarish where Hrithik Roshan plays a quadriplegic. The character could have been played by a disabled person. There are so many more films like these like Black, or Barfi to name a few."

One might argue that acting is a highly professional job which requires rigorous training and practice on the part of the performers. Real-life disabled persons may not be confident enough to stand in front of the camera. Well, there are many actors who, in order to perform well, have to be given so much of instructions by the directors that would even make a tree act. The question is – why can the same thing not be done with the disabled persons? This preference for the so-called trained actors over the non-trained ones often compromises the honest representation of disability in films. This is very true of *Zero* in which Bauaa looks more like a caricatured figure and Aafia's lack of consistency to portray the nuances of one suffering from cerebral palsy is quite visible. Moreover, the justification that the incompetence of disabled persons as actors is the primary reason for their rejection in films does not hold ground for actors like Virali Modi who get deprived time and again simply

because of their disability. Jenni Gold's 2013 film *Cinem Ability* raises questions about this particular issue.

## Commercial aspect of the Film

The makers of *Zero* were quite vocal in numerous pre-release promos that the film, instead of revolving around disability, deals with a simple story involving certain characters who happen to be disabled, and that the film does in no way seek to capitalize on the issue of disability. But, quite contrary to this, the film does exactly this. If one just recollects the teasers of the film, one would only be reminded of scenes and dialogues making unbearable mockery of disability. Again, the cast of the film only proves that it is very much commercially oriented. Had its makers been concerned only with proper representation of disability having little or no regard for box-office results, they would not have to rope in big stars like Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma to play the roles of the disabled characters. However, this has been the trend with almost all the films of this category, and *Zero* just faithfully follows that monotonously repeated tradition.

## Conclusion

Thus, what the film does is to perpetuate with the same undercurrent the age-old stereotypes associated with disability. There is no uniqueness in its portrayal of the disabled protagonist with superhuman qualities or the projection of a disabled character as fit only to marry another. Both Bauaa and Aafia try to love people different from them physically, but ultimately get the space they need only in the company of each other. There are, however, sporadic moments in the film – be it in its presentation of the emotional conflicts in the minds of both these characters regarding love and marriage, in Bauaa's indefatigable efforts at the research Centre to win Aafia's heart or in Aafia's speeding up of her wheelchair in the last scene to see Bauaa just before his flight. But the film's overall tone of mockery and ridicule is enough to make the audience forget these sparkling moments. Thus, the film *Zero* ultimately fails to zero in on any real issue related to disability.

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# 6

# Some Reflections on Landscape Writing in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

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**Abstract**

The diversity of Indian literature in English offers fascinating points of entry to compare variations in spatial representation, notably when postcolonial writers engage with Western aesthetic covenants and the perceptual models they validate. Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* is one of the few novels written in English to address the two great landscape traditions that have developed first in China and later in Europe to probe the symbolic operations through which human beings' bond with their surroundings and develop a sense of place. A house in Kasauli stands as the pivot around which the plot revolves, attracting three central female characters to its garden and the breath-taking view of the plains of Punjab. Yet landscape writing in *Fire on the Mountain* does not serve the instrumental purposes of the standard novelistic setting, whether they are referential or ornamental. This paper argues instead that landscape writing contributes to the literary economy of the novel, prompting a self-conscious examination of the artifices of landscape and the place allotted to the disenfranchised within the field of representation.

Keywords: Indian literature in English, landscape theory, Anita Desai, ecocriticism.

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* is one of the few novels written in English that engages with the two painting traditions that successively arose in China in the 5th century CE, and in Europe a millennium later with the advent of the Renaissance. *Shanshui* – the Chinese alternative to the Western landscape – conjoins the two ideograms for "mountain" and "water." They are the two constitutive elements of a style of painting which has developed since the Antiquity into myriad variations on the tension resulting from the

opposition and correlation between mountain(s) and water(s) (Jullien 2014: 39-40). In English, the word "landscape" – just like its equivalents in Romance languages *paysage*, *paesagio etc.* – does not distinguish between landscape as a reality out there and landscape as its representation on canvas or on the page (Berque 1995). This ambivalence reminds us that the Western landscape originated in Renaissance art when it ceased to be confined to the background of the painting and imposed itself as a portion of land viewed from a single, external point of view. In *L'impensé du paysage* (2014), François Jullien contrasts the Chinese and the European conceptions of landscape and explains that they proceed from worldviews premised upon radically different philosophical traditions. The division between subject and object informs the Western conception of landscape as a portioning of the land made possible by the external position of the beholder's aesthetizing gaze. Jullien criticizes the splintering of subject/object, the abstraction that results from the subtraction of the part from the whole and, finally, the prevalence of the intellectual sense of sight in Western thought. These features, he argues, led with the advent of modernity to the constitution of nature as a reservoir of resources that could be exploited aesthetically as well as economically, which caused the Western point of view to be become critically estranged from the environment. Jullien's critique is particularly effective insofar as it proceeds from contrasts and comparisons. The sinologist uses the Chinese *shanshui* to determine what eludes conceptualisation in Western rationalism and its objectification of landscape. The Chinese painter does not represent landscape but records a differential field of tension and transformation between the opposite and correlated poles of mountain(s) and water(s) that involves the human participant in the process of its actualisation (Jullien 2014: 45).

This brief excursion out of Western rationalism into the processual conception of *shanshui* provides a convenient point of entry into Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* which contrasts several aesthetic codes regulating the appreciation of land as landscape. The novel foregrounds the symbolic operations through which human beings vest an interest in space and become attached to a special place – the affective ties for which Bachelard originally coined the

term *topophilia*, later made popular by Yi Fu Tuan among cultural geographers.[1]

Landscape writing in Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* does not serve the instrumental – that is referential or ornamental – purposes of most novelistic settings (Buell 1995: 252-257). Instead, landscape *fully* participates in the literary and symbolic economy of Desai's novel insofar as landscape writing mediates between the world of fiction and the world of the reader through which visions of space specific to an individual or to a group become naturalised. There is no landscape writing without the visual parsing that precedes the delineation of contours in amorphous space.[2] As a result, the coherence impressed by the perceptual focus on the formation of the image tells us perhaps more about the locus of perception than about the real which always stands in excess of what the human senses and intellect can comprehend and bring to the level of expression (Rosset 1977). Landscape, in other words, is a way of seeing encoded with ideological assumptions, aesthetic values, and affective significance.

But there is another reason why landscape writing may be said to *fully* participate in the poetic economy of Desai's novel. Because its conventions originated in painters' studios in the Far East over a thousand years before landscape appeared, albeit in a different guise, in the Netherlands and in the Italy of the Renaissance, Desai's self-conscious references to these two contrasting pictorial traditions prompt a wider reflection upon ways of seeing that are just as historically transient, socially and culturally specific as the objects they deem worthy of being recorded.

According to the *O.E.D.*, the term "landscape" did not appear in English until the sixteenth century when it was borrowed from the Dutch as a painter's term. It originally implied the framing of a portion of land from the point of view of a static observer. The term "landscape" consequently implies the distinction maintained by "the philosophical tradition that separates the 'objective world' from the 'viewing subject'". (New 1997: 10) This division, however, is not sustained in India. Anita Desai emphasised this point in her essay "Feng Sui or Spirit of Place" in which she observed that "Indians are interested in landscape and seasons only in so far as they relate to human emotions and sensations, not in place or nature as such"

(1984: 107). In the same essay, Desai does not look West to analyse the centrality of a sense of place to her writing, but she turns further East, towards China and Japan where the Taoist opposition-correlation between full and empty energizes the apprehension of space, its material representation with ink and brush and its spiritual contemplation. In all of Desai's fiction, *Fire on the Mountain* is the novel that is most concerned with space, the aesthetic conventions through which it is apprehended as landscape and its perception by the characters as having a personal relevance and resonance. In this short, compact novel (one could almost call it a novella) the plotline remains elusively thin until the penultimate chapter in which violence surges with unforeseen brutality. The contrast with what precedes the ending is all the more effective as, up to this point, the narrative has unfolded at a sedate pace into a triptych introducing each of the novel's main characters in relation to a pivotal locale: the estate of Carignano near Kasauli. The triptych's three panels contrast different viewpoints on the estate and its surroundings, but only the first and the last one approach their description in terms that explicitly evoke landscape painting. In the first section, "Nanda Kaul at Carignano," the old woman imagines how a watercolourist would paint the view from her balcony, whereas her great-granddaughter, Raka, is associated with a nearby ravine in the subsequent section entitled "Raka Comes to Carignano." In the third and final part, "Ila Das Leaves Carignano," the third female character, a friend of long standing, is portrayed unwittingly heading for death, threading her way through the misty shadows of a Chinese scroll. My intention in this paper is to analyse how Desai skilfully articulates these successive views into a dynamic triptych in which the Western and the Eastern landscape traditions operate in a mutual tension, which prompts the reader to look closer at the unsightly view displayed in the central panel, and envisage the consequences of the inclusion of women into the field of representation.

## Right Here in Carignano

Carignano's anchoring in India's colonial history is constitutive of a sense of place permeated by the memories embedded in the old colonial mansion. Although the narrator does not comment on the toponym, its namesake in the Piedmontese hills is a clear indication

of the picturesque tastes the estate's original masters acquired on their Grand Tours to the sun-drenched hills of Northern Italy. The house in Kasauli consequently stands as an architectural vestige of the hill station's luxurious and somewhat embarrassing colonial past. "Embarrassing" is indeed the adjective that comes to mind when Nanda Kaul, the present-day owner of the estate, remembers how her young self – she was then the Vice-Chancellor's spouse – the Vice-Chancellor himself, and their friend Ila Das used to play badminton mixed doubles with a Miss Davies with whom Nanda's husband shared much more than a passing interest in physical exertion. As a vignette of the life of the anglicised, sometimes Anglophile, upper-class during the Raj, the episode constitutes one of the leitmotivs of the novel, fusing together colonial alienation and conjugal humiliation (see Fire 24-25, 122, 134).

Carignano then functions like a time-space. In Bakhtinian terms, it operates in the manner of a "chronotope" evincing "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). The colonial house brings to mind similar architectural chronotopes representing Britain's waning imperial splendor, from V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, to the Ayemenem estate in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, or even Darlington Hall in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. These mansions unfailingly summon memories of the builders of Empire, of the dwellings they vacated as decolonisation gained momentum, and of the new occupants who then moved in, striving to reconcile the duality of their cultural affiliations with post-independence loyalties. It is then no wonder that placing Carignano, that is to say locating it in the geography and history of the subcontinent, should evoke memories of the British officer who had the house built in 1843, and of the owners that succeeded him – all of them oddballs with unpredictable tempers and murderous tendencies (Fire 6-9). One century later, with the advent of Independence, "Carignano was up for sale and Nanda Kaul bought it. The little town went native" (Fire 10).

Terse as it sounds, the last sentence is packed with innuendoes of excess, the source of a disapproval that aligns Nanda Caul with a colonial sensibility. The resurgence of local character is indeed conveyed through a turn of phrase brimming over with

immoderateness, a barely veiled reference to the communal violence that flared up with Partition. Years later, the older Nanda finds the barrenness of Carignano soothing, its scant vegetation and vacant vistas comfortably empty after the turmoil of the past. The memories she would rather leave behind cannot, however, be sealed away, but keep surfacing in the present through analogies with the landscape stretching under her eyes:

> Getting up at last, she went slowly round to the back of the house and leant on the wooden railing on which the yellow rose creeper had blossomed so youthfully last month but was now reduced to an exhausted mass of grey creaks and groans again. She gazed down the gorge with its gashes of red earth, its rocks and gullies and sharply spiked agaves, to the Punjab plains – a silver haze in the summer heat – stretching out to a dim yellow horizon [...]
>
> Looking down, over all those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her. (Fire 17)

The description mixes conventional symbols, among which the rose recognizable as an emblem of youth in traditions ranging from European courtly literature to ghazal poetry, with elements one would not expect in a bucolic context. Sustained by alliterations in /gr/ and /cr/, the morphing of colour into noise ("grey creaks"), and of noise into the sound of pain ("creaks and groans"), signals the passage from objective description to subjective impression, from landscape to mindscape. In fact, even when she becomes engrossed in the contemplation of the remote vista, Nanda remains alert to signs of the living forces that disrupt the still surface of things. Her perception of space is structured by the line of the horizon pulling the safe and distant background away from a foreground replete with foreboding notes. Here spiky succulents and the red gash of a clogged-up gorge evoke the torn skin of a supine body whose integrity has been tampered with. The ominous description has its signification revealed in the final pages of the novel when Ila Das leaves Carignano to return to her destitute home down in the plain. Walking past "a particularly large and murderous agave" (Fire 141) the old lady falls prey to one of her neighbours who rapes and beats her to death. It later transpires that the assassin felt threatened by Ila

Das's active campaigning against child marriage and the threat it posed to his own matrimonial arrangements.

## Far Away into the Distance

Whereas the short range is rife with danger, distance makes for a safer sense of composition and aesthetic satisfaction:

> [Nanda Kaul] wished, as often before, that she could invite an English water-colourist of the nineteenth century to come and paint the view from her garden. They were masters, she felt, at conveying light and space, the two elements of the Kasauli view. Or was it too unsubstantial a scene for an English artist? she wondered. No Indian artist of any epoch could have painted it, she knew, and she had her doubts about the English. She had seen nineteenth-century lithographs of what were then known as the Kussowlie Hills and although they had amused her, they had not satisfied. Perhaps a firmer outline, a more definite horizon was required by an etcher. Here hills melted into sky, sky into snows, snows into air. (Fire 28)

Self-conscious analogies with landscape painting obsessively recur whenever Nanda Kaul gazes at her surroundings. Her rejection of Indian artists in the passage above has jarred on some critics who have dismissed the character's reaction as a "clear case of cultural denigration" (Johae 2004: 271). Yet, Nanda Caul's assessment of the English water-colourist or etcher is clearly nuanced, insofar as she does not believe that any of these artists[3] could render the balance between sharply-defined volumes and the light and air interspacing them. The same impression of saturation causing surfeit dominates in the painterly metaphor that crops up when Nanda Kaul learns of the imminent arrival of her great-granddaughter. At this point, she is overwhelmed by memories of the years she spent attending to the endless needs of her family: "There were so many of them and they were so alike. She could not summon Raka out of the common blur. She was no more than a particularly dark and irksome spot on a hazy landscape – a mosquito, a cricket, or a grain of sand in the eye" (Fire 35). The reference to landscape reveals that Nanda views Raka's arrival as an additional element disturbing the formation of an image. Because it focuses the attention upon itself, the detail of Raka's appearance upsets the subordination of the part to the whole and of the foreground to the background. But once the little girl has settled in Carignano and her great-grandmother has come to realize that the

child will make no claims on her, the view from Carignano's balcony resumes a sedate air more suited to the old lady's pictorial tastes:

> The storm was over. The clouds disappeared: one wisp after another was folded up and whisked away into the blue and a lovely evening emerged, lucid and peerless, the hills fresh and moist and wooded, blue and green *like coils of paint out of a tube*. Away in the north the rock-scarred snow range glittered. To the south many hundreds of miles of the plain were visible, streaked with streams and pitted with bright pools of rain. (87, emphasis added)

Perhaps more subtle than the storm – a rather obvious objective correlative in this context – are the many references to colour and design affiliating the description to a painting tradition which does not require completion to inspire contemplation. Here the narrator gives prominence to mountain and water, the two constitutive elements of Chinese *shanshui*, rhythmically interspersed by the recurring *yubaï* or blanks that invite the beholder's imagination to enter the painting and follow the sinuous curves of lakes, streams and mountain paths leading to spiritual elevation (Berque 1995: 76).

Elsewhere the narrator self-consciously sets up parallels between Nanda Kaul's distinctive way of seeing, her need for space and distance, and principles characteristic of Japanese art, notably its reliance on the efficacy of subtraction in an aesthetic that values the minimal over the plentiful:

> Like her, the garden seemed to have arrived, simply by a process of age, of withering away and an elimination, at a state of elegant perfection. It was made up of a very few elements, but they were exact and germane as the strokes in a Japanese scroll. (Fire 31)

An earlier parallel between Nanda Kaul and Sei Shonagon's time-honoured *Pillow Book* prepared for the parallelism in the citation above between Nanda Kaul's special poise and the artifices of landscape, in the double sense of landscape *in situ* (the garden) and landscape *in visu* (the painting). At that point, Nanda Kaul detected in the lists and aphorisms of *The Pillow Book* a sense of place attuned to the emotions Carignano arouses in her:

> [S]he smiled again, in spite of herself, wondering if Carignano would live up to that epicurean lady's ideas of how things should be. Not quite, for it was not desolate and it was not derelict. But she had an

> idea that its sparseness, its cleanness and austerity would please the Japanese lady of a thousand years ago as it pleased her. (Fire 29)

The orientalist paraphernalia draws attention to the discrepancy between the actual Carignano and the way Nanda aestheticizes the estate into a satisfyingly empty picture sealing it away from the ugly, raucous reality around her. Indeed, delightful as Chinese *shanshui*, Japanese gardens, a geisha's pillow book and Marco Polo's travel narratives may be (Nanda shamelessly pilfers from the latter to ingratiate herself with her great-granddaughter), all of the above screen Nanda Kaul from the bare facts other characters cannot afford to avoid. A brutal shift from Oriental refinement to exotic obfuscation consequently occurs when Ila Das is shown returning from the genteel tea party in Carignano, scurrying back to her reduced circumstances before dusk sets in: "Leaving behind the last of the shabby, rundown houses and dried up, untended gardens of the town, Ila Das began to hop, skip and slide down the footpath to her village, already lost in the evening shadow of the mountains" (F 140). The brooding threat contained in the adverb "*already* lost" signals on the verge of the ending that the narrative shifts away from the character's narrow focalisation, just before the advent of absolute destruction, and widens its scope to assume the commanding language of omniscience:

> There were only a few more farmhouses on the way – solid, square houses built of Kasauli fieldstone, with pumpkins and corn drying on their roofs, goats tied to the doorposts, women noisily dipping brass pots into barrels of water. [...] Although it had been hot all day, now there was a chill like a white mist beginning to creep out of the shadows of the great jagged rocks and filter through the pine trees and set Ila Das, in her frayed, worn laces and silks, shivering. The day gone, the light gone, the warmth of life gone, it was like wandering lost *in a Chinese landscape* – an austere pen and ink scroll, of rocks and pine and mountain peaks, all muted by mist, by darkness. (Fire 140-141, emphasis added)

An additional mention of the "Chinese landscape" Nanda Kaul yearns for can be spotted one paragraph further, when Ila regrets not having asked Nanda for her hospitality, since it would have made it possible for the former to survive on her scant pension while carrying on with the education and alphabetisation of the illiterate population of nearby villages. As the reader follows the old lady scurrying

towards her ordeal, the description of the darkening landscape around her fulfils several purposes. First it sets off the brutality of the assault through delay and "symbolic doubling" (Buell 254) as the mist and chill close around Ila Das. But the pathetic fallacy cannot quite operate insofar as the composition flaunts its artificiality in a postmodernist gesture that simultaneously asserts and disowns its generic affiliation. Here the landscape is blatantly of a composite nature. It combines a picturesque prospect complete with "great jagged rocks" and rustic farmhouses in the middle ground (Fire 140) with a sublime sunset on the Kasauli ridge in the background, whereas the foreground belongs to the radically different style and period of the Chinese *shanshui*. "Mist – now, in summer?" the narrator wonders, sharing in free direct speech the character's disorientation with the implied reader. The conflation of the two styles leaves out an *unheimlich* residue, characteristic of the rearticulations of hybridity according to Homi Bhabha (1994: 25). "Less than one and double" (Bhabha 1994: 116), the hybrid landscape lacks transparency, but glazes over and fractures along the trajectory of a woman who literally has no place, neither in the vacant vistas of Nanda Kaul's oriental fantasies nor in the picturesque version of a quaintly rural India.

## Chaos and Rejuvenation in the Middle Ground

Nanda Kaul's great-granddaughter is only female character capable of confronting the sheer violence exuding from external space. The girl soon turns her back on the colonial prospect of the Punjabi plains to explore the ravine at the back of the estate where the tall walls of the Pasteur Institute block the view, its chutes disgorging the laboratories' refuse down the slope along with the putrefying carcasses of animals infected with rabies:

> Crouching by the rail, [Raka] made out the details that gave the hazy scene edges, angles and interest. Shoals of rusted tins, bundles of stained newspaper, peels, rags and bones, all snuggling in grooves, hollows, cracks, and sometimes spilling. Pine trees with charred trunks and contorted branches, striking melodramatic attitudes as on stage. Rocks arrested in mid-roll, rearing up, dropping. Occasional tin rooftops, glinting. (Fire 41)

Although the description is perspective-oriented as it moves from close (smaller objects) to a middle plane (the larger shapes of

trees and rocks) towards distant roofs, the pell-mell assemblage lacks the completion defining landscape, whether decorative or not. Instead, the paratax accumulates visual material and lists elements that are not subordinated to the logic of precedence or temporal development implicit in the receding succession of foreground, middle- and background. The chaotic accumulation has something strangely appealing about it, and the impression undoubtedly arises from the point of view that tinges it. Raka's curiosity for life's multifarious forms is perceptible in the trees' anthropomorphic silhouettes and the shape-changing rocks. The child's standards of beauty have nothing to do with Ila's refined tastes or her great-grandmother's spare elegance. But she is the only character apt to recognise the transformative potential of a site that goes by several names – wasteland, dump, "edgeland" or "third landscape" (respectively Farley and Symmons Roberts 2011; Clément 2004). The gorge behind Carignano thus features among the interzones that have been fascinating artists and environmentalists alike in the last two decades on account of their indeterminate nature as left-over land, the repository of human waste which is also the refuge of startlingly resilient life-forms.

Likewise, seen through Raka's eyes, the tawny plain is frequently compared with the pelt of crouching felines such as a lion, a tiger (Fire 41), or a cat (Fire 61). She likens Chandigarh Lake to a snake's eye, gleaming in the distance (Fire 49). But it is at close range that Raka's intimacy with her surrounding is most obvious. "As still as a twig" (Fire 72), "her head like a berry" (Fire 91, see also 116) the child is part of Carignano. She blends with and disappears among the creatures of the garden, achieving an intimacy with them that is denied to her great-grandmother. She also responds to their voices, trying to decipher the Sanskrit-like language of crickets rustling in the afternoon heat (Fire 49). Freakish as she may look and sound, Ila Das also shares Raka's ability to merge with her surroundings. She is compared first with a small piece of gravel (Fire 110), and her speech with a waterfall (Fire 118), an odd simile when bearing in mind Ila's frailty. The discrepancy is meant to snag the attention, implying that if people could lend an ear to what the old lady has to say, her eloquence would perhaps put out the violence smouldering in the landscape. It is also the role that Nanda Kaul fleetingly fancies for

herself when she muses that, "Now was the moment to rise and put all in its place, like the goddess of a naughty land returned to deal with chaos" (Fire 122). But it is finally the child who dares to confront chaos with a radical gesture when she sets the mountain on fire:

> The last of the light had left the valley. It was already a deep violet and only the Kasauli ridge, where Carignano stood invisibly, was still bright with sunlight, russet and auburn, copper and brass an eagle took off from the peak of Monkey Point, *lit up like a torch in the sky*, and dropped slowly down into the valley, lower and lower, *till it was no more than a sere leaf, a scrap of burnt paper*, drifting on currents of air, silently. (Fire 140, emphasis added)

The vignette occurs in the context of Ila Das's fated return to her village home, at the exact point where the two different landscapes overlap, the sublime sunset over Kasauli fading into the muted colours of a Chinese *shansui*. Darkness immediately follows the flashing incandescence of the sinking sun. The quick succession is presented through an ambiguous image which may pass unnoticed in the descriptive flow, especially for a plot-oriented reader eager to see Ila Das back in the safety of her home. Before that reassurance, however, the trajectory of the eagle smoothly morphs into a searing trace through a succession of similes. The complex sentence unfurls into parallel clauses replete with symbolic significations. The syntax omits the mention of a human agent when it leaves out the hand that struck the match,[4] and organises the visual composition around the focal point of Monkey Point. The site owes its name to an episode in the *Ramayana* when Lord Hanuman returning with a mountain of magical herbs from the Himalayas stepped on the hill, his giant foot creating a small depression on its top. The intervention of an eagle likened with a dropping torch also brings to mind key elements in Hanuman's legend among which his divine conception after an eagle dropped a slice of pudding stolen from the Sun-God into his mother's lap, his first prank when Hanuman swallowed the sun he had mistaken for a fruit, or a later feat when he used his burning tail to destroy the city of Lanka. The figurative process that links destruction by fire with creation through allusions to the *Ramayana* is both indirect and richly evocative, which calls for a number of concluding remarks.

The first one is concerned with Desai's use of both pictorial and narrative frames to enhance suspense in her intensely descriptive narratives. A meticulous stylist, Desai is also a crafty teller, knowing what to conceal and when to reveal it. The authorial choice to leave decisive elements outside the scope of narrative is a ploy she has often used to question the limits of the field of representation as they include objects deemed worthy of attention just as they are likely to exclude eyesores – things as well as people who do not fit the picture, and spoil the view because they challenge aesthetic and political hegemonies. Ila Das's activism and the systemic violence perpetrated against women are thus strategically left out of the narrative until Ila's murder. This deferral is reminiscent of *In Custody* and the treatment of Imtiaz Begum whose poetic talent is left to the appreciation of a biased narrator until one of her letters finally forces readers to revise their initial opinion.

The allusions to the *Ramayana* and the mythic origins of Monkey Point implicitly link Raka to the mischievous, transformative figure of the monkey god.[5] Many in Desai's international audience may not readily respond to an allusion that turns a childish prank into a sacred sign of rejuvenation and purification. A Western reader, however, would perhaps be more prone to view Raka as a Promethean figure. The girl's symbolic association with cosmic fire finds an echo in the countless stories and paintings that picture the Greek demi-God with two attributes – the fire he stole from Zeus and the eagle later sent to torment him. *Fire on the Mountain* therefore bears witness to Desai's elaborate stereoscopic vision as theorised by Marta Dvorak:

> A stereoscopic technique of representation, if one makes an analogy with the optical instrument allowing the observer to superimpose or fuse two images taken at a slight distance from each other so as to produce an effect of solidity or depth, invites her readers to expect complexity when one culture supersedes another, and to distance themselves from reductive, totalizing statements amalgamating language and identity politics. (2009: 53)

In *Fire on the Mountain*, landscape writing rests upon an interplay of pictorial traditions that upset static views of an eternal India steeped in tradition. Marc Brosseau has famously commented on the role of literature which as a social agent is also a potent vector of

change participating in the transformation of the world out there. The aesthetic dimension of *Fire on the Mountain*, the way it affects us as readers, also has transformative potential insofar as Desai's novel encourages us to imagine alternatives to the traditional place of women in Indian society. The novel came out in 1977, four decades after India's Independence, and on the eve of the spatial turn. Half a century later, Desai's wrestling with the unsightly still has the power to shock, move and question any complacency regarding the place granted to women in today's India, as well as in other great democracies.

## Notes

1. Topophilia is defined as "all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan 1974: 93).
2. As evinced by the grid-like contraption Dürer invented to produce his eerily realistic sketches of both landscapes and reclining female nudes. The reversibility of the conventions ruling the representation of landscape and supine female bodies suggests a common origin in the male gaze that controls the production and visual consumption of analogous images for the land and the female body (Berger 1972: 62-63).
3. The narrator's description evokes the lithographs Mrs W.L.L Scott published in her *Views in the Himalayas*. See for instance *Kussowlie and the Plains Beyond. Sunrise* (1852) on the British Library online gallery http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019xzz000000670u00001000.html. Consulted 28 February 2022.
4. Raka is clearly identified as the human cause for the fire: "She raised herself onto the tips of her toes – tall, tall as a pine – stretched out her arms till she felt the yellow light strike a spark down her fingertips and along her arms till she was alight, ablaze" (Fire 91).
5. See "The Birth and Youth of Hanuman," http://www.gauranga.org/hanuman.htm. Consulted March 1, 2022.

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# 7

# Re-Examining Some Problems of Translation of Literature

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**Abstract**

Translation discourse which has recently re-surfaced in the academia needs re-examination for various reasons. Although many problems related to inter-lingual translation, especially of literary texts, have been variously discussed by scholars and critics, many important aspects are still found unaddressed. Some of the issues that have not been clinched even today are – what is the role of interpretation in determining the precise nuance of a term; why an equivalent even when it verbally corresponds to the original cannot always be used in translation; what is the relation between usage restriction and equivalence; why for capturing the cultural association of the original sometimes even a 'wrong' verbal counterpart is to be accepted as the best alternative in translation; why selection of an equivalent becomes a challenge when the members of a linguistic community for whom the translation is meant have heterogeneous cultural affiliations; how the evolution of culture problematizes the task of translation, making what is appropriate unacceptable. The present article discusses some of these cruces and concludes that despite these challenges, translation of literary of texts, especially the ones de-canonised by the rulers, must continue. This is because while translation can be a means for interrogating the power structure, it can also be a means for embracing internationalism.

Keywords: Interpretation, Usage restriction, Heterogeneous Cultural affiliation, Evolution of culture, De-canonisation

Translation – literal or literary – has many forms and types. In 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (1959) Roman Jacobson mentions three types of translation – *inter-semiotic, intra-lingual* and *inter-lingual* (Jacobson 233). When the Romantic visionary William Blake drew

sketches and coloured them to illustrate his poems, this transference of idea from one art form to another is inter-semiotic translation, for the vision is re-incarnated in pictorial form although the focus is on the poem, the first fleshing of the vision. When *pani* (water) is represented by synonymous words of the same language *udak*, *nir*, *ap* or when Shakespeare's dialogues are simplified and re-written in modern English, say in 'No Fear Shakespeare' series, the translation is intra-lingual. The third type – inter-lingual translation – is basically replacing signifiers of one language with those of a different language so as to make the text comprehensible to readers who may not read the text in the language in which it was originally encoded. For example, when 'water' is rendered as 'Aqua' (Latin), 'Nero' (Greek), 'Eau' (French), 'Wasser' (German), 'Mizu' (Japanese), the rendition is inter-lingual. The present article proposes to critically examine some of the basic tenets of inter-lingual literary translation in order to understand the nature of problems and how to negotiate them.

Translation discourse has re-surfaced in the academic space in the past few decades presumably due to global interest in reading the works of Nobel laureates. It is not that translation was not so much in practice in the past. Leaving apart the translation of oral literature into writing which was sort of copying, the Bible was translated into Greek even before the birth of Christ. Critical views on translation are also centuries old. For example, John Dryden, himself a translator of commendable accomplishment, in his Preface to *Ovid's Epistles* (1680) mentions three types of translation – *metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation* to distinguish three broad types of translation of literature. 'Metaphrase' is word-for-word translation, the prefix *meta-* in the context means not *beyond* but *after*. 'Paraphrase' is rendering a literary text with some degree of latitude, which is why it is often looked upon as a dilution rather than a reliable reproduction of the original. 'Imitation' is a sort of creative transposition – although the original text inspires this rendition, the details of the original can hardly be traced to the new text. According to Dryden, Jonson's translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Waller's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Cowley's translation of two Pindaric Odes respectively illustrate these three types of translation (Works, 1, 114-15).

The etymological sense of 'translation' is 'carried across' (<Latin 'trans-', across + '-latio', the past participle form of 'ferre', 'to carry'). In most cases the focus is on the transference of the semantic core – message/ idea/ thought/ experience whatever, in an undistorted form from one language to another. Lawrence Venuti has pertinently observed, 'translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation' (Venuti, 17). Any translation requires bi-lingual proficiency, for minus the linguistic acumen to grasp the nuance of words of the Source Language (SL) or the power to re-express it in the Target Language (TL), no translation can be successful. So, a translator is not a mere copyist – although (s)he can never enjoy the full freedom of an independent creator, for, generally speaking, the source text can never be lost sight of.

Translators are well aware that the task is not easy at all. It involves a number of challenges. The main challenge is certainly balancing fidelity and freedom – loyalty to the source text and deviating from the source in order to communicate to the target reader. Absence of balance is treated as a fault in Translation Studies, be it *domestication* or *foreignisation*. Incidentally, while the former is 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values', the latter is 'an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad' (Venuti 20). Too much of fidelity to the original will result in foreignisation of the translated text and create problems of easy reading. On the other hand, if only the expectations of the target readers become a priority and the SL text is domesticated to a fault, the flavor of the original will get considerably dehydrated making the translation almost a useless exercise. An Italian phrase '*traduttore traditore*' – translator a traitor – finely sums up the precarious moral dilemma of the translator who is always a victim of conflicting allegiances and cannot be true to one moral obligation without violating the other. Balancing fidelity and freedom are the toughest challenge, for while loyalty to the SL text makes a translation un-reader-friendly, reader-friendly translation makes it dull by desalinating the original flavor.

Any general statistics will reveal that translation of writings published in the field of science, technology and social science are less controversial although globally they far exceed translation of literary writings. One obvious reason is that the writing that is message-centred does not suffer much when transposed into a different tongue. Does it, therefore, follow that translation of non-literary texts is a cake walk? It is not so, for each language has certain unique features which can hardly be retained in a different language. For instance, in Bengali there are three forms of Second Person pronoun: *tui* (intimate or dis-honorific), *tumi* (formal), *apni* (formal and honorific). This subtle distinction cannot be retained in English where there is just one form, *you*. The Bengali verb *khaoya* ('to eat') generally expresses intake of everything – solid, liquid, even gaseous. So, one can eat rice, water and *bidi*, although in English one *eats* rice, *drinks water* and *smokes bidi*. There are problems with name words. *Chawal* is boiled rice in Hindi, un-boiled rice in Bengali. One advantage of name words is that, without searching for equivalent words in the TL, these may be left unchanged in translation, if required with a footnote. But this cannot be done when the expression is idiomatic: e.g., 'to rain cats & dogs' or 'to go cold turkey' 'to beat around the bush', 'to cut the Gordian knot'.

But where the import gets precedence over literal signification, where sound and sense enter into an un-divorceable bond, as in literature, one must murder to dissect; that is, translation is impossible without disintegrating this unique bond. In order to establish the first point, one may consider the first two lines of a verse from Tagore's novel *Char Adhyay* ('Four Chapters'): *'Prohor shesher aloy ranga sedin choitramas/ Tomar chokhe dekhechhilem amar sarvanash*' (Chapter II). The literal meaning of the second line is 'in your eyes I saw my ruin'. But this *sarvanash* ('ruin') is no doom or catastrophe, for it is spoken by a lover hypnotised by the eyes of the object of one's love. 'My self-composure is sealed in your eyes' something like this may come closer in signification to the original. As regards the second, the unique sonic-semantic cohesion, the argument will be clear if we just try to translate the following lines from Tagore's poetic-play *Devatar Gras* ('The Divine Gulp')

*Jal shudhu jal*
*Dekhe dekhe chitta tar hoyechhe bikal.*

*Masrin chikkan krishna kutil nisthur*
*Lolup lelihajihva sarpasama krur*
*Khal jal chhal-vara tuli lakshafana…* (Tagore 1981: 335)

Water only water,
Seeing the unvarying stretch he is out of his mind
Smooth, glossy, dark, crooked, unpitying
Greedy licking tongue, baleful like the snake
Vile, deceitful, raising many hoods… (Translation mine)

Everyone having a smattering of Bengali must admit that although the sense has been captured, the original flavor is missing because the jingle of the 'l' sound which makes us hear the wave-breaking is lost. Another example from Tagore's famous poem 'Duhsamay' ('Hard Times') may help drive the point home:

*Achhe shudhu pakha, ache mahanava-angan*
*Usha disha hara nibid-timir-anka.* (Tagore 1981: 293)

(You) Have only wings and the vast space of the sky
Marked by nocturnal darkness where dawn's course gets lost
(Translation mine)

Here too the meaning is clear but the evocation due to the refrain-effect of *achhe*, the assonance of *usha* and *disha*, the consonance of *nibid* and *timir* is certainly missing, which is why the translation cannot rise to the height of the original. In non-literary translation this is no serious loss because it is message-centric. But a word in poetry, Taraknath Sen reminds us, 'has not merely a meaning-value but also a sound value' (Sen 101). Where the relation of sound and sense is like body and soul or bone and muscle, any attempt to carry either ignoring the vitality of their bond will inevitably cause aesthetic desiccation.

No less problematic is the rendition of culture specific terms. Language carries the baggage of culture which, as Raymond Williams has justly shown, 'is a whole way of life' (Williams 18). Eminent linguist and father of 'linguistic relativity' hypothesis, Edward Sapir has justly maintained that 'No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality; the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (Sapir 69). As language is the vehicle of culture, it is hard to retain the original

nuance in translation of culture specific words. For example, the translation of *gangajal* as 'Ganga water' retains the verbal sense without the trace of cultural overtone that the word carries in most Indian languages. *Gangajal* is not merely the water of the river Ganga, but water which is believed to have a purifying potential despite the existence of millions of coliform bacteria and other pathogens or toxic elements in a drop of such water. The translation of the Sanskrit word *dwija* as 'twice born' is somewhat confusing to Western readers, for, strictly speaking, no one can be born twice. The word signifies a Brahmin who is believed to be spiritually re-born at the time of *upanayan* or the ceremony of wearing the sacred thread. In his translation of Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 18', 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' Sudhindranath Dutta preferred *basanta* ('spring') as the linguistic analogue of 'summer'. *Prima facie* it is quite perplexing, since the Bengali equivalent of 'summer' is *grisma* not *basant*a. However, in the tropical region, the long-stretched summer with its scorching sun rays has hardly the pleasant association that the season summer has in a cold country like England. Rejection of the so called 'correct' equivalent is admittedly a gain to us because what is literally 'correct' would be culturally incorrect in the context. How to translate a word like *antesty* or *satkar*? It may be *cremation* if the dead person is a Hindu, *burial* if the person is a Christian or a Muslim, *dakhma*, 'the tower of silence' if the person is a Parsi, for Zoroastrian faith prohibits the contact of a corpse with either earth or fire. Selection of equivalent must depend on the translator's acquaintance with the religious category of the person about whom it is used. The choice may be also be dictated by the culture of the target reader, or else it may lead to gap in communication and incomprehensibility. Incidentally, in *Toward a Science of Translating* Eugene Nida distinguishes between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The latter is ideal because in it one is 'not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message', but 'aims at complete naturalness of expression' (Nida 1964: 159). One, therefore, may venture to revise the very notion of equivalence. An equivalent word is less a word that corresponds literally to the word in the original but more a word that grasps the cultural nuance of the original. Nida has rightly insisted: "For a truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words

only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function." (Nida 2002: 82).

Another serious problem in this regard is that culture is not static; it evolves, albeit slowly, over the years. As language embodies culture, every translator is expected to be conscious of the change and use language accordingly. Translation is primarily meant for contemporary readers. So, words that are outmoded if not obsolete, unless required for giving special effect, need to be avoided, or else the translation would be quaint. For example, there are a number of words that can be used in addressing one's darling in a letter: *hridayballavesu*, *pranadhikasu*, *sucharitasu, priyatamasu*. The diction that Bankimchandra or Vidyasagar might have picked would certainly have a comic effect if used by a translator in the 21st century. This apart, the language of translation is expected to reflect other changes on the cultural front – say avoidance of sexism in language. The civilised society tries to minimize the various levels of discrimination/ inequality found in society. If the source text wants to expose gender discrimination and the language is consciously gendered, the language of translation is not to tone down the sexist flavor for the sake of fidelity. Otherwise, the language used for translating a text today needs to avoid obviously sexist diction. It is not just substituting, as Taslima Nasrin has done in her autobiographical novel, *meyebela* ('childhood of a girl') for *chhelebela* (literally, 'the childhood of a boy'), used gender-neutrally for childhood in general. This is because as a Bengali equivalent for 'childhood' both the terms (*meyebela* and *chhelebela*) are gendered. 'Ms' rather than 'Mrs' would be culturally appropriate translation of 'Srimati', for like 'Mr' the former does not point to the marital status of the woman concerned. Certain terms create problems in translation for having other type of sensitive cultural nuances. 'Pani' is universally used as an equivalent of 'water' in Hindi, whereas among Indian Bengalees its use is restricted to those who are by and large Muslim by faith while their Hindu brethren stick to *jal*. Linguistically conscious translators feel uneasy when the try to determine what would be the most appropriate counterpart of 'water' in Bengali. After all, in post-translation phase the translated text would open for all Bengali readers cutting across their religious faith. It would be wiser if at the time of selection of diction, the translator refers to the source text and

takes into account the religious identity of the character who uses the word or the social reality that the narrator wants to highlight.

One easy solution of hundreds of such problems of translation would be trans-creation – which is sort of independent creation in a new tongue inspired by but tangentially attached to the thought of the SL text.. Translation value of trans-creation is highly contested but this is not at all an easy task. Ezra Pound has shown commendable proficiency in this job and Tagore has translated as well as trans-created with singular finesse. One instance from Tagore will make the point clear. Consider Tagore's four-liner 'Udarcharitanam', which in Bengali reads:

*Prachirer chhidre ek namgotrahin*
*Futiyachhe chhotoful atishay din.*
*Dhik Dhik kare tare kanane sabai*
*Surya uthi bale tare, 'Valo achho vai?'* (Tagore 1981: 290)

'On the crack of the wall
A small flower without name and pedigree has bloomed.
The whole garden pooh-poohs the poor flower--
The morning sun greets it saying, 'Hope you are well.'
(Translation mine).

Tagore's own English translation of the poem, published as No. 67 of 'Stray Birds', reads: 'God Grows weary of great kingdoms, but never of little flowers' (Das 404). This deserves to be looked upon as another creation despite the fact that it is the Bengali original that inspired the English one-liner. The English translation of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* by Edward FitzGerald is world famous although FitzGerald has translated with more than ordinary liberty of a translator replacing many original expressions at will probably to make them palatable to Victorian taste: 'Where Omar asks for a loaf, a jug of wine, a sheep's thigh and a pretty boy, FitzGerald omits the meat, substitutes a 'Thou', and introduces a pretty book (which no Persian scholar would need) and a Bough, which is not a property of Persian wilderness' (Kermode 61) He consciously did this transmogrification, for, as he himself said to E. B. Cowell in a letter dated April 27, 1859, 'Better a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle' (Bassnett-McGuire 71). FitzGerald's 'free' translation, however, is immensely popular even today and readers hardly bother about small changes. The English translation of the Maupassant's 'Necklace'

is world famous although the scholar knows that Maupassant has no story of that name. Nobody bothers about the fact that the correct translation of the French title '*La Parure*' would be 'adornment' or 'jewelry' not 'necklace'.

In all its forms, translation is actually re-incarnation of an idea in a different language by use of an opposite equivalent. By lexicographical definition an equivalent is what is equal in value, purpose, worth, meaning, function etc. Finding such a word in another tongue, even when the two languages are cognate, is difficult indeed. Even when the equivalent word is available in the translated language, one cannot use it violating usage-restriction. The Hindi word for 'hair' (*bal*) also exists in Bengali, but it is a taboo word, for it denotes the pubic hair and hence treated as vulgar. In his Introduction to *Selected Translations* W. S. Merwin has rightly argued that a 'single primary denotations' is sharable but it is impossible to find equivalent when one takes into account 'the constellation secondary meanings' (say, pejorative nuance of *bitch*), the 'rings of associations' (e.g., *sati*) or the 'the etymological echoes'. 'Daughter', for example does not carry the root meaning echoes of terms like *duhita* (a female who sucks); *atmaja* (female issuing from oneself); *kanya* (female taken away: < Sanskrit *kan,* to take away); *tanaya* (female who continues the line: < Sanskrit *tan*, to propagate). The metaphorical sense of 'Mirjafar' in Bengali is 'a traitor'. Its English equivalent may be 'Judas' although the betrayal of Mirjafar is historical and it has no religious association. In a poem of Tarapada Roy entitled '*Bhut o Manus*' ('Ghost and Man'), two ghosts debate over the existence of man as we debate over the existence of the ghost. The one who has no doubt in this regard refers to the crowd in public places as proof in support of his belief. The other who is rather skeptical refutes the argument saying that the heart of each individual has not been anatomised to check whether it contains humanity. He then adds, '*Erpar kakhano bolte jabe na / 'Manus ache, manus dekhechhi*' (Roy). The word *manus* occurs twice in the last line. It would be wrong if one uses 'man' as equivalent in both the places, for, in the first, *manus* signifies the creature man; in the second, it is humanity which distinguishes man from other creatures. So, any acceptable Bengali translation of the lines needs to reflect the distinction. It could be: 'Now on never claim/ 'Man exists, I have seen

a human'. Or take for example Bibhas Roychoudhury's recent poem '*Shahid Stan Swamike Ek Bhander Chithi*' ('A Hypocrite's Letter to Martyr Stan Swami'). Two lines of the poem run thus: '*Deshi Becharamer khela/ Foreign Kenaram to achhe*'. ( 'The native Sale-master/ In league with the foreign Buy-all' – Translation mine). Here '*Becharam*' and '*Kenaram*' are not just two names. These common Bengali names (literally 'Master Seller' & 'Master Buyer' respectively) have been purposefully chosen by the poet to target the crony capitalism of contemporary India, the collusion of politicians with the industrial tycoons. The profit-hungry capitalists want to grab all public property and their friends, the politicians, talk of patriotism but betray their country by enacting laws so that public property can be gifted to their friends in the business circle without any hassle. Successful translation, therefore, demands determination of word-class – understanding that 'Becharam' and 'Kenaram' are not just two proper names which require no change in translation. They are really Common Nouns used as Proper Nouns.

It is, therefore, clear that selection of counterpart in TL depends on how the translator interprets the original which again depends on correct comprehension of the nuances which is impossible without sound linguistic proficiency. All translation is in this sense a commentary. The task of the translator is somewhat close to that of the actor impersonating a role. When an actress/ actor impersonates a role (s)he has a script written by the dramatist but the dialogue is spoken in accordance with how it is interpreted by the stage-performer. Each interpretation brings out different meanings of the speech. In *Macbeth* when Macbeth is hesitant to murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth tries to stimulate his flagging self-confidence. Macbeth is half-convinced but still lacks courage to venture it and says, 'If we fail'. Lady Macbeth retorts, 'We fail!' (I. vii, 65) Famous stage-personalities of different generations have spoken it to express surprise (how could Macbeth still be hesitant), hopelessness (that Macbeth still clings to his hesitancy), disgust (that Macbeth could be so stolid), ridicule (pooh-poohing Macbeth's inertia) or rebuke (that Macbeth wastes time over something not serious at all). Analogously, a translator is also required to interpret the idea expressed and use of equivalent word in the language of translation depends on this interpretation. At the end of Tagore's short story *Shasti* ('Punishment')

Chandara's husband, who is responsible for her false conviction in a case of murder, wants to meet her in the prison. Chandara refuses to meet him saying '*maran*', which is the last word of the story (Tagore 1989: 383). The translation of *maran* which literally means 'death' in Bengali is a real challenge to every translator, for in this context it cannot be 'death' at all. 'To hell with him!', 'Fie on it!', 'How stupid to say so!', 'Damn the thought!', 'Am I mad?' or any such expression one must think of to translate Chandara's exclamation which is inspired by a hurt sentiment of one who has been betrayed by one she trusted. The translation must squeeze out the protest of Chandara who, at this stage shows firmness of personality by not yielding to the remorseful appeal of her husband who is responsible for the false conviction of his young wife.

Translation, even when successful in the sense of having wide range of readership, falls short of perfection in one respect or other. In *'The Art of Translation'* (1941), Vladimir Nabokov has mentions three types of errors in translation: 1) errors due to ignorance or 'misguided knowledge', 2) errors due to laziness to explore subjecting 'scholarship to primness', 3) errors, least excusable according to Nabokov, that occur when the translator stoops to conquer and consciously distorts the original in order to 'conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public' (Nabokov). 'Free' translations are marked by other departures – Replacement, Insertion and Omission – which, although not errors, Nobokov would hardly be pleased with. Consider for example the English translation of 'Viday Avishap' ('Farewell-Curse'), published in English as 'Kacha and Devayani' with the original title *replaced*. In the last part of her last speech Devayani curses Kacha for ignoring her love in order to be true to his mission of gathering for the gods the knowledge of reviving the dead. In the manuscript the translation runs thus, 'Let me utter this curse that the great knowledge you have earned may become your burden, and though others may learn it from you, yet for the very lack of love it may ever remain apart from your life, like stars floating on the night, leaving its virgin darkness unespoused' (Chattopadhyay 45). This is indeed a poor translation of the original, for, idiomatically, the initial expression is recognizably un-English. In the published book, however, Tagore revised the wording of the manuscript and made it smarter: 'Accursed be that great knowledge

you have earned! – a burden that, though others share equally with you, will never be lightened. For lack of love may it ever remain as foreign to your life as the cold stars are to the unespoused darkness of virgin Night' (Das 258). In the original there is no reference to 'cold stars' or 'virgin Night' which Tagore has *inserted* in the translation, what for is anybody's guess. As regards *omission*, which is not infrequent in translation, Tagore has omitted the last speech of Kacha with which the poetic drama ends: 'Ami bar dinu tumi sukhi habe/ Vule yabe sarvaglani bipul gourabe' ('I bless you, you will be happy/ And forget the chapter in the glory of your life' (Tagore 1981: 213). It is not clear why Tagore must omit it, for it brings out the greatness of the character of Kacha whose love for Devayani is too profound to be profaned by a counter-curse.

Most translators, despite utmost devotion to their task, get lesser recognition than even ordinary authors. Of course, there are exceptions like Krittibas Ojha or Kashiram Das, the Bengali translator of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* respectively. But the thumb rule is that, the better the translation, the more invisible the translator. In *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) Venuti traces it to domestication tendency and over-emphasis on 'fluency' in translation. Whatever the reason, for the translator self-expression, paradoxically, is a mode of self-effacement, for every translator endeavours to make the source text voice perfectly audible by muting his own. Finally, in one's interest in the aesthetic value or the communicative value of translation what one often tends overlook is that there is a relation between translation and power. In several essays, especially in 'The Politics of Translation' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has shown how the colonial power has used translation to gag the 'other' voice, especially of women. She has justly argued that as translation has been used by colonial rulers strategically to advance their own colonial interest, postcolonial resistance demands re-translating the books or translating those books that colonial rulers wanted to suppress. In 'Writing between the Lines: Politics and Poetics of Translation', R. Parthasarathy has justly observed that 'The translator unearths long-forgotten classics and puts them into orbit, thus redrawing the literary map' (Parthasarathy 170). It is a fact that visible or invisible control of translation by state power continues even today. It is visible when a classic postcolonial text like

Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' is expunged from the English (Hons) syllabus of a Delhi University (in 2021) presumably on political grounds. It is invisible when a translator cannot risk translating a text in fear of becoming a target, or even if translates it, cannot find a publisher. But translation will continue negotiating all these challenges, for it is the only way thoughts and ideas can cross linguistic and spatial barriers. R. Parthasarathy thinks that in a multi-lingual, multicultural country like India, 'the very survival (of the nation-state) depends on it' (Parthasarathy 184). Besides, translation helps us to transcend national barriers and reach out to the world. One concludes quoting the words of Jose Saramago, the Portuguese Nobel laureate, 'Writers make national literature with their language, but world literature is created by translators' (Glasberg).

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# 8

# Gender and Margins: Reading the Peripheries in Mayank Austen Soofi's *Nobody Can Love You More*

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**Abstract**

The concept of caste-identity-gender is a trio analogy of marginalisation. The hard effort of the society to continue to maintain the established 'center' and 'periphery' heredity is assisted by the above trio! Identity has always highlighted the fact and subject of the 'I', this 'i' which when is analysed under the spectrum of marginalisation, seems to be subjugated or in power about the caste and gender. Spaces, created for the existence of any being results in the formation of a cluster of ethical epistemologies, which can be very much centered and specific to that particular organisation of bodies/beings. Gender is a complex operative device for the power to organize and categorize identities, and to veil up the continuum nature of its existence; while, caste is that dynamics of operation within the Brahminical setup of Indian society that stands as the core theorem of suppression for any 'body'. My paper would, therefore, like to examine the peripheries of women as subjective objects in *Nobody Can Love You More*.

Keywords: identity, caste, gender, culture, bodies

## Introduction

Multiculturalism has not only brought into speculation the lives that are trodden within interrogations of 'pure/impure' binary but have nevertheless offered with the lens to perceive them to deconstruct the patriarchal cultural setting. It provides the 'power', the right to 'dehumanize' one's existence and mould in to benefit the few recognised shelters of identities. Within the broader spectrum 'marginalisation' is a welcoming device to mark and segregate in a

convenient pattern to operate. The freedom of any soul begins from the mind, for few 'bodies' in our society this mind is universally fitted, established, and owned, whereas for the 'others' scuffles are created to reclaim the existence of their 'own mind'. Swati Shinde in an article titled "Voices and Views from the Margins" published in the newspaper – *Times of India* presented how the lives of marginalised people are, and within this spectrum of layered oppression how the flowing popular culture always veils the lives of those identities and bodies who are restricted within and up to the peripheries of social and political re-presentation. The throbbing sense of *othering* has created a web of displayed 'bodies' which our cognitive standard accepts as the 'other' and continues to maintain that intricate design if 'othering' so that the centre can endlessly benefit. This set of ideas churned from the popular practice of few celebrated norms and suppression of the rest, where binarised ontological (existence of a being) representations function vibrantly, over years of uninterrogated praxis that leads to the understanding of "natural/naturality", which is very similar to what Nivedita Menon wrote in her book *Seeing Like A Feminist* (2012) – "The whole point of nude make-up is to spend hours painting your face to make it look like you had not touched it at all. The maintaining of 'social order' is rather like that... Complex networks of cultural reproduction are dedicated to this purpose solely" (Menon, vii). The problem lies in this conditioned acceptance without any interrogation, something that can be relatable to what took place hundreds of years ago. To find a solution one needs to consider and recognize the problem, without which no solutions can ever be presented. The issues of marginalisation on peripheral identities are never recognised as an issue to be dealt with like years ago when the British ruled us. Referring to the same, in the essay written by Patankar and Omvedt, we see they emphasised through their article "*The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*" (1979), how the matter of Dalit lives has been dismantled-

> Our wrongs have remained open and they have not been righted. Although 150 years of British rule have ruled away. Of what good is such a government to anybody? It was a government which did realize that the capitalists were denying the workers a living wage and decent condition of works and which did realize that the landlords were

> squeezing the masses dry and yet it did not remove social evils that blighted lives of the downtrodden class these years. (413)

## Theoretical Interpretations

Mayank Austen Soofi's *Nobody Can Love You More* is a book based on portraying the Red light district of Delhi. This book has tried to depict a little bit of what can be slightly true about the lives of these women who within themselves have formed a separate world of 'their own'. Some forced, some trafficked, some tricked, and some sold; some voluntary choices, are few selected instances that carefully threads this book. Soofi through a series of open-ended questions and interviews has tried portraying the lives of these 'untold unmentioned and exploited women'. Soofi also tried showcasing the ins and outs of their business- the business of their bodies, their daily lives, and work, how capitalism and sex have demandingly survived on the bodies of Women for years. Soofi tried to appreciate and approach, celebrate and present them as people, who are one among us, and tried reaching out for those simple voices of pain.

Theories and interpretations have often participated in accordance to decode numerous layers of perceptions. Eventually, theories have played a crucial role to organize and provide rhythms to the researching plates of networking ideas. Realizing the stratified marginalisation system of which the Indian culture is a vivid example, a clear depiction of the same can also be found in Indian literary works. Theories and literature have always functioned in a manner, that interpretations have become more layered and complexly interesting with portrayal of the cultural hypocritic standards within a society. Culture as a huge section and branch of power is enormously a tool to subjugate the rule and an excuse to continue the same. It's cultural hegemony and extension that keeps on associating and amassing oppressive rules of 'power'. Literatures and literary theories have eventually started reflecting the pains and hues of the subjugated voices, and narrates these tales to present how their re-presentation is wrong and misleading when the power of the pen is with a body that is very much privileged. Cultural reflection on literary spheres have resonated the cramped hands of patriarchal supremacy with Indian socio-economic domain. The literary texts selected here reflects the lives of women but from an 'intersectional

cultural perspective', where insulting a woman with lewd comments and touches seems acceptable as they are 'sellers of bodies and pleasure' whereas, the same thing on another body is 'unacceptable' because they do not sell it, yet cannot even protest.

***Prostitution and Literature***

Prostitution is a cult and a culture of its own. Patriarchy has constructed the profession within that marginalised periphery from where the voices have always been nullified. Why is prostitution exempted from the mainstream discussion; if we delve a bit deeper, we can also understand that prostitution has created a space for the bodies although in an exploitive zone. Within this zone the autonomy of an anatomy is pictured with glamour(ed) tales of pain. But if there was no demand for such bodies, no trafficking of such bodies would have taken place. In the world economy Prostitution accounts for a huge portion of business that continues to run unnoticed and legally supported. Desire is channelised into this 'unmentionable zone' of Prostitution repeatedly each and every night where the fleshes are melted with raw paws and frustration. We are able to narrate many different tales about popular prostitutes or red-light areas of India, because the narrative power re-presents the stories and bodies that are underrepresented within this phallogocentric community. Creation of prostitution as peripheral bruises has been a result of terrible practices over days and years; careful maintenance of rules of which kinds of vaginas are to be kept behind the veils and doors, which to be thrown outside to be stamped. This evaluating form includes class, caste, religion, gender, sexuality, and many more nets to assess whom to place where. But the more critical question is who does this, from where do they get the power to do this? This is nothing other than a small community or space or spot that eventually grows and spreads its branches to become the 'global ethico-onto-epistemological space', which perhaps omits and restricts the layers, experiences, intersectional occurrences, individuality, isolation, personal spaces, etcetera, to ambitiously get recognised as the authentic authority of a specific anatomical power- a phallogocentric society; hence, from epistemology to ontology, everything becomes phallus-oriented. Therefore, within this phallus-oriented community we get to explore layers of faithful services provided by people who are conditioned enough to disgust the

identities with norms other than the Brahmin-white-heterosexual-man. Prostitution by this community has been excluded in all formats, while night celebrations with them have been accepted with silent jests among such men.

In Soofi's work, a different flavour, aroma, and culture are portrayed. I am beginning like this because our society has framed and reframed the 'world where sex is just a work and profession (by choice or not)' as a separate 'universe' of its own, where the 'people from "respected" families are not expected to tread or even let their eyes visit those thresholds'. Prostitution is a profession where the alliteration of emphasizing its urgency to be recognised under the legal professional works is somewhat overturned and overlooked by our 'benevolent patriarchal' society. The concept of women's body and their identity is linked and understood as something essentially inseparable. The idea of body for women is as Judith Butler says, "Women are the sex which is not "one". Within…a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*…women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity" (Butler, 13). This separate world of sex-workers is to be kept and operated in 'silence', during the nights, behind the veils, under the 'red and colourful lights' only! The lives of these people seem to be as much 'storied' as their shelters are. Every story of their existence and identity, every escape, each domination, every 'rape tale', each smile, each 'shared bed', all those alternative names and hidden earnings, have created 'sex workers' identity to be something that needs speculation and discussion, not silences. Soofi has beautifully portrayed the lives of these people in an autobiographical format to the readers but has also confessed that the effort to portray anything is a 'lie', a lie which will remain a lie only, no matter what it says, it will only re-present those lives with an attempt to justify their existence but can never represent and can never be the 'truth tale' for the same-

> There's a lot of things that you must have discovered about the women's lives upstairs- how they came here and so on- but you will skip some aspects and highlight others. And this manipulation will shape the image you present to your readers. You have the pen, you have the power…but it will never be an accurate portray of your subject (Soofi, 195).

Soofi may not have clearly demonstrated the plight of Dalit prostitutes, as he writes and explains how religion, caste, believes all merges into the same place for the sex-workers. However, if we place the customer's point of view who if enquires about the background, and the pays; marginalisation takes numerous layers. Within this already marginalised space of prostitution, a Dalit worker is more easily considered available, as we see- "You said you will give hundred rupees…you deserve this" (Soofi, 105). Soofi has simply presented another identity whose journey is designated to the peripheral margins. The denizens who lived in the 'Kotha No.300' of GB Road, Delhi cooked foods for their children and lovers just like any other ordinary women from any respected household would do, visited temples, celebrated festivals, listened to film songs and engage themselves in entertainment of various forms of which they have the accessibility. Soofi presented how they led lives just like we all do, just like a 'civilised' world did- "Go to any part of the world, and you will find them. GB Road is a part of our society. How can you say that they are not civilised?" (194). Few bodies have restricted and pushed them to the marginal shelters, where their identities are equated in terms of their 'flesh-sold'! Remembering what Helene Cixuos in *Laugh of Medusa* said that within the phallogocentric symbolic order of our society there are separate entries constructed for men and women; hence the 'subject position' open to them stands different. This difference results in the creation of 'crisis' which omits all experiences and intersectional sufferings of women; thereby, creating an identity that leads to 'half-voiced' and paralysed selves. These created women as an identity and body who were the victim of this phallocentric society. The only reason for which they face such perils is the 'marking' system of our social order, where women have been tagged with 'nothing beyond oppression'; suppression because the body is a 'woman's' and hence from rape to physical abuse, this 'body' is a platform to showcase these 'cultural stigmas'. Thus, Soofi writes- "…There are burn marks on left side of her chin…She has gone home to deliver a child but the baby died. So, she is being very silent" (Soofi, 132). Thus, 'silence' is the only operative security for their 'storied stories'.

## Conclusion

Woman's identity as the 'oxymoron' presentation now needs a stoppage, where every time woman must not be visualised within the structural binary if 'pure/impure', 'wife/whore', 'and angel/devil' and so on. Thus, the objectification and suppression of women from and under diversifies layers is still a question that is composed under 'silent discourse'. Within this cultural heterogeneity of India this subjugative power regime that commodifies women from birth to death and turns their lives to a living hell needs discussion urgently. Therefore, amidst various 'silent operations', identities have somewhat created and destroyed their spheres of reliance again and again, failing in their attempts to extend the lines and diameter of the 'centre'/main/image and move beyond just reflections/servitude/ night body lives! Caste and gender are actually tools produced and reproduced with time to shift the horizons of 'identities' that can be excluded from recognition and rights, be it the right to live freely or to survive with dignity. So, merging the targeted object- 'identity' with the tools which modifies, categorizes, cramps, scratches it, was only an attempt among the vast network of interpretations, to depict how limited 'interaction' based on caste and gender has provided the provision of the trio- caste/gender/identity to flourish in a regressively progressive format!

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# 9

# The Trauma of Loss and the Loss of Self in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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**Abstract**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) dramatizes both traditional forms of gender discrimination and Western influences that precipitate the emotional and physical trauma suffered by its protagonist, Olanna Ozobia. Factors that assail Olanna and other African literary women are family loss and marital abandonment. While Adichie and other African authors critique these destructive pressures on women's dignity and very well-being, they also celebrate the ability of women to surmount violation and injustice. While females make essential contributions to the health of their communities, as Olanna repeatedly does in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, their own health is routinely undermined by contradictory and demeaning pressures and expectations. These norms of behavior may have an adverse impact on the psychic wholeness that the women naturally pursue and can result in depression and sometimes despair and pathology. Olanna's situation has its unique features, due in part to her experiences of the Nigerian Civil War, but we may discern in the family and societal ordeals that she faces, the depression they trigger, and the fortitude that enables her to survive and even lead, a vital bond with other women portrayed in African literature.

Keywords: African literature, postcoloniality, feminism, trauma.

Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie considers in her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), the causes and manifestations of female emotional trauma. Such trauma is reflected not only in psychic disturbance, but also in bodily dysfunction. Multiple plot developments and the characters associated with them wreak havoc on the emotional, psychic, and, even physical life of

Olanna Ozobia, *Yellow Sun*'s thoughtful and resilient female protagonist. Through these developments Adichie draws attention to the ways in which social betrayals of healthy individuals produce physical as well as psychic morbidities. For numerous female characters in modern African literature, one consequence of emotional trauma is the severe deterioration of physical well-being. This pattern is discernible in the cases of such female characters as Nnu Ego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Jacqueline Diack in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979). These characters, who in certain respects may be viewed as forebears of Olanna and in others are as distinct from her, are shaped and constrained by traditional codes of female conduct in African family structures that are transformed by the hegemonic influences of Western education and materialism. Both traditional forms of gender discrimination and such Western influences are general sources of the emotional and physical trauma suffered by diverse female characters. Prominent among the immediate factors that traumatize women in the literary context are family loss and marital abandonment. While various authors decry the varied assaults on women's dignity and their fundamental well-being, they also celebrate the capacity of many women to surmount violation and injustice.

Reflecting some of the continuities as well as differences between the earlier novels and *Yellow Sun* may help contextualize the subsequent discussion of Adichie's story. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Emecheta questions the actual benefit to women of a certain pact embedded in patriarchy. The pact demands, in effect, that a woman dutifully serve her husband and their children, and, in return, eventually enjoy reciprocated financial and emotional support from them. The malaise that afflicts Nnu Ego at the close of the novel and the accompanying deterioration of her sanity and physical strength derive in some measure from her violated trust that her husband and children would be close by and, at least in the case of the children, attend to her in later life after her many years of courageous self-sacrifice. The Westernised orientation and even location of her children contribute to this violated trust. For example, while Nnu Ego remains in Nigeria, one of her sons lives in the United States and another in Canada. Economic factors, including ones that drive children to places far from their parents, help explain how, to cite M.

Keith Booker, *The Joys of Motherhood* "suggests that the treatment of women as the mere property of men in traditional society is not necessarily overcome by modernisation" (88). According to Carole Boyce Davies, moreover, Nnu Ego's illness and death dramatize, "the tragedy of woman's existence when it remains circumscribed by motherhood alone" (253). The failure of Nnu Ego's family and society make good on the reward of family support and kindness that Nnu Ego anticipated as a return for her years of devotion to her husband and children though undermines her well-being. Nnu Ego's suffering derives not only from her lack of connection to her children, but also from the conduct of her polygamous and sometimes abusive second husband, Nnaife Owolum, who, like her first husband, Amatokwu, eventually abandons her. The emotional and physical abandonment of Nnu Ego by Nnaife and their children eventually brings about her downward slide into psychic disorientation and physical deterioration.

In Bâ's *So Long a Letter* the institutionalisation of Jacqueline Diack is evidently precipitated by the infidelity of her husband, Samba, a medical doctor. Jacqueline, from the Ivory Coast, lives in Senegal and "enjoyed life" (46), but Samba betrays his wife and seems oblivious to the denigration of Jacqueline and their children that his behavior entails. He "did not bother to hide his [sexual] adventures, respecting neither his wife nor his children" (44); Jacqueline begins to suffer both emotional and bodily disturbances as a result. She "complained," at one point, "of a disturbing lump in her chest, under her left breast; she said she had the impression that a sharp point had pierced her there and was cutting through her flesh right to her very bones" (44). In other words, the nexus of her physical pain is close to her heart. Jacqueline undergoes a battery of tests, but no physical pathology, such as cancer, is found. Her friends try "everything to draw this sister out of her private hell" (45), tranquilizers are ordered for her by more than one doctor, and she is given "a series of shock treatments," authorised by the head of the Neurology Department (47). This physician remarks to her that "the problem is that you are depressed, that is . . . not happy. You wish the conditions of life were different from what they are in reality, and this is what is torturing you" (47). The head of Neurology thus holds Jacqueline and her unrealistic outlook as responsible for her own torment. At the same

time, no evidence is given that this or any of the other doctors who treat Jacqueline ask what *she* thinks is causing her depression, and one may infer that they do not really want to know.

Both Nnu Ego and Jacqueline are at the mercy of a patriarchal power order that ultimately denies them their subjectivity and the kinds of personal fulfillment they previously and reasonably had expected that they could attain. These emotional privations become manifest in the symptoms of physical distress that overtake them. From Michel Foucault's perspective, "nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power" (57-58). Power, according to Foucault, "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (39). The exercise of power by previously mentioned characters and societal factors are largely beyond the ability of these women to alter. Consequently, they suffer from family losses – specifically, husbands and, in the case of Nnu Ego, children as well. For Nnu Ego these losses are fatal – despite the resilience and even heroism she displays in surmounting obstacles through much of her life; but Jacqueline manages to locate inner reserves of strength, partly in response to encouraging words from the Head of Neurology, to transcend her sorrow: "Jacqueline . . . had left the interview already half-cured. She knew the heart of her illness and would fight against it. She was morally uplifted. She had come a long way, had Jacqueline! . . . . [Her] ordeal [had a] happy ending" (47). A slight semantic contrast lies in this passage between "half-cured" and "knew the heart of her illness." May we locate in these two assessments of Jacqueline's condition a suggestion that the power to transcend depression lay essentially within Jacqueline's heart but that such power did not resolve another half of the reason that despair had overtaken her in the first place – namely, Samba's betrayal? In all events, Jacqueline's determination to free herself from prolonged morbidity evidently allows her to resume the "enjoy[ment] of life" (46).

Like Jacqueline and Nnu Ego, Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* also is devastated by family losses. She is resilient and intelligent but, like Nnu Ego and Jacqueline, is afflicted by an undiagnosed malaise, one that stems from applications of male, and, to some extent, female power that are beyond her control. Because a large portion of the

novel is set during the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War (1967-70), Olanna endures an array of war-related traumas and privations, yet remarkably she never suffers from those circumstances or an identifiable disease. Rather, she is laid low three times from emotional trauma, and in each case; arguably, the trauma involves forms of abandonment. In the first instance Olanna discovers that her partner and future husband, Odenigbo, has, while Olanna is away, cheated on her with Amala, the servant of his unnamed mother. This outcome has been plotted by the mother and results in Amala's pregnancy, another outcome the mother has sought. The second time that Olanna experiences trauma in the novel literally immobilizes her: her beloved aunt, uncle, and pregnant cousin are brutally murdered in one of the state-sponsored anti-Igbo pogroms in northern Nigeria that precipitate the war. Olanna suffers actual paralysis from this atrocity, which she may construe not merely as the horrific loss of deeply beloved family members, but also as the abandonment of her, her family, and her people by her nation, Nigeria. The third instance of Olanna's emotional desolation occurs when her twin sister, Kainene Ozobia, disappears near the end of the war after entering Federal Nigerian territory to obtain supplies for the refugee center that she directs. By the end of the novel Olanna has become enmeshed in forms of denial over this loss of her sister.

The empty space and silence that replace Kainene are made the more oppressive to Olanna, as well as to Kainene's partner, Richard, by the fact that, as Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo remarks, "there is no witness to Kainene's supposed death and, therefore, not even words on which to base a funeral" (122). Another reason that Kainene's disappearance overwhelms Olanna is that prior to and during the Biafran war she had endured a years-long period of estrangement from her twin, whom, as Dodgson-Katiyo observes, Olanna felt was the "missing part of herself" (120). The sisters end their silence – which ensued from Olanna's betrayal of Kainene, a response to Odenigbo's betrayal of her [Olanna] – and reconcile partly due to the transformative consequences of war. But now, after her sister's disappearance, "Olanna is," in Dodgson-Katiyo's words, "unable to accept that she has lost Kainene" (122).

Previously Olanna was unsettled by the potentially impenetrable silence of death as she recalled her aunt, who, with other members of

the aunt's family, had been murdered in the anti-Igbo Northern pogroms that helped precipitate the Biafran war: "Perhaps Aunty Ifeka could see this [pro-Biafra] rally now, and all the people here, or perhaps not, if death was a silent opaqueness. Olanna shook her head, to shake away the thoughts. . ." (205). The disappearance of Kainene at the end of the war reinforces for Olanna the dread of this kind of mortal silence. In addition, the disappearance, forces on Olanna the renewal of wordlessness from Kainene, whose silence during their years of estrangement contribute to Olanna's recurring depression.

Dodgson-Katiyo elucidates Olanna's depression partly through reference to Freud and the concept of melancholy:

> Before, during and after the war, Olanna shows signs of melancholia. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" distinguishes between these two conditions, describing mourning as a "normal" state that will end after a period time and melancholia as pathological, in illness with no clearly defined end. . .. Both mourning and melancholia are centrally concerned with loss of a loved person or a loved object (such as one's country) or an ideal (such as liberty). Nevertheless, Olanna' experiences suggest that she suffers from some of the symptoms of depression that Freud describes as melancholia. (117-18).

While elements of depression or melancholy periodically overtake Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she has her own term for her sadness and shock, as if there is no old or new clinical phrase that captures it. That term is "Dark Swoops" (156-58), and the first time the Dark Swoops afflict her, after the murder of her aunt and other beloved family members in northern Nigeria, she loses the ability to walk and take care of herself. The event and the symptoms resonate with the Mariama Bâ's description in *So Long a Letter* of a nervous breakdown and its devastation, despite medical authority's tendency to dismiss it:

> Oh, nervous breakdown! Doctors speak of it in a detached, ironical way, emphasizing that the vital organs are in no way disturbed. You are lucky if they don't tell you that you are wasting their time with the ever-growing list of your illnesses – your head, throat, chest, heart, liver – that no X-ray can confirm. And yet what atrocious suffering is caused by nervous breakdowns! (43)

Olanna's symptoms also remind us of one's temporarily exhibited by Tambu, Tsitsi Dangarembga's narrator in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), who, in her abhorrence over the prospective Christian wedding of her parents, already married by virtue of a traditional Shona ceremony, "could not get out of bed . . . [her] muscles simply refus[ing] to obey" (168).

While Olanna, then, does suffer profoundly from the sense of abandonment by the man she loves and the loss of her twin, it is the murder of her family members in a state-sponsored action that paralyzes her. In Olanna's private experience of these murders, of their raw cruelty, she experiences a dimension of life that she had not known and abandonment by the world she thought she did know. Without that world she temporary loses parts of herself. In *Yellow Sun* as a whole, moreover, Olanna's sense of abandonment due to absence and infidelity disturbs her emotional and even physical wholeness.

Adichie as well as numerous African female authors have sought to identify the larger social, political, and economic conditions that produce psychic and physical disturbances in women. These authors repeatedly show that the more immediate causes of women's mental and physical illnesses are estrangement from loved ones and feelings of emotional rejection and worthlessness. Female characters endure acute symptoms of distress that, as with Olanna, persist for protracted periods. In a number of cases these disturbances are not clinically identified, yet they can immobilize women, as when her "dark swoops" overtake Olanna.

Paradoxically, though, the foregrounding of feminine physical and emotional distress in African literary works indirectly emphasizes the vital importance of women to the well-being of the African communities portrayed and to these societies' potential to flourish over time. So, while it is true that Olanna suffers from the losses occasioned by marital infidelity and war, it also is true that she manages to retain her composure and help sustain her family and the communities to which she belongs. Her strength and courage are evident, moreover, when, in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, she performs arduous labor demanded by Federal Nigerian soldiers and fends off being violated by one of them:

> Then she walked to the pile of wood planks and picked two up. At first, she staggered under the weight – she had not expected that they would be so heavy – then she steadied herself and began to walk up to the house. She was sweating when she came down. She noticed the hard eyes of a soldier following her, burning through her clothes. On her second trip up, he had come closer to stand by the pile.
>
> Olanna looked at him and then called, "Officer!"
> The officer had just waved a car on. He turned. What is it?"
>
> "You had better tell your boy here that it be better for him not to even think about touching me," Olanna said. (521)

Olanna's "boldness" at this tense moment (521), when she and her family are at the mercy of angry and physically violent Nigerian soldiers, almost certainly spares her from being raped by the soldier who closes in on her. Her faltering denial of Kainene's loss, notwithstanding, Olanna remains before, during, and after this scene the central moral force of her family.

A central tension thus emerges in the cumulative portrayal of women in a range of African novels: while females make essential, life-giving contributions to the health of their communities, as Olanna repeatedly does in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, their own well-being is routinely diminished by contradictory and degrading forces imposed upon them. This tension may fracture the psychic wholeness that the women naturally seek: "in many novels by African women . . . a woman is . . . divided against herself: she loves to serve her family and society but often finds that her service denies her basic humanity as much as it supports and develops it" (Davies and Fido 324). This is the kind of double-bind that breed depression, and sometimes despair and pathology in women portrayed in African fiction. And while Olanna's case has its unique features, due in part to her personal experiences of war and betrayal, we may discern in her losses, the depression they trigger, and the fortitude that enables her to survive and even lead, a bond of kinship with other African female characters.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

# 1

# Review of D. Gnanasekaran's *A Divine Visit and The Human Touch* – A Story Collection of Human Pathos

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[Gnanasekaran, D. *A Divine Visit and The Human Touch*. Bluerose Publishers, 2019. 163 pp.]

D. Gnanasekaran's second story collection *A Divine Visit and The Human Touch* contains fifteen well-written stories which are predominantly marked by an intimate and urgent sense of passion. It deals with the lives of people and what their real-life interactions are like. The memory of the stories refreshes the readers in a gripping narration. It is a collection of insightful human element that stands in the forefront. To him, every image that leaves an impression is the seed of a story. Inspiration could come from the simplest things in life. Every experience in life adds to your art and widens the perspective. "Each individual is going to be uniquely different" drew my attention as to how much Gnanasekaran fuels a kind of interest among the readers. It is to his credit that these stories get the gamut of emotions that affected, or appealed to his readers. It is not his readers who are judges but he himself becomes a connoisseur of human pathos in the world around him. A creative writer uses those situations in which he either experiences or observes them. In the story collection, Gnanasekaran appears both as an experienced citizen and an observer of life around him. The stories entitled 1) A Divine Visit 2) Mass Leader 3) Sorcerer Grandpa 4) All Out 5) In

Search of Mother 6) Last Dinner 7) Deadline 8) A Wormy Mind 9) Nightmare 10) Inamorata 11) The Gift 12) Bad Touch 13) Call Me dad For Once 15) Ponamma, An Altruist are perfect gems that move around facts and realities. The ordinary gets a sublime treatment thus the collection's richly textured prose ripples like shot silk with regular shafts of brilliant imagery, anecdotes and elements from the past appearing and reappearing in the form of lives experiences. The scope and grandeur of story collection is vast, serious, and socially multi-dimensional. The stories are fairly longer, pithy, compact to the point of brevity. It is what I reckon to be a masterly collection. Gnanasekaran is undoubtedly "a Walking Encyclopaedia" whose power of expression and narrative technique hold the readers in rapt attention. It is no exaggeration to put his skills in presenting those stories. Of course, as a reader, I find that the collection is a brilliant amalgamation of past and present in its truest existence that finally casts a dark shadow in a few stories and at others, an awakening of knowledge and wisdom. It is a collection of real places and real incidences as we watch in contemporary society. Real incidents are viewed through multiple lenses and common, everyday images run like a leitmotif through an excellent narrative to the finish. All the stories deal exclusively with common people and everyday situations. In the run up to the first story which is entitled *A Divine Visit,* Gnanasekaran takes the readers to somewhat a fairy tale that deals with the unexpected visit of the Monkey-God and that finally left the inmates and the belongings in a chaos and disorder. In Indian context which the writer predominantly focuses it is more of a divine visit and he still remembers how his beloved mother persuades him like," son, my dear son, For Heaven's sake, don't harm the visitor" (3). Usually, people worship animals as representing Gods. In the story, his mother pleads with him, "No, no, dear son, for goodness sake, you shouldn't say like that. It is blasphemous to say so. We shouldn't call it a monkey"(3). The appearance of monkey was seen as a manifestation of a divine visit in the incarnation of Lord Anjaneya. He recalls it as, "I respected her religious sentiments with deep admiration. She did not mind her persistence in being religiously over-zealous" (4). In continuation to the strong belief of Indians and their practices, the writer observes how his mother recounts from the past, "Normally, believe me, he won't visit homes.

He may visit the premises outside a house but he is not likely to enter into a house like royals. Today, you are abundantly blessed since he has chosen our house to leave his divine footmarks inside our house. Our house has become a sacred one after his visit" (5). Such comments are but a reflection of past into present bringing back the ancient Indian system of beliefs and rituals. His mother, as the writer recollects, had a knack of telling stories from myths and legends in her own rustic style. It is significant to note that Indians whose strong beliefs are rooted in fairy tales are back into action once again. This story is noted for chaos, disorder, abrupt interruptions, belief system, disturbed state upon the visit of monkey who is revered to be an incarnation of Lord Anjaneya. Gnansekaran exposes the hollowness of Indians since ancient times. Any belief has to be suitably justified. Indians follow the fairy tales in true spirit. In the end, Gnanasekaran delved deep into whole episode and observed that, "To me, her laughter was as mysterious as the monkey's visit. I reflected: why is she laughing? Is she laughing to mean that I'm in complete ignorance of such legendary stories? Did she find my ignorance horrifying? (7). True to his observations, India has been in the system of strong ancient beliefs in the midst of blind superstitions for centuries. Rightly, he exposes the blind beliefs that hold people on their feet. It is altogether a story of human sentiments and emotions. In the next story, "In Search of Mother", the writer presents the shocking revelations and betrayals in which a young girl, Meena faced it in the hands of her grandfather, Venu. The focal point of the story is to find out whether Meena's mother is alive or not. It moves around endless questions which Venu evaded so cleverly in order that Meena should not learn the facts. Meena protested several times. "Her outburst was met with silence from him" (48). "Where is she now? (48). Venu listened to her in unbroken silence. A resolute Meena was bent on cracking the secret held in suspense for years. After a series of queries, Venu convinced Meena but she was undeterred in her efforts. All his curt replies yielded more pressing questions by Meena. Charumathi, his wife, must have leaked it to Meena. As things stand out, she asked her husband, Venu, "How long can we hide the truth from her" (49). Soon, the story took a twist and turn. Embarrassments caused much damage between two families. Mohan's marriage with Anu and subsequent shifts in family to Delhi

and finally Meena's birth – all these moved them amidst fights and arguments and finally to bigger problems. "Silly matters swelled into tasteless arguments which ultimately approached the flashpoint. Much squabbling and pleading followed" (50). Such disconnections between the parents put Meena into the care of her grandparents. Anu and Mohan argued endlessly for some time. The altercation muddied the situation over the trivial issue. Mohan left Anu and settled in his native town for he needed emotional and moral support at that juncture. They were not on good terms as couple. Then, Anu's mother asked her to leave Meena in the care of Mohan. "So, you can take your child, deposit it in Mohan's house and come away. Just do that. Nothing more" (53). Then Meena who was one and a half years old was deposited in Mohan's house. Since then, Meena has been with her grandparents. Gnanasekaran evokes human pathos in accurate description as "There is a general feeling that mother is always coeval with unfathomable profundity of compassion, love and solicitude. Mysteriously and painfully, Anu was an exception to this general perception" (53). Mohan was remarried to Leela later. His efforts to take Meena to Bengaluru failed. Extreme desperations followed. Meena was left to the care of her grandparents. The climax gets emotionally packed up in the end when Venu took Meena to Jaipur to see her mother Anu who was working in a hospital. Thus, the long waits and tensions that Meena underwent for some years came to a happy conclusion. Venu felt greatly unburdened. Indian situations usually witness such cases of negligence and violations when children are left with their grandparents. It is at first emotions and tensions and finally separations and divorces between parents that left young kids at the hands of grandparents. It is not an isolated case but a representative story in the end which Gnanasekaran rightly exposed as a social reformer. Unnecessary fights between couple put Meena into the world of chaos and tensions. Endless waits cause mental traumas. The plight of a young girl is succinctly portrayed through the story. Similar tales have happened in India in the past. In yet another brilliant story of contemporary life, the touch of human pathos figured prominently in "Last Dinner". It revolves around a newly married couple by name Dinesh and Divya whose married life ended in a tragedy of sorts. It came like a bolt from the blue. Dinesh, a multi-national employee, working in Dubai, was

married to Divya. He came to India some three months ago. Though it was a brief separation for the young couple, it was painful for her. As it was the hundredth day of their marriage, they wanted to celebrate it. They planned it a day before. They wanted to do trekking. As usual, Divya prepared the special dishes. They were dressed up accordingly for trekking. They desperately missed all the fun as the young couple. "It is quite natural for a husband, separated for livelihood compulsions very soon after his marriage, to wallow through such emotional depression when his wife suffers as a green widow at the other end" (62). They felt like Superman and Superwoman flying high in the air. Suddenly, the part of the mountain has put on a flaming face. Soon, it was like a wildfire. The fire was alarmingly rushing towards them. In order to escape from the fire, they jumped from crag to crag. The flames of the fire were just behind them as if letting their sharp tongues lap up the couple alive. They screamed for help. Dinesh was burning along with the twigs and leaves. Divya had closely looked at him in a bid to put out the fire. They became united by the flames and Divya too was in complete union with Dinesh. Gnanasekaran described the scene as, "Light and shadows danced before their eyes beating a grotesque tattoo. Memories drifted back and forth, but they couldn't collate them into a recognizable unit" (66). It was the last dinner for them. Through this dark lane of chaos, they ran all the fun-filled moments of the short span of their married life. "Last Dinner" became eternally silent for them. Life took an unexpected turn and twist for Dinesh and Divya. The story presents that life is temporary though people may take it for granted. All that they had dreamed ended in a death-trap. They died on the spot. Nothing is permanent on earth. "Nightmare" is a story of nightmarish experiences for the author whose auto-biographical account of episode gets dominantly covered for certain chaos and unnecessary drama that finally uncovered. The settings are usually his farmhouse where he and his brother applied pesticides through the day and were taking rest. All drama unfolded when his father came to inquire their safety in the farm-house. Most of the countryside life depicts such incidents nowadays. His father found his brother absent at the site. There was a big confusion and they searched for him all around the place His prayers to Murugan and his efforts to engage a swimmer to find him in the well yielded

no results. All his family members became panicky. They had a sleepless nightmare. They moved all around cinema theatre in the hope of finding him. Finally, his brother was traced in the cattle shed. They suspected the worst to befall them. "My father rushed inside and found my elder brother standing motionless and blinking his eyes. He pulled him out and we all looked at my brother with a mixed feeling of relief and anger" (98). He just hid inside the manger just when he returned from a cinema theatre. He was afraid of calling them. The story ended on a happy note when his brother had surfaced before them. "Nightmare" left them in futile searches and his brother had hidden from them. This caused much embarrassment throughout the sleepless night. Having looked at the story, I find such instances 'very common recurrences' in Indian context. "The Gift" is a fine story of many reflections in life. Rajesh, the father, gifted a medium –size rubber dog for his daughter, Priya. It went on a few funny situations after Bubbly (Rubber Dog) was accepted as a member of the family. It is but natural that children are tempted to buy artificial toys. After many twists in the story, the gift that Priya expected from her father ended in a tragedy of sorts. Since her father was occupied in the office, he could not pick up Priya to the shopping mall. But to his surprise and shock, Rajesh could see Bubbly also running behind her. He found that something got stuck under the left front wheel. Then, he got out of the car and found that Bubbly was in a pool of blood. Its crushed head lay at the feet of Priya lying unscathed. Priya then asked for the gift in her ignorance. The rubber dog saved the life of Priya who was about to die then and there. This was really a gift of life. "Bubbly had given its life as a gift to Priya and saved her" (118). Priya was still peering at the gift lying blissfully on the car's rear seat as innocent as the little girl. Gnanasekaran concludes the story that Priya had an irresistible temptation to take the doll and fondle it. Thus, the story leaves life's little ironies at the end. Animal gifted life to Priya and it evokes human pathos in complete faith. Life is full of unexpected gifts from different sources. It leaves a message that the most loving and caring in the world get gifted. "Bad Touch" is a story of reflections about the safety of girls. It is further a story of many precautions that Kalpana, as a responsible mother, felt and experienced. It is a story of how the girls are molested, raped and killed by those ruffians. One such incident was

reported from a TV News Channel in Kashmir. "A ten-year old girl was molested to death by eight men in Kashmir" (121). This news has put Kalpana into deep contemplation about the nefarious activities going on in the country. She questioned the lawlessness in the country. As a responsible and dutiful mother, Kalpana was under mental trauma. There are no stringent laws in the country for such heinous crimes. Having undergone the intensity of molestation on TV channel, Kalpana had visualised the appearance of the girl molested in her thoughts. Horrific incidents loomed large in her mind. Insecurity of girls was troubling her disturbed mind. Conspirators and betrayers rule the world. Gnanasekaran observes that the physical scar may wear away but the mental scar will always remain. Kalpana is worried about her daughter's safety in such situations. That reflects a mother's anxiety about a safe world for her daughter in future. Her line of thinking, as the author rightly emphasised, had continued. All the frantic searches about the girl had failed in the end. A law-abiding author questions, "what are the laws for?" strongly reflect the state of poor governance and sentence of punishment for the crimes unchecked. This story calls for urgent implementation of Laws necessary for delivery of justice. "Bad Touch" symbolizes the atrocities and molestations on women by men on shoulders and other parts of the body in physical wounds or injuries. When there is a bad touch, there is also a good touch. An appreciation of someone is regarded as a good touch while a molestation of girls is indeed a bad touch. This was how Kalpana alerted her daughter Brinda against bad and good touch. Thus, the story is both a rumination and reflection of safety concerns as the primary focus for girls in particular against all bad touches intentionally inflicted upon in the society. "Good Chemistry" is a story of harmonious relationship between two individuals. It focuses on two people and between people and it is obvious that they are attracted to each other or like each other very much. It is a story of ambition and achievement. It is further a story of understanding between two people. The mother, Sathya had a dream. "Not all we want comes true, not all the dreams that blossomed have borne fruit" (143). The dream was to prepare her daughter, Bhavana for a dance competition conducted by a popular TV channel and win the first prize. Having a dream is good. But fulfilling that dream into realities

is always challenging. A good chemistry emerges between the mother and the daughter in the end. The show began. It was a duet song involving Bhavana with a male – partner. All the judges except the Woman judge gave away ten out of ten. The woman judge has given just nine marks that irritated Sathya and later Bhavana. The judge revealed her weaknesses in body language and poor expressions when she was dancing with her male counterpart. Expectations were running high for Sathya but performance put her in agony and frustration. What was required was a good chemistry in the end for accomplishment of a performance. When Bhavana attained puberty, all problems started from her. Ceremonies restricted her to sit back at home for a week. Later, her cautious warnings about her moving with Sriram, her next-door neighbour, brought her so many questions about her. "Sathya advises her daughter not to go along with her neighbour, Sriram anymore" (149). Thus, Bhavana is not able to understand her mother's sudden change of attitude. She is forbidden to continue her classes too. At this Sathya feels that she is both a woman and a seasoned mother, and a combination of intuition and instinct developed over many years. She needs to watch her daughter as the world goes by her because adolescence is the watch word here. She feels a certain responsibility laid upon her. Gnanasekaran rightly titled the story as "Good Chemistry". What is required between mother and daughter is good chemistry. A good understanding dispels doubts between them.

In conclusion, I reckon that Gnanasekaran diagnoses the society by touching the prevailing issues in elegant narration. He selects the themes according to the contemporary times and situations. The narrative technique is nicely done in terms of plot, point of view, character and style. He adopts a style that is remarkably simple and easily intelligible. His power of narration is gripping and his command of vocabulary is extraordinary. Human Pathos dominates all the stories. Contemporary realities are the hallmark of the collection. He is for sure "A Walking Encyclopaedia" through the story collection.

# 2

# Review of *Once There Were Wolves*

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[Charlotte McConaghy. *Once There Were Wolves*. Flatiron Books, 2021. 258 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. $27.99.]

Following the trend set earlier by the climate fiction novel *Migrations*, Charlotte McConaghy's latest novel, *Once There Were Wolves*, extends her concern about climate change and human intervention in it. The protagonist-cum-narrator, Inti Flynn, narrates her experiences from early childhood till her attainment of motherhood. This novel is a complex tale, touching upon so many important issues, including sexual assault, women's physical and verbal abuse, poisonous relationships, and sisterhood. It talks about climatic changes and how humans are messing with the process of life and ecosystems of Earth. It is a homage to nature, and readers can sense an immediate urgency to save nature. McConaghy's luscious portrayals of landscapes and fauna are mesmerizing. In an interview, while discussing the book, the author blurted out her objective behind this project. She analysed the ill-effect of killing wolves and its consequences on the natural habitat:

> Killing the wolves was a massive blunder on our part. Ecosystems need apex predators because they elicit dynamic ecological changes that ripple down the food chain, and these are known as 'trophic cascades.' With their return the landscape will change for the better – more habitats for wildlife will be created, soil health increased, flood waters reduced, carbon emissions captured. Animals of all shape and size will return to these lands.

The novel chronicles the story of a young biologist and environmentalist, Inti Flynn, and her arduous yet ambitious project of reintroducing three packs of grey wolves (Abernethy pack, Tanar pack, and Glenshee pack) into the Cairngorms National Park in the Scottish Highlands. Along with her entire team, she aims to bring about a balance in the ecosystem of Scotland, which the interference of the

Anthropocene has completely eroded. Inti faces resistance from the local farmers and the people living nearby, who fear that the resettlement of wolves will have a damaging effect on their lives. However, Inti never bows down; instead, she proceeds with her plan with full force and sets the wolves free from their container. Subsequently, there are many murders and killings of cattle and humans in the novel, and as expected, all the charges fall upon the wolves. In the end, we come to know that the murderer is not any of the wolves but the hysterical elder sister of Inti, whose name is Aggie Flynn.

The narrator and protagonist, Inti Flynn's characterisation, is the fascinating part of the novel. She has acquired an immense love for nature and wild animals from her father, a wood logger. The novel is filled with instances in which Inti expresses her most profound love for nature while also mourning the disruptions and destructions caused by humans to the ecosystem. McConaghy personifies the forest as, "The forest has a beating heart we can't see . . . They're like us, a family. Stronger together" (15). Another queer aspect of her is that she suffers from a syndrome known as "mirror-touch synaesthesia," a condition that makes a person feel the same sensations of touch as the person they are looking at, or the person feels everything she sees happening to other people. This rare neuro-psychological disorder manifests in the first line of the novel when Inti sees her father killing and cutting a rabbit for food. She comments, "When we were eight, Dad cut me open from throat to stomach" (1). The story also unfolds the intensity of the emotional relationship shared by Inti and her sister Aggie, who has a speech impediment.

The novel can be studied from an ecofeminist perspective. Throughout the novel, the readers encounter events where both nature and women are exploited to their core. The characters, such as Lainey and Aggie, get trapped in toxic marital relationships where they completely lose their individuality and get severely tortured by their male counterparts, Stuart and Gus, respectively. The condition of Aggie is much worse, as she, throughout the novel, is being treated as a sexual object to satiate the carnal desires of not only her husband, Gus, but also his cousin. Her sexual exploitation is so brutal that she nearly goes insane, traumatically admitted to the hospital. Like these women, the exploitation of nature and wildlife is also glaringly visible in the novel. Charlotte talks about the human

intervention in the ecosystem that led to the destruction of a vast forest patch and the near extinction of wolves and other wild animals in Scotland. Charlotte's description of humanity's detachment from nature holds much significance here, as she claims, ". . . the world turned wrong when we started separating ourselves from the wild, when we stopped being one with the rest of nature, and sat apart."

As Charlotte McConaghy's detailed and evocative writing weaves these strands together, we are forced to ponder how we communicate, connect, and trust each other. Inti's empathic nature allows us to comprehend that the wolves have their personalities and a sense of belonging to the pack. There are times when it is difficult to tell if wolves are more predatory creatures than humans. Aggie's trauma also allows us to see the consequences of speech impediment and the limitations of human verbal communication, as Inti struggles to convey the advantages of her initiative. We are perplexed as to how the groups can dispute whether the plundering of our environment is genuine when we are constantly confronted with factual data. In the end, we are troubled by these dilemmas as we consider how to chart a sustainable course ahead soon.

The novel's narrative is gripping and compels the readers to finish it in one go. If the author could have taken some more liberty in giving out more descriptions of the environmental degradation and climate change crisis behind the near extinction of wolves from Scotland, the novel could have been more aptly suited to the title. At some points in the novel, primarily when the author describes the subplot, a murder mystery, the reader might feel alienated from the main plot, the wolf, and the environmental crisis. While McConaghy offers insightful viewpoints on the appropriateness of rewilding, the work delves further into epistemological issues. Knowing how we know what we know is under severe strain in a society beset by changing climate and the need to adjust to formerly unimaginable situations. Despite mounting evidence that we are leaving our earth uninhabitable for human existence, we continue to argue over fundamental reality. Every day, we are presented with the limitations of language. Moreover, as McConaghy demonstrates in this magnificent book, the limitations of language inevitably lead to the limitations of compassion.