

ISSN 2347-5951

# GJLL



**Phenomenal Literature**  
A Global Journal devoted to

# **Language and Literature**

Vol.2 No.2 | Year 2017

Chief Editor:

**Dr. VIVEKANAND JHA**

Associate Editor:

**Dr. RAJNISH MISHRA**

Review Editor:

**Dr. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY**



**AUTHORS PRESS**

Publishers of Creative & Scholarly Books

ISSN 2347-5951

# PHENOMENAL LITERATURE

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**Language and Literature**

**Volume 2 ♦ Number 2 ♦ January-March 2017**

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**AUTHORSPRESS**

**Worldwide Circulation through Authorspress Global Network**

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Website: www.authorspressbooks.com

**PHENOMENAL LITERATURE**

*A Global Journal Devoted to  
Language and Literature*

(Volume 2, Number 2, January-March 2017)

**ISSN 2347-5951**

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## EDITORIAL

Phenomenal Literature reiterates its commitment and continues to devote itself completely to language and literature which opened up new frontiers in creative writing, research, scholarly reviews and interviews of eminent poets and writers pushing the boundaries within the literary tradition to literary expression, socio-political upheavals, human conditions and their perceptions across the globe. The current issue like previous issues has included eminent poets, researchers, reviewers to lend the journal an academic expression and literary sensibility. Two research papers on North-East literature record the lives and history of the people in a particular time and milieu. This, coupled with voices of resistance against oppression and marginalization, and followed up by assertion and pride in their unique identity, has forged a new literary sensibility which India shares with African and other world literatures. There have been unique local factors which gave their literatures a new direction, a new sensibility and idiom. This issue has given adequate space to poets from home and the world, recognising the importance of their versification, innovations and experimentations suitable to be set to music and meant for larger audience. The prose section carries a bunch of creative writings by the eminent authors from India and different parts of the world celebrating the rich legacy of imagination. We are also carrying an interview engaging in an illuminating conversation. One of the first impressions that a reader would draw is the range and quality with which

the writers would engage them in intellectual and philosophical debates.

The next issue of our other journal, *VerbalArt: A Global Journal Devoted to Poets & Poetry* is scheduled to come out by 30 Sep 17. For this issue the last date for submissions is 31 July 17. You are requested to spread the word about it. More information on its submission guidelines can be obtained from its website at [www.verbalart.in](http://www.verbalart.in)

We have renovated the website of this journal too into a responsive site. Now we can enjoy the journal on a mobile, tablet, desktop and all other similar portable devices. There is a feedback-form embedded on the website where you can leave your honest criticism which will further help us in improving the quality of the journal for which we have been committed right from the beginning.

Indian subcontinent is reeling under scorching summer. Wish you happy, calm and cool reading.

– Editors

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## POETRY

### 1

## For a New Life

U. ATREYA SARMA

Whatever I prattled or cooked up  
I presumed poetry it was, and I a poet.

Soon I realised:

It was just a silly drool, a surface flash  
A laborious, contrived wordy concoction  
A baby made to be born in its sixth month.

Whatever I managed to dish out  
Was just the spittle of ideas  
Half-baked, premature or clichéd.

It dawned upon me:

Whatever comes out from the tongues of the noble souls  
Turns into poetry, in its pristine purity, and divine grace.

A glaring reality:

A worthless, ill-memorable life I lived.  
I had hit the end of a blind alley  
So it was far too late now to mend the course.  
Could a river that hurtles down be ever swept back?

It was time only to yearn and pray  
For a new birth and life –  
If ever one could be there.



## 2

### Cycles

JOHN C. MANNONE

*The end of the age of demons will come  
when flowers will be begot within flowers,  
and fruits within fruits.*

– The Mahabharata

When purple twilight blushes  
the blood of a sackclothed moon,

and the sun scorches  
the horizon red,

I will fall through sky  
like Icarus with melted wings,

and black clouds  
of locust will swarm to blot the sun

as the ground cracks open  
effusing a sulfurous stench,

and the oceans will drink the poison  
air swollen with fire,

and tsunamis will pummel shores,  
salt stinging land.

Buildings will dance on liquid  
sand – concrete, steel twisting –

as people stumble on rubble  
becoming their gravestones.

But centuries from now  
when my frame is stripped,

with my flesh macerated into soil  
and my bones ossified, knuckles

clawing dirt, the skull of my  
mouth burning,

I will be reborn as serpent,  
my rebirth, naked of all intrigue.

And the ground will quake again  
filling my nostrils.

Then, this garden will be green once more  
for a little while before a tinge of violet

smears the dawn, the attar of white rose petals  
lingering just a little longer.



### 3

## Floodgate

C.L. KHATRI

You have broken all walls  
even the roof is removed  
floodgate is open.  
It's flowing unbridled  
with original energy.  
Why are you worried now  
for what it carries?  
Everything comes out of everything  
nectar and venom  
all have equal rights  
in the surging tide of flood.  
Flood knows no rule,  
does not differentiate.  
Well if you can withstand it.  
But don't seek shore  
or a wall to hide  
a roof to climb up.  
Sorry friends it's devoid of human brain.  
You have to compete with  
fishes, dolphins, snakes  
men and mammals swimming, floating.  
Fend for yourself or float like garbage  
it is carrying along.  
You have to live with  
both desert sand and fertile soil.  
Who knows what mystery or prophecy  
lies within its swollen womb?



4

**Green Fields**

K.V. RAGHUPATHI

Walking along the black ridge of the alluvial soil  
I gaze at the green fields to the west,  
vast expanse like my green consciousness  
I strut, stumble and tumble  
and my left foot slithers like ice dune  
and dips into chocolate sludge  
and my clothes soon dotted with postmodern designs.  
Watch tall rising eucalyptus like pagodas,  
an hour later, I rolled up a little mound  
like a cock that roosts, I stood.  
White clouds flecked my eyelids  
I see how my life unfolded like the green fields  
I am lying on a warm ground  
as the full blown sun dips down against the blue expanse sky.



## 5

### Nature

**BINOD MISHRA**

We always live in your company  
and learn not your ways  
to become everyone's friend,  
always keen, kind and compassionate  
gratifying everyone's needs  
in all seasons.

We always unburden  
all our shrieks, sorrows and severity.  
You receive them gladly without groans  
and never deceive like humans  
in love, friendship and brotherhood.  
Do our agonies make you strong?

We always recreate and yet you create  
new meadows in deserts too.  
We put to test your perpetual rest,  
you always squeeze all our cries  
into meaningful silences over the tops  
and sweet notations  
rise and flow in your daughter's throat.



## 6

### To My Boy: In Times of War

POORNIMA LAXMESHWAR

Travail in the dawn of a foggy city  
You were not meant to occur  
Built under the haunting rubble  
Slick as a landmine  
Muscle by muscle, we made you

Replacing dreams with corroded locks  
Your tiny soft hands never knew sand castles  
But they clearly distinguished – water and blood  
My boy! What do I give you  
But endurance  
Of the trees that stand noiseless  
Even when the saw is infiltrating  
To and fro, to and fro

This night is no different  
Anonymity of the known enemies still trail us  
How we crave for the routine  
Only we know  
Complaints about lazy milkmen  
Yawning doormen, everyday gossip of the neighbours  
Climbing trees, playing with friends fearlessly  
All of that is disremembered normalcy

As a mother what can I tell you  
You are just five years old  
Just hold on, my boy  
For you shall see a better sunshine  
That is made of promises  
Of peace  
Of 'home'.



7

**Spring**

JAMES G. PIATT

Spring arrived with a symphony  
Of pastel blush, like a flowered sprite prancing with colorful  
garlands around. Her neck that has come back from Winter's  
tomb to rouse nature's Loveliness throughout the land. It  
arrived with the promise of sweet Scents, like a honeyed  
memory evolving from a long winter sleep.

Spring clothed with the aroma of damp Soil, is alive with  
transparent brooks that Flow In flower-laden meadows  
where the heat from the sun warms the earth and the  
coolness of a placid pond greets weary hikers.

With the advent of spring, sweet fragrances of wildflowers  
infuse the atmosphere, and temperate winds coil around  
gnarled oak trees searching for sky, causing them to undulate  
to the rhythms of life. Spring, a mysterious time when  
temperate rains dampen the earth with glimmering moisture  
in the early sunrise, and newborns arouse to the beauty of  
life, a time when the elderly can pause for a brief time to  
renew their souls and gather their breath from winter's harsh  
trials.



(This poem first published in *Scarlet Leaf*)

## 8

### Water Font

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

Within these joyous moments,  
nothing could have spoiled our intimacy  
except a scratching on the outside window.  
Like forsythia, we become pendant in rain,  
shielding sensitive portions  
from the agitation of sparrows.

Within those joyous moments,  
my thoughts are kinetic and cantilevered  
by a flourish of your eyelashes.  
The hum of sunrise softens to inaudible.  
Together, we give marzipan to morning;  
a yellow preceding downpour.



## 9

### Silence

TEJASVI SAXENA

Silence is symphony of bare homes  
That flourishes in rhythm of longing  
Where dust of space piles on clocks  
On books and pens and drawing curtains

On mirror which myths the faces of smiles  
Of pain, of rapture, of calm, of delight  
All await to hear a sound  
A whisper, a talk or laugh resounds

An empty chaos  
Where, absence floats  
The same one that longs to embrace  
The silhouettes of its lost frames

Such silence perturbs through lively tenors  
A whirring of wings  
Or, crackling leaves  
Chirping crickets  
Or, humming bees  
Gracious visitors of such homes  
Who promise to wait for a life  
A dweller to play music of soulful vibe



# 10

## Price of Our Souls

FABRICE POUSSIN

Where have they all gone this eve,  
the good souls at play in the fields  
of our daily lives?

These serene, gleeful shiny little souls.

There was a day, timeless as we knew them,  
when you could feel them all around,  
frolicking like joyous butterflies.

These souls in the summers we recall.

It may be they were once captured,  
by a darkness without transparent origin,  
to a depth unfathomed.

Souls, sparks of light in stormy hours.

So few remain now, electricity prevalent,  
a clarity at midnight, yet still darkness,  
now a veil upon this land.

Souls, yours and mine, but for how long.



## 11

### Nights-Soothing and Frightening

SURYASRI SAHA

The same night that soothes me,  
Also frightens me at times...  
The darkness seems to get darker,  
and clutters the mind with fear...  
gives a wary feeling,  
Its that time when quietness prevails  
and everything seems to become still...

Sleeping in my bed,  
Seeking security from my pillow...  
I wonder what stories hides within  
the dark lanes and surroundings,  
In the quietness, even a little sound  
stirs the mind with horror...

The same night that frightens me  
also soothes me at times...  
It is at this time that solitude finds a place  
and it rests silently in my soul,  
The silence lets my thoughts to absorb me completely...

To give a better meaning to life  
and to every unsolved maze...  
The dark, still and quiet night  
helps me to connect with my soul,  
letting out every emotions hidden long...

Every night brings in  
varied emotions along,  
so many flashbacks, realizations, recognitions,  
So many pain, despair and frustrations...  
at the same time hopes, belief and peace

The same night that amazes me  
with its beauty,  
also shocks me with its cruelty...  
but it never fails to make me realize  
its unanimity...

The same night that soothes me also frightens me,  
The same night that frightens me also soothes me...



## 12

### Portrait of a Woman Poet

USHA AKELLA

She was beautiful, fluid as night,  
poems branched as tridents raised in battle,  
circuitous as conches of hidden murmurs,  
a childish voice enamored and narcissist,  
let poems drift as nails... trails of silk  
and flags of womanhood, the obsession with death;  
the romanticizing of madness and its imitation;  
she was sane as a sunset falling into a habit of night,  
Once they fished her from a lake; she came alive  
like a phoenix; it's the others around her who die daily,  
a hundred deaths a day to keep her alive.



## 13

### Haiku

PITAMBAR NAIK

Boundaries  
Illusions, love sweeps over  
All borders.

Once I will depart for ever  
Laying all great things dishevelled  
Time is so cruel.

Borders  
Fence wire, military posts  
Tensions hide in the bushes.

The beach  
A boundary of the tides  
Often you and I get tickling.

War  
A hate dance  
The devil tests his weapons.



## 14

### Nature or Nurture

J.T. WHITEHEAD

It's a big question mark.  
A snake crawls from its egg,  
learns quickly, then curls,  
& turns back on its origin:



## 15

### Stephenean Love Sonnet (Number 36)

STEPHEN GILL

The fine feelings of the fingers  
which fabricate feathers for me  
to flee from the airless shelters  
to watch the Canada geese  
on both sides of my walk  
savoring the felicity of the breeze.  
Long slender black-necked birds  
carry your ease in their flight.

I see your contours  
in remarkable array in forlorn cottages  
not afar  
which revolve around the hues  
in the beauty of the scenery  
of your glory in the greenery.  
The glaze of the vagrant shy moon  
wears a spiritual costume  
to pay at the altar of the waves  
the silvery tribute of your croon.



## SHORT STORY

### 1

## Letter from an Omniscient Racist

JUAN ZAPATA

You come from a land of strife. A land that is broken and ruled by fear – dead men, women, and children hang from bridges and streetlamps. Gunshots are heard outside the home and people get beheaded for sport. Drug lords and their friends come by and ask for payment for their “protection”. They gun you down should you refuse. And what about the police? Forget it, they’re paid off. Your home country’s soldiers are no better than those men either. They seize the innocent at random stops in public. They remove them from their cars and slam them on the unforgiving pavement, breaking teeth and faces. They point their assault rifles down and scream. They violate your rights, but you dare not report them. They’ll murder you, and how could you even report them? They wear masks of black, their faces bereft of all emotion, yet a sinister evil lurks beneath. And so what do you do? Or rather, not you, you’re a child – incapable of even a semblance of complex thinking. The decision falls to your parents, your guardians, your protectors. What do they do? They grab you and pack their belongings quickly and they flee. They flee to another land .....but don’t hold your breath. The storm isn’t over.

“Work hard in school!” they say. “Give it your best!” they say. They give you a stern look and tell you that education leads to a successful future. Ha – what liars, what deceivers, what fools. They screw you from the start and they know it, however good their intentions are. You have no future, it is destroyed the moment you leave your home country, the moment you are dragged across a patch of land. Why? Because they drag you here and turn you into a criminal. You don’t have any say – any choice – how can you? A mere child. But don’t put on your innocent face! No one cares. You’re a swine.

You do everything they ask. You are intelligent. You are talented – gifted. You have driven, fire, and passion. You’ve done everything close to perfection – a top student. Teachers praise your work ethic and say you will go far. And you, like a fool, get caught up in their words, start living a delusion. You are patriotic, you are strong, you are an athlete. You score high, colleges seek you, people are proud of you. You have everything! You have your part done, you followed orders. But despite all your accomplishments, you utterly failed. Why? Because you were screwed the moment you were brought into a country illegally as a child.

You see your friends, your peers, and many others alongside you begin to rise in the world. You are just as talented as they, if not more, but it doesn’t matter. You can’t rise with them. You become nobody. Nothing. Why? Because as an illegal you can’t enroll into a university. As an illegal you can’t be hired anywhere, not even in a petty McDonald’s. If you fall into poverty, that’s too bad, you can’t get welfare. Who are you to get it? You’re an alien. You don’t belong here. You don’t exist. And pray incessantly, little illegal, that you never get an injury, for the price will be too high to pay. You have no medical insurance. You can’t have any. *Wetback.*

They call you a rapist and a murderer. A thief and a swine. The very name of the place you come from is uttered with such hatred and disgust, it becomes derogatory. To be associated to your birth country becomes an insult, and stings like a slap to the face. Why? Because they don't have a shred of compassion and they believe anything they're told. They are gullible, most of them, and they view you as an enemy. Everyone's woes are blamed upon you – the vagrant who takes away their jobs, yet you can't even get one. And even if you're lucky enough to get one, it's not something one of the born-privileged would ever soil their hands with.

They blame their incompetence on you. They blame their insecurities on you. They blame a murder, not on the murderer, but on an entire people – on you. They hate you. But that's not the worst part. The gut-wrencher in this fiasco is that you love them. You love the place you were brought to. You love their language, their customs, their traditions. You love their culture, their mannerisms, their livelihood. This is all you know, this is your home .....in your heart. For it will never be that in the real, cold world. Remember that, illegal cur. Keep your head low, swine, or you'll be tossed back from whence you came.

Perhaps it would've been better if you'd been left behind in your country of origin. At least there you were an equal to those alongside you if you didn't get killed first. There you had a shot. This place you call home, you have nothing.



## 2

### For Laura

JAMES MULHERN

My grandmother sat on the toilet seat. I was on the floor just in front of her.

She brushed my brown curly hair until my scalp hurt.

“You got your grandfather’s hair. Stand up. Look at yourself in the mirror.”

My hair looked flat, like someone had laid a book on it overnight.

I touched my scalp. “It hurts.”

“You gotta toughen up, Aiden. Weak people get nowhere in this world. Your grandfather was weak. Addicted to the bottle. Your mother has an impaired mind and is in a nuthouse. And your father, he just couldn’t handle the responsibility of a child. People gotta be strong.” She bent down and stared into my face. Her hazel eyes seemed enormous. I smelled coffee on her breath. She pinched my cheeks.

I reflexively pushed her hands away.

“Life is full of pain, sweetheart. And I don’t mean just the physical kind.” She took a cigarette from her case on the back of the toilet, lit it, and inhaled. “You’ll be hurt a lot, but you got to carry on. You know what the British people used to say when the Germans bombed London during World War II?”

“No.”

“Keep calm and carry on.” She hit my backside. “Now run along and put some clothes on.” I was wearing just my underwear and t-shirt. “We have a busy day.”

I dressed in the blue jeans and a yellow short-sleeve shirt she had bought me. She stood in front of the mirror by the front door of the living room, holding a picture of my mother. She kissed the glass and placed it on the end table. Then she looked at herself in the mirror, arranged her pearl necklace, and put on bright red lipstick.

We drove to her friend Margie’s house. Margie was a smelly fat lady with a big white cat that always hissed at me.

“Don’t let him get out,” Margie yelled, as the cat pounced from behind the open door. “Arnold, don’t you dare run away!”

“I got him.” I had my arms wrapped around the white monster. He scratched my shirt.

“Why don’t you put him in the closet when you open the front door? We go through this every time,” my grandmother said, pushing past her towards the kitchen in the back of the house. “I gotta sit down. It’s hot as hell out there.”

Margie placed a tray of ham sandwiches, along with cheese and crackers on the round grey Formica table. I liked her wallpaper – white with the red outlines of trains. Her husband had been a conductor; he died when he got squished between two train cars.

“I don’t know how I feel about all those miracles Father Tom was going on about.” Margie placed a sandwich on a plate for me with some chips. “What ya want to drink, Aiden? I got nice lemonade.” Her two front teeth were red from

where her lipstick had smudged. And as usual she had white cat hairs all over her blue sweater, especially the ledge of her belly where the cat sat all the time.

“That sounds good.”

She smiled. “Always such a nice boy. Polite. You’ll never have any trouble with this one. Not like you did with Lorraine.”

“I hate when you call her that.”

“That’s her name ain’t it?” She poured my grandmother and me lemonade and sat down with a huff.

“That was my mother’s name, her formal name. I’ve told you a thousand times to call her Laura.”

“What the hell difference does it make?” Margie bit into her sandwich and rolled her eyes at me.

“Makes a lot of difference. My mother was a crackpot. I named my daughter Lorraine to be nice.”

“Well, Laura is... ” I knew Margie was going to say that my mother was a crackpot, too.

“Laura is what?” My grandmother put her sandwich down and leaned into Margie.

“Is a nice girl. She’s got problems, but don’t we all.” She reached out and clasped my hand. “Right, Aiden?”

“Yes, Margie.”

My grandmother rubbed her neck and spoke softly. “Nobody’s perfect. She’s got a few psychological issues is all. She’s a beautiful human being, and that’s what’s most important. One of the kindest people I’ve ever known.” Her eyes were shiny and her face flushed. Her bottom lip trembled. She looked at me. “Don’t you gotta use the bathroom?” She raised her eyebrows. That was her signal.

“Yes, I gotta pee really bad.”

Margie laughed and farted.

I made my exit just in time, creeping up the gray stairs. The rug in the upstairs hall was full of Arnold’s hair. Margie’s room was the last one on the left. I opened her jewelry case and took the diamond earrings and opal bracelet Nanna had told me about. Then I walked to the bathroom and flushed the toilet.

When I entered the kitchen they were still talking about miracles.

My grandmother passed our plates to Margie who had filled the sink with sudsy water.

“Let’s not forget about the fish,” my grandmother said.

Margie shook her head. “I don’t know Catherine,” She looked down. “It’s hard to believe that Jesus could have done all that. Why aren’t there miracles today?” I imagined a fish jumping into her face from the water in the sink.

My grandmother smiled at me. “Of course there are miracles today. As a matter of fact, I’m taking Aiden to that priest at Mission church. A charismatic healer is what they call him. Aiden’s gonna be cured, aren’t you, honey?”

“Cured of what?” Margie said.

“Oh he’s got a little something wrong with his blood is all. Too many white cells. Leukemia. But this priest is gonna take care of all that.”

“Leukemia!” Margie said. “Catherine, that’s serious.” Margie tried to smile at me, but I could tell she was upset. “Sit down, Aiden.” She motioned for me to go to the table. “We’re almost done here.”

"You gotta take him to a good doctor," she whispered to my grandmother, as if I couldn't hear.

We said our goodbyes and when we were in the car, my grandmother said, "Let me see what you got." I pulled the goods out of my pockets and she unclasped her black plastic pocketbook and placed the jewelry inside.

We parked on Tremont Street just down from the church.

"I need to get that chalice, Aiden. I read an article in *The Boston Globe* that said some people believe it has incredible curing powers. It's a replica of a chalice from long ago, over 100 years old, with lots of pretty stones on it. If I have your mother drink from it, maybe she'll get better and come home to us. Won't that be nice?" She smiled at me.

I looked towards the church where an old man was helping a lady in a wheelchair up a ramp. "Won't God be mad?"

"Aiden, I'm going to return it. We're just borrowing it for a little while."

The church smelled of shellack, incense, perfume, and old people. It was hard to see in the musty darkness. Bright light shone through the stained-glass windows, where Jesus was depicted in the twelve or so Stations of the Cross.

"Let's move to the front." My grandmother pulled me out of the line and cut in front of an old lady, who looked bewildered. "Shouldn't you go to the end of the line?" she whispered kindly, smiling down at me. Her hair was sweaty and her fat freckled bicep jiggled when she tapped my grandmother's shoulder. The freckles reminded me of the asteroid belt.

"I'm sorry. We're in a hurry. We have to help a sick neighbor after this. I just want my grandson to get a cure."

"What's wrong?" she whispered. We were four people away from the priest, who was standing at the altar. He prayed over people then lightly touched them. They fell backwards into the arms of two old men with maroon suit jackets and blue ties.

"Aiden has leukemia."

The woman's eyes teared up. "I'm sorry." She patted my forearm. "You'll be cured, sweetie." Again her flabby bicep jiggled and the asteroids bounced.

When it was our turn, my grandmother said, "Father, please cure him. And can you say a prayer for my daughter, too?"

"Of course." The white-haired, red-faced priest bent down. I smelled alcohol on his breath. "What ails you young man?"

I was confused.

"He's asking you about your illness, Aiden."

"I have leukemia," I said proudly.

The priest said some mumbo-jumbo prayer and pushed my chest. I knew I was supposed to fall back but was afraid the old geezers wouldn't catch me.

"Fall," my grandmother whispered irritably. Then she said extra softly. "Remember our plan."

I fell hard, shoving myself against the old guy. He toppled over as well. People gasped. His friend and the priest began to pick us up. I pretended to be hurt bad. "Oww. My head is killing me." Several people gathered around us. My grandmother yelled "Oh my God" and stepped onto the altar,

kneeling in front of a giant Jesus on the cross. "Dear Jesus," she said loudly, "I don't know how many more tribulations I can take." Then she crossed herself, hurried across the altar, swiping the gold chalice and putting it in her handbag while everyone was distracted by my moaning and fake crying.

"He'll be okay," she said, putting her arm under mine and helping the others pull me up.

When I was standing, she said to the priest. "You certainly have the power of the Holy Spirit in you. It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh."

The old lady who let us cut in line eyed my grandmother's handbag and shook her head as we passed.

When we were home, listening to talk radio in the living room, I asked my grandmother if she believed in miracles, like the ones she talked about earlier in the day with Margie.

"Sure, sure," she said, not looking up. She was taking the jewelry and chalice out of her bag and examining them in the light. I saw bits of dust in the sunlight streaming through the baywindow. As she held the chalice, she murmured, "for Laura" and kissed the side.

"You're not listening to me, Nanna."

She put the items back in her handbag and stared at me. "Of course I am."

"Well do you think I'll have a miracle and be cured of leukemia?"

"Aiden." She laughed. "You haven't got leukemia. You're as healthy as a horse, silly."

"But you told everybody I was sick."

"Sweetheart. That was just to evoke pity."

“What does that mean?”

“Make people feel bad so we can get things from them. I need money to take care of you, Aiden.” She spoke hesitantly and looked down, like she was ashamed. “I’m broke. Your grandfather left me with nothing and I gotta pay for your mother’s medical expenses. If Margie notices her jewelry gone, maybe she’ll think you took it to help your Nanna. I told her I was having a problem paying your hospital bills.”

“Sorta like a *tribulation*, right?”

“Exactly, sweetheart.”

“Is my mother a tribulation?”

My grandmother’s tears gushed like water from that rock. I knelt before her and put my head in her lap. She hugged me, bent down and kissed my face several times. Then she looked out the window. It seemed the tears would never stop.

“Don’t worry, Nanna. I believe in miracles, too. Someday Mom will come home from the hospital.”

And we stayed like that until the sunbeams dimmed and the dust disappeared and her tears stopped.

In the quiet of the room, she whispered, “Keep calm and carry on” to me or to herself. Or to both of us.



### 3

## Mirki and Mayli

SHEFALI SHAH CHOKSI

It was the first day the rains had stopped. Mirki and Mayli, the twins, had their own plans for the day.

Mirki and Mayli, though twins, were nothing alike. Their grandmother liked them to dress alike, look alike, move alike, as though the twins' life were a Bollywood dance number. Their mother, on the other hand, wanted them to dress differently; she always shivered internally when she saw them dressed alike. She felt that there was something malevolent about the idea of a person duplicated. Old Dai-ma, who lived in the largest outhouse, would loudly declare how any twin-born girls would be abandoned, or at least one of them would be killed upon birth, to avoid a peril of souls. Mayli, who commanded an army of the rag-tag boys, would make sure that a pot of Dai-ma's leaked anew, or that dried leaves found their way on her newly-swept floor within a day of such declarations. But beyond murmuring and loud complaining, Dai-ma was like a toothless dog, vicious but unable to do real harm. The twins' family adored them to the degree that their mother and grandfather feared that the girls would grow up spoiled, cocooned in their clan's armor.

But today's story is not about the family, though there will be other stories about them. This story is only about Mirki and Mayli, especially Mirki.

Like I said, the girls were nothing alike. Mirki was like any indulged seven-year old girl. She insisted on frills on her

frocks, sequins and little bells on her chanya-choli, and invest meticulousness and caution over her toilette every morning. Her fussy morning rituals were legend in the family. She chose with great care the powders for dusting her face and neck, the fresh flowers for her hair, the matching bindis for her forehead, even the earrings for the day. Her youngest foe, her father's youngest sister, oversaw Mirki's post-bath ritual, ended it with a dot of kajol behind Mirki's ear, to keep the child safe from evil eyes and intentions.

Mirki spent her play hours arranging her dolls' weddings, settling tiffs between the make-believe in-laws, adorning the brides so heavily that the dolls could not be balanced enough to sit in the wedding dais as Mirki played the priest and mumbled what sounded like wedding mantras very loudly and very quickly so that the words stumbled and tripped over each other. She would interrupt these chants with undertones of the ladies from the groom's side criticizing the décor, the food, and the hospitality, all of which was organized traditionally by the bride's family. By this time, the little girls from the outhouses and neighboring huts would assemble to watch. Mirki, though often the youngest, would assign roles to the girls so that enough relatives from all sides of the families would be properly represented.

Mayli, on the other hand, never noticed what she wore and what she wore, too often for her mother and grandmother, were tears and rips in her shirts and salwars. She could not be persuaded to wear the matching odhni or scarves that went with her salwar-kameez sets. She refused all frocks because of the beatings she had received when trying to climb trees wearing them. She also found that her army of rag-tag boys respected her more if she wore shirts with collars instead of kameez that matched her salwars. She often stole her older brothers' shirts, old ones that the youngest had

overgrown, the ones that the shirt's owner had not liked, gifts that fit none of the brothers, even unfashionable kurtas with strangely colored embroidery. If it had a collar, it fit Mayli.

Unlike her twin, Mayli organized battles against the other neighbor boys, oversaw conquering of tree forts her brothers had built, and coming up with code words for endless chor-police games against a variety of groups of neighborhood children. Unlike her twin, Mayli would summon her gang of rag-tag boys with a whistle and hoot, one of the secret signs that everyone in the neighborhood knew. She would escape the afternoon nap hours and begin games with complex intrigues, games that would last well into the twilight and the supper hour. These games were elastic enough to stretch beyond midnights on fasting, holy nights when sleep was to be avoided.

Of course, this is not to say that the girls did not get in to trouble. In fact, they were always in trouble, the both of them! Their mother believed in not sparing rods, brooms, combs, ladles, rolling pins, or anything that she happened to be holding. But the girls were experts in dodging missives and could wiggle away from one-handed grips with ease. Worse than an armed, upset mother was the angry one with no weapons to slow her down. Their grandfather had devised a punishment doled out frequently to all the children of the family, irrespective of the nature and intensity of the crime: it was to copy out in neat handwriting, an entire section of *The Times of India*, the daily newspaper that liked to be verbose.

The main objection the family had to the twins was the absolutely unacceptable language they were picking up from the lower castes they daily associated with. It wasn't just the swearing, though that was the absolute worst and the absolutely unacceptable part. It was also the common phrases, the sing-song elongated vowels, the harsh, slashing

consonants like pebbles on glass, and a variety of aggressive, often belligerent stances the girls took when being scolded or admonished or even gently cautioned.

Mayli rarely spoke without shouting and all that she meant as requests sounded like rude commands. Her mother tried to slap some polite into her and washed her mouth out with soap. She copied the matrimonial advertisements from *The Times*; her grandparents hoped that she would somehow understand the kind of girls that were prized in the marriage market. All to no avail. Mayli retained the cadence of a command in her speech for life. She later learned to modulate her vowels, consonants, and phraseology to fit her station in life, but this story is not about that.

The influence of language on Mirki went deeper. She reveled in her superiority of class and enjoyed lording over her playmates, who silently bore all her petty conspiracies with a mixture of admiration and envy. If she knew that a girl admired a particular doll, she favored the doll especially in view of the girl who yearned for it, coddling it, scolding it, casting slanting snake eyes at her audience. She did this carefully, though, afraid that her grandmother, who ran a women's NGO, would figure her play out and force her to relinquish the doll to the girl who watched her. Mirki got her share of punishments, but managed to avoid the beatings, mainly because it was so much easier to punish her by taking away a frilled frock or a ribbon or a set of bindis for a day. She had, however, avoided so much as a slap from her mother. She often teased her sister by smoothing sandalwood powder over her own cheeks, smiling sweetly while Mayli hiccupped in the aftermath of a thrashing. It was generally believed that Mirki was the more coddled, more spoiled of the twins.

This is the story of how this pattern broke and Mirki received what she considered her first beating.

On this particular day, the air was still cool after the rains, even though it was late morning. The wives were in the kitchen, cleaning, picking, slicing, preparing vegetables for the family's lunch. The husbands were in the dispensary, dispensing common sense, unguents, and other medicinal cures for sores, cuts, and fevers. Mayli was squatting in the dry dust, a stick in her hand, explaining a complicated strategy for the day's conquests to her army. Mirki sat in her parent's bed, its curtain of mosquito net drawn over the bed posts, a cool breeze from the nearby Tapi river promising a bright, fresh day. Just outside the window grew a flourishing jamun tree which gave shade to the room in hot summer days.

This jamun tree played host to a variety of creatures, including a tribe of nomadic monkeys, headed by an old male. The young of the tribe spent the day gathering berries and leaves, keeping predators from the females and their suckling babies. The old monkey sat on a high branch of the tree, staring into a distance, occasionally breaking off a leaf or a jamun berry and chewing slowly on it without breaking his stare.

Mirki was bored. The festivals were near and her playmates were kept busy by their mothers in a variety of chores relating to each family's patron deities. Mirki's family, she figured, had completely different, sophisticated sort of deities, who did not like all the fuss and dramas their lower caste counterparts leaned towards. She sniffed in a sophisticated sort of way. Then she looked around and saw that a half-adorned bride lay next to her, abandoned when a stray, forgotten thought had distracted her. She picked up the doll and examined it. Then Mirki giggled: the doll looked more like an item-girl in a Bollywood movie than a bride. Well, then! Item girls were made to dance, and so Mirki made

the doll dance. She swirled it and twirled it and threw it up in the air, accompanied by a rendition of a popular Item Girl song.

The leaping of the doll, its long hair, ghaghra skirt, and odhni scarf floating, its earrings and bangles clanging caught tangled in the old monkey's stare and broke it. Mirki noticed and caught the doll. Then she directed her energies at the old monkey and made the doll dance at the money, managing a tune while sticking her tongue out at him. The old monkey bared his teeth half-heartedly, and turned his head a little away from the window.

Mirki, not to be outdone by a monkey's indifference, increased the pitch of her voice and the speed of the doll's dance. The doll looked miserable, as though there were a rictus of agony sketched across her face rather than a happy smile of an expectant bride. Mirki's pace increased to a feverish intensity, matched by the shrillness of her voice.

She wanted the ugly old monkey to be gone from the Jamun tree.

The monkey did not such thing. He calmly strode to the end of the branch, and gracefully leapt, landing delicately on the edge of the window's outer ledge. He met Mirki's eyes and bared his teeth quietly. Then he reached between the wide bars of the window and slapped Mirki's right cheek, and leapt away to his perch.

Mirki's dancing stopped abruptly. Her cheek burned but she did not really notice it. Before she could fully understand what had happened, her knees gave way and she fell down on the bed, falling instantly into deep sleep.

When Mirki woke up, her right cheek bore the red imprint of the monkey's slap. Mayli, who had just received a

blow for tearing her dress, stopped in mid-sob, chortled at her twin in delight.

What is it you ask? Why is Mirki's left cheek also red? That, my dear, is from her mother, for teasing a poor dumb animal who was minding his own business.

Ever since then, Mirki hasn't teased Mayli after a thrashing, but Mayli has often been known to end an argument with a sweet smile and a hand smoothing her own right cheek, with or without the sandalwood powder.



## 4

# Pariah

HARSHAL DESAI

Hello, I am a woman. I am here on earth to carry out my life's purpose, to be married to a man. At least, that's what I am told.

My first memory of this was in my early childhood when my mother and father ingrained the notion of marriage being my sole reason for existence. It began when I received my first toy kitchen set and I would play with my mother while she tells me tales of how she cooks for the family while daddy goes and does all the work, make the money, and provide for the family. I replied to her that I want to work like daddy as well and was quite adamant at wanting to be like daddy. This was also the memory of the first slap received from my mother. A woman cooks and controls the home, a man provides.

As I grew older, I gained an interest in commerce and was eager to study for an MBA. After much cajoling my father, I was granted permission to enlist in the course, with a condition that I spend weekends learning cooking with mother. I was ecstatic. I dreamed of finishing my MBA with top honours and spend the next years rigorously studying, while fulfilling my womanly duties in the kitchen. Little did I know, during my MBA term I committed two cardinal sins.

My first sin was to think I have a career.

The MBA was merely a tool in the long list of womanly qualities I had to possess to attract good suitors; namely having a post-graduate degree, along with the ability to cook, look beautiful, bear children, and serve my husband. When I told my family I wish to have my own career and not get married, I was rebuked with a flurry of questioning.

“You want to make a career? Why? You don’t need to make any money; you will get a rich husband who can fulfil your every need? And of course, once you have children when will you get time to do a job? You don’t know these things; we will find a good husband for you.”

“I can find a good man on my own if I work. I can get to travel, meet new people, get to know them and in turn, find my soul mate”

“You want to go out with random men? For shame, what will people say! You will do no such thing. We will choose good suitors for you. Don’t be so dejected, they will be your choice, you can marry any one of them you like. Besides, it is better to choose a husband from the same caste, someone with a high economic status, good affluent family... you are too young to understand these things. There is no such thing as love or soul mates in life. That is a glorified fairy-tale, an illusion. You don’t need love to make a marriage work. Love fades in time. All you need compromise, understanding, and a strong capable husband who can provide for you.”

I could hear the irony in their words. They were eager not to let me meet strangers and go out with them, while they were planning to marry me off to a stranger. But I dare not say anything because of my second sin.

I had fallen in love with a fellow student from my college, and wished to marry him.

It was an impossible feat to even attempt convincing them. I tried talking to my mother, swearing her to secrecy for fear of father finding out. She did not respond kindly.

“He is not of our caste. He hardly earns money and is not even working full time. He is not living with his family too, who knows, he must be drinking and smoking and doing drug in his single apartment. You can’t trust men who live alone. Everyone needs a mother and father to look after them. What kind of a boy is he to abandon his own parents? They probably kicked him out. You will not see such boys. I knew putting you through college was a bad idea but your father insisted, and this is how you repay him? Think of our family, all that we have done for you. How can you even think to marry this commoner? You are so beautiful; you’ll get a good wealthy husband”

A week later I had to choose between three strangers. There was no option to decline them all. My silence was met with a choice of their own. Our families met. Sweets, snacks and teas were exchanged as his family ticked off a virtual checklist for their son. Just like my MBA, I passed with flying colours, and just as quickly, dowry settlements were made and I was engaged to the stranger.

Both families were delighted, they paraded around sharing the news as if they won the Olympics and are flaunting the gold medals around their necks. Meanwhile I contemplated having a noose around mine. My mother entered the room, saw the forlorn look on my face and instructed me to be happier. She stated I will thank her for her wisdom in choosing this stranger as my husband; as my figurative noose got tighter.

But I could never take my own life, I could however run away but it will bring unnecessary complications. Besides, I

can never bring such shame to my family. They are actively hurting me without realizing and I wish they would realize their actions but I cannot hurt them by walking away. I begin to wonder if I am truly wrong in my understanding of the world. All of them, my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, even my cousins are convinced that this is the right choice for me. That the notion of love in marriage is exaggerated and anyone falls in love after marriage, it is more important to choose a good man, a good provider.

I want to believe them. Visions of being with my love pervade my mind on one side, while the words of my family on the other, and I start to slowly get ripped in two. Perhaps they are right after all, I wonder. I am not the one married, they all are and would know best what marriage is truly like. All I have is an idealistic concept of it, while they are living the reality. Maybe marrying this stranger will bring love and happiness and fulfilment to me. It does work in our society and has for generations so there is a kernel of truth in their statements.

The voices in my head amplify, breaking down my identity. I gather up one last courageous roar, proclaiming to myself that it is MY life and I deserve the right to choose the one I love.

Mother saw my struggle. She came up to me and told me that life isn't always about doing what you love.

"Imagine going to a doctor to get an injection, nobody likes that but it's done for one's wellbeing. One may hate something and it can still be good for you. Trust me; this marriage is perfect for you. You cannot ever find a better suitor than him. Trust the wisdom of your elders. You got a good husband immediately. This is your destiny."

I realized my battle is lost and I had to accept my destiny.

I compromised my life to carry out my purpose told by my family. Years passed since my marriage and monotony has set in. I realized that I was trapped in a cage. Of course, I could always flee but I had grown too comfortable in my cage. It is the same as a bird. At first birds hate their cages and flutter around inside, yearning to be free. In time they grow accustomed to it, developing a fondness for it, and later even if the cage door is opened, the bird will stay inside the cage.

It was not just my mother's words that swayed me to marry the stranger, now my husband. There are several women like me; women who fell in love but their parents refuted the notion and got them married to someone they approved. My mother herself was a prime example. She told me a tale of how she loved a boy back in her college days and instead she was told to marry my father, and now both of them are living happy normal lives. I contemplated over it, thinking perhaps marrying a stranger is not as bad as I make it out to be. Mother seems to be content. If it was living in agony, she definitely wouldn't have recommended it to me.

I was wrong. I know now that these women were defeated themselves. They changed after their trauma of marrying strangers and hated themselves and the world for being forced to marry someone not of their choice, someone who stifled their identity, someone whom they did not love while having another that they did love. It pained them each day to be emotionally devoted to someone while being married to a stranger, no matter how much he provided for them.

They were doomed to forever be emotionally disconnected as their heart already belonged to another. The only way to stop the pain and avoid a miserable existence was to pretend it never happened. They had to cut and hack away their identity, their will to fight, their notions of love and romance, their beliefs on life, all just so they can sustain living. They needed to keep lying to themselves in order to believe it, and one day, they did. Once they did, they started preaching other women to embark on the same journey.

It is a vicious cycle.

I know now that their loss is terrible, as I am slowly learning to numb the pain myself. I am actually getting better at it. I realize that I can live a 'normal' life even after cutting out large chunks of my identity. I am comforted knowing that soon, I will believe my own lie that I am in a happy fulfilled marriage and that everything is okay.

There are days I am depressed. There are days when I am coming back from grocery shopping, only to stop outside the front door of the stranger's my husband's house and the feeling of running away overwhelms me. There are days when I dream of the man I loved, the man I wanted to live with and make babies. But instead, I am here now, pregnant with my husband's child.

I hope it is a girl. I will be a good mother.

I'll buy her a toy kitchen set and tell her how I cook for the family and her father goes to work, makes all the money and provides for the family.



## 5

# The Peterborough Pea-Pod's Last Letter to the Sun God

MARTIN SHAW

*Dear Just-Happened-to-be-Up-There-for-a-Considerable-Amount-of-Time,*

I trust you are well. By April the second, nineteen sixty six (next month) I will have committed suicide by selling what's left of me as a wear-once-and-throw-away, biodegradable Parka Jacket. Please forgive me, but here are the details: in the delivery room, the Tuber delivered, while me, Mr. Mangetout, signed on the dotted line all of my money away. A baby Celery of a son popped out before me, a carbon copy, a 'chip off the ol' block' in mannerisms and in features. His screams were regulated by a gas knob, meaning, he was surely my son. But out popped a sister, a wee-beast of a Swede, her blood red eyes ready to photosynthesise into scornful tongues.

Tuber and Swede slowly bled me dry of nitrogen and I began to lumber through life. My son, who was very quiet, grew long and thin and slept in the fridge compartment with me. Once, we both tried to warn Swede about the dangers of becoming too bulbous. But it didn't work. Her mother, wearing a tight tank top and Daisy Duke shorts, said it was all just pith and that most potatoes liked the natural look. Subsequently, Swede genetically modified herself to double the size, and went with meat too.

Life became intolerable for Celery and I. We decided to run away and live in Cardboard City, although it wasn't long before he informed me he was gay. I told him it's not a problem and we both saved up for his sex change operation by tossing as much salad as possible. He went with males and me with females, although most of mine didn't have any berries.

I lined our home with purple polystyrene apple sympathisers to try and keep warm, until finally came the day for Celery's stop and tail. After his operation he was red and swollen – like a Lincolnshire potato. His sprouts inverted, and deep as the divot that he spawned from.

'It was very painful,' he said, 'but worth it because I now feel that I finally have an identity.'

Later, for pork reasons, he informed me he was moving back with his mother and his giant Zeppelin of a sister. It left me feeling empty – the shell of a Mangetout of what I used to be. So, you see, Just-Happened-to-be-Up-There-for-a-Considerable-Amount-of-Time, my shelf life is now obsolete! See you around.

Yours truly,

*The Once-Perky-Pea-Pod-from-Peterborough.*



# NOVEL

## 1

### Chapter One: Michael

RICHARD LUTMAN

The Nekoosa River reborn in the mountains with each clear drop of rain, the river that brought life and death to the waiting world, which Michael knew played no favorites. Called the Bracelet of the Earth by the Indians who once dwelt near its shores, it ran in a wide brown belt across the hot summer meadows where the mansions beckoned with shady porches and the quiet mystery of high-ceilinged bedrooms.

In some places docks with stone parapets and balustrades had been built along the banks. And in other places were the boathouses, some as ornate as the mansions themselves. It was from these Michael knew the lovers, the families, and the adventurous would row to a favorite shadowy spot and tie up to a tree to catch the last scrap of breeze that tickled the water.

Those who dared swam from the boats with a few tentative strokes, remembering the careless mistakes of those who disappeared beneath the silent surface.

Their fear made them quiet as they lay stretched out in their boats, arms tawny and strong, with wine, lemonade, and sandwiches, some to read, others to sleep, all thought of

talk gone in the shimmery heat that pressed at them. The children drunk on enchanted air, played along the hot, sandy river banks until they became aware of the dank, uneasy stillness of the river. Then they crowded back into the boats where they sat, hands trailing into the water.

The Nekoosa with the splash of a fish. The glide of muskrats, crinkling the opaque surface. Ducks kicking water as they rose, rippling a garland of daisies. And a girl plunging into the current, the river welcoming her arrival.



For over twenty years the Hood family had summered at their farm, Wind Tryst. From June to September the house would be full of children, adults, guests, and servants, the lives of each so intertwined as to be almost one, the children sometimes thinking they were adults, and the adult's children.

Just as the sheer clothes of women hint of nakedness underneath, so did the lives at Wind Tryst hint of the same yearning and desire for things that could only be sensed or dreamed about.

Designed by one of the most famous architects in the City for a lawyer, who liked to gamble, Wind Tryst sat like a gingerbread island in the meadows surrounding the Nekoosa River. Delicately scrolled eaves accented the many-gabled design of the three story house the lawyer had desired. Two years after he had settled in he had been found floating face down in the river a knife in his back. Some gossiped that the local gypsies had done it, but nothing was ever proven. The event added a mystique to Wind Tryst.

Alfalfa and daisies filled the river meadows around the mansion. Three stone steps from the back terrace led to a lush

lawn full of marble rococo-like statues, gardens, hedge rows, lilacs, beds of ferns, iris and violets, marble furniture, and a fountain that no longer worked. It was the fountain that had made Wind Tryst famous throughout the valley. The spray had gone up twenty-five feet in the air. When the wind blew from the south the spray would sometimes mist the terrace. When the wind blew from the south the spray would sometimes mist the terrace. Michael remembered the dank smell and taste of the wind-blown spray on his face and mouth.

The house itself was surrounded by tulip poplars and an occasional beech tree. One wall was partially covered in wisteria. From the north the hills could be seen, quite dark and mysterious with the sharp almost human-like profiles of cliffs. To the east and west were more meadows and the distant shapes of the other river mansions.

The summer of 1926 Michael and Alison were both sixteen, Alison younger by three months, something she never forgave him for. Because they were the oldest children of the family, they were often allowed more freedom than the younger ones, who continually got in the way.

It wasn't unusual to find themselves doing things together whether they liked it or not. No matter what Alison thought or how many times she objected to being with Michael, the answer was the same. No one listened. The whole process of being together was considered part of the growing up one must do. The training for what was to come.

"If you can't get along with your own family, Michael, then you can't get along with anyone else," his father had said to him in a stern voice. "In families one learns about jealousy, love, and hate, when to give in and when to be strong. You

learn to be a diplomat for the life ahead of you. Do you understand?"

Michael nodded his head, and then ran outside in time to see Alison climbing the beech tree next to the long driveway, to his favorite place in the upper branches above where the trunk split.

Today he and Alison had been sent to get two pails of fresh milk for the evening meal. It was a task they both enjoyed because it allowed them to see Jack Hauser, the German caretaker who farmed the meadows along the river. It also meant Michael could be alone with his cousin without her telling him to go away.

Three years ago Michael and Alison had fought over almost anything; who could blow grass whistles the best, who was the strongest, who ran faster, swam faster, and who could throw a stone further. She had beaten him every time. In anger he'd struck her on the chest. It had been soft. She grimaced, her white teeth biting into her lower lip.

"Don't you know you're not meant to punch girls there?" she said.

"Why not? That's where you punch me."

She glared out over the tea brown water of the river, her arms around her chest, as if hugging herself. The sunlight was like living fire on her hair, and her eyes had turned gray.

"Because you're not," she said. "Don't you ever do it again or you'll be sorry." She had stamped her feet.

Ever since then he began to be conscious of confusing sensations about her. Yet he sensed she knew he wanted to run and hide because somehow she knew everything in the world about him. He felt as though he was stripped away bare and she didn't seem to care about it, except to hurt him.

What would it feel like to die from the pain he felt? The thought made him sick.

Hauser, who was thirty and came from the western part of the state, had worked the land for three years. Rugged looking, with deep set brown eyes that seemed to penetrate he became an attraction that was hard to resist. Before working for the Hoods and other families along the river he'd been a soldier in the Great War and had been wounded in the arm in France. For his efforts he had been awarded a medal. He liked to show them the long ugly gray scar on his right forearm, which made Alison turn away.

Neither of them had ever seen a German before. When Hauser first started to work, they were afraid of him.

"He's no more a German than I am," Michael's father had said one day while repairing a torn butterfly net. His fingers were quick as he sewed in a new patch. "He's an American citizen just like you are." But they had seen the pictures in the papers and read of the German atrocities and didn't believe him.

"He's good with the land." His father swept the net through the air. "I asked him once why he didn't want a farm of his own. He told me he wanted none of it, but gave no reason. With him working for us we're going to show a profit for the first time in years. You be nice to him and treat him just like anyone else."

It wasn't long before they all bragged about Hauser and the things he could do, swim across the river underwater, roll tight, neatly shaped cigarettes with one hand, then flip them into the air in a perfect arc, and shoot the crows with a pistol and never miss. And there were always the stories about how much bootleg whiskey he drank and of his women.

Once Michael had seen him in the pantry talking to Lily the maid, who sat blushing with downcast eyes. Michael thought she was quite lovely to look at and never tired of hearing her call him "Master Michael," in her soft breathy voice.

"*Wie gehts, Lily,*" Hauser said. "How are you? It will be hot today. I can already smell the mud of the river bank."

Lily had blushed again. "*Danke, gut. Und inmen,*" she said with a mumble.

"*Ich spreche kaum Deutsch?*" Hauser said.

She got up and ran out.

"It's all right," said Celia, the family's long-time cook, who had been busy scrubbing out a pot. "I don't think she was expecting you to talk to her in German. In a little while it will be forgotten."

"Maybe I better hadn't come again," he said.

"That would be worse," Celia had said. "She has to get over being shy around men."

Another time Michael had seen Hauser and a red-headed girl were kissing in the haystack by the barn. The girl's blouse was unbuttoned and Hauser's hand had been between her legs. Michael felt his body swell.

Alison never said much around Hauser, yet her eyes followed his every move. He sat on a wooden milking stool. His large, long fingered hands delicately stroked the teats of the cow in a steady rhythm. The hard white stream foamed the milk in the pail. The barn smelled of hay, and made Michael's nose itch. Standing close to Alison, Michael smelled her faint, bitter perfume like the pink petals of the flowering almond which grew in profusion by the guest house.

"There," Hauser said. "I'm finished. Be careful now. The pails are very full." He rose and handed each of them a pail. "Tell your father the milk's from the spotted cow. She's the best milk giver in the herd. I'm headed to the lower river pasture for a quick swim if he needs me."

Sometimes Michael wanted to let Alison be first, just to see the wonderful flash of victory on her face. But today he hadn't felt like it. He wanted to be the first to return with the milk and Hauser's message. She seemed to know what he was thinking and pushed against him, spilling milk over her legs and thighs. The sudden touch of the milk made her gasp.

"Now look what you've done," she said. "That milk was for supper."

"You pushed me."

"You're just clumsy. You're the clumsiest person I've ever seen."

Stung by the words, he stopped. For a moment he wanted to throw something at her, but she had put the pail down, lifted her dress to the knee and was rubbing the milk into her skin. Neither of them said a word. He gazed in wonder and was struck with something beautiful and at the same time shameful rising in his chest. He knew he would never forget the shape of her legs and the golden skin beneath her delicate fingers.

"There'll still be plenty of milk," he said in a thick voice. "If you don't drink it all or spill it on your sister."

"I don't like my sister," she said. "And I'm not the only one who drinks it all. You are."

"Am not," he said.

She lingered over her legs, then slowly let her dress fall.

"Are too," she said and started off toward Wind Tryst which lay ahead of them. Michael picked up his pail and trudged after her, no longer interested in being first.

Michael set the pail on the ground. Still holding her pail, Alison wriggled through the hedge surrounding the meadow closest to Wind Tryst. Hauser stood by the gate, his shirt unbuttoned to his waist.

"Come, we must go," Michael said. "They'll be getting worried."

"Let them."

"We're going to get in trouble."

"Don't be such a baby," she said.

"I'm not a baby," he said into the purple patterns of sun where she had been. He picked up his pail and headed toward Wind Tryst trying not to think of her and the day that spread before him. Another summer day he suspected would be full of surprise and heartache.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHY/MEMOIR

### 1

## Fishing for Cats

RICK HARTWELL

I have a fond remembrance, a wistful recollection, of Ben fishing for Siamese kittens on a hardwood floor as I cursed and nursed a first hangover from a teenage escapade. As small town boys are prone to do, probably part of their maturation, we had formed an underground club of various youthful rejects from local society. The premise of membership was the solo consumption of a fifth of *I.W. Harper, 101 Proof*, in one night. Period. That was it. There were no hidden clauses or legalese. You had to get it down in one night. No further mention was ever made as to whether the booze had to stay down or whether you had to remain alive. In my case, I was eventually grateful for the former point, and being sixteen or seventeen, I didn't care about the latter. Suffice it to say that I became a founding member of this close fraternity. As I recall, I was the second to apply for membership, followed in quick succession by David and Les. Ben, of course, had been the first, as he was for so many things.

Ben is tall, even stretched to extreme lankiness; perhaps six-foot-six, but so rail thin that he would look that tall if even shorter. At various times he could present an almost emaciated appearance. He tanned up well in summer and

with a disheveled shock of darkened auburn hair, deep, explorative, piercing eyes, and the smoothest delivery of personality and come-on lines you ever heard, he never lacked for the companionship of the fairer sex. Not that, for a minute, the girls we hung out with were fair, in any sense, and they did not know to withhold sex from anyone. These are among some of the many advantages of education in a small, Central California town.

But I don't mean to portray only this public side of Ben. Those facets of this diamond-in-the-rough were known throughout Gilroy and many of the nearby towns and hamlets. Those sides of him were known down at *Steinmetz Pool Hall*, at *Galvan Liquors*, and out at the *Moonlight Drive-In*; and, they were known also to many girls' protective fathers, to Lewis Johnson, the Boys' Vice Principal, and to Sergeant Jewell of the distinguished Gilroy Police Department, "The Pride of the Dam End of Santa Clara Valley," and even to my first wife, whom he probably seduced when my back was turned for an instant. But damn, we'd shared so much when we were younger. Ben's knowing her didn't seem to be a deal-breaker and, besides, he hadn't broken anything.

I knew another side of Ben as well: a side not easy to explain to those who constantly harangued me to stay away from him and questioned what I saw. I could always bum a ride, or cigarettes, or half of whatever change he had. These are important at that age, regardless of what others say. He never turned me in for what I did, or what he did, or what we did together, even later when someone had spun donuts on Jewell's lawn and they ran Ben in for questioning; even under the admittedly inept interrogation of Sergeant Jewell. Despite his whining protestations, we all knew it was Dennis who confessed to Jewell our grandiose plans for an end-of-year hooch party up at the reservoir.

I could cover many years of anecdotes centered on Ben. Displayed day by day and end to end they'd cover several Western states and several states of mind. Perhaps those warrants are no longer still outstanding, but who would want to take the chance. In 1966 we sadly parted ways for many years when I went in the Army. But to best understand my relationship with Ben, I must turn back to a day of fishing for kittens and catching a bass. This day fits best in my reversible lens, despite how opaque it may seem to others.

I was probably still more drunk than hung over when I first opened my eyes. Ben had brought me back to his house after my initiation night. I remembered most of the time at the drive-in theatre and some of the ride to the dam, but things got hazy after the first half of the bottle, and when I threw up outside his girlfriend's house they dribbled away to nothing. Strong as he was, he said later, he couldn't figure out how to lift me over my back fence and pour me through my bedroom window without waking the whole neighborhood. So he brought me home. No questions. Not from his mom and not from his dad, my geometry teacher. He had dragged me upstairs to his room with the help of his brother and left me on the extra bed with a wastebasket and a towel, although by now there was not much chance of putting them to work.

I awoke in the late dawn with a sunlight headache and amplified hearing. I kept thinking I heard the crinkle of cellophane and then a chorus of wailing from his pride of Siamese kittens, a compact six-pack. This commotion would then be followed by the thundering, at least to me, of twenty-four exuberant paws clawing their way across the hardwood floor. This would then stop with the clutched notching of a rewind spinner reel.

Ben had tied an empty pack of cigarettes to the monofilament line of his bass rod and was dry-casting the

length of two rooms and into the hallway. The high ceilings of the turn-of-the-century old farm house allowed for a modified overhand cast and with each thrust and parry of his rod he'd send the kittens into apoplexy and then lure them back on the run, each vying with its siblings to kill the empty pack of *Pall Malls*. Even though it hurt so much, I couldn't help but laugh my ass off, regardless of the fact my head was still up it.

I threw some water on my face in the upstairs bathroom and dry-brushed my teeth with my fingers. Ben gave me one of his shirts, as mine needed to be buried, and we went downstairs. Without a word of remonstrance his mother fed me breakfast and, regardless of what some say, it was good to eat some toast and wash it down with milk. Ben was still fishing for kittens, driving them insane, and perhaps that too had a salutary effect on me. It felt good to be there. Breakfast hit bottom about then and I thought it was going to bounce, so Ben and I went outside and started throwing dirt clods at the side of the work shed.

On an impulse, probably left over from the cats, Ben decided we should go fishing in the pond below the shed, down near the bend in the road, and shared with his neighbor. I still felt woozy, so I waited outside while he retrieved his pole and a couple of bass plugs. We sauntered down to the pond with no real purpose in mind. It was Saturday and sunny and it just seemed right to go fishing.

We circled the pond counterclockwise, working against superstition and shadows, with Ben casting a plug and reeling back in repeatedly. After about fifteen minutes of plunking like that he changed to a silver spoon. He said his brother Walt had gotten several strong bites just the day before on a spoon, but no solid strike. Ben hadn't really been trying to be cagey; we'd been spending too much time just

jaw jacking. We were now taking turns, trading off after every three or four casts. Like usual, I was trying too hard. He was just being casual with each try, flipping the spoon out and popping it back, skipping it on the surface occasionally, pulling the lure towards the shore just to cast again. Of course it was Ben who got the hit.

The great pond bass rose to the surface and took the spoon just as Ben had started to jig forward again. The fish hit hard and the tri-barbs held fast when the fish tried to break right. Ben let him run a bit with the drag on. Although there was a lot of fight in that bass, almost as much as there was in Ben or Walt or even me, it didn't take Ben but a minute or two to land him in the grasses edging the pond. I raced to grab the fish by the gills, perhaps fourteen inches, and remove the spoon, forcing the barbs back out. There were feathers protruding from the gaping mouth and when I pulled on them a bird appeared like a rabbit from a hat or a card from the sleeve of a riverboat gambler. It was dead of course, the bird, not the bass; although I suspect the bass would have died too, choking on the oversized meal he couldn't swallow. Normally we would have kept the fish and had him for our own meal or maybe fed him to the cats. But without really discussing it, Ben just told me to put him back, to let him go.

I waded out into the shallows, ignoring my shoes and wet jeans. I bent over and placed the bass back in the pond. I'd been cupping his belly with my left hand and I just let it slide back down. That bass slowly swam away as if without a concern in the world. He was either stunned or the most sedate fish I would ever encounter. Or, perhaps like Ben, he was just a southern gentleman out of place. It was such a simple thing. It was such a simple day.



## 2

# **Becoming a Reader: How I Resparked My Love of Reading**

HATIM ALQAIDHI

I am a reader. You don't know how satisfying it feels to say that. Reading was always an activity that I wanted to do but never really committed myself to. It was like that popular kid in school whom everyone wishes to befriend but only a few succeed.

As a child, I did read a lot. Since they were abundant, most of what I read were stories of Islam and the Prophet. Majed's magazine and Super, a football focused magazine were what got me through my teen years. My brothers and I would pool our money every week to buy the new releases. I remember reading everything in every issue after three days of buying it and then having to go through the torture of waiting for the next Wednesday to come with the new issue. I always saved the comic of Kaslan Jiddan, the best – or my favorite – until last. In an age when I did not care or barely knew who Spiderman, Batman or Iron Man were, Kaslan – a regular boy, in fact a lazy child who found himself in trouble for acting like an adult – was a relatable, tangible hero to me.

Over time I lost the habit of reading, because of many other things that came to my life. I started to play more serious videogames and saw what that medium could offer and, of course, movies were something that fascinated me and over time, something I watched more of.

Fast forward to my second year in the university when I had to take my first literature course. The only part I hated about the course was that I needed to read. Things changed when I saw my professor's enthusiasm when he talked about the works of Jack London or Charles Dickens. I really admired his passion and commitment to literature. One of the requirements of the course was to do a presentation so I chose a random story from the list we had, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce; I hated the fact that I had to read but what choice did I have. The pacing of the story was slow but it ended in a way which shocked me and changed my mind about the whole piece. It reminded me of movies I loved like Fight Club or Shatter Island where the whole movie takes a certain focus but there's a twist at the end that makes both protagonist and viewer seem manipulated. Immediately, I looked up the writer online and read another story by him, experiencing along the way the same happy creepiness, intense and ending with a bang.

Before this, I used to see people online tweeting about how much they liked a new book or how the book they just finished has changed their lives. I used to make fun of these people, though I realize now it was mostly a way to vent my jealousy because the old me just wasn't willing to invest in reading.

One day, one of the people I'm following wrote a review on a book and how it gave him "the feeling that Japan is not the place where it's all sunshine and rainbows." I've always been fascinated with Japan; I mean, who isn't, right? This sentence made me look up the book and download a PDF version on my phone and I quickly forgot about it. One day, while waiting for my mother at a wedding I forgot my portable gaming device and my data plan had ended so my options for wasting time were quite limited. After going

through pictures on my phone and deleting every old conversation on What'sapp, I remembered that I had a book on the phone so I opened Adobe Reader.

There it was, *School of Freedom* by Shishi Bonruko. Last opened: 3 months ago. I started reading it and got hooked. It was the first time my mother would finish something before I called her. I was startled when she opened the car's door and she was surprised that I didn't say anything to her about her being late.

At that time, everyone was praising a movie called *Gone Girl* but I couldn't go to the movies to watch it, firstly because it was bad timing, the middle of the semester when tons of things needed to be done. The second reason, the main one, was that the gang and I were broke. Once this dark cloud had passed, the movie was shown nowhere and I would have to wait months to see it online. So I decided I would read the book.

That was the turning point in my metamorphosis. I read on long road trips, read while waiting for my car to be ready at the car wash and late nights when sleep wouldn't come. I finished the book and when I did see the movie, it paled in comparison to what I'd read. Since those days, I've tried to read some of the famous works of literature. I really like Orwell's *1984* and Hemingway's *Old Man and The Sea* along with *Moby Dick*. I've also tried to read some books that I'm familiar with. Thankfully, being a movie hound came in handy and kept me interested. I've read *The Hunger Games* trilogy and *The Martian*, which was better than the movie by miles and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Letter in Scarlet*.

As a gamer, I always have the discussion of movies versus videogames: which is better? I believe that videogames are better. When watching a movie, you see the story through the director's eyes but when you play a game,

you have control over the characters and in some cases, you decide how the story advances in terms of which character to save and which one to leave behind. This makes the relation between the character and the player a deeper one. I rarely care when a character dies in a movie, but every time I play *The Last of Us*, a flood of emotions passes through my veins.

It is only recently that I've understood that books are always out of this discussion because they're in a league of their own. The thing with books is that my way of drawing the sets and places are quite different from what someone else would think. When reading a book, you're given the script and everything else is left to you. Your imagination is the director that chooses the camera angle, the custom designer who decides how to dress the characters and the casting guy who would put a face next to each name. I love watching a movie after reading the book. Aside from spamming my friends with the whole argument of "the book was better," I get to compare the direction which the director took and compare it to mine which ultimately tells me whether if I'm going to be a good director if I decide to venture into that area.

After all this reading, It feels so good to know who's the Big Brother that's watching the star of a certain movie and what's his white whale that he's been chasing the whole time and what does it mean to abandon all hope. It's like I've arrived, I've befriended the popular kid, finally, and he's telling one of those inside jokes which sound normal to anyone from the outside but feels really different when you're from the inner group – the reading party.



# PLAY

## 1

### The Thirst\*

RAMDEO JHA

#### CHARACTERS

- Uttanka : A Hermit of the Mahabharata Age  
Bhadramukh : The disciple of Uttanka  
Huntsman : Indra in disguise, with a dog  
Krishna : Visnu's advent

#### SCENE I

*[The scene is a desert at noon. On the white sands, few trees of acacia stand afar. The earth witnesses scorching sun. The hermit Uttanka along with his disciple comes up. He has radiant matted hair, a staff in hand and a Kamandal too. Beads of perspiration on his face, indicate tiredness. It appears from his parched lips and restlessness that he is extremely thirsty. He is followed by his disciple Bhadramukha, in the guise of a young celibate. He also holds a Kamandal in his hand. He, like his guru, is also fatigued.]*

Uttanka: Oh, how long it will take to get across the sands?

Bhadramukh: Gurujee, we shall have to move seven yojana (Ninety one K.M.) further.

- Uttanka: Ah, my legs now fail to carry me. What a scorching sun! it appears that the scorching heat will just engulf the earth. The earth is aflame just like the 'havan-kunda' (*sacrificial pit*) and the whole universe seems to have turned into ingredients of oblation.
- Bhadramukh: This body is exposed to the singeing hot wind mingled with the sand of the desert. Gurudeo! It appears that the sun has spread out its wild rays in the whole atmosphere.
- Uttanka: Bhadramukh, the rising whirlwind seems to be the flame of fire soaring up to touch the sky. Bhadramukh! Ah, now I shall not be able to satiate my thirst. I came for water. Oh, for a palmful of water to keep the breath going!
- Bhadramukh: Excuse me, Gurudeo! There's not a drop of water now in the pot. The little water lying at the bottom has already evaporated due to extreme heat.
- Uttanka: (*Disappointed*) I have already had such premonition. But I loved to labour under illusion. In the illusion itself I sensed some satiety.
- Bhadramukh: (*Throwing his glance to a distance*) Gurudeo! Look thither! It appears to be a pond a little away from the tree towards the south. Ah, (*Gladly*) what a clean reservoir of water ebbing and flowing! Gurudeo! I'll just fetch water (*Gets ready*).

Uttanka: Bhadra! That's not water. Just as there's illusion in this world, things are unreal and non-existent; yet man runs after it in hallucination, so also this is the illusion of the desert called a mirage. It seems to be trembling due to the rays refracting from the sands.

Bhadramukh: Acharya ....!

Uttanka: even then you may try. At least my hope of drinking water would be there till you return. The same hope will assuage my thirst. But, mind it, you will in no case move farther.

Bhadramukh: I must obey your commands, Acharya!

Uttanka: O Lord Krishna! (*Impatiently*) The lord of this relentless universe! Having brought the Kurukshetra war to an end, you had met me on your way to Dwarka and granted me a boon that whenever I feel thirsty, water would be there for me to drink. Today, the time has come for that, but you are mum. O lord Vasudeo! Please be visible and fulfill your word.

*(His head bends in prayer.)*

*(After a while, a huntsman enters – he is half-naked. His dirty clothes are in tatters. He holds a string to which three or four hounds are tied. He has a bow and quiver across his shoulder? He holds a leather-bag filled with water and a bamboo-pipe hanging from a string.)*

- Huntsman: O great sage! The uneasiness and impatience writ large on your face demonstrates that you are very thirsty.
- Uttanka: Thirst... thirst... that's the only one thing of this desolate desert which is true. Here nobody can get to the end of this insatiable thirst. Alas! How far has Bhadramukh gone!
- Huntsman: O great sage! I feel crowned with success by having a glimpse of an enlightened person like you in this lonely wilderness, hence give me a chance to serve you (*Holding out water to Uttanka from the leather-bag*) O revered! Be pleased to satiate your thirst with this water.
- Uttanka: (*Looks at him*) You... who are you in this strange guise? Where have you brought this water from?
- Huntsman: I, an ordinary hunter, an outcaste, live by hunting wild beasts. While passing by, I saw that you were restless. Why are you hesitating to take this water? Please take it, soak your throat with it. Uttanka: You are an outcaste. How would I drink water from your hands? I would rather die of thirst than drink water offered by you and lose my caste and get debauched thereby. Huntsman: You are given to suspicion for nothing. The blaze of your spiritual austerity is powerful enough to burn the whole universe to ashes. But I am what I am. If once you accept even a drop of water

from my hand, my whole tribe would be redeemed. Be so kind as to accept my hospitality.

Uttanka: Being an untouchable, you are making repeated requests to a Brahmin like me. Trespassing the bounds of common courtesy, you are penetrating into the ambit of misdemeanour. To drink water touched by one whom the scripture forbids even to touch!

Huntsman: You are so prudent! But one thing I must say that I am also a human being. Blood of the same kind flows through the artery of every man. Our hunger, thirst and happiness are also quite alike. You may or may not realize this, but I do feel that you must be yearning to drink water as much as I do when hunting. Is it untrue? My sage? Is your inner-self not looking at this leather-bag with tempted eyes? Has an irrepressible thirst not risen in your throat?

Uttanka: There, you are not far from truth.

Huntsman: A man alone can feel a man's inner afflictions. Moreover such men who, having risen above the surface of common humanity, move along the path of magnanimity are supposed to have attained equanimity of mind.

Uttanka: O visitor! Saturated with the ideal and rationality of a common man notwithstanding, I can't help it. How

would I act against the age-long social and scriptural tradition?

Huntsman: O Sage! I am no doubt, an outcaste, but this water is not for that matter unholy. The water of the Ganga is never contaminated. All the sins get immersed in the Ganga. Would this water remain unholy even after being touched by the Ganga of your spiritual austerity? Taste it. You would get the taste of ambrosia, happiness and safety from it.

Uttanka: O Chanda! Why are you so stubborn? Why do you importune me so? Why do you disregard the word of a mendicant?

Huntsman: Because it is the call of humanity. O sage! It is possible that you are being tried. How deep and sublime is your perseverance, austerity and personality may also be put to test and trial.

Uttanka: (*Angrily*) My trial? My trial? The trial of the sage Uttanka's spiritual personality by a huntsman. Here and now you must reap the consequence of insulting a Brahmin.

*(The Chandal bends his head. Krishna comes from another direction in yellow attire, peacock feathers in a row on the head, a garland hanging up to the knees, a smile on his face, sublime radiance emitting through his personality.)*

Krishna: Be calm, great sage! Anger does not suit you. (*In the meantime he goes away in the direction from which he had come*)

- Uttanka: (More in anger) Oh Krishna! Having thrown legions of human souls into the fire of feud in a malicious manner, now you are maligning me also! Is it your pledge? Where's your blessing? Liar! Distrustful, inhospitable to Brahmins! You too, as also this Chandal, must forthwith be reduced to ashes. (*Tries to pour water from his Kamandal*)
- Krishna: It's of no avail to pour water from that Kamandal. The pot contains no water which you could consecrate and sprinkle over one whom you want to chastise. O great sage! Had it been filled with water, it would have been a more benign to save somebody's life with it than to curse two persons with it. Forgiveness, not anger, is an ornament of a great man. Sublime and liberal attitude raises a man to the heights of a superman.
- Uttanka: Vasudeo...
- Krishna: What is the use of age-long rigorous discipline and austerity when it would not make man human, if it wouldn't let the Bhagirathi of sympathy flow within, if it wouldn't be replaced by divinity.
- Uttanka: Forgive me, Vasudeo! Forgive! Due to restlessness resulting from thirst and arrogance of austerity, rationality had forsaken me. I had become sightless, listless and senseless.

Krishna: O great Brahmin! My statement is not false. Of course, it was at my own request that he requested you to drink water.

Uttanka: O lord of sportive display! I am a layman. Was it justifiable to put a man like me through such an ordeal? You should have kept it in mind that a Brahmin would rather die from thirst than drink water from the hands of a Chandal. Would the age long caste-sanskar allow him to do so? Lord! I insulted the person and the water sent by you. I am harmless (*Turning back, not seeing the Chandal*) O my God, he is not visible! He has disappeared now.

Krishna: how could he stay on to get burnt to ashes in the flame of your curse.

Uttanka: I'm going now. In whichever nook and corner of the world he meets me, I must beg forgiveness and drink water offered by him.

Krishna: O great sage! Now he will not be available. He was Indra himself in disguise.

Uttanka: Deo... Raj ... Indra...

(*Wonderstruck*)

Krishna: Yes, O great sage! It was not ordinary water in his hand but celestial ambrosia, yes, ambrosia itself.

Uttanka: My mind is shaking off its stupor and in the light thereof, the first thing I notice is that the water offered with affection and

cordiality even by an ordinary man tastes ambrosiac.

Krishna: You had been afflicted by thirst. Seeing so, I requested Deoraj to make you drink ambrosia. He remarked that ambrosia was not meant for a man. As such, he should be offered something else.

Uttanka: Does it not follow from that he was none but Indra? Had he not nectar in his hand?

Krishna: True, Indra was holding nectar in his hand. How could I offer you ordinary water to drink? In compliance with my ardent request, he agreed to offer you ambrosia in the form of water. He believed that if Uttanka refused to drink, he would not force him to do so.

Uttanka: A Chandala too is a part and parcel of this very cosmos. Being a child of human being, I committed an unforgivable mistake by insulting Manu's descendent.

Krishna: O sage! I agree to the statement of Indra that you are so wise, so large-hearted and generous. By now you must have risen above the petty considerations of high and low, touchables and untouchables. To you, the whole world must know occur to be your kith and kin. You should have no longer any constraints in accepting water from the hand of the outcaste. But my assumption proved false.

Uttanka: Vasudeo! The supreme truth has revealed itself to me late in life. I shall continue to preserve this truth for ages to come.

*(Falls prostrate at Krishna's feet)*

Krishna: Get up, O great sage! Bhadramukha is coming over to you with water.

*(He disappears)*

Bhadramukh: *(Enters with water and notices Uttanka lying down)* Woe to me! Restless this thirst, Gurudeo has fallen into a swoon. Ah, please drink water Gurudeo.

*Uttanka (gets startled) with astonished eyes, he looks around and takes the Kamandal from Bhadramukh's hand. For once he looks up to the sky and starts drinking water.*



## ESSAY

### 1

## Modern Poetry- History and Future

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Poetry as a form was a solution to a basic need, the necessity for news. Messengers gave a rhythm to their messages to remember and repeat. In olden days Poetry sang of heroism and love. With time it progressed to become a divine source of expression of lofty feelings. The poets were thought to have grace and almost worshipped for their intellect. They must have profound personal and cultural recollections, able to extend outwards beyond something else in variety of situations and particular conditions of the intellect, distinguishing the good from the bad and shifting out the gems from the junk, intensely deep or bright imagination.

But now we have changed poetry as a means of moral and ethical standards enforced in a society to a medium of special utilization of language. Today an aesthetic poetry lover would not get sonnets or ballads with regular meter and rhyme.

Modern poetry is no longer confined to a kind of template or formula that poetry can be composed in. Its period stretches from 1885 to 1950. It began with French Symbolist movement. Political and literary developments around 1900, affected the poetic idiom and Imagism which

was started by poets like Yeats, Hardy, Pound and Eliot. They were disillusioned from society with anxiety and a sense of hopelessness about their work after World War I. They rejected Romantic ideas and artistic styles, and approached language with suspicion, resulting in fragmented sentence structure, juxtaposition, intersexuality and cerebral in its appeal like we see in "*The Waste Land*." Modern poetry rejects the Romantic Movement, stresses to work without bias, and lacks natural quality and resourcefulness, but is original and creative in thinking, uses typical vocabulary of a language, interpretation of a word or sentence is like a test for the common readers. They are strict in manner and express the most in the least possible way.

Today's Poetry is not very approachable. It creates an image, if the reader doesn't understand it, and then he should move on from that particular poem. Moderns are willing to get filthy with their poetry. No Modern poem seems to try to enlighten us with an account of courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. For them the abhorrent turns into poetry, the trivial becomes great. Their poetry is in between the prose and poetry minus rhyme and meter. Moderns value crafty sense of hearing and poems are produced for tone and mood but are nowhere near to an exceptionally good rhetoric and a few are attempting to present clear, logical, and convincing grand epic poetry.

The poetry is generated in the social mould which reflects in the emotional content of the poem. Ezra Pound and T S Eliot gave their personal experience a poetic form which happened to have universal appeal. Sylvia Plath wrote poetry. Free verse is the final attempt of the middle class to discard all social bonding.

When the poet works in the world for art's sake, his rhythm becomes clearly noticeable as in Apollinaire's *Alcools*.

He deliberately chooses bizarre associations, words which are only personal, but rational. The Georgian poets could not remain far from the traditions of romanticism but were sardonic to it. Yeats said, "We were bored and disappointed of the art of Tennyson. We wanted no poetic diction. We wanted a style like speech, as simple as a cry of the heart".

The reason is disillusionments of the age. The 19th century English community of faith needed the poet to restate the self-evident amenities immune to tentacle of skepticism? Tennyson's worst poems were then his best; we are in the era of nonconformist rationalism. There is no common-to-all-truth; Heaven, Hell, Duty, Olympus, and Immortality were the "themes": the Modern poet so astute has had no experience of these things. He will be happy in his own perceptive processes.

The English poets were not much impressed but in America it influenced American revival of 1912. Rupert Brooke, De la Mare, Ralph Hodgson, Masfield caused the modernist revival by "The Everlasting Mercy" with stern realism and consort ill. The new verse forms came mostly from America. The poetry was thought to be the English property about which others were not sure. Perceptive people became critical in the shadow of the socialist movement. New psychology provided food for different and serious thinking. They started to invent new and unique ways to give vent to their experience with departure from traditional styles of poetry. So the new verse forms came mostly from America. These writers wrote with themes being about intriguing aspects of life.

20<sup>th</sup> century is intellectual rather than emotional. The previous age gave us sentimentality and all the emotions. They questioned age old beliefs and defined morality the other way. The literary and scientific knowledge made

modernists skillful to create obscure allusions to other poets and events, which the reader should know. Science made Modernists to use all literary, religious and historical allusions altogether. It shows segregation of individual conversance in a pugnacious universe. Now the poet tries many things in a single poem. D Thomas's poem "This Bread I Break" is about creative skills, physical world and theology.

Another quality the moderns have is cynicism in their work. The advancement and power struggles have turned them against the old and present society although they have certain idealism but they don't have faith in their fellowmen. It is particularly concerned with writing away from established rules, and re-examination of every aspect of existence. It was against Victorian artificialities and moral bankruptcy. The new branches of social sciences, liberal arts and natural sciences sprung up. "The Big War" that turned out to be a ghastly experience left Moderns with many social and cultural traumas.

Adrian Mitchell said once "Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people". Modern poets do not bother to think what people really like. Freud said "the world view of the poet is reactionary, in the classical and cosmopolitan sense, and not in the currency of provincial and local slang. For the poet must lead us out of the bull rushes and into the Promised Land". W B Yeats discovered a mass poetry that would be well received, is the diluted magical potion of a later age, which they never seen before. He said, "True folk poetry delights in rhythmical animation, in idiom, in images, in words full of far-off suggestion".

In 20<sup>th</sup> century, some poets like G M Hopkins and Thomas wrote musical poems, tried many new combinations. One of them was "sprung rhythm". They were fully aware of the fact that music of poem was contingent to stressed and

unstressed syllables. A good foot could take numbers of unstressed syllables. Thomas was more musical, more superficial also. He plays with tempo. They are suggestions of poetic reverie in an unpoetical era. For those who adhere to tradition, especially in cultural or religious practice, these poets are inappropriate.

But the critics have never been satisfied; the poet tries many things. The prose has reduced poetry as a sleep pill. And the poets have to live by their expectations, ignominious. Where is modern poetry heading? Is the future of poetry safe? Free verse, half rhyme and the consonantal rhyme are to some extent a modernist contribution. Has the free verse failed? Free verse uses an idiom so peculiar that the scheme of resonance, both rhyme and measure, are getting ignored. But these present fixed forms are not permanent because poetry is never free from certain rules. But, yes, poetry as an art is in a very good position.

There is shortage of the content. The rational poet of today is in a position which he cannot occupy forever. He has to have perception and methodology like modern prose assuming it as a formal metrical exercise. If the modern poetry is losing its fervor, then there must be a reason. It is deemed that poet's aesthetically satisfying craft makes the reader to believe in the unreal. Poetry knows the difference between a vocabulary and an idiom. It is a rational blend of clairvoyance and speculation.

There are not two clear thoughts – a traditional old and a clear new one. The older poems have a variation which is practised by modern poets. Repetition isn't tradition; but a great achievement. As of now we can't figure out any thing clear about future. The conscientious denigrator will not let the rimes and oratorical music to get into line easily. The new generation of poets has to change current diction. The

external originates the inner inspiration. The poets have to show spontaneous expression, variety, a right division of a poetic idiom. Now Poetry don't care about public morality

The poet's diction did not touch the consciousness. This is not moral or cultural decline as characterized by excessive indulgence in pleasure, but in a wider sense. It is an enlargement under French superintendence; and it is less imaging than the progress from Wyatt to John Donne. We, with this materialistic approach all the way, need to perceive the exact abstract realities of Justice, Beauty and Truth. But we are so much reclined in our comfort zone that we have no time to look at them.

Poetry, the priest, is gone. Today a poet is no more than a clown. There are so many of them. But our poet knows his situation. He is not good as to write like Milton or Homer or anyone else of that era now but from his skill combined with experience he has minimized a disturbing convolution. Today journals are full of poetry reviews, they hire poets, offer certificates in various genres and there are poetry workshops coming thick and fast. But all these take you away from the actual language. Perhaps language study and jurisprudence introspection may be a future subject for poetry. In the words of Poet Laureate Carol Duffy "The text message is the future of poetry. The Face book, what's Up, Twitter generation is the future, and, oddly enough, poetry is the perfect form for them. It's a kind of time capsule. It allows feelings and ideas to travel big distances in a very condensed form."

Now-a-days the boom in social media has given opportunity to experiment various combinations and share them with their connections and it looks like they will create a new face of the next generation poetry. Modern poetry is unschooled about poetic customs like meter and rhyme, form and content and truth and emotion. The general folk like

managers, brokers, house wife have assumed control of it. It is said poetry should not excessively adhere to prescribed forms or rules. The path of poetry is to be different from that of prose like the critical observation of language as a whole; the perspective which takes us out of our limited sphere. This has paramount possibilities. Objective philosophical study of being is going to attract more poets or imitators.

Poetry in the next era will be metaphorical or symbolic, minimal, omnipresent, evocative about itself but it will rhyme because the poetry which have perfect rhymes are forever to remain in this literary scene as we have seen from ancient past till date, if a poet wants to be remembered in his life and after that also, he has to follow this path. Today's generation read a lot to get relief from stressful life because there are a few who like outdoor activities. If you want to communicate with MP3 or Podcast or Kindle notebook generation, you need something new every time. Now we read area related poem, the future should see, other sort of articulation like verbal art.

Poetry has to have varied tone and colour. The romantic idiosyncrasy, a panorama of the cosmos, The quintessence procurement, sound judgment that is often instinctive, and the vivacity of human, an obsessive attitude of criticism, and the sense of moral commitment, which will trigger it to traverse all compass suitable for sublime life.

The complications of poetic enterprise is same since the entity. The first and foremost inevitable factor for the creation of poetry of enduring efficacy is the person, the poet who has exceptional intellectual or creative powers, whether inborn or acquired and a responsive soul to outer and spiritual world. The poet must have a close acquaintance with the resilience of meter with a feeling of deep admiration for past literature and the skill that make particular personal acquire a universal

character. Some degree of compactness and convolution in sentence structure, words should have the veracity, with high level of consciousness of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

Modern poems are amorphous and the classicists have restrained form. The moderns pretended to revolutionize art. "The form is the content of art" said early art critics like R Fry, Clive Bell and C Greenberg. Miles Mathis says "We have been told that everything has been done under the sun. Poetry peaked with Dante or Shakespeare or Milton, and has been in decline ever since. The reason poetry has been in decline is that poets have been far too inbred and far too timid. Meter from the time of the Romans to the time of Thomas Hardy hardly changed at all. Meter was originally introduced to make poetry musical. Meter is an analogue of music. Music developed syncopation and triplets and grace notes and trills and arpeggios and melody and harmony and a thousand other things, while poetry stuck to iambs, trochees, and – in its most daring moments – dactyls. To this day, the metrical foot is either disyllabic or trisyllabic, and even most of those are unheard of. What poet now uses the tribrach or molossus, or even knows what they are? Prosody, like so many other old arts, is dead. "

To remove the standard forms in any field is not easy. What needed was to do appraisal of the musical qualities of poetry. The recapitulation to produce effect does not always work but limits it. So it is a freedom to be minus. The ranks that prefer a traditional and usually graceful and simple style in art are actively encouraging a return to meter. They have created their own journals to accept the poems that follow the old route.

Have Keats and Shakespeare done all that can be done with the sonnet, but there is strong possibility that some

future bard will perform exceptionally well to add some novelty to it. The need of the hour is that the form must be re-introduced with musical meter and content. Poetry has been accessible to everyone but with some socio-political barriers. We can't blindly tread on the heels of the moderns, who have socio-political ink to fill their pens. If you go after the classicists, you are going to get stone cold in their limited upstanding. If they can't bear H Crane, how can they accept, willingly and enthusiastically, a new Shakespeare? The insurgence, in real term, is allowing a new wave to come up in the literary ocean.

## 2

# **Could Once Again Windows be made out of Mirrors? Education System in India**

NEETI AGARWAL SARAN

Education should be such that it should elevate the student socially, physically and morally. The contemporary education is only information based and no stress is laid for the gain of knowledge as the teachers just enter the class-rooms, deliver the lectures and move out without caring the amount of knowledge grasped by the students as a result the main motive of education i. e. to make the taught knowledgeable remains unfulfilled. In Ancient India, we will find the education system unique as it aimed for the self-realization of the students, carving them to develop a complete personality. The system of education was such that scholars from all over the World came to gain knowledge in India where as none Indian scholar went outside. The present education is making scholars crafty with no focus on character building. Here the students do extra-classes for the development of personality but all in vain as the modern education has nothing to do with character building. The education should also inculcate social, cultural and moral values so that the youths can attain higher goals of life – towards becoming responsible citizens and being in connection with God too. Following the above mentioned ideas India can once again achieve Universal education and show its potentiality to the World.

As I am A person who spends a major part of the day in classrooms, staff-room and most important interacting with students, I thereby have an opportunity of analyzing a wide variety of students, talking to them about their academic problems and suggesting them solutions, which to a member of academic is of much higher interest than a glance of all that beautiful art and culture. Amongst a variety of multiple topics, we took an occasion to talk; the one that seemed most relevant was the system of education and the role of a teacher in the student's life in the contemporary scenario. The education should be such that is should craft the scholars physically, mentally as well as morally. It should enhance the mind of the scholars giving them full understanding of the worldly affairs at the same time making them responsible citizens.

The contemporary education is only information based and no stress is laid for the gain of knowledge as the teachers just enter the class-rooms, deliver the lectures and move out without caring the amount of knowledge grasped by the students as a result the main motive of education i. e. to make the taught knowledgeable remains unfulfilled. The contemporary education lacks the personal relation or interaction between the teacher and the taught. We must be remembering the headmaster in R. K. Naraynan's *The English Teacher*. His philosophy is the "business of education is to shape the mind and character of a child." R. K. Naraynan through this character is of opinion that, "Leave Alone System", seems to be a friendlier approach to education and motivates children more.

The education in the present decades is not life giving and mind enhancing, meaning that the students have been divided from God, generally they have no spiritual goals in their lives. They just move towards the path of nothingness.

They have become mechanical as they just focus on passing the exam and moving on to other exam until they get their desired goal. The whole process becomes a very mechanical one as the students just pass the exam and move on to the new class without caring for the knowledge not obtained by them. The rat-race competition for the marks has deteriorated the quality of education. The selection for the jobs and interviews are basically marks based or on the passing of some examinations and knowledge suffers in front of marks as most of the student's mug up and reproduce in the exams. Thus the mind of the scholars is not developing as the focus is on mugging and the creativity is being lost. The education system should give heed to the creativity and to the skill training to the students from the initial age so that the mugging could be avoided.

The education should be such that it can elevate the nation. The Government policies should encourage students towards research in those areas that can develop new technologies for the nation. The education system should be like a coin having two different facets – on the one hand education should craft the students physically as well as mentally and on the other hand the education should work for the upliftment of the nation. The result would be that we will be more responsible citizen and build a strong nation. There should be no politics in education as the politics disrupts the mind of the students and instead of obtaining knowledge the students get involved in leadership and the main motive of education is lost. In the earlier days there used to be students union that used to work for the betterment of the students but slowly it took the form of politics and lost its main motive i. e. the welfare of the students. The results are that the students who wants to study are also disturbed by the political atmosphere and the

engaging students who desire to become politicians lose their valuable time, education and money as only a few are able to climb the political ladder and the rest have to suffer throughout their life.

In many of the Universities the girl and the boy students are taught separately. There should be combined education for all students, so that at a later stage in life they can better understand their responsibilities towards the opposite gender. This is true that the students coming from various backgrounds should be given co-education else this one aspect of their personality i. e. how to react with the opposite gender remains unfulfilled throughout their life. If we go back to the past to the Ancient India, we will find the education system as unique as it aimed for the self-realization of the students as well as the education carved the students to develop a complete personality. The education was not only philosophy based but also taught science, literature and vocational courses so that the students can develop culture and character with noble ideals. The education in the Vedic system was such that the State did not interfere with the education system. The students had a personal relation with the teachers and resided in their homes. The students also did the manual work no matter from which background the taught came. The mastery in the household affairs along with education gave the students a better responsibility for life. The lectures were imparted by the Gurus under the tree where the student understood the subject through the question-answer method. They were more like the seminars of the modern times.

Education was not only for the boys rather the girls were also highly educated. Apart of the art of housekeeping they were also taught music and dance. They also learnt the Vedas. Some of the names of the scholarly women are Maitreyi,

Ghosh, Indrani and Gargi. The ladies of the time were remarkable in their character and freely took the education because neither the family nor the ladies were scared of the immorality of the society. Be it the men or the women of the Ancient times were high in their virtues. The education system of the Ancient India was an elaborate one that consisted of four Vedas, Vedangas (grammar, exegetics, phonetics, metrics, ritualistic knowledge and astronomy) darshan shastra, tarka shastra (logic), purana (history) and the Upanishads. There were other arts also like the medical sciences, veterinary science, weaving, spinning, art of making equipment's, jewels, training the horses, making houses and so on. The professional education imparted to the students was right from the primary stage of education so starting from the childhood the student had a single goal and the result was the perfect craftsmanship.

The Gurus paid individual attention to the pupils and taught through various methods like of critical analysis. The Gurus articulated the students to come up with new views and ideas. Introspection was another method of teaching. The students listened (sravana) and contemplated (manana) on the Gurus lectures. The teaching was done in the story form where the students the subjects through the question-answer method and thus had a deeper and critical knowledge of the subjects. The Ancient Indian education system was incomparable as the students were carved out from the bedrock of life. The Ancient Indian Universities like Takshila-known for handicrafts, image-making, painting and most important for its medical science, Nalanda for logic, Ujjain for mathematics and astronomy and Benaras for its theology were haunted by the students from all over the World.

People from all over the World invited Indian scholars to their countries. Because of its rich education India was a hub

of scholars like: Shankara for philosophy, Kautilya for political science, Sushruta for surgery, Nagarjuna for chemistry, Aryabhatta for astronomy, Baudhayana for mathematics and Patanjali for yoga. The concept of zero was also given to the World by Ancient Indians. They are also well known for the master structures of Khajuraho, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Odisha. Thus we should revert back to the Ancient Vedic period and re-consider the purpose of education that is unfortunately being misunderstood by the Modern India. The Ancient education crafted the complete personality of a scholar at the same time making the scholar skilled in the Worldly affairs. The present education is making scholars crafty with no focus for developing an instinct for reason based knowledge. Here the students do extra-classes for the development of personality but all in vain as the Modern education has nothing to do with character building.

In the present times the students can't imagine good education without coaching classes. The coaching classes are making more harm to the education system as they narrow a student's vision and way of thinking, making them restricted on some particular exams only. A student who gives two years to a methodology of an exam and unfortunately he is not selected he loses the platform of education. Education, once again should be mined enhancing and not limited to certain exams. This loss of character is effecting the present decades as well as the education system also. In Ancient India though the literacy ratio was less but still the women freely took the education. The girl students as well as their family members were mentally free to educate the girls.

One of the solutions to such problem could be that teachers should be more personal with the students. Apart from the bookish knowledge the teachers should also impart

the lessons of morality and character building. Studies need to be framed in the wider content, with the connectivity with God. The students should be made aware of their responsibilities towards the nation. The education should be such that it should work towards the welfare of the nation. The students should be imparted with the technical knowledge of the subject and mugging should be avoided. The new technical knowledge should introduce innovative methods to the students. In the Ancient days the knowledge was very much practical and technical that created more interest in the subject resulting in a lot of innovations. A similar kind of education with practical methods is needed in the contemporary times. Suraj Singh, a B. A. II<sup>nd</sup> year Allahabad University student opines that “there should be smart classes, as they would captivate the mind of the scholars, making them techno-friendly and updated with the contemporary technical world too”.

Education is a right of everyone. The system of education should be such that it should deliver impartial education to everyone. In the Ancient days education was same for everyone. The rich and the poor got the same education according to their capabilities. In the present times money has commercialized education. Nowadays the students do not pass the exams according to their capability but on the capability of money and political backing they can offer. Umme also considers corruption, brotherhood, early marriage and rapes as obstacles to education. The mediocre should be finished and there should be transparency in admissions, exams and interviews so that the eligible candidates can come to the focal point.

Thus to sum up the education system should be inclusive. It should focus on the life giving education and not just passing the examinations. It should revert back and take

examples from the Ancient Vedic period where the focus was on the enhancement of skills and not on the bookish learning. The education should enhance the personality of the students at the same time mastering them in the skills needed for life. We also need to recognize that the knowledge, skills and the productivity of our growing young and dynamic work force forms the backbone of our economy and of country. We need to implement the reforms in the education system and also bring forth new factors namely knowledge, skills and technology to reap the benefits of such young force, The education should also inculcate social, cultural and moral values so that the youths can attain higher goals of life-towards becoming responsible citizens and being in connection with God too. Following the above mentioned ideas India can once again achieve Universal education and show its potentiality to the World.

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### 3

## Love in Early America

JANEL BRUBAKER

In a time when men dominated early American society, a few female writers began to stand out against the patriarchal canvas. Anne Bradstreet was one such woman. Born Anne Dudley in 1612, she was the first woman to be recognized as a successful New World poet. She married Simon Bradstreet around 1628, had eight children with her husband, and died in 1672. Her volume of poetry, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*, was published in London in 1650 and received tremendous attention (Poetry Foundation). In Anne Bradstreet's poem, "To My Dear and Loving Husband," one sees an example of how poetic language can be used to express feelings of romance and sexuality, and how it offers insight into relationships that would, otherwise, be closed to us.

In the 1600s it was not common for people to marry for love or even mutual respect. An individual's level of eligibility was based almost exclusively on their amount of income and standing in society and marriages were based on eligibility. Even after marriage it was not uncommon for husbands and wives to only tolerate each other, nor, due to the lack of gender equality at the time, was it rare for a husband to beat his wife. The very fact that Bradstreet would write a love poem to her husband and express in the title that he was both "dear" and "loving" communicates to the reader the uncommon nature of their relationship.

The language of the poem is incredibly passionate; from the beginning Bradstreet compares their marriage to others and declares, in no uncertain terms, that theirs is superior. "If ever two were one, then surely we. If ever man were loved by wife, then thee." Sometimes poetry is considered fleeting, cliché, superficial. Based on nothing more than the two opening lines the reader can surmise that these expressions of love are not borne of a whirlwind romance or written merely to comply with an expected social norm. These words are written out of a deep, consistent affection. "If ever wife was happy in a man, compare with me, ye women, if you can," is another example of how Bradstreet believed her marriage to be superior and she, likely, was not incorrect. Though marriage was considered sacred and private, those couples of the higher end of society who had horrible marriages were often the brunt of gossip. This may have shown Bradstreet how lucky she had been in marriage.

"I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold, or all the riches that the East doth hold."

Thousands of men and women would have traded love for money. In a time when money was terribly important, these two lines reflect the sincerity of Bradstreet's affection, especially considering the environment in which she had been raised versus the environment in which she'd written this poem. Bradstreet was raised in England on the Earl of Lincoln's estate where her father was a steward. She was accustomed to finery and comfort and, when her family made the move from England to the Colonies, she was forced to trade that comfort for a much more difficult life. And yet the reader sees that, at some point in her marriage, money meant nothing when compared to the love and affection of her husband.

Sexuality, in western civilization, was widely considered to be primarily for male pleasure. A woman's duty was, after all, to offer her body to her husband for his physical enjoyment and then to provide him with children, preferably sons. Rape within marriage was not unheard of since the wife's body was said to belong to her husband. *Her* pleasure was not of much concern. "My love is such that rivers cannot quench, nor ought but love from thee give recompense," communicates to the reader just how strongly Bradstreet feels. Her love is not purely of the emotional or spiritual kind, but is, instead, so intense that it transcends the social barrier and builds within her physical desire. Mary Ruby, a writer for Black Bird Library, in her analysis of "To My Dear and Loving Husband" said, "By arguing that "Rivers cannot quench" her love, the speaker implies that her love is an ongoing thirst that no amount of water can slake...that the speaker's desire can neither be stopped nor quantified." For modern readers this may seem trivial, but considering the cultural and historical norms for the time, this declaration sets Bradstreet utterly apart and exposes her to potential ridicule from her peers.

"Thy love is such I can no way repay, the heavens reward thee manifold, I pray. Then while we live, in love let's so persevere, that when we live no more, we may live ever." The final four lines close out the poem with an image that, if ever one doubted Bradstreet's sincerity, their minds would be set at ease. Such is the love between Anne and her husband that one lifetime together is not enough; she wants to also be with him throughout all of eternity. For a modern reader profusions such as this may be commonplace, but in a time when husbands and wives often didn't even like each other, such a declaration means a great deal. It may not reflect the details of Anne and Simon's relationship, but communicates

enough for the reader to understand that their marriage truly was one of passion and affection. By peering into this corner of Anne Bradstreet's heart, modern readers not only have the chance to examine a type of marriage that was exceedingly rare, but also catch a glimpse of how important love is, and has always been, to humanity.

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1

**Wordsworth Conception of Poetry –  
As “Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful  
Feelings”**

ANUPAM SHARMA

Wordsworth poems are the spontaneous overflow of passion, but passion has been tampered and modified by thought. In his poems feelings are more important than action and situation. Emphasis has been laid on feeling and emotion, and in this way he has tried to correct the contemporary craving for the unusual in situation and incident. According to Wordsworth a poet is essentially a man speaking to men. The poet communicates not only personally felt emotions, but also emotions which he has not directly experienced. For Wordsworth poetry is a method of interpreting the reality or the meaning of life.

Critics and poets, in all ages and countries, have tried to explain their own theory and practice of poetry. Wordsworth, too, expounded his views on poetry, its nature and functions, and the qualifications of a true poet, in his *Preface* to the 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and later, developed his theory in the *Preface to the 1815 edition* and a *Supplementary Essay*. Few compositions of equal length contain so much of vigorous criticism and sound reflection on poetry, its nature and function, as the 1802 *Preface*.

### PASSION: IT'S SPONTANEOUS OVER FLOW

As regards the nature of poetry, the poet clearly states that, "*poetry is the spontaneous over-flow of powerful passion*". In other words, poetry proceeds from the internal feelings of the poet. It is a matter of feeling, mood and temperament. When the mood is on him it flows naturally, and without labour. Poetry, true poetry, cannot be written without this proper mood and temperament. We cannot ask a poet to write at our sweet will; poetry cannot be produced to order; it must flow out voluntarily and willingly from the soul of the poet. As has been well said, "*The clear springs of poetry must flow freely and spontaneously – it cannot be made to flow through artificially laid pipes*". Poetry is generated in the heart and not in the mind but in the heart overflowing with feelings". Poets are gifted with greater organic sensibility than ordinary individuals. They have greater capacity to receive sense impressions. Beauties of nature, which may leave ordinary mortals cold and untouched, excite in the poet powerful emotions, and he feels an urge to express those emotions and thus convey his joy to others. Wordsworth himself was such an individual; his heart leapt up with joy on beholding a rainbow in the sky or daffodils dancing in the breeze and he expressed his powerful, over-flowing spontaneously, of his own accord, in his immortal poems.

### THE ROLE OF REFLECTION: FOUR STAGES OF THE PROCESS OF CREATION

But according to Wordsworth, good poetry is never an immediate expression of such powerful emotions. A good poet must mediate and ponder over them long and deeply. In other words, *poetry has its origin in "emotions recollected in tranquility"*. There are at least four stages through which an experience has to pass before successful composition becomes

possible. *First* of all, there is the observation or perception of some object, character or incident which sets up powerful emotions in the mind of the poet. Secondly, there lies recollection or contemplation of that emotion in tranquility. At this stage memory plays a very important part. An interval, of time, it may be a quite long, say ten years, must elapse, during which the first experience sinks deep into the poet's consciousness and becomes a part and parcel of his being. As, during the interval the mind contemplates in tranquility the impression received by it, it is purged of the non-essential elements, accidents or superfluities, is "qualified by various pleasures". This filtering of selective process is very slow; time and solitude are essential. In this way, the poet's emotion is universalized. Thirdly, the interrogation of memory by the poet sets up, or revives, the emotion in "the mind itself". It is very much like the first emotion, but is purged of all superfluities and constitutes "state of enjoyment".

This does not mean that the creative process is a tranquil one. The poet expressly points out that I the process of contemplation, "tranquility disappears". When creating, the poet has to, "passion anew" and is terribly exhausted as a consequence. Dorothy's Journal proves beyond a shadow of doubt that creation exhausted our poetry terribly. But creation, if it be healthy, carries with it joy or what Wordsworth calls, "an over-balance of pleasure". On the whole, "the mood of imaginative creation is enjoyment". How does it all happen? How does the selective process take place so as to leave behind a state of enjoyment? Wordsworth provides no answer to the riddle and simply ascribes it to Nature. In other words, threw creative process is natural; the ability to create comes from nature, and not from premeditated art.

The fourth and last stage is the stage of composition. The poet must convey that, "overbalance of pleasure", his own, "state of enjoyment", to others. He differs from ordinary individuals not merely in his greater sensibility, but also in his capacity to communicate his experience to others, and to communicate them in such a way as to give pleasure. Metre is justified for it is pleasure super-added: *verse will be read a hundred times where prose is read only once.*"

H. Read has admirably summed up Wordsworth theory of poetry composition in the following words: "Good poetry is never an immediate reaction to the provoking cause; that our sensations must be allowed time to sink back into the common fund of our experience, there to find their level and due proportion. That level is found for them by the mind in the act of contemplation, and then in the process of contemplation, the sensations revive, and out of the union of the contemplating mind and the receiving sensibility, raise that unique mood of expression which we call poetry. "

Wordsworth himself closely followed his theory in his practice. He rarely made, "a present joy the matter of a song" still less a present sorrow. He did not poetise an experience immediately; there are hardly ten poems in the bulk of his output which he described as extempore. His characteristic mode of composition was to place a wide interval between an experience and its poetic delineation. He had a powerful memory and sometimes he would fetch out an impression, "from hiding places ten years deep". All his best poems – the Daffodils, Tintern Abbey, Peele Castle, and Solitary Reaper – resulted from emotions recollected in tranquility.

It is recollection in tranquility which enables the poet to see into the heart of things and communicate the very soul, or essence of an experience, to his readers. It is through such contemplation that the poet is able to impart to every-day

objects a 'visionary gleam', a 'glory', a 'light that never was on land and sea'. As such recollection is best done in solitude, the poet loved lonely places, liked to wander all alone, oblivious of time and place, lost in reverie, and came to be known by the simple rustics of Cumberland as the Solitary, who was rather crazed.

#### POETRY: IT'S FUNCTION

As regards the true function of poetry, Wordsworth tells us that its function is to give pleasure. Even when the subject is painful in itself, it must be so treated that it would result in an "over plus of pleasure". The poet is himself in a "state of enjoyment" and it is his duty to communicate his own enjoyment to his readers. But pleasure is not the only, not even the chief aim of poetry. Its aims are much more exalted and noble. Poetry is not a mere entertainment, a diversion for a patron's idle hours, like sherry, or rope-dancing. Thus poetry, to be worth the name, must serve the purpose of life and morality. *"Poetry divorced from morality is valueless. Through his own poetry, he hoped, "to console the affected, to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier, to lead the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous."*

Wordsworth preferred incidents, situations and character and every-day objects of nature, the subjects of his poetry, because in that condition of life the elementary passions and emotions find a clearer and freer expression, for they are not repressed or inhibited by convention as is the case with more sophisticated people. They can be observed more clearly and expressed more accurately. Moreover, such elementary passions in rural conditions are associated with, 'the beautiful and permanent forms of nature'. The poet must deal with such simple subjects but so as to throw over them,

'a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way.' For Wordsworth it is the feeling and emotion that is important and not action and situation. "*Feeling developed in a poem gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.*" The poet's re-occupation with feeling would become obvious even from a cursory perusal of his poetry.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, it may also be added, was a direct outcome of his democratic preference for simple rustic life and characters. When the theme was simple, the language must be simple too. It must be a selection of the language really spoken by such men; otherwise it would not be in character. He is, therefore, critical of the artificial poetic diction of 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry.

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## 2

# **Every Decolonized Mind Has Got Something to Write: An Analysis of Postcolonial Texts of Franz Fanon and Ngugi Wa Thiongo**

ROHINI JHA

### ABSTRACT

Post colonialism is in itself a term which by many critics have been found to be controversial. Post colonialism has many implicit meanings. When we talk of colonialism, we are immediately been reminded of a poem by Rudyard Kipling and that poem is 'The White man's burden '(published in 1899 with the subtitle 'The United States and the Philippines Islands'), Aime Cesaire's essay Discourse on Colonialism. Franz fanon's wretched of the earth, Fanon's Black skin white mask, and how we could forget Joseph Conrad's 'The heart of Darkness'. The aim of present paper is to discuss how decolonization had been possible and the need to stop aping Europe. It was due to the continuous and never tiring and never giving up attitudes of some great persons who instigated protest and sowed the germs of revolution in the minds of common people and brought them Independence. This paper shall also probe why post colonialism can't be revelled without remembering the dark history of colonialism. Decolonization does not only mean freedom from physical boundary but an individual's mental freedom is also important. The politicians, the freedom fighters, soldiers all were fanatically seeking freedom for their countries but the role of writers, critics and publishers were also very much important and can't be ignored from

any point of view. The writer's roles in awakening people and that too from journals, books, newspapers, handbooks, pamphlets were really very useful tool for the purpose. In fact, they took vows to work for the welfare of the people in the colonial period and they continued to awaken and aware people after decolonization or in postcolonial period too.

*Keywords:* Post colonialism, Freedom, Protest, Struggle, Awareness, Culture, Custom.

### BACKDROP

Excoriating the colonial gaze was never so easy and not even today. After decolonization the scenario was not different because, people were almost lost and mingled up with the Eurocentric culture causing their neurotic orientation towards aping Europe. And this sad plight of aping by colonials is forbidden by many post-colonial intellectuals like Franz Fanon.

In "The Negro and Language", Fanon quotes Professor D. Westermann, who avers:

"The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements." (qtd. in *Black Skin* 14)

This aping of even rags and torn out European clothes by the colonials or the Blacks who were even more marginalized shows a clear picture of predicament of their social status. They feel this aping may be the only way to compete with the Europeans and raise their status. People who were under the colonial rules were very much oppressed and ultimately they became habituated to live according to

the Colonizers rule and even after decolonization the effects were very much visible. Their habit of surviving in compulsion under colonial reign became their life style even after decolonization. Frankly, colonizers were living and surviving at the mercy of their rulers. The extent of tribulation leads them to suffer endlessly. People were unable to come out of the cocoon shell created under imperialism. They were unable to understand and recognize their original culture, custom, lives and in that situation they had to live a dual life like hybrids. In almost many colonised countries who gained independence from imperialists were unable to adopt their native language. Country like Africa was very horribly coerced and after gaining independence after many years they had to face major difficulty in the adoption of language. They celebrated year of Africa during 1960s but the question of language still persisted leaving many intellectual writers and critics to discuss. Africans were almost indecisive as to which language they should adopt. This language crisis may be seen as the most horrendous result of imperialism. But now who is going to compensate the loss of the natives caused by imperialism? The imperialists presented themselves as the Saviour and their whole empire as a missionary that can civilize the whole race of colonisers. This was perhaps the greatest tragedy for the colonials and the biggest achievements for the colonisers. Really, it was a great Irony on their part.

In the wake of colonization the weakening of all sorts of values could be observed but the debatable topic remains the same. Are we the post colonizers/post modernists are able to fully restore / and repair that loss? The answers vary from nation to nation because the time frame for their Independent struggles and the achievement of their independence were

different. Post colonialism has given a very Himalayan task of restoration of many nations originality.

Meanwhile the role of some writers came to prominence for their contribution in helping people realize their originality and individual capability. These writers from different countries emerged even before decolonization. Frankly speaking, their mode of instruction was through writing but it would be very interesting to see how they did it. The struggles for freedom in almost many countries were running parallel with the struggles of writers to awaken common mass through their writings. And it helped common people in understanding the reason behind colonialism and how to get rid of it and establish a free nation. G. B. Shaw (propagandist and dramatist) says any work of art must propagate something. Literature is in its best form and colour when it propagates something for the sake of common people. And in the case of addressing and disclosing Imperialist policies, what other device could be more helpful than writers and their propelling ideas and writings. In other words, the race for the search of identity started when the colonial rule was at its height. They instruct people not to ape the colonizers rather live as their own culture and custom allows. Martinique- born thinker, Marxist psychologist Franz Fanon (born 20 July 1925- 6 Dec. 1961) also considered very prominent postcolonial writer. His post-colonial works especially 'White Skin, Black Masks' (originally pub. in French as *Peau noire, masques blancs*) and 'The Wretched of the Earth'(written in 1961) are stunning books elaborating colonialism and dealing superbly with its content about the mental effects of both the colonizers and the colonized. In his 'The Wretched of the Earth,' Franz Fanon urges:

“Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create

the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth". (WE 252)

I think, Fanon's call for people not to imitate Europe could be seen as an insight into people's heart and mind so that they could build up a new scenario in their respective countries. What Fanon could see and feel is very obvious for the welfare of common people. People would be able to measure their capabilities and create a new nation with a fresh vision. There is no need to imitate Europe because Europe had not only crushed the power of its colonized nation but it has eclipsed the progress of each and every individual also. Moreover, Fanon concludes his wretched of the earth as: "come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different". I think, Fanon's saying that 'the European game has finally ended' has so many connotations. Frankly, there is no need to discuss whether the European game was dirty game or a clean game. The political condition during colonial reign was as such that the social statuses, individual liberation, identity establishment, progress, freedom, peace etcetera all were brutally stamped by Europe. What has been left after decolonization is not so important. Because there is a continuous need to examine whether the minds of every post-colonial/and postmodern individual has been decolonized or not.

Ngugi Wa Thingo was (born 5 January 1938) is Kenyan writer, formerly working in English and now working in Gikuyo. His work includes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. He is the founder and editor of the Gikuyu-language journal, Mutiri. David Cook paraphrases Ngũgĩ understands of imperialism as he articulates in his work:

“Imperialism disrupts the entire fabric of the lives of its victims: in particular their culture, making them ashamed of their names, history, systems of belief, languages, lore, art dance, song, sculpture, even the color of their skin. It thwarts all its victims’ forms and means of survival, and furthermore it employs racism.” (Cook David)

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o was very much concerned about the language issue in Africa after decolonization. Ngugi’s concern about language was very genuine. He felt that his people have been betrayed by everything which is required for a human being in general and a free individual in particular. He suffered a lot for this fight. In African post-colonial reign Ngugi could best be called as a hero who has true feelings for his race, culture, customs, ethnicity and above all restoration of language. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o rejected English and declared his love and interest in writing his novels in Gikuyu can’t be forgotten. This sentimentalism and affection for his own language i. e. Gikuyu shows his extreme anger and resistance towards language issue. It is also true that language question and translation has long been debated topic. Silencing the language of the natives was one of the most prominent features of Imperialism. But gradually the writers realized that post-colonial texts should be written in English and if not written in English at least translation is permissible. And the postcolonial subversion is taking place gradually. Also they are not carrying forward European model rather they are in process of developing texts and literary fields that speak something of hybridity (used by Bhabha) because it is not possible to come out of the mixed culture created by Europeans to the same original culture and customs which were the recognition of any nation. So, it is just impossible to imagine a different post-colonial nation without the involvement and re discussion of colonialism, colonial texts and imperialist’s policies. Can we say that the

nomenclature of post colonialism is defective? Or colonial and post-colonial texts both can't be viewed without the political lens?

With increasing momentum after the end of Second World War, anti-colonial nationalist movements took a more confrontational, no compromise approach to decolonization. The demand was for complete independence Purna Swaraj (in India), ujamaa (or independence along collectivist lines in Tanzania), amandla (or power, the power of the people, in South Africa). (Waugh Patricia p 344). Extreme anger of the common mass has begun during colonial reign and was very widespread and it could best be seen through different countries and their sentimentalism. Although the extent of oppression varies nation to nation but people were no longer unaware of the cruel intentions of the imperialists. They started to revolt because they understood that the sole purpose of Imperialist policy was to damage people's identity and marginalize them in every field so that their voices could be unheard. And their mission to civilize people (instead making them slaves and treating them like servants) flopped and became complete fiasco. Anti-colonial nationalists also rose to prominence like Aurobindo Ghosh in *The doctrine of passive Resistance*(1910), Franz Fanon in *The wretched of the Earth*(1961), Amilcar Cabral in his speech 'National Liberation and culture' (1970). All of them belonged to different nations but they share something in common and the message was only about the liberation struggle. As Aurobindo wrote, conditions could arise where 'national life' had to become 'perforce a national assault'.

Indian writer-activist Arundhati Roy writes: 'Independence came (and went), elections come and go, but there has been no shuffling of the deck. On the contrary, the old order has been consecrated, the rift fortified. We the rulers

won't pause to look up from our groaning table.' (Roy, Arundhati). The nationalism and the fight and struggle for the freedom by many countries have left a remarkable sign and impending legacy in the postcolonial world. Postcolonial criticism has attempted to recognise that the perceptions and responses of colonised peoples in India or Africa, where European settlers have brought and imposed their own social, cultural and political values on indigenous populations, may be very different from the experience of Caribbean peoples who have suffered exiles and diasporas, losing contact with the lands of their origins. (Padley, Steve). Post colonialism has brought a moving scenario in people's life, their culture, custom and even in their thinking perspectives. People are not able to enjoy endlessly because of the mental scars of colonialism has so deepen that makes them to stop and think. This era is postmodern era but if we peep in the past much has been lost and a lot more need to be achieved.

### CONCLUSION

No doubt, Post colonialism has given every decolonized individual freedom, self-respect, identity, recognition, voice, individuality, new vision. But at the same time post colonialism has also left a deep scar on the psyche of people. However, post colonialism can't only be seen as an obsession for Independent nation but it has become a movement wherein every one learns to revel the present and no longer mourns for the past. Post-colonial writers have said so much so far that their revelations have been very bitter for the Imperialists and sweet for the decolonized nations. Fanon should rightly be called as a true post-colonial thinker and writer who has presented Eurocentric scenario very prudently. How invective one gets while rewinding the

chapters of imperialism and its selfish mission but it has undoubtedly given rise to intellectuals who can dismantle the harsh realities and consequences of following and not following Europeans. Defeating the Imperial culture is not so easy and an instant process but the complexity of indigenous culture is improving gradually. It is a sine qua non for every post-colonial people to read and understand Franz Fanonian analysis of colonialism which is very unique and different in its own way. Fanon had mirrored the destruction caused by colonialism in a superb way and emphasized the loss of colonized culture, law, psyche of natives, education, language etcetera and even causing their dispersion. Let's see how Fanon's words could be treated as the best solution in reestablishment and re exploration of originality. No wonder, Fanon's writing and his labour will not go in vain because he warns individual not to be tangled in the web of Eurocentric power anymore. His words are moving in the sense that he calls for the pure culture that has become dusty with the smog of imperialism.

Both the post-colonial writers, Fanon and Thiong'o have been placed on the top rung of postcolonial writing genre. Simply, saying that their writings inform would not be enough because their writings have true penchant for inculcating every commonwealth individual with feelings of love for their own language, identity, style and uniqueness.

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### 3

## Fallacy of the American Dream in Steinbeck's *The Pearl*

SANGEETA SHARMA

#### ABSTRACT

John Steinbeck, one of the foremost authors in the American literary pantheon, continues to be a relevant and valid voice in the globalised village of the new millennium. A much-anthologized writer, he is widely prescribed in the universities of the English-speaking world – Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Steinbeck is a regular staple in the syllabi of the Indian academe as well. Teaching his text in an under-graduate classroom can be both challenging and delight. The struggles and insights are as contemporary as they were in his time.

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1962 confirms his stature as a writer of significance not only for the Americans but other nationalities also. One of the major themes in his novella *The Pearl* is the pursuit of the American Dream and its end proves it to be a fallacy. This paper attempts to reinforce the view that Steinbeck has once again shown the chimera of the American Dream fizzle out in *The Pearl* as he has done before in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

*Key words:* American Dream, obsession, tragic/tragedy, fallacy etc.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Pearl is a gripping novella by American author John Steinbeck, published in 1947. It is the story of a Mexican pearl diver, Kino, and explores man's nature as well as greed and

evil. The protagonist Kino's desire to utilize the pearl to improve his life echoes the traditional narrative of the American Dream. He attempts to transform hard work into material wealth, and material wealth into education, comfort, and familial advancement. According to this reading, Kino's gradual corruption and the story's tragic conclusion hint at a fundamental flaw in the American Dream: it condones sacrifice of virtue for material gain. Additionally, Kino's gradual disillusionment with the pearl (as he realizes that it won't make his life better) underscores the fallacy of the American Dream itself. Rather than widespread opportunity, Kino finds a world of powerful, greedy men conniving to take his wealth away from him dishonestly.

Steinbeck's inspiration was a Mexican folk tale from La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico, which he had heard in a visit to the formerly pearl-rich region in 1940. In 1947, it was adapted into a Mexican film named *La perla*, as well. The story starts with Coyotito, the only son of Juana and Kino, a young couple, being stung by a scorpion. Kino, his father, is desperate to get his son treated by a doctor but could not find a way to pay the town doctor to treat him. The doctor denies Kino out of racism, which enrages him. Shortly thereafter, Kino discovers an enormous, lucid pearl which he is ready to sell to pay the doctor. Everyone calls it "the Pearl of the World," and many people begin to covet it. That very night Kino is attacked in his own home. Determined to get rid of the pearl, the following morning he takes it to the "pearl buyers' auction" in town; however, the "auction" is actually a fraud and always has been. The "buyers" normally feign to auction each pearl and pretend bid against each other, but in reality they are all paid a salary by a single man, they all turn the pearls over to him and he resells them outside the village, thus cheating the locals. The corrupt pearl buyers try to

convince Kino that the pearl is the equivalent of “fools gold” and they quote an incredibly low price for it. However, Kino’s dream blinds him to the greed and suspicions the pearl arouses in him and his neighbors. Even Juana, Kino’s wife, sees that the pearl has brought darkness and greed, and sneaks out of the house late at night to throw it back into the ocean. But Kino stealthily follows her and holds her from discarding it. He furiously attacks her and leaves her on the beach. Kino decides to go over the mountains to the capital to find a better price. While returning to his hut with the pearl, Kino is attacked by an unknown man whom he stabs and kills. Kino thinks the man has taken the pearl, but Juana shows him that she has it in her possession. When they go back to their hut, they find it has been set on fire. The family’s canoe had also been ruined, an offense that enraged Kino. Kino and Juana then spend the day hiding in the hut of Kino’s brother Juan Tomás and his wife, gathering provisions for their trip to the capital city. Kino, Juana, and Coyotito leave in the dark of the night. After a brief rest on their journey in the morning, Kino spots trackers he believes are pursuing them. Well aware they will be unable to hide from the trackers, they begin hiking into the mountains. They find a cavern near a natural water hole where the exhausted family hides and waits for the trackers to catch up to them. Kino realizes they must get rid of the trackers if they are to survive the trip to the capital. As he prepares to attack, the men hear a cry like a baby’s, though they decide it is more like a coyote with a litter. One of the men fires his rifle in the direction of the crying, where Juana and Coyotito lie. Kino kills all three of the trackers. Realizing that something is wrong, he climbs back up to the cave to discover that Coyotito has been shot in the head when the tracker fired. In the morning, Kino and Juana return to La Paz with Coyotito’s dead body wrapped in

a sling. No longer wanting the pearl, Kino throws the pearl back into the ocean.

In this heart-rending novel, Kino sees the pearl creating a better way of life for the people through an education for his baby son, Coyotito. If the child could read and write, then he could set his family and his people free from the social and economic bondage in which they toil. Kino is ignorant of the dangers of wealth, and *The Pearl* is the tale of how he matures by coming to understand them.

His dreams that represent the 'American Dream' are well expressed in the following lines: And Juan Tomas, who squatted on Kino's right hand because he was his brother, asked, "What will you do now that you have become a rich man?" Kino looked into his pearl, and Juana cast her eyelashes down and arranged her shawl to cover her face so that her excitement could not be seen. And in the incandescence of the pearl the pictures formed of the things Kino's mind had considered in the past and had given up as impossible. In the pearl he saw Juana and Coyotito and himself standing and kneeling at the high altar, and they were being married now that they could pay. He spoke softly: "We will be married – in the church." In the pearl he saw how they were dressed – Juana in a shawl stiff with newness and a new skirt, and from under the long skirt Kino could see that she wore shoes. It was in the pearl – the picture glowing there. He himself was dressed in new white clothes, and he carried a new hat – not of straw but of fine black felt – and he too wore shoes – not sandals but shoes that laced. But Coyotito – he was the one – he wore a blue sailor suit from the United States and a little yachting cap such as Kino had seen once when a pleasure boat put into the estuary. All of these things Kino saw in the lucent pearl and he said: "We will have new clothes." And the music of the pearl rose like a chorus of

trumpets in his ears. Then to the lovely gray surface of the pearl came the little things Kino wanted: a harpoon to take the place of one lost a year ago, a new harpoon of iron with a ring in the end of the shaft; and – his mind could hardly make the leap – a rifle – but why not, since he was so rich? And Kino saw Kino in the pearl, Kino holding a Winchester carbine. It was the wildest day-dreaming and very pleasant. His lips moved hesitantly over this – “A rifle,” he said. “Perhaps a rifle.” It was the rifle that broke down the barriers. This was impossibility, and if he could think of having a rifle whole horizons were burst and he could rush on. For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. And this is said in disparagement, whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have. The neighbors, close pressed and silent in the house, nodded their heads at his wild imaginings. And a man in the rear murmured: “A rifle. He will have a rifle. “But the music of the pearl was shrilling with triumph in Kino. Juana looked up, and her eyes were wide at Kino’s courage and at his imagination. And electric strength had come to him now the horizons were kicked out. In the pearl he saw Coyotito sitting at a little desk in a school, just as Kino had once seen it through an open door. And Coyotito was dressed in a jacket, and he had on a white collar, and a broad silken tie. Moreover, Coyotito was writing on a big piece of paper. Kino looked at his neighbours fiercely. “My son will go to school,” he said, and the neighbours were hushed. Juana caught her breath sharply. Her eyes were bright as she watched him, and she looked quickly down at Coyotito in her arms to see whether this might be possible. But Kino’s face shone with prophecy. “My son will read and open the books, and my son will write and will know writing.

And my son will make numbers, and these things will make us free because he will know - he will know and through him we will know." And in the pearl Kino saw himself and Juana squatting by the little fire in the brush hut while Coyotito read from a great book. "This is what the pearl will do," said Kino. <sup>1</sup>

There are other critical views that concur with this analysis. In *A Critical Look at Steinbeck's 'The Pearl'*, Stacey writes, "The Pearl is a direct expression of Steinbeck's very personal experience of achieving the American dream and finding it wanting."<sup>2</sup> Not only Steinbeck, there are other important writers who have also explored the negative side and the hollowness of the American Dream. The theme of the fallacy of the American Dream finds manifestation in well-known literary texts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920), touches upon the increasing disillusion with the traditional American dream and *The Great Gatsby* (1925), considered to be Fitzgerald's masterpiece, is commonly cited as a comment on the American dream, in describing how despite his riches, the ostensible hero Jay Gatsby could not get the love he longed for.

Some authors take a realistic view of the American dream, depicting characters struggling to attain their dreams in the face of sometimes insurmountable difficulties. Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's 1949 play *Death of a Salesman* is a tragic hero who believes in the American dream but sees it fall apart. Although Willy has worked hard all his life, he has not managed to attain the success he thinks he deserves. The protagonist is Willy Loman, a salesman, now in his sixties, who gradually feels redundant in a commodity economy, with decreasing exchange value in the reified social system. The whole play revolves around the pathetic figure of Willy

Loman and his falling value in a society where youth and appearances count a lot. He is envious of his luckier neighbors and relatives, but his pride does not allow him to accept help.

### HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

James Truslow Adams is usually attributed first with coining the phrase "American dream," when describing it in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*, where he wrote of a "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity according to ability or achievement." American literature is permeated with explorations of the American dream, the idea of which existed in the national consciousness well before the phrase was first used.

From the infancy of the nation, Americans saw their society as different from others because of the opportunity it offered to the individual, no matter of origin, to accomplish success. This was enshrined from the very founding of the nation, in the Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, with its statement that all men are created equal and endowed with the rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Benjamin Franklin, who helped write the declaration, was also an example of the achievement of the American dream. Franklin's rise from an apprentice to one of the most respected figures of his age was a demonstration of the opportunities of the New World. Moreover, his idea that hard work is the only true way to wealth became a key tenet of the American dream.

Another key aspect of the dream is freedom. This feature is woven in the image of young Huck in *The Adventures of*

Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain's 1884 adventure novel. Huck does what he feels is right. Worried that he is helping his slave friend Jim to escape, by the end, he listens to his heart when making decisions.<sup>3</sup>

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is set in the Great Depression and tells the story of the Joad family, who, driven away from their farm in Oklahoma by drought, head to California in search of simple dreams, to find only disappointment. The theme about the dream is also present in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), where disaffected youth Holden Caulfield dismisses as phony the adult world and the concepts of the American dream that goes with it...

Other authors who explored the theme of the American dream in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century include Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon* (1977), Edward Albee and Langston Hughes, Douglas Coupland in *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991) and Anna Deveare Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (1994).<sup>4</sup>

Steinbeck's characters in *The Pearl* are not only real people in a real world, but they are also universal types. Kino, the fisherman and the sea-diver named for an early Jesuit explorer; Juana, his wife; and Coyotito, their baby, are almost an archetypal family, like the holy family in a medieval morality play. Kino's aspirations are the common desires for social and economic upliftment of his family for which he keeps all his precious possessions at stake.

In his Nobel Prize speech of 1962, Steinbeck indicated what he tried to accomplish in his work: The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams, for the purpose of improvement.

No writer has better exposed the dark underside of the American Dream, but few writers have so successfully celebrated the great hope symbolized in that dream – the hope of human development. Steinbeck's best fictions picture a paradise lost but also posit a future paradise to be regained. In spite of his faults and failures, Steinbeck's best literary works demonstrate a greatness of heart and mind found only rarely in modern American literature.<sup>5</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The unattained pursuits of Kino in the *The Pearl*, despite the best of his efforts, point towards the erroneous belief in the American Dream, the fallacy of the American Dream. The "American Dream" while not completely false, is not as easily obtainable as people are made to believe. This classic novella from John Steinbeck examines the fallacy of the American dream, and illustrates the fall from innocence experienced by people who believe that wealth can solve all problems. Kino as *The Pearl's* protagonist is a dignified, hardworking, impoverished native, motivated by basic drives: his love for his family, loyalty to the traditions of his village and his people, and frustration at his people's oppression at the hands of their European colonizers. He possesses a quick mind and a strong work ethic and does not lack in physical strength as well. Though Kino possessed all the qualities of a true patriarch of the family, he could not accomplish the happiness for his family that he relentlessly attempts to. In the end, he loses his most precious possession, his only son, Coyotito for whom he had seen all the dreams. Coyotito can also be seen as a symbol of the American Dream that he loses in the end.

Kino's obsession with the pearl though criticized as 'excessive greed' by the critics and the readers alike is an

honest and determined pursuit to elevate the social standing of his family. Nonetheless, with the loss of his son, he gives up his dream of getting a big prize for the pearl and returns to La Paz with a heart full of hopelessness and despair. He discards the pearl and abandons the American Dream forever.

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## 4

# Hour of Antipathy: Creating a Dream-World by Mere Sankalpa or the Thought-Power

SURESH CHANDRA PANDE

*"Morality has been hijacked by religion"*

– Arnold Toynbee

Indian English Poetry, more particularly post millennium epoch, reveals variegated fads and proclivities, largely notable for exemplary idiosyncrasy and distinctive aesthetic excellence. Moreover, the multiplicity of thematic texture and textual construct imparts a conspicuous series of personal sensibility more or less cohesive or consistent individuality. Harmoniously associated life giving flow of elements together constitute the Individuality. When associations get unstrung disintegration sets in. Innumerable associations hover around the individual. Around each and every poet. Around the man and the milieu. Thus individuality is a constant struggle for integrating the self. What is more it is a positive loneliness when a particular person feels at ease or unease with his own real self. Viewed against this backdrop all poets appear in their own different way to their different peers and counterparts. Accordingly we have a large variety of poetry sumptuous and meager, tortuous and direct, in brief, providing contraries and binaries. Likewise some poets are too simple to be *au fait with* and others too tiring to be chewed and digested. One wholesome poet in the company of Indian English Writers writing up-to-date is D. C.

Chambial. As he is already celebrated and benignly illustrious he needs no new initiative. Besides his ontology of poetry sufficiently imparts a sense of familiarity to all those scholars and associates who like to read, understand and appreciate him. He does not claim to be a proponent of a set poetic philosophy but beneath his creative credentials lies a teeming message for those practicing or experimenting this genre now lately. In the light of the brief introductory note wherein he looks for posterity to deliberate and leaves for scientists of hermeneutics to examine his poetic-blossoms, I on my behalf making a humble attempt to study Chambial's *Hour of Antipathy* thereafter to present my deductions whatsoever.

Being a Sutradhar of revolution and transformation Chambial appears keenly committed to sustainable growth of measures such as – change of climate, conservationism, green politics, eradication of penury, destitution, wickedness, impious drifts, endemic immorality and social injustice. His indigenous ingenuity coupled with serene poetic sensibility presents keen surveillance and execution of social life against ever increasing corruption and humbug in ethical field. His imagination fly high, dreams take flight and there from that pedestal far above the ground he voices forth his indignation and disapproval of all that he finds *bête noir*. So much so that the then raising ire and anger impels him to call the existing hour the *hour of antipathy*.

Hour of Antipathy wonderfully culls and collects 57 pieces the poet calls flowers of fancy. Some are too effortless both in tone and texture while many others too obscure to unfold precisely the proposition of ideas and images displaying vague and unexpected move tallying inexplicable enigmas or riddles. Many avid readers of Chambial's poetry feel true difficulty posed or created by such abrupt moves in

decoding the real purport and contextual significance of his poems. Furthermore, the inhibition the poet seems to feel in the direct assertion and expression of hitherto unexpressed emotions and pending vibes bubbling to find quick outlet is another trait that adds to the attribute of obscurity of the poet. But in entirety Chambial is unambiguously simple, pensively delightful and intellectually vigorous. Therefore possibly free from disenchantment and cynicism. He agreeably captures his thoughtful readers into his inner fold and amuses in his own friendly way. To quote from *The Bliss* – "*A sweet and beautiful birdie/Hit by the flowery arrows/Being young and full of warm blood/Could not spurn the offer of bliss*" (4-14, *Hour of Antipathy*). In this perspective it is worth noting that Indian Eros shoots with the arrows of flowers. More so because, the aphorisms in these lines and onwards aptly yet contextually hides the real motif of inquisitive inquiry lurking beneath cupid's covetousness, besides bringing conversely two binaries the mundane and the celestial, the profound and the extraneous. Overall the poem imparts a superb notion of poetic precision alongside parsimonious verbalization. Another poem that delineates the assiduous aspect in simple poetic diction and formulates impressive entertaining mode, practically accommodates his readers, if not for a laugh at least to spread smile, is an *Escapade*. The whole of the poem looks as though the poet is keenly immersed in apprehending the existence of pure awareness – the sole ground of his Being – wherefrom he perceives the ephemeral world as a blissful play of the Eternal Self, for the meaning of life is Lila – play. Indeed the poem begins with the play participated by all and sundry – both young and old, marching in procession accompanied by divine prop to grace them graciously. The mood meticulously maintained by the poet is in obvious conformity with the revelation of moments full of divine

bliss. The feat being performed by the protagonist together brings in the spirit of chivalry and gallantry the hill-gentry is closely and intimately accustomed and familiarized to. As the providence wills a fatal stroke hits the protagonist. There is momentary awe, fear and bustle followed by a bigger chaos. Yes, it is the chaos that resembles the same which existed before the creation. But as destiny is inscribed in the forehead of man or human the bliss returns almost immediately without adjournment and the play terminates with amiable memories of the calamity buried deep in the hearts of both players and the audience and is allowed to rest within time's hood. The hood is supposed to be a light on the forehead like coiled serpent that brings the breath down to establish in silence – devoid of all worldly buzz. Truly the merit of the poem lies not in captivating – in enticing the readers within the surroundings escorted by time, but in the mellifluous net of narratives woven deftly by the poet.

Besides there are poems which delineate the plight of those who are on the breadline against the backdrop of the brutality and rudeness of inscrutable nature, such as – *"Morning breeze in summer soothes the scorched souls/The shivering bones get soothed by winter sun at noon"* (57-76) *Trials Dog Man*. The poem *The Thick of Night* likewise avers – *"The shriveled hands crouch beneath emptied sacks/After the expiration of day's toil"* (26-39). *The Kindred Souls* also depicts the predicament of those who are under the burden of nature's vagaries. How skillfully the poet portray – *"The kindred souls, in cold, they shiver, /Spring up to toil and calm the fire in belly/With first ray of sun, their faces aglow, /Pounce on the garbage hill, their sacks to fill."* (25-38). The unconcerned approach of nature towards human beings is the most privileged and exhilarating theme of *Will Man Ever Learn to Live...* A little bird called Myna is so close to human habitats

that she catches the attention of one and all by her sheer exploits and gestures than other sub-human species of this earth. So a perennial source of life and existence. The bird in totality is shown to represent the vibrating beauty and pleasantry of nature. That is why she is depicted to pay least heed to the ugly and deformed features of the poor – “...*Care little for those/ Who fail to get a day's square meal.*” (48-66) The Poet very modestly brings in the picture of Myna against all that is evil in human society. Men are portrayed suffering from sloth, hunger, greed and other maladies while the bird in a swift movement getting nearer to human environs to be overfed and puffy both with food and water. Then flies away to show that in the creation of the Almighty there is plethora of joy adversely co-mingled with greed. Also leave behind a lesson for human beings to emulate. They should at least realize the fact of the matter that nature has an exalted status than man and his devious nature. The poem like some such others sufficiently highlight the depravity, denial, neediness and impecuniousness deep rooted into the stratum of our contemporary society and milieu as a malaise that requires easing or therapy. In a world as such we can hardly dream of a society where economic equality will ever rule the roost. Another aspect the poet touches side by side is of moral depravity or declining ethics. In the survey recently done by the United Nations, India occupies the fourth position among the nations which are declared corrupt. There are many poems in this collection those very explicitly highlight the moral rot, degeneration and lack of ethical uprightness, for instance – My Country is Great – in Villanelle mode very deftly yet sardonically illustrates the frauds and the scams the ruling elite is subjected to – “*Starving the people of life soon or late/Prices soaring to sky, they don't assess/ Her polity is yet all the more great!*” (44-61)

The rampant intolerance, contempt, fanaticism and bigotry rife in the political and geographical quarters of today's INDIA is the favorite theme of the poet – *"man has grown fangs to bite man; /love is lost in the human heart, /Sits like a vulture on the carcass/digging tones of his own demise"*(42-59, There Was A Man). How concisely the poet gives expression to the deteriorating values multiplying in a good deal – *"We are living in a land/ that abounds in /wolves, hyenas, and jackals/care for none/save for their own selves and broods; /proficient in pilfering/ the share of the meek hen and lamb; /their concern confined to their clans. "* (29-43, We are Living...) The soul- stirring melody foresees to carry forward a larger rift between man and the mammon – *"Man has meddled not with morals only, /Dug deep into the bowls of Earth as well;/Has made vulnerable Earth, life, a hell, /In his blind quest for Mammon selfishly"*(24-37, Man for Mammon). How those born with a silver spoon on their mouth take advantage of the meek and the underprivileged is the central theme the poet interweaves to explore. The affluent are not only indifferent to the voice of their conscience that is flooded with intentions foul and defiled but also proceeds ahead to represent a darker plane wherein they endeavor to devour the marginalized existence. They have no knowledge of the time-honored ideals, of the actuality that indigents are also human beings like them so have the same warmth of blood in their veins and the same divinity in their hearts. This notion has amply and intelligibly been illustrated in the poem *"This Lascivious World"* (23-36). There is an old adage – Money makes the mare go, accordingly post-millennium consciousness pertaining to money, has gained significance not only in social dealings like trade, exchange and bargaining but also unfortunately has assumed gigantic proportions to the extent of committing crime and other heinous acts such as scams, hoaxes and large

scale cheatings. The poet being scrupulously aware of this prevalent moral squalor seems to sneer at the rampant decadence of old established principles of uprightness and decency. How genuinely he quips – *“By fair or foul means, one wants to be rich/In no time. One seeks all troves of Solomon, /Connives for this even with demon. /With money one tramples bodies sans Hitch”* (22-35, Man Prefers Matter). What’s more the moralizing nature of the poet finds succinct expression in lofty ideals such as – *“Life’s not money/Money sustains life/Life for karma”* (32-47, Man For Man).

Another feature that makes Chambial’s Poetry memorable and unforgettable is his wide spread concern for our ailing planet that is the Earth. It incorporates ecological imbalance, natural calamities, issues concerning soil pollution and conservation, global warming, green movement etc. In a pretty good manner the poet gives expression to the hardness of the soil of his own kitchen garden where he has grown radishes and turnips – *“The soil is tough/Find hard to penetrate/And gain girth. /They need soil Soft”* (5-15, Radishes And Turnips). The mysteries of soil in conserving, sustaining then germinating and growing the ingrained seeds not only highlight the functional values of the Earth but also all together bring to light the inherent gentleness and placidness of human values devoid of every harm and damage. The ecological issues further provide a feasible fusion between the poetic and the scientific because some of his poems symbolize ideas and notions which appear sensibly sane and artistically amazing. How apt are these utterances – *“Trees and plants/quaver with fear unknown;/sleet and hail-storm/the tiller nervous”* (8-18, Clouds In Sky). At another place he avers – *“The snow-clad peaks/entice hearts/at a crow’s flight/Sweet songs/stir the chords/lof heart and mind/ Long to languish/in this bowl of natureland merge with it”* (12-22, Wingless). Natural

calamities such as – Earthquakes, floods, landslides, cyclones and hurricanes and Tsunami structures an inimitable silhouette against thematic design and construct. In portrayals as such Chambial appears to have cultivated a distinctively personal mode of expression that places him ahead of all contemporary peers and counterparts. How appealing is the following extract – *“Gone in the twinkle of an eye! /Mansions big and fabulous tall/All gone, all at once, gone were all/Into the belly of sadistic sea”* (50-68, Tsunami Memorial, Andamans). Sweet bemoaning at the change of climate attracts all and sundry – *“The grass is dried, flowers withered; /the path downhill strewn with brambles; /senses seek the gone by sweet smell; /linger memories: tales to tell”* (27-40, Tales to Tell). The geological upheaval and tectonic tumult further provides spectacles never seen or heard before – *“The rain did stop, /With it the fear, /The salubrious hill side, a gorge; /naked – rocks exposed.... ”* (2-10, That Old Hill). The sheer sight and fury of the hurricane at once captivates the readers and forces them to deliberate – *“The trees tremble insensate/the hurricane ravages/life stands stunned mirages”* (40-57, Stunned Mirages). What is more there runs a streak of ethical message, a moralizing advocacy in profusion, behind and beneath such intensely profound and blissful utterances, intended to strengthen and elevate, to keep amused and occupy good-humouredly almost all sensitive readers of Chambial’s Poetry. Additionally there are copious instances wherein the poet seems to explore his philosophy and ideology rooted in purity and piety, positioned against malicious dishonesty and raging pollution. Purity opposed to pollution have been part of Indian way of life for millenniums visible palpably nonetheless most perniciously in our caste-ridden society. Indian society in general divides people between two cubicles – the highest and the lowest. The highest are known as

ritually purest while the lowest are dubbed as most polluted. In the light of assertions as such, and as stated in forward note, the *sine quo non* for poetic growth of Chambial is an exercise into the historic rite of purification, hence free from all possible pollution or contamination.

Hour of Antipathy, being a preferred and appropriately picked out *Entitas*, side by side imparts immediate recognition to a poet whose roots are already well-established not only in the soil of his own land but also in the vast enduring cosmos towards where by taking wings he soars sky-high and then from that space peers towards the planet below, so as to offer the fidelity of a dream. This is a vision potent enough to overcome – “*The devils of / Ego, desire, greed*” (54-73, Heaven on This Earth), by way of enjoying the undying fruits of age-old ethics. The poet further gives the impression of being inebriated so as to rejoice and facilitate his decisive victory. This is also the blissful vision of heaven that grows in spite of all odds and vulnerability – “*Heaven rises/Out of hell/On this bloody Earth*” (54-73, Heaven on This Earth). This is an unfeigned and unadulterated vision that materializes not by mere looks but by the sound leaps the poet sports there into the Garden of Bliss and Tranquility. To simplify this vision of the poet is a gradual move from ethical-moral imperatives to virtuous habits. The cultivation of higher moral values for practical rehearsal requires creation of an outer conducive ambience. The outer ambience of quietness and restraint further contributes the awakening of the dormant to explore the infinite possibilities of inner dimensions. This is what seems to lie at the core of the theorem that shapes the natural pause or creative-voice of Chambial’s poetry. There is still enough scope for further study but I prefer to sum up only by saying that Chambial’s Hour of Antipathy being a *tour-de-force* encompasses a

complete dream-world emanating from the historic memory that accumulates almost all encyclopedic varieties of virtues and merits. His dream of realizing unhampered peace, setting up democratic stability, determining moral-code for healthy society, anticipating the emergence of divine life on much malignant earth etc.; provides sufficient evidences for nominating him as a poet of hope and anticipation. A true hierophant longing to entwine his dreams into reality and pining to ascertain the wheel of piety for the resurgence of illumination for one and all. MAY his dream in the days yet to come, be real and true to set- up a set of exalted and abiding morals!

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## 5

# **Contesting Marginality: Literature and the Dissenting Voices from the Northeast of India**

**K.B. VEIO POU**

### **Abstract**

The Northeast of India has long been an ignored region and very less understood by the rest of the country. Besides the geographical isolation, being connected by only a narrow strip of land called the 'chicken neck', the administrative and political negligence by New Delhi has led to the marginalization of the various people groups of the region. Somehow, the Northeast quickly became one of India's postcolonial/post-independent 'others' like many other subaltern groups within the nation. However, of late the region has attracted attention for its potential 'gateway' to the eastern Asian nations for trade and economic purposes. But the delayed attention paid to the region only heightened a sense of curiosity to the onlookers on the real intentions of the nation state.

Given the history of violence and insurgency from different pockets of the region, the stories of the common people who are bearing the brunt of the onslaught have not been heard. On the contrary, this 'peripheral' region has grossly been misunderstood and misjudged even by the rest of the people from the 'mainland' where the real politicking is done. In an interesting way, literature has given the platform to the dissenting voices from the region. With a rich history of oral tradition among many diverse communities inhabiting the Northeast, the new writers emerging from this part of the country also relies on their

storytelling culture as they write about lives on the edge. This paper proposes to explore literature that dissent the marginalization of the people of the region while at the same time protest against the social ills that has affected the harmony of communities from the Northeast.

*Keywords:* The Northeast of India, marginalization, misunderstanding, roots, oral tradition, history, violence, Naga writings.

### INTRODUCTION: THE MARGINALITY OF NORTHEAST

Often the people groups of the Northeast are cursorily looked upon as a homogeneous community, but the ground reality says a different thing: there are different cultural, linguistic and racial groups cohabiting the region. Geographically, the entire land mass constituting the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura is connected to the rest of the country only by the Siliguri corridor or the 'chicken neck', a stretch of land of just about fourteen miles at its narrowest, while the rest are international boundaries bordering China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal.

Perhaps, some may assume that it is this geographical isolation that the Northeast has become India's 'periphery', away from the 'mainland' where the real politicking is done. But on closer observation one will realize that that there is more to it and much more to be seen. Compounded by this geographical isolation is the inability to find kinship with the rest of the country which has created further discord: "In terms of their physical features, ethnicity, culture, food habits and language, there is closer affinity with the peoples of Southeast Asia than with the population of mainstream India" (Mukhim 2005: 178). Furthermore, a long period of political indifference or mismanagement by the centre, coupled by a general ignorance of the people from the rest of

the country about the people of the region, has further alienated the Northeast. Like everyone else the people from this part of the country are also proud of their own tradition and culture. And recognition of their rootedness to their land and culture is still wanting. What has been projected as representations from the region needs a relook, else, the chasm will grow wider and the region becomes more reclusive.

The Northeast of India has got more attention only in the recent past, more so after the initiation of the much hyped Look East Policy in the early 1990s as India's policy to engage with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). Realizing that forging a relationship with ASEAN would not be possible without the involvement of the Northeastern states, India launched attractive packages for economic development for the region and even called the Northeast the 'gateway to Asia'. But what is not understood, again, is that the problem of the region is not just economic in nature. The region has received assaults from the Indian state in various forms of oppressive laws, most notorious among them being the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA) which empowers the Indian security forces deployed in the declared "disturbed areas" to operate with unrestricted powers and even kill at mere suspicion to maintain law and order. Adoption of such draconian laws only alienated the people of the region even more. Human Rights groups and various people groups have repeatedly appealed to the government to repeal AFSPA as insurgency is not very active and as dialogues are being held with various underground groups. Though some of the Northeastern states are relatively peaceful, Indian armed forces have a heavy presence, or as in the words of the union minister Jairam Ramesh, there is "one

armed personnel for every ten northeasterners or thereabout”.

Even today, the estrangement is clearly visible from the kind of reception to the people from this region when they move out of their home states. Being referred to as ‘Chinky’ (a derogatory term used in India to refer to those who have narrow eyes), ‘Oriental’, etc. because of their ‘looks’ or worse still being asked if they are from ‘China’ or ‘Nepal’ make the

Northeasterners feel out of place in different cities of India; somehow, they remain the ‘visible minority’ even in university campuses (Baruah 2005: 166). It is not new for a Northeasterner even in a metropolitan city like Delhi to be asked if Manipur or Nagaland or Mizoram is located outside India while on the search for jobs, accommodation, etc.

While such stereotyping isn’t uncommon in India, these visual images concocted to refer to a group might connote certain differing implications. To the peoples of Northeastern region the citation is closely “linked to a violent historical and unstable political relation with the postcolonial nation” (Kikon 2009: 93). These racial labeling of making the Northeastern people feel ‘outsiders’ in their own country will continue to affect the relationship even in the future if not addressed promptly as “[t]he battle for the future of North-east India is also a battle over images” (Baruah 2005: 175). This may also be read in conjunction with the recent exodus of Northeastern people from different metropolitan cities of the country in the middle of 2012 because of some rumours of a possible attack on them following the Assam violence. The postcolonial constellations of people groups in India need a revisit so that representations can be done by engaging with reality.

**WEAVING HISTORY BY TELLING 'PEOPLE STORIES':  
THE NAGA EXPERIENCE**

The recent writings from the Northeast, particularly those written in English and translated into English, have garnered new interests widely across the country. The evolution of a literary body called North East Writers Forum (NEWF) too has boosted the newfound interest. A closer study of various writings will showcase a kind of response to the misunderstanding and misjudgments pronounced upon the Northeast and its people since long; that the region is sparsely developed, infested by insurgents, filled with supernatural environments, etc. Debarred of attention at the national level or public debates the Northeast has long remained a region to be imagined. The national media, newspapers or television, rarely cover stories that can be 'newsworthy' to the 'mainstream' Indians. The little things that seems catch the nation's interest occasionally are related to insurgency, cross-border problems, smuggling and inaccessible geography.

Even a quick glance at the academic works, literatures and journalistic writings from the Northeast will also testify to the growing voices of dissent against marginalization of the region and also against the various social evils that has cropped up within the society. With a handful of emerging writers, particularly those writing in English, writing about the much misunderstood people groups of the region and the land that they cohabit, there is a sense of contestation on this marginalization. Though it would make an interesting study on the literature of dissent from the entire Northeast, due to constraint in space and time, this paper will be narrowed down to explore the literary works of some Naga writers to see how their narratives are voices of a people that desires to

be heard, being sidelined from historical and political accounts.

Unfortunately, anything relating to the Nagas has somehow been overshadowed by the protracted political problem with the Indian state that not much effort has been made to understand their tradition and culture in a proper sense. Owing to this, I guess, there is a tendency to exoticize their culture, or for that matter the cultures of the Northeast as a whole, because they are too little known. Intriguingly however, the appearance of some prominent Naga writers writing about their people's struggle over the last many decades has once again ushered in an interest among many. By giving voices to the ordinary citizens who struggle to negotiate with the state of unrest in their land, the writers are weaving into the fabric of people's history. Or as Easterine Kire would put it, these are 'People Stories' – stories that are of real experiences of the people that needs telling and the telling thus results in 'healing'. For the Naga writers this experience of storytelling is therapeutic for the trauma suffered because of the sustained violence they have seen among their people.

Often the best loved songs are sourced from an unrequited love or penned by a broken hearted. And the most memorable stories are the saddest. Strange yet true, the heart-wrenching moments are those that stay on in the memory. It is not that the 'happy days' are not remembered or that the important days are not treasured, but somehow the painful or horrendous acts of the past seems to linger on with a greater grip on the psyche of the people. History of mankind has so many of those. Such is the story of the Nagas too. Though the past was memorable for many of the positive things that happened in the society, the ones that get prominence are those of the freedom struggle muddled in blood and tears.

Stories have been told and songs sang of the struggling people marginalized for so long but a retelling of the prolonged political imbroglio through literary fervor has generated newer interest among reading public.

Many of the stories from Temsula Ao's collection of short stories, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) narrate experiences of individuals during the "turbulent years of bloodshed and tears" whose lives were interlaced by the discomfiting forces of violence. Set in the early years of fervent Naga nationalism there are stories of the unexpected raids on Naga villagers by the Indian armed forces, the precocious young girl brutally raped by the soldiers in front of the church goers, the shadowy force of personal enmity that has invaded the idealistic nationhood struggle, and the old man reminiscing his underground days as a Naga army to his grandson. Temsula Ao's other short story collection *Laburnum for my Head* (2009) also include stories that tell of the hovering sense of uncertainty in the minds of the Naga people about their future.

Easterine Kire's novel *Bitter Wormwood*(2011), while tracing the life and experiences of a retired old Naga soldier, gives us a glimpse of the romantic rise of Naga nationalism in the 1950s to its present day disappointment of factional war that has deeply wounded the society. Like history unfolding before us, the novel lay the past bare for us to behold and learn from whatever has happened. And using 'bitter wormwood', the traditional herb believed to keep spirits away and also heal wounds, as a metaphor the author suggests that we heal the wounds of the past by learning to 'forgive'. Violence and war only leaves an endless flow of bloodshed. Easterine Kire's other novel *Life on Hold* (2011) tells of the other side of suffering in the later day story of Naga nationalism. While the nationalist movement continues

to attract young people into it, the anxieties persist for those who wait at home as so often the news that comes home is heart wrenching.

In poetry too, as in fiction, the theme of Naga struggle for an independent nation gets articulated clearly, though there is also anguish over the latter day disappointment with it. With the deep attachment to the oral tradition and its lyric form, the poets successfully used their creativity of composing poems to rant against injustices done to their people, the ill-happenings in their homeland and the assault of their beloved land. Stories have been told so that it will not be forgotten; songs have been sung so that the message is carried onward. This poem by Easterine Kire (1982) mourns of the loss of dear ones for the cause of freedom of their people;

They brought in their dead by night  
 their proud warriors, their mighty warriors  
 the brave beloved of the godly,  
 to rest under troubled skies  
 and battle-scarred lands  
 .....  
 they trampled her silent hills  
 and squeezed the life out of her  
 and washed their guilt in her blood,  
 washed their guilt in her blood. ("Kelhoukevira")

Monalisa Changkija (2007) reminisces the 'nightmare' that continues to haunt the psyche of the people;

Stop this nightmare, I pray  
 wherein my people, victims of  
 geography, history and politics  
 have become prized booty  
 to be overpowered and possessed  
 by those who will not listen. ("Stop This Nightmare")

While the Naga poets use their poetry as a tool to critique the oppressor to the Naga people, they also

understand that there is an equally menacing threat growing at home ground. Through their writings, they address those dangers that lurk from behind. Differences that have cropped up midway the struggle have become a major threat to achieve their dreams. Once, the enemy was only an outside force, now another enemy has been born from within too. The prolonged conflict between the Nagas and Indians has only resulted in more disturbances in the society and has given birth to a generation of disillusioned youth. Desperate youths are becoming a thorn to the prospect of the society. In this situation of friends against friends and brothers against each other, there can be no end to bloodshed as articulated by Nini Lungalang (2003) in this poem;

I saw a young man gunned down  
 As I shopped in the market place.  
 Two thuds and then he fell,  
 And thrashed a bit, on his face.  
 That's all. He sprawled in the staring sun.  
 (They whirled away in a cloud of dust  
 In a smart white van).  
 His blood laid the dust  
 In a scarlet little shower,  
 Scarlet little flowers.  
 In the staring sun, the little flowers  
 Will burn and turn to rust. ("Dust")

One can picturise the sudden action that took place in a public arena – “the market place”. The boldness of the perpetrators left the spectators static, giving them no chance to react but merely watch the collapse of the victim before them. Through their poems, the Naga poets reveal a close association with nature while at the same time talking of violence. This is exemplified by their use of natural images like hills/mountains, rainbow, forest, dust, flowers, etc. alongside the disturbing images of fire, bullets, blood, death, etc. Yet, the poems do exhibit in them the powerful contrast of

reality. The world of the Nagas at present is a blend of the violent and the idyllic.

Whether in poetry or fiction, the Naga writers bring to fore the social reality of living in a land and a time when 'uncertainty' is still the catchword. Though the prolonged Naga struggle against the mighty Indian nation seems to have gained a prominent thematic position in the contemporary Naga literature in English, it does not in any way sideline the other people stories that are deeply rooted to the culture and tradition. Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2006) brilliantly showcases the simple yet pristine life of the Nagas at a time when modernity was fast enveloping and transforming their reality. Despite the unsettling problem of insurgency in the background, the people do not cease to take pleasure in their usual customary life. And as the Naga society moved on negotiating with the changes initiated by western/modern education, the novel also draws our attention to the discomfiting position when traditional norms are also questioned. This is also seen even in *These Hills Called Home* when Temsula Ao ropes in stories that celebrate the ordinary life of the people and their everyday activities.

### CONCLUSION

Any close observer of the Naga writings would, therefore, be able to perceive how the writers have based their writings on experiences of the world they have lived through and continue to live in today. Through their works a collective experience for the Nagas is exhibited, particularly of the recent and turbulent past that continues to linger on as a force even while they engage with issues of the present times. The literary experiences of these writers have yielded in generating great interest among the reading public because

they disclose another panorama of the Naga life, the less talked about everyday lives. And therein also lies the power of literature which history may not be able to write about: the simple and ordinary individual experiences of the episodic past.

An insightful study of these literatures will also give us perspectives on how these writers are not only dissenting voices, expressing themselves, but rose to don the mental of the common people and speak for them too. In this sense, they also become social commentators like the storytellers of olden days. Stories and poems by these Naga writers are interwoven with the commonalities of simple and ordinary people's lives. Further, the continuative world that has been created, by synthesizing the past with the present, results in the engendering of new literary themes. This is also true of the other contemporary counterparts from the Northeast. Or as Temsula Ao would rightly put it that there is "a subtle conceptual shift" in the writings from this part of the region because they borrow a lot of the "elements from the oral traditions" (2007: 107-8). She asserts that the emerging trend of going back to their cultural roots help the creative writers to find metaphors with which they speak of themselves.

What we have seen through this short discourse, therefore, is also that the act of writings is not just an individual quest to explore creativity. Writing is defiance at times and an assertion at other times, as these Naga writings will exemplify. With a narrative style strongly hinged on the art of storytelling that is very rooted to their culture, these simple yet profound writings are truly people stories.

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## 6

# **The Rhetoric of Protest and Politics of Dissonance: A Comparative Study of Thangjam Ibopishak's "I Want to be Killed By an Indian Bullet" and "Land of Half- Humans" and Muktibodh's "Void" and "So Very Far"**

CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

This paper attempts to analyse the inherent strains of voices of protest and politics of dissonance in the poetry of Thangjam Ibopishak, a poet from North-east (Manipur) and Muktibodh, a noted Hindi poet. While spectrum and scope of the paper is vast, as it seeks to interrogate and critique these two poets, it focuses on two poems of each poet, to show, how the voices of protest emerge, build and run through these poems to weave a world of protest against the forces of oppression and how their poetry acquires political overtones. Thangjam Ibopishak's poetry is deeply embedded into the historical background of North-east, its violence, corruption and ravages of Great wars. Robin S. Ngangom writes "*Hijam Ibarat, the Socialist poet, is considered a trail-blazer because of his language and subject matter*" (Contemporary Manipuri Poetry: An Over View, Ngangom, in Modern Indian Writing in English Translation, (ed.), Kapse, 2016, pp140).

Ibopishak explores the violence, terror and dehumanized conditions of the people in Manipur through a

set of images, metaphors and diction that depicted the rootlessness, agonies and altered consciousness of the masses by creating rhetoric of protest. It was a protest against the feudal structure of the society, the tyrannical order let loose by those who controlled the political and economic order of the society. However, this condition was further aggravated and perpetuated by a number of reasons such as fragmentation of social life, urbanization, dispossession and dislocation threatening the very identity and culture of the people. Such conditions necessitated the emergence of hostile forces against contemporary evils gradually transforming the whole region into a *“Troubled Zone”*. (Ram Nayar, *Kavya Bharti*, 15, 2003). Ibopishak’s poetry talks of complex terrain of everyday negotiations where politics, cruelty and theatre of violence are intricately engaged. Overpowered by a sense of terrible loss, the poet speaks of their land and people in a language that is filled with images of guns and bullets, anger and frustration, politics, corruption, bloodshed and destruction. The voice of protest became a prominent voice of North-east poets and they applied many literary genres to express their views such as satire, myth, theatre, folk tales etc. To quote Robin S, Ngangom *“Poets began responding to the altered circumstances by breaking with their romantic predecessors and choosing a diction which would suit the times. They became more inward looking and, consequently, tried to adapt the world to themselves by adopting ironic and alienated stances. In short, these modernist Manipuri poets fashioned a skeptical post-independence poetics in which irony, satire and detachment or confrontation became the prime means of self-discovery”* (Robin S. Ngangom, Kapse, ed., p140).

Ibopishak doesn’t only record the events and situations but lend them an aesthetic form. Tormented by the grinding realities of the society he tends towards internalization of

situations but unable to escape the boundaries of realism, he takes refuge in surrealism. Here he weaves a paradoxical world of horrifying incidents, political corruption, blood drenched violence, cultural dilemmas and a world of fantasy and imagination. Ibopishak's poetry is 'densely textured' and his images yield resonances of a world eclipsed by moral and spiritual resources. The poet mixes the lyrical, the fantastic with familiar undertone of dark realities and humour. Ibopishak evokes the collective memory of suffering masses tormented by internal conflicts and psychological trauma triggered by insurgency and armed rebellions. Frantz Fanon and Jo-Ann Episkene talk about the historical trauma caused by colonialism and impairment of individual and collective memory which was transferred to the generations to come. (Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, 204-8 and Jo-Ann Episkene, 2009, 79). In his poetry, Ibopishak presents pathology of dehumanized existential conditions wrecked and ruined by a cult of violence and intolerance. It is this point where he creates the trilogy of protest, rejection and resistance. In his poems 'The Land of Half-Humans' and "Dali, Hussain, Or Odour of Dream, Color of Wind" the poet uses surreistically transformed imagery to reflect upon contemporary reality. Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, another poet to be discussed in this paper, is a poet of commitment and his poetry like that of Ibopishak has upsurge of turbulent human conditions and voices of protest delineated through a set of sharp images, myth and allegorical characters. Ideologically Muktibodh belonged to the Progressive Writer's Association and his poetry resonates the voice for the deprived section of the society, as he grew with his craft there is complete disenchantment from bourgeois intellectuals, and division between the privileged and unprivileged becomes more glaring and visible. Anand Prakash and Richa Bajaj

rightly observed *“Disgust for the intelligentsia in bourgeois surroundings helps Muktibodh to perceive the sharp divide between the privileged and the deprived”*. (Anand Prakash and Richa Bajaj, *“Sweeping the World Clean”*: Short Poems of Muktibodh, ed. Kapse, 2016, 61). In Muktibodh’s poetry one can see the internal conflicts and their crushing psychological impact on the individuals. His poem *“Anantdarshan”* (Thought of the Eternal) presents picture of an individual who is torn by internal conflicts and realises that his identity is blurred by antagonistic forces of the society and he can seek freedom only through interventions and protest. Muktibodh lived his ideology in his poetry which always made him to intrigue and critique the bourgeois society. Throughout his poetry there runs a voice of protest dismantling an old order and envisaging a future redeemed with hope for change. Chanchal Chauhan in his perceptive essay *“Ideological Content of Muktibodh’s Poetry”* writes,

“Like all great philosophers and creative writers he explores and reveals reality with his own social vision. This vision is his worldview, which was formed by his pursuit for the scientific and rational outlook. With his thought study of various trends in world philosophy he adopted the Marxist worldview for analysing and understanding the national and international reality of human world” (Kapse ed, 2016, p73).

Muktibodh incessantly fights against social injustice, corruption and bloody past with reformist zeal. To him the world is bleak, barren and irrational and individual souls are captives of degenerated and debased human conditions. A distinctive voice of protest has been heard in Muktibodh’s poetry. It is a voice which articulates class, society, struggle for survival in an apathetic world and expresses resentment against the existing socio-political order. Namwar Singh, a noted critic and thinker believes that Muktibodh had evolved a method which strengthened his profound social

commitment to creative writing and his sustained objective standards in literary criticism. Muktibodh explored human nature vis-a-vis external nature and sees the reciprocity of this relationship in wider perspective creating rhetoric of protest in dialectical method. Namwar Singh, a great critic and thinker writes that in Muktibodh's background of the poetic world there lies an administrative system which is not *only cunning but highly tyrannical*' and he further adds that it is this power that seizes the documents, declares books illegal and bans them on a large scale. To Muktibodh this tyrannical power is conspiratorial and deceptive. (Namwar Singh, Kavita Ke Naye Partiman, 1997, p. 232-33). In his poem "Andhere Mein", Muktibodh talks about search for identity in a socio-political system which is corrupt and degenerated, devoid of all moral principles. Muktibodh's voice of protest emerges from the agonies of such diseased social and political order which runs throughout his poetry. This flame of protest can be discerned in his poem "Antardarshan": *"Whenever I lost to myself, something evolved from within /Interospection filled my eyes with tears /I rebelled against the world but I remained a rebel against myself /The flames of deep sense of discontentment incernate me"* (The translation is mine, quoted from "Aadhunik Pratinidhi Kavi, Haricharan Verma, Part-2, Jaipur, 2013, p148). Muktibodh's vision of protest becomes crystal clear in the above lines. Dr. Haricharan Verma further says that Muktibodh celebrated common man in his poetry as he was deeply moved by the sufferings of the poor and one sees the hatred and rebellion against capitalism in his poetry. Muktibodh is essentially a poet of human sensibilities, a poet who seeks freedom from the exploitation and oppressive social system. (Dr. Haricharan Sharma, 2013, p148). Muktibodh's poems "Void' and "So Very Far" under discussion highlight the alienation and sufferings of common

man in a paradoxical world. Muktibodh's rhetoric of protest against capitalism, exploitation and a dying and degenerated social order comes from his strong sense of commitment to the poor and deprived lot of the society. The inhuman conditions, apathetic attitudes of the bourgeois, unending wheels of exploitation filled him with apocalyptic vision, and he went to an extent of saying "*Though poetry leaves no scope for statement / but I say this society shall not last for long*". (Muktibodh)

Both Ibopishak and Muktibodh created rhetoric of protest by applying a number of devices such as myths, religion, imagery and surrealism. These devices don't only help them in constructing dialectic of protest but sustaining its inherent conflicts with such verbal explosion which borders at anger, resentment and rebellion. It becomes important here to see how these two poets applied the rhetorical devices to their poems included in this paper. Thianjam Ibopishak's "I Want to be Killed by Indian Bullet" originally written in Manipuri and translated by Robin S. Ngangom, addresses a host of issues that confronted the contemporary Manipuri society such as violence, capitalistic market system and a cry for freedom from all exploitative forces. The underlying tone of the poem is that of anger. The rising sense of protest and resistance running throughout the poem was grounded in the contemporary Manipuri society which witnessed upsurge of several political conflicts resulting in formation of many insurgent groups. K. B. Veio Pou writes "*The Indian state responded by adopting various forms of oppressive laws empowering the armed forces deployed in the region, the most notorious being the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA) which empowers the Indian security forces deployed in the contentiously declared 'disturbed' areas to operate with unrestricted powers and even shoot to kill at mere suspicion to*

*maintain law and order''*. (Veio, Literary Cultures of India's Northeast, 2015, p5). Sanamacha Sharma rightly points out that Ibopishak's poetry presents a critique of the socio-political unrest and corruption in Manipuri society. She calls it *'dystopian satire as protest'*. Undoubtedly, the satirical jibes run throughout his poetry creating mood and manners which don't only perpetuate the situations but create a hope for reform and change. Ibopishak like Muktibodh creates his own method of literary diatribe against a social system in which the unprivileged and deprived sections are alienated and condemned to suffer. Ibopishak's diatribe is rooted into the existential conditions of the society where an individual is not free and he sees no escape from the traps which condition him. Ibopishak is a poet who sees like Conrad no escape from the darkness but Muktibodh sees the hope for escape in distant future. Here Sanamacha Sharma's these words are relevant *"In Ibopisak's poetry, one doesn't find the optimism of a better future world. The castrophe is not in the distant future, it is our very present and there is no escape from it. Dystopia is an extreme form of satire and Ibopisak's satire of Manipuri society often goes to this extreme point. He sometimes calls it 'a heap of darkness', sometimes an 'illusionary land'. He is attacking the whole society directly as an insider..."* (Sanamacha Sharma, 'Dystopian Satire As Protest in Thangjam Ibopishak's Poetry', Kapse ed., 2015, p164). "I want to be Killed By an Indian Bullet" is a dystopian satire charged against the oppressive system and diabolic mechanism of those in control of power to silence the voice of protest. To the poet this power is organized, calculated and systematic in destruction of divisive power. These lines from the poem have ironical stance attacking the omnipotent power structure: *"They can create man; also destroy men at whims/They do whatever they fancy. / The very avatar of fancy. /The very avatar of might. / I ask*

them: *'When will you kill me? /* (Ibopishak, Kapse ed., 2015, 135). The poet uses here a prosaic dialogic method to dramatise and intensify the satirical tone. The leader frowns at the revolutionary fervour of the poet and hates his creative freedom and revolutionary spirit. These words of the leader are loaded with censorious power of the ego and antagonism which as custodian of draconian laws he thrusts upon the protagonist to silence his voice of protest. To quote the poet: *"And you a poet who pens gobbledygook and drivel?! Or do you consider yourself a seer with oracular powers? / Or are you a mad man? "Asked the leader"* (Ibopishak, 133). The dialogue between the narrator and the terrorist leader on the make of the gun reveals the hideous intention of the leaders, their evil desires and disrespect for India. The poet beautifully captures the consciousness of these traitors who owed their allegiance to some foreign power. The dystopic satire in this poem operates on two levels of consciousness that of the narrator and the terrorist leader. The narrator's fearlessness, his cool surrender to the bullets of the opponent can't be seen as an act of timidity but signs of inner resource and strength who defies death as a protest against antagonistic forces. The rhetoric of protest in Ibopishak can be discerned in manifestation of anger, discontent, acceptance and rejection of a given situation. He chooses allegory, myth, drama, fantasy and storytelling as different methods for poetic and aesthetic effect. The last line of the poem is important and quite dramatically, it attains the climax of the poem: *"Being fastidious about death, I escaped with my life"* (Ibopishak, p136). Here one can see the irony embedded into the simplicity of words, the conversational and dramatic style of the poem in prosaic language like that of Muktibodh in his many poems, appeals to the feelings of the readers. Robin S. Ngangom's these words beautifully explain the phenomenon of bullets in

a society torn by insurgency, terrorism and death: *"In contemporary Manipuri poetry, there is predominance of images of 'bullets'...A poet from Imphal told me how they've been honing 'the poetry of survival' with guns pressed to both temples: the gun of revolution and the gun of state"* (Robin S. Ngangom, p42). The resistance to oppression drives the impulse for survival, it is both condition as well as destiny of the people in a land of terror. *"The Land of The Half- Humans"* is a bleak portrait of an irredeemly damaged society that spawns a race tragically unable to constitute body and mind. The poet profusely uses the elements of myth and fantasy to reflect on the contemporary society. It is poetic rendition of violence, fear, moral desiccation and political turmoil. The poem powerfully captures misery, hardship of common people caused by the rotten and corrupt system and evil nature of man resulting in moral bankruptcy. The underlying tone of the poem is social moral protest against all that is inhuman, grotesque, ugly and devilish. Ibopishak's satire attacks the injustice and oppression, lawlessness and corruption that reigned the existing social system. Sanamacha Sharma in her research paper *"Dystopian Satire in Thangjam Ibopishak's Poetry"* writes *"For Ibopishak, his bleak satire may be one way of responding in the immediate dehumanizing influence of a society full of injustice, corruption and oppression"* (Sanamacha Sharma, Kapse ed., 2016, 1200). It is an allegorical poem written in conversational style. The poet laughs at the dehumanized conditions of the society and its people. He weaves rhetoric of protest against the very human civilization by creating a Caliban in Shakespearian mode or Yahoos in Swiftian mode. By applying history, myth, prosaic conversational mode Ibopishak creates a world within a world. It is a world of 'half-humans', inhabited by 'headless body' and 'bodyless head', it is a strange world which thrills and shocks the

reader like Gulliver's land as the narrative unfolds. Daily chores of life in this land are filled with futility and meaninglessness. These lines show the fragmented consciousness of a social order which has grown morally and spiritually disjointed and sterile: *"For six months to talk and to eat is their work; like millstone grinding...The head talks, eats, drinks just talking, eating, drinking. While the body is working, labouring, shitting."* (Ibopishak, *The Land of Half-Humans*, p 132). The last stanza of the poem attains the subtlety and sharpness of satire against the political system; governance, rules and modes of functioning. The poet mocks at the futility of the democratic system and its meaningless debates in the land of half-humans like that of Swift's land of Lilliputs in chapter iv of *"Gulliver's Travels"* where 'Big-Endians' and 'Little-Endians' are engaged in the futile discussion on the way of breaking the egg at the big end or small end. (Jonathan Swift, *Gullivers Travels*, 43). Without striving to achieve historical exactitude Swift is attacking the Catholics and Protestants by adumbrating the controversies here. To quote Ibopishak: *"But for the people in this land there are no names. / So for the nameless citizens the nameless deputies govern the land of the half-humans. / Because whether to give human names either to the head or to the body – they cannot decide"* (Ibopishak, p55). One can see in Ibopishak's poetry like that of Muktibodh use of myth, history, allegory, surrealism and stories from the Mahabharata to reflect on the complexity of contemporary life.

In Muktibodh's *"The Void"* the mechanism of protest is inherent in the existential conditions of the individuals. The void is negation of the self-imposed on the individuals by external conditions such as inequality, erosion of values, barbaric laws and ruthless competitions. Here self is constantly in collision against the external surroundings

resulting in abrasion of the self. Anand Prakash rightly points out *"To the poet, such a self is produced by constant strife between the subjective inner realm and the external world of an individual. At the same time, it is result of conflict within one's self and contradictions that exist in material conditions."* (Anand Prakash, 'Sweeping the World Clean', Modern Indian Writings in English Translations, 65). Muktibodh's rhetoric works at two levels in this poem.

First, through a set of densely structured relevant images and secondly, through the intrinsic and philosophical level. These lines show how protest has been ingrained in human nature expressed through anger, fear, hatred and violence: *"The void inside us/ has jaws/ those jaws have carnivorous teeth.../ The dearth inside /is our nature, / habitually angry, / in the dark hollow inside the jaws / there is a pond of blood / The void is utterly black, / is barbaric, is naked, / Disowned, debased, / completely self-absorbed"*. (Muktibodh, Modern Indian Writings in English Translations, 2016, p 36). The void is contagious which consumes the self, dissipates the inner resources filling its inside with nothingness and spreads it in the surroundings. It becomes diabolic and almost like a vampire sucking and multiplying in number all those being sucked. Muktibodh fights against such vampires of industrialism, capitalism and hedonism which became rampant in the post-war era rendering individuals to a state of anarchy, alienation and loneliness. These lines from "The Void" would explain the situation better:

*"Everywhere it breeds/ saw, daggers, sickles, / breeds carnivorous teeth./ That is why, / wherever you look, / there is dancing jubilation, / death is giving birth / to brand new children"* (Muktibodh, 2016, 36).

Muktibodh in "So Very Far" presents the paradox of two contrary worlds of 'haves' and 'haven'ts'. This poem uses rhetoric to depict a world of chaos, internal conflicts, saga of

sufferings and bloody past. The poet presents the existential notions of alienation, loneliness and sufferings. The voice of protest is reflected through a set of well-chosen images depicting sufferings, corruption, social insecurity, social and spiritual morbidity. Nand Kishor Naval writes, on the one hand, while the detractors of new poetry were launching a massive movement against new poetry in Hindi. On the other, Muktibodh advocated for the new poetry which emphasised the conflicts and struggle which didn't only address the issues of higher class but it had guts to defend lower middle class too, as manifested in its inherent potential desire for social change. (Nandkishor Naval, 2000, p146). In "So Very Far" the strains of protest are vivid in these words of Muktibodh *"I covered myself with failure's trash. / Finding heaps on the spiral staircase / Of corruption and cash, / And though I have gone straight / I am still bitter in what I do, hate / The poison / For whatever one wants something better."* (Muktibodh, 2016, p 25). The poet further presents the anatomy of hunger, pity and anguish emanating from degenerated human conditions imposed from outside. Muktibodh's protest is against those vicious forces of the society which inflict social, economic, psychological and moral degradation on the individuals and their liberty. To Muktibodh independence is indispensable condition for the existence of men and women, who are truly liberated. These lines echo the existential notions of suffering which state that a man is condemned to suffer: *"Only suffering imprisoned by the nothing is true / All else is unreal, untrue, a delusion, deceit"* (Muktibodh, 40). Muktibodh's protest is against social injustice, animal-like degradation and inhuman oppression.

The poetry of Ibopishak and Muktibodh defies host of issues pertaining to capitalism, urbanization, social injustice and inhuman oppressive system. Their rhetoric of protest is

directed against fossilised attitudes, individualism, misery and wretchedness perpetuated by a diseased social order. These two poets paint a picture of black, bleak and barren world and they apply modernist techniques to weave the rhetoric of protest. Muktibodh unlike Ibopishak creates a hope for change by harnessing the divergent conflicting forces in aesthetics of protest. The politics of protest assumes many forms in the poetics of both Ibopishak and Muktibodh such as satire, surrealism, dialogues, silence and verbal explosion engaged with interrogating, revising, negotiating and validating. Rajesh Joshi in foreword to "Muktibodh Sanchayan" rightly points out "*Muktibodh's mind is a constantly interrogating mind...All implicit and explicit aspects of life and literature are constantly engaged in debates and negotiation*" (Rajesh Joshi, Muktibodh Sanchayan, 2015, 15). These two poets paint a picture of black, bleak and barren world and they apply modernist techniques to weave the rhetoric of protest. These poets use fantasy as tools to reconstruct realities out of imagined situations, recessed from legends, myths, folktales and stories from Indian literary sources. Muktibodh uses the ancient literary sources and Sanskrit aesthetics to create such sensibilities which express and explain the dissenting voices in different tones. Muktibodh beautifully explains the process of putting fantasy into words and he further adds that how new elements merge into fantasy constantly amending and reshaping it into a new consciousness. It is "*Born out of experiences and it is projected through experiences*" (Muktibodh, Eik Sahitiyak Ki Diary, 2011, 23). Ibopishak like Muktibodh uses fantasy to reinforce ideas to negotiate between consciousness emerging from lived experiences and imagined situations. Muktibodh unlike Ibopishak creates a hope for change by harnessing the divergent conflicting forces in aestheticism of protest. The

politics of protest assumes many forms in the poetics of both Ibopishak and Muktibodh such as satire, surrealism, dialogues, silence and verbal dissidence engaged in interrogating, revising, negotiating and validating. These resonances suggest complex intertextual revelations. In both Ibopishak and Muktibodh images imply and suggest flames of discontent reflected in non-linear, revelatory response to complex human situations, where philosophy takes precedence over facts constituting such aesthetic moments which further constitute an escape from the real and the material world through a collage of surrealist images.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### 1

## Review of Sunil Sharma's Short Story Collection *Haunting and Other Stories*

RAJNISH MISHRA

[*Haunting and Other Stories*, Sunil Sharma, New Delhi: Authors Press. 2016. ISBN-10: 9352072723. ISBN-13: 978-9352072729. Pages 168 | Rs 295]

Sunil Sharma's *Haunting and Other Stories*' is a collection of short stories containing diverse issues and perspectives of the contemporary society. One can see the systematic rendering of these issues and perspectives through a set of well-chosen characters. His stories are multi-layered and there are polyphonic voices running through the main thread of his stories. The narrative voices range from that of a maid-servant's preteen daughter, to Children of the Lethe, to the man who wanted to write like Marquez: "survivors of tough battles in an insane world of hatred, strife and mindless mayhem, in the name of religion, region, language or skin colour" (167). The inherent cohesiveness and universal appeal of these stories with names like Marquez, Hemingway and Barthes show author's own cultural range and finesse. The personal sense and tone the writer infuses in these stories is remarkable as one hears the voice of his characters recurring

even in the contemporary society. Staying clear of the Scylla of intentional fallacy and not delving deeper into the author's psyche are no guarantee that one will also be saved from the Charybdis of the affective fallacy. But then, if delight is one of the main functions of literature, if not the main function, the reader has all rights to look for it in the stories they read. These stories, not all of them and not all parts of those that do, offer delight mixed with social messages. These stories show author's deep sense of social commitment and purpose. He's committed to the cause of humanity and his stories strike a note of reconciliation between past and present, personal and impersonal and

The book begins with "A Story told by a Maid-Servant's Preteen Daughter" and ends "With Barthes, on boredom". There's the dream world, the real world, the surreal world and many worlds in these stories. On these pages are filled with men, women, children, real, unreal, magical, ghostly, but never boring. "A Teen Daughter" makes an experiment by bringing the epistolary form back to life. It takes the core questions of the previous story and links them to the next one. There's an art, in hiding art, in flaunting just a little corner of the same at times, and finally in being able to merge it with the overall structure of the work.

"At an Indian Police Station: Some Philosophical Thought" gives primacy to the female point of view and creates a new sensibility for women. There's something in the chameleon writer who takes the colour he wants, and enters the skin of his choice. It is this art that sets average from good apart. These stories become good by that rare touch of genius that is not always available to all fiction and short story writers. Reading these stories is a satisfying experience and fills both heart and mind at the same time. He creates characters that stay alive in mind long after the book is

closed. Who can forget Smita, or it's Deepu, who can change herself at her will with a flick? Her metamorphosis, like all the other metamorphoses, is challenged by the real world. Her fairy tale cannot be tolerated and her make belief world must go – crashed on the rocks of hard and harsh reality. One only wishes that her end would not come that way, but what could be expected in “a brutal world where innocence can never survive”? It shocks, the story, by the way it takes up the theme of death and transcendence. “Profanities” takes up the theme and begins with a dead body lying on the floor. It ends with ‘a stranger or a neighbour, not a father, was consigned to the hungry flames in the presence of a bored group ready to flee from that dismal place into a different reality” (103).

Meetings with Marquez, Hemingway and Barth on these pages in “The man who wanted to write like Marquez”, “The Meeting with Hemingway” and “With Barthes, on boredom”, one enters the stream of a larger discourse, from material to the ideal world. Thus flow the current of the world of thoughts. The atmosphere that's maintained in these stories is surreal. The writer is socially committed, and utilizes the stories to present a veritable cornucopia of images from life – the pieces of life. His old men and young, and not so young old men and dead, and alive women both young and old, and children, male and female, they are all always alive, never lifeless, never dead in the metaphorical sense of the word. For what if life if not played on the screen of mind in light of full consciousness against the darkness of the unconscious? The writer maintains his objectivity, and yet, at the same time is not dry and dead. He succeeds in having hope, against all odds, against that which stifles all dreams and makes innocence scalded and burnt: life in the modern urban wasteland. He takes up institution after institution, relation after relation, page after page of life in his stories and every

page is worth its lines in golden ink. He never wastes space, line, words and sense. His economy and control of words is perfect.

There's one remarkable feature of the stories: the picture of India that emerges while and after reading them, although true and very vivid, is nowhere like that of India projected in the books, films and documentaries generated for an international market that has only one India in mind: the land of abject poverty, snake charmers and magicians. The India of these stories is the India of inequalities, poverty and magic no doubt, but it is in no way different from many other, even western countries, and it is definitely populated by flesh and bone real human beings.

These stories work at minimum two levels. The first level is of the literal meaning and the deeper, richer intertextual level is where the multiple allusions and references lead one to one's own "intellectual speculation embedded in a world of affluence and social isolation" (167). The transport from the world of Sharma's stories to that of Shakespeare's plays, or Dickens's novels is instantaneous and mostly unconscious on part of the reader. It happens again and again and gives the stories their rich and densely woven texture. These stories weave a world of fantasy, reality, joy and thrill in this cosmic universe and many more tantalizing events that life is made of. Sharma takes the readers on this voyage engaging them with intrinsic thoughts of his stories, their ingenuity and purpose. Thus readers are face to face with the great world and our relations to it are manifold. Sunil Sharma is a versatile writer exposed to many genres and his writings reflect the inklings of that composite and comprehensive thought evolving from content, form and characters. I recommend this book for all reasons and seasons.

## 2

### Review of C. L. Khatri's Poetry Collection *For You To Decide*

SANJAY SHARMA

**[*For You To Decide* by C.L. Khatri. New Delhi: Authorpress, 2016. Paperback, pp. 82, Rs. 250. ISBN: 978-93-5207-406-8]**

C.L. Khatri has emerged as a noteworthy signature in Indian English poetry. His four poetic collections are – *Kargil* (2000), *Ripples in the Lake* (2006), *Two Minute Silence* (2014), and the latest *For You To Decide* (2016). Commenting on his poetry Prof. Shaileshwar Sati Prasad observes: C.L. Khatri's love for his land, his people, his culture, his festivals, his flora and fauna, his family and his trilingual existence in Bihar mingles with his mythopic sensibility and gives a specific structure to his poems in English.

In his latest volume *For You To Decide* he appears as a mature poet with a firm grip on his themes and deeper understanding of life. The themes are varied- ranging from religion to post-colonialism, Life, Love, Nature, death and immortality all are grist to his mill. That his poems are open to multiple interpretations is evident from the title poem. It is for man to decide whether he wishes to live like a tiny creature or to encompass eternity within himself.

Sometimes I wonder  
if Vamana's legs are  
What men need to measure  
the infinite space and time?

In "Flames Within" he compares the human spirit to an eternally burning flame. His faith in God is well expressed in the poem "I Have God". He has no godfather. He has God as his father. On the wordly level, he is critical of colonial tendencies. He wishes his colonial masters away. He wants to live in the free air of independent India. His fascination for "Hundroo Waterfall" places him in the line of great nature poets. Poems like "Love" and "Pangs of Parting" present him as a master love poet. In the latter, he wishes to re-live his love life again and again.

O' my love!  
Let us take a revisit  
from where we were strangers.  
Not that I am weary of you  
but to infuse life into life.

There are poems on almost every aspect of human life. The "Three Liners" and "Haiku" make pleasurable reading. The poems compel the reader to think a fresh on life and its changing dimensions. As Mr. Khatri goes on writing, his readers go on asking for more.

### 3

## Review of U. Atreya Sarma's Poetry Collection *Sunny Rain-n-Snow*

KETAKI DATTA

[U Atreya Sarma | *Sunny Rain-n-Snow* | Collection of Poetry  
| Partridge India. 2016 | Pages 158 | ISBN-10: 1482868547 |  
ISBN-13: 978-1482868548 | Paperback \$ 9.99 / Rs 399]

*Sunny Rain-n-Snow: An Olio of Poetry for Pleasure* [2016] is no debut collection of poems of a poet of middle order. But, I daresay the collection left me mesmerised when I went through all the poems with much alacrity and avidity. As a poet, U Atreya Sarma has a way with words. He can play on words, he can make them dance to his tune, he himself can break into Samba steps even, if he so desires. 'A poet of substance' can do whatever he wants with his poetical lines. He can create a picture, mar one, recreate another ambience at the cost of the given one. He is not just a 'raconteur' or just an 'entertainer' – he is even more, an artist, a lover of life to the bottom, a latent hero who needs no armour to go out with.

In this debut collection of 63 poems, he puts a stamp of his originality. The book has twelve sections each containing two to eleven poems. And, it is my privilege to say that each poem of the 'olio' is a tuberose in a garland, woven with love and care.

In the brilliant Foreword, Dr. Sunil Sharma, opines:

*"Sunny Rain-n-Snow* is about living and loving life. It is the exuberance of a rich soul finding kinship with others. It is a

deep-sea exploration of various facets of submerged realms. The book spans major genres and provides poetic epistemes on living and being human in a challenging milieu and world. You will be totally immersed in it; and when you re-surface, you will be transformed! That very few writers can guarantee these days to readers" (Foreword: xi).

The twelve sections remind me of the stupendous twelve books of *Paradise Lost* by Milton. The length of the two may not match but profundity and grandeur fashioned a bit by modernity can obviously do. The twelve sections are: *Femina*, *Facets of Nature*, *Epiphanies*, *Americana*, *Musings on Poesy*, *Relations and Equations*, *Romantic Peeps*, *Reflectively Yours*, *Social Bristles*, *Tongue-in-Cheek*, *Occasional Voices*, and *Metrical Forays*. And, of course, the nomenclature of each section is self-explanatory.

Let us take a plunge into some poems from each section separately.

The first section 'Femina' is about the importance of women in the social matrix. I do not feel that the poet is blatant in winning empowerment for women. But his love, respect and concern for womenfolk in all capacities – wife, mother, daughter, friend, or inamorata– is drawn towards the lines. I do not know whether Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" would be a befitting comparison here, but the Indian sensibilities would surely take this line as an adage:

"Daughter or sister, wife or mother  
 Daughter-in-law or grandmother  
 She is the woman wonderful.  
 Woe betide us,  
 If we don't wipe away her woes!

She is every virtue –  
 Love and tenderness

Patience and gentleness  
 Forbearance and forgiveness  
 Sympathy and empathy –  
 ... ..

Then why worship distant angels unseen  
 When we have the woman on this earthly scene?"  
 (WWW: Woman's World of Woes)

Even writing about the dead mother who keeps blessing her sons even after her demise, jerks tears to our eyes. Indian mother pines to see her wards happy and well-fed. Even the dead mother wishes them well and expresses:

"If you don't eat, it pains me; so eat you well;  
 And I'll be happy wherever I am."  
 (The dead mother blesses)

The horror of foeticide (Crush and finish it!), woman's desire for emancipation (A housewife's lib) –all feature in this section with meticulous precision.

In the Second Section, 'Facets of Nature,' right from ruining the atrocities inflicted on nature by Man and Nature's subsequent Revenge to unalloyed love of Nature keep the plate full for the readers. While Wordsworth in his The Prelude, Book I says:

"From rock to rock I went  
 From hill to hill in discontent...";

Atreya Sarma asserts:

"Bounden am I to the bounteous hilly vantage  
 For the fascinating delicacy of a rare vintage  
 I can't love more these Sahyadris  
 At Phase Three of Pune's Hinjewadi!"  
 (In the bosom of a breezy hill)

In Section Three, 'Epiphanies,' the moments to be eternized are beautifully done. "Vertigo" encases a few

pictures, which again nullify the ephemerality of the 'moment':

"Of what avail my syllables and letters?  
Of what avail my jugglery of words?  
Of what avail my loony moony ways?  
Of what use is my Muse?  
Except to build castles in the air?"

They build and bond bricks far better  
Then I put my words at all together  
And much less mean and live them."

Section 4, 'Americana,' contains poems which are the reflections of the poet's journey to the United States of America and the moments well-spent on Bear Lake or on Swan Queen or in proximity to the fresh, fragrant blossoms or flakes of snow that need to be frozen on the canvas of Memory. The poet turns eloquent:

"Let it freeze me into an obelisk  
I won't move or flinch or shrink back or slink.

Then, what's it that you want?  
Be a part of this draft!  
Lose myself into it!  
Let the moment be stilled!"  
(Freeze this moment)

The next three sections, 'Musings on Poesy, 'Relations and Equations,' and 'Romantic Peeps' are about peeks into the world of 'poetry,' celebration of 'friendship' and 'tales of love of a rosy-cheek beloved and chivalrous lover.' The diction and the style change according to the demands of the theme.

Wordsworth's theory of poetry, Coleridge's, Shelley's even, fall far short of the instant appeal that Sarma comes up with. He says:

“When flight of fancy  
 And a worthy wreath of words  
 Cohabit on a bed of aesthetics,  
 The labours of their union  
 Conceive the baby of poesy”  
 (Cradle of Poesy)

Words and Fancy get married to each other to give birth  
 to Poetry!

He goes out to analyze his own art too!

“That my poetry is too elaborate, they grumble.  
 Tell me if Nature and Creation are not humongous.

... ..

*Now, my dear erudite connoisseurs, compeers and critics!*  
*My muse is only as good or bad as Nature herself.”*  
 (That my poetry is, too...)

In the friendship poems of the next Section, ‘Relations & equations,’ I find these lines to define “Friendship” in a nutshell:

“Well, friend, you’re then my tree, sun and candle;  
 It’s how I’d always love you to so handle.  
 Giving is your nature, taking is mine.  
 Isn’t then our friendship mutually fine?!”  
 (Ah, what a friendship!)

Mutual bond of friendship is a much treasured one to the poet. “Giving...taking,” “mutually fine” are the terms which are modern in usage, keeping in view the definition of Friendship in these trying times, when relationship of all sorts stands jeopardized.

The section ‘Romantic peeps’ has five poems, all of which are gems as per merit. Diction, expressions, turns of phrases, occasional use of italics – all speak volumes of the romance these pieces depict. Again, a touch of levity is also there in the lines:

“Lips full, what a pull!  
 This labial liaison!  
 What a connubial celebration!”  
 (Lip-lapping)

The Eighth Section ‘Reflectively Yours’ is perhaps the longest one with eleven poems. Different curves of existence, hued with myriad of temperamental vicissitudes add up to grandeur which lend an especial charm to the poems of this section. Sarma tries to delve deep into a baby’s inarticulate laughter and shrill cries and seek a balance, as he says:

“What’s this funny relativity?  
 ... ..  
 Is it because –  
 When you’re elated – you’re on levity?  
 When you’re somber – you’re under gravity?”  
 (Baby relativity)

Seeking space in between orbits, the less-comprehended dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless in the case of Man, the poet’s tears for the underdog stolen by a rich girl, the aversion of the Sun towards Man’s sins, adage-like pithy statements like:

“Mood or no mood, go on and ahead.  
 Don’t rust in rest; use rest for your best.”  
 (Tantrums of Nature),

Or calling the ‘simple dog’ a ‘free, unpaid watchman,’ dumping the ‘truth’ ‘by the wayside’ while we walk along – all these are snippets of Reality depicted in the unrhymed lines of this Section.

The last four Sections are a class by themselves. A few of the poems deserve special mention, however. The poem “Toast To The Terrorist [TTTT]” in the Theatre of the Absurd mode has a charm of its own. The brilliant analogy drawn in the concluding lines, “All’s Ill that ends Ill” asserts a mind with a sense of humour. In the poem, “What’s in a name, Ms

Rosie?" in the Section 'Tongue-in-cheek,' the poet proves that 'name' does matter. Yet, the patriotic touch makes the 'name' take a backseat when we are proud to 'hail from India that is Bharat,' a land of all-inclusiveness.

Makar Sankranti being round the corner, the culture-specific appeal of the poem(Sun-Kranti) is simply irresistible. An eternal appeal to make the Good win over Evil rings clear in every ear.

"Limericks" and "Facebook escapades" are some of the poems which make the past and the present stand on the same pedestal to shake hands with each other. The last poem and the last but one are Metverse Poetry Contest winning poems. They deal with social issues like the deplorable plight of the Caribbean Coolies and the sad end of an AIDS victim, who himself was the cause of such misfortune, though!

In gamut, the poems of all seasons and clime, the themes of all countries and time, with a flick of genuine emotions, with a touch of verisimilitude and meaningful/less commotions, bring us to the edge of plethora of queries whose answers are not always blowing in the wind! A kind heart, an attentive mind, a compassionate soul would only get to comprehend the poems – by reading once, by reading several times! The book is a collectors' item, to be treasured beside The Holy Bible on his bookshelf. Kudos to the poet, Atreya Sarma Uppaluri, who would belt out more and more poetry collections in near future, I am sure!

## 4

### Review of Paul Coelho's Novel *The Spy*

CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

[*The Spy*, Paul Coelho, Penguin Random House, India, 2016, pp186, Price: 299]

*Love, lies and seductive dalliances of Mata Hari: Retelling and Fictionalising a Historical Narrative.*

Paul Coelho has written many bestselling books and all his books are a great source of inspiration for millions of readers all over the world. His books provide a wonderful insight into life with exploration and experimentation replenishing the readers with eros and positive energy. His protagonists are constantly engaged with natural quest for life, heart's desire, miracles in life, the purpose of life, search for love, sex and spirituality, triumph over suffering, the courage to live one's dream. His books "*The Pilgrimage*", "*The Alchemist*", "*By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*", "*Veronica Decides to Die*", "*The Zahir*", "*The Fifth Mountain*" and "*Eleven Minutes*" explore the above themes and create a saga of journey filled with life-enhancing impact and stories of living, loving and dying. Coelho is essentially a non-conformist who defies the convention and explores the new stating what it means to be alive. The book under review, "*The Spy*" is based on actual facts of Mata Hari's life. Coelho acknowledges that although he based his story around actual fact but he took liberty to suit the requirements of the narrative, " ...I had to create some dialogue, merge certain scenes, change the order of a few events, and eliminate anything I thought was not relevant to the narrative".

The story of Mata Hari has been covered extensively in Pat Shipman's excellent book *"Femme Fatale: Love, Lies and Unknown Life of Mata Hari"* (Harper Collins, 2007) and Philippe Colla's *"Mata Hari, Sa Veritable histoire"* and Russell Warren Howe's *"Mournful Fate of Mata Hari, the spy who was n't guilty"*. *"The Spy"* beautifully and lucidly chronicles the life story of a woman who is pauper but ambitious, a beautiful dancer who delighted her audiences as a courtesan and bewitched the richest and most powerful men of her time. She defies convention and uses her power of sexuality like Cleopatra who seduced Caesar, ruined Egypt and was doomed to give Augustus the sceptre of the world. Finally, consumed with her own paranoid activities she pays the ultimate price.

Structurally the novel is divided into three parts with a prologue and epilogue. The Prologue has been beautifully structured focusing on the last moments of Mata Hari's life in the prison in Paris on October 15, 1947 under the charges of espionage where she succumbs to the bullets. The description of her death presupposes the events and acts of this enigmatic personality. Coelho dramatises her death lending it air and aura of a heroic death which teases the imagination of the readers fueling them with curiosity about her life as they plunge into three parts of the novel that follow. The mysterious story of Mata Hari becomes more authentic and compelling with her first person narrative. The first part of the novel begins with her letter to Mr. Clunet revealing her intent and impulse for writing this letter. She speaks about her optimism and realism and defends her own position of being innocent and confesses that how confident of manipulating men, she herself got manipulated. Reflecting on past of her life she is overpowered with a sense of futility and sadness. The scream of thoughts mixing memories with

desires fills her with remorse and loneliness. These lines reflect the state of her mind" *Memories are full of caprice, where images of things we h've experienced are still capable of suffocating us through one small detail or insignificant sound...This tears me apart more than my fear of death or the solitude in which I now find myself.*"(13). She continues her stories in confessional mode detailing the events and situations that prepared her for life. She candidly tells about her marriage with a person who was twenty one year senior to her and joy of having a baby and trauma of losing her. She gives us graphic details of her journey to Holland and Paris unfolding the events and action of the plot. She tells about her seductive feats and desire for manipulating moneyed and powerful men with whom she was sexually generous for every favour. As she would let us know "*I was just another one of those women who venture to the city of dreams in pursuit of wealthy men and easy life*"(43). The first part of the novel depicts the restless strivings of Mata Hari, who enters into a series of adventures using her body as a means to an end that defined her drive for power and self. The second part of the novel is poetic evocation of the magical dancer in Mata Hari, these lines create the spell of her mesmerising persona" *Slender and tall, with lithe grace of a wild animal, Mata Hari has black hair that undulates strangely and transports us to a magical place. The most feminine of all women, writing an unfamiliar tragedy with her body*" (55). To her dance is not only passion but a way of life, an act of "*communing with the universe*". Gradually her audiences multiplied in number and gentry comprising journalists, celebrities, ambassadors and rich men from Germany and Japan, and she thrived on it exploiting the lusts and longings of men as she says, "*...I was always asking for favours in exchange for sex*". She believes in power of sex and to her love is poison which consumes a person relegating him or her to nothingness.

These lines provide an insight into the mind of Mata Hari who remains detached to sickening love full of caution:

“Never fall in love. Love is poison. Once you fall in love, you lose control over your life—your heart and mind belong to someone else. Your existence is threatened. You start to do everything to hold on to your loved one and lose all sense of danger. Love, that inexplicable and dangerous thing, sweeps everything you are from the face of earth, and in its place, leaves only what your beloved wants you to be”(63). The second part of the novel takes the readers to mazes of her life explicating lures, temptations and traps of life. Her experiences with numerous males weave powerful narrative of a woman who in her ascent explores the fear and insecurity underlining love and lust. The variety of experiences adds to her perception of the world and conviction that sex sells and excels. This part also gives beautiful description of foods, dances, music and dresses prevalent in her era. Such graphic details add to the narrator’s sense of history. As the narrative unfolds it provides an interesting reading into a world of love, longing and sex. And then knowingly and unknowingly she fell into a deadly trap signing an agreement in exchange for measly twenty thousand francs, ‘to sign everything as H21’.

These words sum up the tragic life of Mata Hari, “That was my life; I am the nightingale who gave everything and died while doing so. “

Third part of this novel begins in Paris on October 14, 1917 stating the charter of allegations against Mata Hari and her subsequent interrogation and trial. The charges of espionage for Germany against France - This part also focuses on modus operandi of espionage and counterespionage networks during the wars in Germany and France. Historically speaking, mass organized espionage was in its infancy in World War I, but many of the techniques developed during this period became vital to the governments around the world. Paris was a priority target for

the Germans. Margarethe Zelle, better known as Mata Hari became mistress of Lyon industrialist, Emile Etienne Glimet, the founder of Muse Guime of Asian Art in Paris. She became part of espionage network and frequently travelled Spain which brought her under suspicion of the French intelligence. The French were successful in cracking her code and establishing her identity. Coelho's greatness lies in his art of retelling these historical facts with poise and grandeur of an epic novel. The thread of story leads the readers to two landmark events in Mata Hari's life; her arrest on February 13, 1917 at the hotel Elysee Palace, her conviction on July 24 and finally, at the dawn of October 15, 1917, she was taken to the Chateau of Vicennes and executed by a firing squad. Readers are sympathetic with her in spite of all her follies and tricks because she is amazingly honest in her all confessions. Beginning her career as an ordinary woman, she suffers at the mercy of a debauched husband, finds her way to Holland with one of her friends, learns dance, posed for provocative photographs and mingled in wealthy circles. Prior to World War I, she was generally viewed as an artist and a free-spirited bohemian, but as the war progressed, she was perceived as a wanton, promiscuous and perhaps, dangerous seductress. Coelho's aesthetic sense is reflected in creating the persona of Mata Hari as a beautiful lady with gifted intelligence, an accomplished dancer with magical spell and a courtesan whose beauty struck the French with all the power of mortal blow. He creates a powerful tale of love, loss, choice, destiny, loving, living and dying. The Epilogue tells about the brutal cutting off her head and handing over to the representatives of the country according to the custom of the time. Finally, the execution of Mata Hari itself becomes a question as it is revealed to the readers that 'entire *proceedings* were based on *deductions, assumptions*', concluding with:

*“Between us, the evidence we had was so poor that it wouldn’t have been fit to punish a cat” (186).*

The philosophical undertones of the novel which are very much peculiar with Coelho impinge upon the narrative and hinder the natural and organic development of the story but these matrices never kill the joy of reading as the personal and public accounts go hand in hand with the main narrative voice in a polyphonic world. Like all great works of Coelho this novel has been written with poetic lucidity, objective assessment and generic perspective which no reader can escape. I enjoyed it and look forward to other such great novel with historical frame work and integrated picture of a woman who lives her passion and not her life and her subsequent rise and fall.

## INTERVIEW

### **Bibhu Padhi in Conversation with Goutam Karmakar**

#### ABOUT BIBHU PADHI

Born on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1951 at Cuttack in Odisha, Dr. Bibhu Prasad Padhi (*alias* Bibhu Padhi) has become one of the leading voices in the domain of Indian English Poetry. Besides being a poet and translator, he is a teacher by profession. For his academic career, he has bestowed his knowledge on English literature at Ravenshaw College (now Ravenshaw University) from 1974 to 1992 with a gap of 4 years in between from 1981 to 1985. At the same time from 1986 to 1990 he became the counselor for Odisha branch at Indira Gandhi National Open University for 'Diploma in Creative Writing in English'. He has also taught at SCS College, Puri-on-Sea. He was invited as visiting writer and professor in several colleges and universities across India (e.g., Central University of Hyderabad, Berhampur University, Utkal University, IIT-Madras/Chennai, National Academy of Letters and as Visiting Professor of English & Creative Writing at University of Maryland-College Park, Washington DC, USA in 1992 and to the "International Writing Program", University of Iowa, USA in 1991. But his fame rests more clearly, widely and positively for the 11 volumes of poems that he has composed till now. He began writing poetry in 1975 and it was 1988 when his first volume *Going to the Temple*

was published. Since then he has widely published his verse in India and abroad. In 1992 his second volume *A Wound Elsewhere* was published and after that came *Lines From A Legend* in 1993, *Painting the House* in 1999, *Games the Heart Must Play: a trilogy in of love poems* in 2003, *Living With Lorenzo: Poems on D.H. Lawrence* in 2003, *Choosing A Place* in 2011, *Migratory Days* in 2011, *Brief Seasons: 60 love songs* in 2013, *Magic Ritual* in 2014, *Midnight Diary* in 2015 and *Sea Dreams* in 2017. He has published his poetry in distinguished magazines in India, UK, Europe, USA, and Canada, such as *Chandrabhaga: a magazine of Indian Writing*, *Debonair*, *Gentleman*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Imprint*, *Indian Literature*, *Journal of Literature & Aesthetics*, *Kavya Bharati*, *Quest* (now *New Quest*) [all from India], *Contemporary Review* (London/Oxford) *Encounter* (London), *Orbis*, *Outposts*, *The Poetry Review* (London), *Poetry Wales*, *Red Rock Review*, *The Rialto*, *Stand Magazine*, *Wasafiri* (London), *2PLUS2* (Lausanne, [Switzerland]), *The American Scholar*, *Colorado Review*, *Tulane Review*, *Confrontation*, *Helix*, *The New Criterion*, *New English Review*, *New Letters*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *Prairie Schooner*, *Rosebud*, *Southwest Review*, *The Literary Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Xavier Review* [all USA] *The Antigonish Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *The Toronto Review* [all from Canada].

Apart from poetry, he has also shown his interest in fiction particularly on his favourite D.H. Lawrence and his book *D.H. Lawrence: Modes of Fictional Writing* published in 1989 proved this. With his wife Minakshi Padhi he has published a reference book, called *Indian Philosophy and Religion: A Reader's Guide* in 1990. He has also published a novel in 2014, titled *Absences*. Besides being a poet and critic, he has established himself as a well-known translator. The first one is the poems of Sitakant Mahapatra namely *A Morning of Rains and Other Poems: Selected Poems of Sitakant*

*Mahapatra* in 1990. Next he has translated the poems of Bibek Jena in his *Memories, Legends, and The Goddess: Selected Poems of Bibek Jena* in 2013. He has tried to give national identity and voice to young Oriya poets and his *Parallel Speech: An Anthology of Fifteen Younger Contemporary Oriya Poets* proves to be a major attempt in this direction.

*In a short conversation Bibhu Padhi allowed Goutam Karmakar to take a look to the poetic world of him. He was asked a few questions and he managed his time to answer a few from those. Hope this will give pleasure to his readers and all the lovers of poetry. Following is the text of conversation:-*

**Goutam Karmakar:** Since your poetry focuses on the life and happenings around yourself can you share with your readers how far do the surroundings of Odisha shape your creative faculty?

**Bibhu Padhi:** I have been influenced by my home city of Cuttack, which is a mix of town and city. If you visit the narrow lanes of Cuttack, you feel as if you are in a village. If you visit the Buxi Bazaar area, you have all the ingredients of a big city. Everything has influenced me – from the backyard of our house at College Square, the house of my senior poet-friend, Jayanta Mahapatra, the funeral grounds.

**Goutam Karmakar:** At which age have you responded to the call of Muse?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Regarding the call of Muse, I have felt it always. But I started writing seriously from 1975.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Your poems like *Indian Evening, Sea-Breeze, Sunset at Puri-on-Sea, Paper Boats on the Fullmoon Day in October* and many other poems remind your readers about another notable poet Jayanta Mahapatra. How has Mahapatra influenced you?

**Bibhu Padhi:** We have had a relationship for more than 46 years. I was influenced by his cryptic language, his urge to describe the rains, the night, the loneliness in the midst of plenty, the mythic dimensions of living.

**Goutam Karmakar:** **Apart from Mahapatra who are your major source of inspiration?**

**Bibhu Padhi:** I have been much influenced by Seferis, Quasimodo, Ungaretti, Neruda, Pavese, Vasco Popa, Lorca, Hardy, Whitman, Seamus Heaney, William Stafford and many others. In fact, I've been influenced by all those poets whom I loved and admired.

**Goutam Karmakar:** **What does poetry mean to you? What are those salient features of your poetry by which readers can tell that this piece is written by Bibhu Padhi?**

**Bibhu Padhi:** Poetry is, as Wordsworth has said, a "recollection in tranquility", and I totally agree with him. I believe poetry is a passionate utterance, a celebration of life and death and all those things in between these. I do not have a large vocabulary; while reading my work, the reader will not have to run to the dictionary. My poetry is simple, short, without too many images, highly personal, and somewhat meditative.

**Goutam Karmakar:** **Your *Games the Heart Must Play* is a trilogy of love poems. So can you tell how you have connected the three parts *Dream Children, Today and Daughter* here?**

**Bibhu Padhi:** The three parts in the book are independent of each other. In the first part, I have written about all those children and old men who have influenced my psyche. In the second part, I have written about man-woman relationships and in the final part I have written about an

imaginary daughter. I must mention here that I do not have a daughter.

**Goutam Karmakar:** How have you projected a sense of loss from various cultural spaces in your *A Wound Elsewhere*? Your poems like *Rest*, *Grandmother*, and *The Bare Bamboo Bed* show that you are sensitive to suffering and its source. But the epicenter is always 'Everywhere'. What do you mean by this '*A Wound Elsewhere*'?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Glad to know that you have gone through my *A Wound Elsewhere*. I love to suffer. I have been associated with suffering since the death of my father when I was ten. The "wound" has stayed with me over a long time. It has been difficult to place my finger on this "wound", but I have been intensely aware of it. I have seen this "wound" everywhere, at all those places where my voice cannot reach.

**Goutam Karmakar:** It seems that you have focused on surrealistic images in every poem of *Choosing A Place*. Do you agree with me?

**Bibhu Padhi:** I wonder if my images are surreal. I think my poems in *Choosing A Place* are much less surreal than the poetry of a Jayanta Mahapatra or an Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Absences however have been a part of my life. A long time ago a British critic-friend, Keith Sagar told me that my poems do not treat solid objects, but the space between objects. I think he was right.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Do you think that poetry can restore innocence and make us human? And does poetry hold the power to reform society and culture? How have your poems attempted to restore innocence and justice?

**Bibhu Padhi:** My poems do not consciously “restore innocence and make us human”. It is really difficult to achieve that. My animal-poems do talk about the innocence associated with the animal world. Take for instance a poem like “Pigeons”; you will see for yourself how far we are from the simplicity and innocence of these birds. The poem ends however with the way the larger natural world accepts the smaller animals.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Your poetry throws the reader to a world of psychological realm where mysticism, sensuousness, human emotions and imagination are coupled with epigram and other rhetorical devices. This reminds me of John Keats. So tell us how far have your poetry confirmed the principles of Keats?

**Bibhu Padhi:** From my childhood I have lived with mysticism. These days I have been writing poems that try to rediscover the sensuousness that builds up our relationships with fellow human beings. I must be candid about what you say about Keats and your comparison of Keats’s work with my work. I am nowhere near Keats who is one of the finest poets the world has produced. And I will wait to know how you will relate me with Keats.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Your poems can be a ground of different religious confluence where Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Charvak’s philosophy along with Bhagavad Gita, Veda, Upanishads have melted together. Do you agree with it and how far all these affected your writing?

**Bibhu Padhi:** I have been attracted by all these religions and religious texts, but I don’t think I have used mythology and legends consciously. Yes, my book-manuscript of

poems, *Meditations on Being* is based on the Upanishads. Each of the “meditations” is based on a single upanishadic mantra. I want to show my people the worth of all these religious texts.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Have you faced any problem while translating poems of Oriya poets? What are the immediate reasons behind your translation of Oriya poems?

**Bibhu Padhi:** I have translated almost every Oriya poet because I have loved his or her work. I suppose translations shape the craft of my own poems. The book was commissioned by my publishers. I chose only those poets whose work I admired.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Your poems like *The Night of the Waters, All through the Long Night, Living in the Dark, The Dreams at Midnight, Growing up in the Dark* present dark, gloomy pictures which work as metaphor for death, defeat, departure and loss. Why have you shown such pictures of doom, despair and death in your poems?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Recently one of the senior poets of India reviewed Jayanta Mahapatra’s latest book, *The Hesitant Light*, and my own *Selected Poems* and asked why our poems were so melancholic. The poet is not responsible for what comes to him. It is nearly impossible to describe the way a particular poem was shaped or crafted. I still think the arrival of a poem is a mysterious phenomenon; also, that every single poem chooses its own poet.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Do you have any specific goals to achieve as a poet? And what kind of future do you see of Indian English poetry?

**Bibhu Padhi:** No specific goals, absolutely none. And, Indian English poetry has a very bright future. Some of the younger poets are writing beautiful poems. But the readers should distinguish between good poetry and second-rate poems. The world is more than full of bad poetry.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Where lies the difference between Bibhu Padhi the poet and Bibhu Padhi the novelist? And sir as you are now retired from your profession kindly tell your readers how are you passing your leisure time?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Sorry, I'm afraid I don't have an answer to that. Critics and readers will point of this difference better than me. Don't you think so Goutam?

Yes I am telling you about my activities in leisure time. Better I tell about my hobbies. I spend my time Teaching English (both spoken and written) to smaller children, particularly those belonging to the economically-challenged families. I have been holding "Sunday Morning Classes" for the past seven years and the response has been extremely encouraging. In my leisure time I Listen to Indian and Western music, classical and modern, especially instrumental. And you will always find me to appreciate Art, especially those of the "great masters."

**Goutam Karmakar:** I guess your pen has not stopped. But have you ever faced 'Writer's Block'? And what can your readers expect from you in future any plays, or haikus or short stories?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Good question for a poet. Yes, I've had my lean years. I clearly remember the period from 1992 to 1997,

during which I wrote almost nothing, or wrote poems which were just third-rate.

No, I don't have plans to write haikus, plays or short stories.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Sir it seems that I have taken quite a long time of you as I am so fascinated listening your answers. But let's come to the concluding questions. Many new poets are rising to the surface. So is there any advice you want to offer to them?

**Bibhu Padhi:** Just wait for the poems to arrive. Please don't wait for awards. Write quietly. I am always there to extend my help and encouragement to younger/beginning poets as much as I can.

**Goutam Karmakar:** Thank you Mr. Padhi for this interesting conversation.

**Bibhu Padhi:** Thank you Goutam.

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# Phenomenal Literature

A Global Journal devoted to

# Language and Literature

ISSN 2347-5951

Vol.2 No.2 | Year 2017

GJLL

## Statement of ownership and other particulars about GJLL

<i>Place of Publication</i>	: Q-2A, Hauz Khas Enclave, Annexe Block, First Floor, New Delhi - 110 016 India
<i>Periodicity of Publication</i>	: Bi-annual
<i>Printed by</i>	: Authorspress
<i>Published by</i>	: Authorspress
<i>Chief Editor</i>	: Dr. Vivekanand Jha
<i>Nationality</i>	: Indian
<i>Managing Editor</i>	: Mr. Sudarshan Kcherry
<i>Address</i>	: Authorspress, Q-2A, Hauz Khas Enclave, Annexe Block, First Floor, New Delhi - 110 016 (India)
<i>Website</i>	: <a href="http://www.phenomenalliterature.com">www.phenomenalliterature.com</a> <a href="http://www.authorspressbooks.com">www.authorspressbooks.com</a>
<i>Email</i>	: <a href="mailto:editor@phenomenalliterature.com">editor@phenomenalliterature.com</a> <a href="mailto:info@authorspressbooks.com">info@authorspressbooks.com</a>
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