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## Editorial

*Transcript: Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies* is the result of the endeavour on the part of the Department of English, Bodoland University to produce and provide a platform to sincere and genuine research works by intellectuals, academicians as well as students on different literary and cultural fields. Bodoland University, situated at Kokrajhar in the western part of Assam, is apparently a new university in the North-Eastern part of India. The university wishes to usher in a positive change in the socio-cultural and economic life of the people by creating a favourable academic environment in the region. As the university is encouraging research activities in every field of academic disciplines, the English Department also joins the collective effort by extending research works in literary as well as cultural activities both within and outside the region.

The basic aim of this journal is many folded. First of all, it tries to encourage research works on the literature and cultures of the people inhabiting a region comparatively less represented and often 'mis-represented' in the popular narratives of mass-media. Secondly, the journal wishes to be aware of the latest developments in the fields of literature and cultural studies at the global stage. As such, despite numerous constraints, the journal tries to maintain an 'international' standard in terms of its choice of content.

This volume includes articles of varied areas of scholarship ranging from Arabic to American literature, religion to ecocriticism, film-studies to folklore. The first article by Arfan Hussain and Liza Das makes a critical enquiry into the themes of fluxion and mobility in selected essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the greatest figures of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century America. With the help of a few selected essays, the authors have attempted to show how in spite of his uncompromising support for individualism and sovereignty of human mind as sufficient power to know the reality of the external world, Emerson seems to become skeptical of such adequacy and absolutism due to the inherent duality or the fluctuation of ideas or thoughts that show a discrepancy as the human perception changes along with the succession of time. On the other hand, Pallavi Gogoi and Dr. Liza Das take up the autobiographical works of Maya Angelou, a black American writer, for investigating the representations of crime and deviance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Abdus Salam, in his article, tries to critically assess the contribution of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi to Arabian poetry.

This volume includes a few articles that critically examine a few works literature and culture in Assam. Dalim Das's article "Modernity and Folk Consciousness: The case of Jiban Narah" critically investigates how a modern Assamese poet Jiban Narah negotiates between his cultural root in Mishing folk-life and the modern urban lifestyles and worldviews in his poetry. In an ecocritical approach, Ratan Deka examines different aspects of Mamoni Raisom Goswami's representation of nature in her *Chenabor Sont*. The volume includes two important papers on two different aspects of the Bodo people and their socio-political and cultural lives. Whereas Dr. Arup Sarkar tries to understand the plight of Bodo culture in the context of the modern times, Deepak Basumatary engages in a highly critical and theoretically sound enquiry into the cinematic representation of the ethnic as well as socio-political realities of the Bodo people. His paper is a significant attempt to situate Bodo cinema in the context of Bodo literary and cultural movements as well as in the context of Assamese and Indian cinema. Dr. Lilabati Choudhury's article is an attempt to make a brief study of the religious centers of Assam with the help of statistical survey of different cults spread across different districts of Assam. On the other hand, Nikunja Kishore Das's article critically reevaluates the religious, cultural and social signification the river Ganga in the context of changing times in his comparative study of the poetry of three modern Indian poets.

In editing this volume, every possible measure has been taken by the editorial team to retain originality of the research articles send by different contributors. We are thankful to the contributors for their kind cooperation by joining hands in our academic journey. We hope, our efforts will add something significant to the ever-expanding and dynamic domains of literary and cultural studies across the world.

**Manab Medhi**  
Editor

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## FLUXION AND MOBILITY IN RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S SELECTED ESSAYS

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Liza Das<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract:

Among the dominant figures appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century literary world of America, Ralph Waldo Emerson is the most recognizable personality who has been granted an unchallenged platform by the mainstream American people due to his devoted philanthropic and involuntary service to engage them in the activities that fortify and uplift the self above anything else. Apparently subscribing to the philosophy of Pyrrhonian Skepticism Emerson's ideas as unfurled in his groundbreaking essays like "Friendship", "Nature", "Experience", "Montaigne; or the Skeptic" and "Circles" seem to be pulled by two divergent and extreme propensities of life simultaneously that indicates the fluxions and mobility without adherence to any extreme polar side of the dual consciousness of his mind. A passionate follower of twofold perspectivism, Emerson never yearns for permanence and stability of facts as he comprehends the everlasting existence of change and alteration in everything in the world.

With the help of some selected essays of Emerson, in this paper an attempt has been made to show how in spite of his uncompromising support for individualism and sovereignty of human mind as sufficient power to know the reality of the external world, he seems to become skeptical of such adequacy and absolutism due to the inherent duality or the fluctuation of ideas or thoughts that show a discrepancy as the human perception changes along with the succession of time.

**Key Words:** Transcendentalism, Self-Reliance, Skepticism, Fluxion and Mobility

*Life is a progress, not a station.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) is the torchbearer of New England Renaissance in the late nineteenth century American world. Emerson, the “sage” of Concord (Buell 292), is considered as one of the chief spokespersons for Transcendentalism, an idealistic philosophical and literary movement of the nineteenth century which professed the superiority of intuition, belief in individualism and self-reliance, nonconformity to customs, traditions and government authorities, inherent goodness of people among others. Known as a critic of society in his time, Emerson has published dozens of essays in two volumes—*Essays: First Series* (1841) and *Second Series* (1844), poems and public lectures that are replete with sublime thoughts and philosophical insights; they can be regarded as the nutritious fruits for the thoughtful minds.

Emerson’s essays like “Nature” (1844), “Self-Reliance” (1841) and “Compensation” (1841) seem to be full of highly loaded Indian understanding and judgments shaped with a foreign atmosphere as once Mahatma Gandhi praises them saying, “The essays to my mind contain the teaching of Indian wisdom in a western garb. It is interesting to see our own sometime in differently fashioned” (qtd in Hunt 203). His essays seem to be so odd due to the hard to make out mystical ideas and beliefs that cannot be penetrated easily. It is not at all straightforward to grasp the meaning of his writings and this fact is echoed in the essay “Emerson’s Tragic Sense” (1953) where Stephen Whicher says, “The more we know him, the less we know him. He can be summed be in a formula only by those who know their own minds better than his” (285).

The early phase of Emerson’s life has manifested his adamant support for individualism and autonomy of human mind as sufficient power to know the reality of the external world. His essay “Self-Reliance” is the best embodiment of his faith and optimism in the power of the self as he starts the essay with a Latin sentences “Ne te quaesiveris extrea” (45) which means there is no need to see outside; everything is within the human self and the ideas and beliefs should be developed in that sphere only. All human beings are potential enough to write their own destinies. Emerson’s optimism and his faith on the individual soul are reflected in the following lines,

“Man is his own star; and the soul that can  
Render an honest and perfect man,  
Commands all light, all influence, all fate”

(“Self-Reliance”45)

This confident attitude as explored in the essays of Emerson is observed by Richard Whelan saying, “Full of optimism and idealism, Emerson’s essays make wonderful companions through the trials of life providing a feast of inspiration and insight. Reading Emerson is like taking a potent elixir that refreshes the soul, restores hope and inspires faith” (16).

Again Henry David Grey finds an uncompromising faith and optimism of Emerson regarding his ideas of individualism as for him “the optimism of Emerson is unshaken” (77) as the dark side of human life is not powerful enough to surpass the ability of the self.

Joseph Blau in “Emerson’s Transcendentalist Individualism as a Social Philosophy” (1977) opines about Emerson’s belief on the likelihood of achieving the absolute or universal knowledge or the final conclusion about any idea or belief with the help of relying on the self. Blau in the article seems to highlight the positive aspects of a self-reliant person. He says,

What [Emerson] had found in the healing process of finding himself was the conviction that any person who honestly examines his own mind and his own heart and carries the examination out to its utmost limits will arrive at conclusions that are not particular, self-centred and limited, but are universal and applicable to all of humankind.

(82)

According to Emerson an individual can attain the absolute knowledge if he trusts on himself totally; a self-reliant person has the capacity to carry of universal truth”. Emerson himself feels ashamed of people’s desire to imitate the ideas and opinions of other people without relying on the dexterity of the self. A person himself is a great powerhouse whose reliance on exterior thing is a mere mockery of the self. Emerson says in “Self-Reliance”(1841), “The power which resides in him is new in nature and none but he knows what that is not which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried” (48).

In this paper, with the help of some selected essays of Emerson, an attempt has been made to illustrate how in spite of his stubborn support for individualism and sovereignty of human mind as sufficient power to know the reality of the external world, at times, he seems to be skeptical of such adequacy of knowledge as well as of the absolute power assigned to the self due to the inherent presence of continuity, change and mobility in it that he discerns especially in the later part of his life.

The most noteworthy and often discussed matter in relation to Emerson’s essays is that they have fundamentally talked about change and instability that happen to be the part of everything in the universe. The celebrated essays like “Friendship”(1841), “Circles”(1841), “Compensation”(1841), “Experience”(1844) and “Montaigne; or the Skeptic”(1850) and “Fate”(1860) elaborately deal with the subject of fluxions and mobility associated with all parts of nature. In this regard Russell Goodman provides the same idea as “the notion of process or flux finds its way into all Emerson’s essays” (5). The cosmos as perceived by Ralph Waldo Emerson is essentially centerless, dynamic, mobile, slippery and processive like that of his philosophical ideas as expressed in the essay form.

Most of his essays have focused on the point that nothing is permanent in the universe and like nature everything is essentially in a continuous progression that challenges an idea of permanence and durability. Human life, as marked by Jonathan Levin, is fundamentally “expansive, a never ending process of vital transition and transformations” (2).

Emerson in “Montaigne; or, The Skeptic” (1850) declares that “the philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility” (160). Human mind should be cautious to accept and respond critically to any nuance of life. Human past and steadiness always try to immobilize the thinking process of an individual thereby crippling his experimenting sensibilities regarding views and opinions on a certain idea. Andrew Epstein observes that, the “inability to change one’s thinking, unwillingness to call today’s truth a falsehood tomorrow is the root of that ‘foolish consistency’ Emerson famously castigates as the ‘hobgoblin of the little mind adored by the little statesmen, and philosophers and divines’” (56). This so-called ‘foolish consistency’ creates a mental inertia that emaciated the nervous system for which an individual tends to prop himself up with all conformist convictions and deeply rooted old fashioned ideas without any critical eyes. Emerson advocates that people should shun the desire to attain any kind of uniformity, fixity or certainty as nature itself is chaotic. They should never try to dwell into the “angular dogmatic house” (“Montaigne; or the Skeptic” 160) that does not teach anyone the importance of flexibility in life. Viewing Nature as a dynamic process Emerson comments in “Circles” “We now and then detect in Nature slight dislocations which apprise us that this surface on which we now stand is not fixed but sliding (293). Nature is always in flux or change as in case of it “we can never find the end of a thread” (“The Method of Nature” 10).

It seems that like a believer of Pyrrhonian skeptical philosophy, Emerson too “desires a kind of mobility, an ability to remain as unmoored and fluid as a house floating on water” (Epstein 57). A Pyrrhonist is basically a philosopher who “suspends judgement on all matters philosophical and speculative because he has found that no philosophical doctrines or beliefs can be conclusively justified” (Armstrong 13). Like a Pyrrhonist Emerson appears to abstain from making any final judgement on value or faith; even sometimes he seems to contradict his own ideas to avoid making any conclusion or judgment. George Kateb in *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (2002) echoes the contradictory nature of Emerson in “Self-Reliance” (1841) as follows:

Emerson seems to stand behind every utterance with his whole being and risks his being by the completeness of his candor. His variety of declarations tempts us to say that he contradicts himself, but even if we resist the temptation we are still not sure where he finally stands. We can admit the force of his impeachment of consistency in ‘Self-Reliance’ ... leaving us suspended and uncertain (2).

He acknowledges the fact that “Life is a series of surprises” (“Circles” 298) and nobody knows how this surprise will be manifested to them. He says, “I can know that truth is divine and helpful; but how it shall help me I can have no guess” (298-299).

Being a supporter of individualism and non-conformism he combats all kinds of institutional authorities, the age old habits and conventional beliefs that simply seem to maintain an ominous camouflage among humanity that renders no help to fortify the human soul.

Emerson, as argued by Richard Adams, trusts in the “seamless continuity of all things” (Adams 124) in the universe. He perceives every principle and value as a part of a larger process or progression which is relentless and fluid in nature and which is circulated through each and every particle in the universe. Barry Albert Wood recognizes Emerson as a “process philosopher” (97) in his thesis entitled *Emerson as A Process Philosopher* as the idea of process seems to be a governing key to his contemplation. The same fact is also echoed in the words of Jonathan Levin who relates the process with undying freshness and uniqueness of things:

Emerson values process but not necessarily their end products which are in any event only instruments of further processes. So long as he keeps faith with these processes, at once cosmic and imaginative, Emerson can identify with the continuously emerging novelty of things.  
(Levin 2)

Attaining the absolute end of any process is not a part of Emerson’s principle or of his desires as he believes that “Everything good is on the highway” (“Experience” 65).

Emerson’s idea of mobility inevitably indicates that the past is always gobbled up by the vibrant present. In the essay “Circles” he says, “In nature every moment is new” (298) and this newness always begets new ideas and thoughts in the human minds preparing them for a better tomorrow. This thought of inventiveness or newness is the product of the intellectual and artistic minds of America, i. e, the transcendentalists who have brought a fresh beginning and a new attitude to life by dispelling old rigid customs and practices. Joel Myerson echoes it as, “There was a sense of ‘newness’ in the air and the Transcendentalists were often called the ‘New school’” (Introduction xxvii).

Though Emerson celebrates the inexorable power of the individual self, in later part of his life, he has started discerning the vulnerability of the self before time as it never allows an individual to dwell upon established ideas as everything is unsettled by the unfair tyrant i.e. time creates a fluid platform where nothing can stand up for a long time. Like time he has marked out other seven powers in the essays “Experience” saying that these powers or “lords of life” (83) namely—Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality and Subjectiveness—hamper the aim of each

and every individual in understanding or comprehending the reality of life. They cover up the absolute truth with innumerable layers of apparent truths. It appears that it is because of the ubiquitous nature of these lords that has made Emerson, though sometimes, a believer of scepticism.

No truth, Emerson argues, can create an everlasting aura around it as it will be replaced by another truth or fact. So he comments in “Circles” that “Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series” (284). Even like the lack of fixity in case of absolute truth or fact, “there are no fixtures to men” (286). Every article on earth is at a “risk” (288); all virtues are “initial” (295). In this universe “Nothing is secure but life, transition, energizing spirit” (298). Emerson perceives the possibility of innumerable layers of facts around a statement or an idea for which he suspends his final judgement.

He considers that nothing can be found in the unadulterated form. For instance, there is nothing like purely good or purely bad like the impossibility to get a completely new thing or idea cutting it from an old one. The traces of opposites are all the time inherent in them. Any kind of change or newness an individual desires to observe in the physical world must be combined with the old from. There seems to be a natural tension between these two polar opposites—old and new—that work constantly against each other giving rise to a frictionless and transitional platform to all parts of the natural world. The tension arose in this particular zone seems to be welcomed by Emerson as it is the temperate as well as the safe zone that appears to be esteemed by the skeptical minds.

The transition or the moment of change or flux from one position to another without any radicalism has its own beauty as for Emerson where there is no change there is only deformity or distortion. He says in the chapter “Beauty” in *The Conduct of Life*, “Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to flow into other forms”. Any fixity associated with in one particular thing or point without counting the other possible side or is “the reverse of the flowing, and therefore deformed” (257). This particular place or state of transition is identified by Stanley Cavell *In Quest of the Ordinary* as “a place of modern imagination” (qtd in Whiteman 48).

Emerson does not believe in the sacredness of the past; he seems to care about “the Gospel of the present moment” (Richardson Jr.71). Every particle or every atom in the universe is in a process of constant flux or change. Changeability is the fundamental nature of everything. Emerson’s idea of change or fluctuation seems to bear the influence of Buddhist philosophy as according to it “Everything changes, nothing remains without change” (qtd in McCurry 3). In is an inevitable process to be accepted by all. In the similar tone Emerson declares in “Circles” that “Permanence is but a word of degree”. Even the whole cosmos is “fluid and volatile” (282). No truth is absolute; it always slips away when trying to grab it hard. No sentence is powerful enough to claim the possession of the ultimate truth. In “Nominalist and Realist” Emerson appears to

declare that “No sentence will hold the whole truth, the only way we can be just is by giving ourselves the lie” (233) due to the nature of changeability in the process of different perceptions, viewpoints, and arguments of different individuals that will assign multiple meanings to a particular idea. Again the essay “Fate” echoes the same idea of fluidity as, “Every solid in the universe is ready to become fluid” (37). The idea of fluidity is also associated with the concept of Over-Soul as Oscar Firkins in *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1915) notices:

The divine power is likewise in flux. The concrete thing, the one image that attaches to the Over-Soul in Emerson’s description is fluidity... The flux is part of Emerson’s own mental operations... He had a marvellous knack of keeping his footing upon mobile surfaces, as sailors walk steadily on a heaving deck. Most men, to ensure their intellectual equilibrium, assign a quite factitious solidity and fixity to the universe; Emerson balanced its agility by his own.

(329)

A close study of Emerson’s essays inevitable reflects the way in which he assigns a partial meaning of a particular statement he gives thereby showing the possibility of negating that statement with some negative or opposite attributes. The cause for which any sentence cannot bear the burden of absolute truth within is marked by him in the essay “History” (1841) as “it is the fault of our rhetoric that we cannot strongly state one fact without seeming to belie some other” (42). Language betrays us of final truth. This “semantic faults” seem to be evident in Emerson’s sentences and “almost always it seems there is another sense vitally at work in the statement beyond the sentences already noted” (Brown 187). Due to the possible existence of a couple of meanings or logical conclusions, people never arrive at a constant point or judgment. Language consists of signs that are not fixed or static and as a result of which meaning is also in the state of flux. Human words measurably fail to deliver the truth or the reality in a concrete form. The facets of truth are so diverse that they cannot be wrapped up with words as for Emerson, “Words are finite organs of infinite of infinite mind. They cannot cover the dimensions of what is truth. They break, chop and impoverish it” (*Nature*, Emerson 42).

The notion of “fluxions and mobility” (97) as Emerson seems to highly praise in the essay “Montaigne or the Skeptic” (1850) is directly related to the French philosopher and essayist Michael De Montaigne, one of the representative men as Emerson discussed elaborately in the book *Representative Men* (1850). The admiration Emerson display towards Montaigne in that essay is due to the fact that Montaigne, the “Wise Skeptic” ,has successfully developed the philosophy of “fluxions and mobility” (97) and has taken the middle zone between the two extremes like abstractionist and the materialist.

Both Emerson and Montaigne seem to recognize and appreciate the temporariness faced by humankind in every aspect of life. Every conclusion arrived through arguments or logical discussions seem to bear the possibility of begetting some other conclusions or endings and the process appears to continue in a spherical way without any hope of termination. They are of the same opinion that absolute truth always escapes from human grasp as it is slippery and obscure in nature. Montaigne in his famous *Essays* comments that “truth is engulfed in deep abysses where human sight cannot penetrate” (Montaigne 422).

Again Emerson in “Nominalist and Realist” (1844) marks the ungraspable nature of truth as “Each is a hint of truth, but far enough from being that truth” (215). The new and the ever-evolving ideas of human beings deconstruct the possibility of getting an absolute truth or meaning in real life. It appears that both Emerson as well as Montaigne continues to be stunned by the puzzle of the polarity or the doubleness of things and due to their realization of equally dominance and control of the both sides they cautiously abstain from preferring one to the other.

Like the fluctuation or fluidity of meaning, Emerson’s writing style also seems to fit it. He is a preacher of ambiguities or contradiction; his whole mental workings regarding his own principles as a nonconformist transcendentalist respond to the idea of changeability; though he believes in idealism he has never shunned the material reality of the world. Like a true skeptic, he always maintains a balance between these two aspects of life never trying to fix him to a definitely justified position. For him mid-world which he identifies variously as “temperate zone”, “Middle region of our being” or “the equator of life” (65), is the best terrain to rest in so that he can shift his own ground according to his arguments. He is a true experimenter who seems to experiment even with his own words or ideas. He examines his principles and beliefs time to time never fixing them to one point as he perceives the possibility of flux or change of them. The proclamation as made earlier in “Self-Reliance” of the possibility of union of the individual soul and the Over-Soul as a channel to be free from all worldly hurdles and sufferings is strongly scrutinized by his skeptical eyes and later realises the difficulty of it due to the presence of duality and polarity present in nature. The essay ‘Compensations’ (1841) marks this hindrance of the union for the presence of dualism. Emerson says, “The same dualism underlies the nature and condition of man. Every sweet hath its sour; every evil it’s good” (95). S. G. Brown rightly observes this peculiar nature of Emerson:

...sometimes the world seemed to him to have independent material existence; colored and interpreted by the mind, and sometimes it seemed to him wholly dependent and ideal. He never could entirely make up his mind, and hence, it is that throughout his writing, and whatever the specific problem under discussion, you will find him now on this side and now on

that in the fundamental question of metaphysics. All his contradictions and little inconsistencies flow from this source". (qtd in Hagiwara 4-5)

Being an advocate of nonconformity Emerson opposes all kinds of established and conventional patterns of the human world and wants his followers to liberate from the tyrannizing effect of it. He realizes that only the conformist people—"the traitors of originality" (Pearl 178)—yearn for fixity in every aspect of life. They conspire against the possibility of creativeness or inventiveness in all aspects of life. They attempt to check the general human tendencies to bring novelty to the livelihood of the people. Cornell West has rightly echoed this issue saying,

[T]he basic nature of things, the fundamental way the world is, is itself incomplete and in flux, always the result of and a beckon to the experimental making, workings, and doings of human beings. Language, traditions, society, nature, and the self are shot through with contingency, change and challenge"

(15)

The fixity or the inertia of our thoughts tries to limit this natural change. The individual who believes that the whole world is in the state of uninterrupted flux or change is recognized by Oscar Firkins as "the unsurpassed seer of possibilities" (330). The change is an essential and ubiquitous part of human existence. Emerson in "The Method of Nature" (1841) boldly claims: "If anything could stand still it would be crushed and dissipated by the torrent it resisted; and if it were a mind would be crazed" (119).

### **Conclusion:**

The fixity as upheld by the traditionalist is the malady of the civilization that corrupts the purity of the human mind. It hampers the ever renewal process of human thoughts and ideas sealing it from its natural expansion. The change follows the principle of gradualism; it is evolutionary ubiquitous and inevitable. It is not only a crucial part of existence; it maintains a healthy and tranquil situation balancing every part of nature.

The ever-changing natural world indicates the inevitability of change that occurs in its parts like socio-political as well as religious organizations. Society cannot be a bystander itself when every part of it is under the spell of gradual change or alteration.

The change as Emerson and other transcendentalists of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century aspire to bring into the society dispelling all institutional authorities does not seem to be an abrupt process. The fluxions and mobility inherent in all parts of nature cannot be perceived abruptly. It is a slow and continuous process which replaces the old things and principles with new and fresh ones. Daniel Savage observes, "Innovation is ever properly enjoyed when tempered by the opposing principle" of it and "Change...must

maintain continuity with old forms. In other words it must be gradual and contextual” (128).

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## MODERNITY AND FOLK CONSCIOUSNESS : THE CASE OF JIBAN NARAH

Dalim Das

Though we are said to live in the era of postmodernism, such an understanding of our times is patently categorical; it reflects contemporary culture only partially. We still inhabit a time in which the perennial contradictions and paradoxes of the modern civilization continues to haunt us. If postmodernism seeks to celebrate the fragments into which human self is split, such fragmentation and alienation impels the modern mind to pursue a total and integrated human self. However the poets, located as they are in diverse socio-political and cultural situations, have their own mode of pursuing this totality. It was T. S. Eliot who defined the 'modern' in terms of the complexity of the modern experiences (and he ascribes it, with an undertone of triumph and self glorification, to western civilization), and he resolves the question of poetic modernity within the larger and overarching concept of *tradition*. In the context of Assamese poetry, if we look at Nilim Kumar and Jiban Narah—two important poetic voices emerging in 1990s—they have their own way of negotiating with modernity. Whereas Nilim Kumar seeks to explore dimensions and aspects of life from within a predominantly urban sphere, Narah returns to a tribal social landscape to articulate a sensibility against the backdrop of a certain folk-consciousness.

However, Jiban Narah is not all alone in his explorations of folk consciousness. What, then, distinguishes him from others who have extensively drawn on the variegated materials of folklore is the fact of his cultural location itself. The tribal folk-life is not something that Narah strives to incorporate from outside, from a remote cultural location. Rather, folk consciousness is constitutive of his poetic self. It goes without saying that his composite cultural identity—as a Mising and as an Assamese—naturally has a bearing on his poetic sensibility. For one thing, his poetic *semiology*—if I may use the term—is not confined within the Mising community, even as many aspects of Mising folk culture permeate his poetry; it is extended to the framework of Assamese culture and language. As he the poet himself says of his poems “Whatever image, simile and symbol I have used in my poems had their source at Assamese folk poetry and Mising tribal poetry.” (*Haladhiya* 17) Even Assamese folklore is not completely

alien to Mising culture. The Mising community, as the researchers have found, are originally hill tribes who descended in the course of time to the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley, and have undergone a process of cultural assimilation. As the eminent folklorist of Assam Dr. Birendranath Datta says:

What is significant about Mising culture and, for that matter, of Mising folklore, is not the erstwhile hill affiliation but the remarkable manner of adaptation of the hill modes and mores in the wider cultural setting of the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Thus Mising traditional culture—much of which belongs to the domain of folklore, the community being non-literate till recently—runs along a channel in which two different streams mingle with each other and move towards a broader confluence. (I)

Sadly, the emerging trend of contemporary Assamese poetry, with a few exceptions, seems to take little cognizance of folk life. It is not an isolated tendency; it is the culmination of a larger process of cultural hegemony unleashed by the forces of globalization that has increasingly posed a threat to the tribal and folk cultures and to the value systems associated with them. It is in this context that the poetry of Jiban Narah can claim to occupy a distinctive position in contemporary Assamese poetry. His association with the folk ways proves to be immensely rewarding, as he was gifted with a rich array of imagery and symbolism thanks to his cultural location. Some of the recurrent images that figure in his poems include yarn, spinning wheel, moon, sun, boat, river, homemade liquor *apong*, festival such as *karpungpuli*, goard blossom, the forest fire, oi:nitam, literary myth of Janki and Panei, variegated colours of the Mising textile, banana leaf, mango leaf, rain, sunshine, hills, wild flowers, image of harvest, pork and earthen pitcher, among others. It is pertinent to mention that Mising folk poetry is immensely rich in images and symbols; and they reveal a fine poetic sensibility:

- a. Oiya lambedem ngoike lambedem  
mokora ja:lo:de sortidbomdu:ne (Dutta 143)  
(Free English Rendering: O my love, the path of our love has been covered up by webs spread by spiders)<sup>1</sup>
- b. Siloniye bergodung porong ao lega:pe  
Do:lu ya:me: gigo:dung oisiri:ke lega:pe (Dutta 143)  
(The fish-eagles are soaring in the sky looking for the chicks in order to pounce upon them. The young men are roving about looking for my beloved)

It is no wonder, given such highly poetic resources of Mising folklore, that Jiban Narah establishes himself as a positive exception to a contemporary and popular trend of superficial sentiments and worn-out expression prevailing in Assamese poetry that at times veers towards the vulgar and the laconic. Moreover, Narah strives to negotiate

some aspects of modernity through explorations and projections of folk-life, and also explores some of the elemental aspects of life itself through consciousness embedded in myriad materials of Mising folklore.

This paper explores three aspects of the poet's engagements with folk-life: 1. his treatment of the theme of love, 2. his idea of folk-life and its contrast to an urban modernity, 3. poetic treatment of certain rites of passage.

#### **The idea of Love:**

The poet's rootedness in his tribal community set up is affirmed time and again. One of the major themes of Narah's poetry is love between men and women. It is important to note that much of Mising folk poetry is based on the theme of love. A brief account of Mising folk songs can be categorized into four sections: 1. Songs and chants connected to rituals, called *mibu a:bangs*, 2. Songs associated with ceremonial and merry making dances, 3. Lullabies, nursery rhymes and children's game songs, 4. songs of love and yearnings, 5. Songs connected with marriage, and 6. Mising folk songs in which Assamese language materials have made their entry. (Datta III-VII)

Poems of love and yearning constitutes a major part of the Mising folk poetry, and the most popular of them are known as *oi-ni:tom*, which means song for the beloved. *Oi-ni:toms* are short compositions sung to the accompaniment of folk musical instruments such as the drum, the cymbals the bamboo clapper, the Jew's harp and the buffalo-horn pipe. An *oi-ni:tom* consists of two parts; the first part denotes a statement about nature or natural phenomenon, the second one embodies the personalized feelings of the lover. The first often works as a metaphor for the emotional state expressed in the second part. *Kabans* are similar compositions and give vent to the laments of a broken heart. *Kabans* can also embody a sense of loss at the death of the dear ones. There are, besides, songs that dramatize the love encounter in a socially disapproving situation.

Thus, Mising folk songs give vent to variegated shades and colours of the experience of love. Given this variety of the nuances of love to which the Mising folklore is alive, the realm of folklore opens up a world of possibilities to Jiban Narah who makes wonderful use of the imaginative resources of the tribal community. It is important to note that Narah's idea and emotions of love, as expressed through his poems, are difficult to appreciate by dissociating it from the context of folk-life, its rituals and belief-systems. In a poem titled "A Dream" (*sapon*), the poetic subject eagerly looks forward to his marriage with the maid he loves, but this inner yearning is manifested through a discourse about the tusked boar. The subject's mother rears the boar for him, and he even has a dream about the boar. Among the Misings the guests at the marriage ceremony are served the traditional rice beer, *apong*, and the roasted pork. What is interesting is the way the poet who assumes the persona of an illiterate Mising youth to convey the warmth of emotions and yearning to his beloved:

I whispered in the ear of my beloved:  
 It is amazing to eat the roasted pork with ash-wine  
 Do eat some day, for it is  
 Really delicious.<sup>2</sup> (*Haladhiya* 32)

The explicit reference to the traditional Mising cuisine does not end in the statement of an ethnic/folkloric fact. It suggests an interesting mode of wooing the maid and expressing the lover's deep yearning for her. This is a fine instance of how the poet achieves a complete union of poetic emotions of love and yearning and traditional culinary practice, the lyrical and subjective dimension of youthful love and the objective realm of folk tradition.

In some other poems we hear a note of agony and frustration arising from unrequited love and pangs of separation; but this is not expressed through a romantic self. It is the familiar folk-world of Narah's that provides him with different voices through which he articulates his emotions. In his use of different folk-persona Narah seems at times to come closer to Federico Garcia Lorca of Spain who incorporates a multiplicity of voices and consciousnesses from the Andalusian folk-life. This association of poetic emotions and folk life finds a mature culmination in poems like "The Intoxication" (*nisa*).

She turns wild and restless  
 Finding the moon appear on her palm  
 She seeks to swallow it. (*Haladhiya* 108)

The poem is woven around the picture of a woman drinking *apong*. When she is intoxicated she takes the bowl of beer for the moon, something she pines for. And she seeks to swallow the moon, suggesting her intense craving for her lover. It is important to note that the moon stands for (in free English rendering) "O dear, don't cry loudly when the moon is dead. Don't give love to others if you love me."

The woman's deep-seated yearning for the moon suggests her yearning for love. The familiar intoxication of *apong* and the cultural symbol of the moon lead to a synesthetic experience in which the deep-seated yearning of love achieves a physical dimension:

Then the moon collides against her limbs  
 And the moonshine gets scattered  
 All over her body. (*Haladhiya* 108)

In some of his love lyrics the poet uses certain folk-symbols, expressions and motifs. In the poem titled "The Gourd Blossom", it relates the union of blossom of the flame of the forest and the firefly. It beautifully delineates the world of love, yearning and desire through microcosmic account of the union of the flower and the firefly. It embodies all restless passions of youthful love imbued with physical desire

I would rather not spend the night alone

I am the lone first blossom  
Of the Flame of the Forest<sup>3</sup> (*Haladhiya* 231)

There is a clandestine nature of this love. There are in Narah's love lyrics a hushed romantic anxiety about the possibility of a love affair getting publicly known. The firefly is wearing the color of the gourd blossom. What ends the poem is a climactic, emotionally moving appeal of union:

Blow out the lamp  
We flower at night (*Haladhiya* 226)

The motif of 'blooming together', for instance, is pervasive in the *oi;nitoms*. Here are a few examples:

- a. O my dear orchid  
Come, let us bloom together on the branches of the *bowal* tree.  
(*Suna* 75)<sup>4</sup>
- b. We are the flowers of rain  
Let us bloom together (*Suna* 55)
- c. We are twin orchids  
Let us bloom together (*Suna* 55)

It is the incorporation of the folk motif, finally, that endow the poem with a rare dramatic appeal.

### Folk-life and Urban Modernity:

Narah, like the Romantics, centralizes the oppositions between the rural tribal community life and the so called modern, urban living. The poetic persona's choice between the folk and the urban life is not difficult, neither does he see their oppositions/contradictions from the vantage point of an outsider. In the poem "The Guest" the invitation to an urban (and urbane) friend for the *bihu* celebrations goes on to depict the mores and ways of the tribal community. What is significant here is the situation of the poet himself within the cultural structure of such shared living. It is a world governed by its own set of social and moral values which could prove difficult for the guest:

They will offer you another bowl of rice beer when you finish the first

.....

Don't refuse to drink lest they will feel bad

Don't lose your composure when you drink, either, for they will feel bad

Once they feel bad, they won't ever invite you (*Haladhiya* 21)

If this community life knows the festive air of celebration, as happens during the *bihu* celebrations, it is anything but indulgent in vulgarity. Even as the community is much alive to all customary occasions of celebrations, it has its own way of maintaining its sanctity. Thus individual idiosyncrasy which characterizes a modern urban mind has to

remain subjugated to sanctity of the community life. The phrase ‘they may feel bad’ reiterates not to give vent to the notion of exclusive nature of such shared living, but to drive home the fact that the guest’s nonchalant and condescending ways might prove to be grossly perverse and offensive: the vulgarities of the so-called modern guest might meet with a societal resistance here:

Don’t wish, being over-drunk, to touch the bosom of a maiden—it will offend them.

Being offended they will bring you to the custody of the village headman.  
(*Haladbiya* 22)

In another poem titled “Having Heard an Unknown Bird’s Song” we have another outsider who proves to be a nuisance to an unperturbed rural life.

Don’t throw pebbles into the river

Fishes will be injured

And it will bring the small pox. (*Haladbiya* 31)

‘Fish in the river’ is a telling image that seeks to unravel the mystique of folk-life. The symbol of river that figures in Narah’s poems frequently, suggests the community itself. What is significant in the above mentioned stanza is a deep sense of reverence to the community life. The ‘community life’ here does not necessarily suggest the Misings alone; it is reminiscent of the organic, rural community which is in decline in the wake of modernization and urbanization. It is a life imbued with a natural humanism.

If you are caught in the rain on your way

The cowherd will get you a banana leaf. (*Haladbiya* 31)

Yet to the luxury seeking self-centered urban mind, such a mode of existence is also no solace, either. When consumerism and vulgarity has seeped into the very marrow of modern living, it is no wonder that the tendency for objectification of everything under the sun as well as the propensity for instant gratification of desire translates itself into an urge to outrage the sanctity of nature and rural life. But Jiban Narah establishes the sanctity and self-dignity of the tribal life by visualizing the ways in which such a life resists being objectified.

Don’t you see the hill covering the sun

The river concealing the boats of both the banks

The cowherd concealing the buffalos

Mouths concealing the flutes. (*Haladbiya* 31)

The dichotomy of the rural and the urban is more vivid in his earlier poetry presumably because the young poet could not admit of such contrast, as in “The Past Calls On”. In this rural/urban dichotomy, the urban is seen as intrusive that inflicts trouble to the serene and unperturbed village life, as in poem like “Having Heard an Unknown Bird’s Song”, “Dhansirimukh” etc.

### Rites of Passage and Poetic Pursuit:

The rites of passage constitute an important aspect of folk-life. The rites associated with different stages of an individual's life such as pregnancy, childbirth, initiation, betrothal, marriage and funerals are performed in different ways in different societies with a certain reverence and awe. What is relevant for us is the fact of the incorporation of such rites into poetry. The point here, however, is to see whether Narah celebrates such rites of passage or makes them vehicle for a wider poetic exploration.

In Assamese culture and among the Misings there is a ritual associated with a girl reaching puberty. Apart from the rituals associated with it, it is the time also to pass on a set of moral values and codes of conduct to the girl to integrate her into the world of the adult women. This is a patently patriarchal institution that circumscribes a woman's space through a formal social mechanism. For instance, she is now stripped of the essential freedom of her girlhood.

Child, you will keep mum  
 We will put in your forehead a red bindi  
 Don't go away to catch the butterflies any more  
 Cover your bosom with a breast-cloth (*Haladbiya* 33)

But the poem does not seem to focus on this loss of freedom; it rather uncritically accepts this process of indoctrination as a fact, or as a tradition handed down by the elders:

Keep walking ahead, following us  
 We are three years' elder to you. (*Haladbiya* 33)

"Yarn", one of the most remarkable poems by Narah, retains this sense of continuity of present and future through a never-ending yearning that really marginalizes the question of loss of freedom that such rite of passage suggests:

Then I became a youthful maid  
 I was garlanded on the neck of a *sereki*  
 And now I keep dancing with a bobbin, together with her fingers (*Haladbiya* 19)

What is remarkable in the concluding image is three simultaneous circular movements, one integrally related to other, suggesting, among other things, the independent societal mechanism through which the folk-life keeps reproducing itself. But it also operates not through unleashing the individual's subjective forces but by means of certain mechanism of inhibition and restriction that result in an irretrievable loss of freedom.

The poet, however, is no indifferent to the tragic aspects of such a rite of passage. Marriage, to a woman, always denotes the contrary pulls of union and separation. It marks the bride's separation from her home, and hence, from her familiar universe. Such a separation invites a sense of loss and sorrow; and it is a shared emotion. It

cannot be wished away just because it is part of a tradition. In the poem titled “Bidding Adieu” (*bidai*) the persona of a bride’s elder brother is gripped by this sense of sorrow, but the lyric consciousness also relates a similar sentiment in the mind of the departing bride

And from the day she went away sailing downstream on a boat  
She was gripped by the sorrow. (*Haladhiya* 20)

To conclude, Jiban Narah is situated in a predominantly folk-world; his articulations are largely mediated through a certain folk consciousness embedded in the imaginative resources of the folk life. The incorporation of the folk consciousness is all but labored in case of Jiban Narah who is born into a culturally rich terrain. However, a creative and critical distance from such a world would have liberated him from the ideological limitations that sometimes result from the euphoric celebration of the ethnic. His poetic treatment of certain folk institutions associated with women reveal some limits of his cherished modernity. Yet the very fact of his engagement with the folk world speaks volumes of his significance as an important contemporary voice in Assamese poetry.

#### Notes:

1. Free translations from the Missing poems are presented in Dr. Birendranath Dutta’s edited book *Folksongs of the Misings*.
2. All the quotations from the anthology, except when mentioned otherwise, are translations done by me.
3. I have quoted from the translations by Pradip Acharya.
4. Jiban Narah’s *Suna Mor Phulkali* is a collection of Mising folk poems in translations. The quotations are free renderings by me from Assamese translations.

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## ETHNO-CINEMA : THE BODOS IN CELLULOID

Deepak Basumatary

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Living in contested spaces in the far north-eastern end of India, the Bodo people, literally and metaphorically have been jostling for spaces; in other words ‘a room of one’s own’<sup>1</sup> for the most part of their history in recent memory, especially post-Independence. Spatially inhabiting the peripheries of the political and cultural map of the country and the region they occupy the same marginal spaces in the political and cultural discourses of the mainstream as well. Although stated to be one of the largest indigenes of the place, they have been marginalized as the *other*<sup>2</sup> in the grand narrative of the Indian state and nation-hood and thus reduced to the margins. Written history of the region gives just a passing reference to these people, by and large, reducing them to a subaltern marginalized existence. The reasons for this present state of affairs of the Bodo people are not far to seek, one of the obvious reasons being the lack or dearth of ‘written’ literature of their history and culture inspite of the fact that the Bodos like other indigene tribes of North-East India possesses a rich repertoire of ‘Oral’ literature that recounts their history as well as cultural heritage.

In the Indian colonial history, Bengal Renaissance, the tremendous growth of learning that flourished in Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the contact with the West was a pivotal factor in the emergence of modern India both culturally and politically. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the chief architect of this Renaissance, vehemently argued for the introduction of Western knowledge; their science and philosophy among others to the natives at a time when many of his contemporaries were sceptical of the efficacy of this system of knowledge which seemed to be an alien culture to many. The colonized and the colonizers were quite at odds with each other, the natives being the “savage” *Other* and the ‘White Man’s burden’ to the colonizers. The introduction of Western knowledge and learning to the natives by the colonial dispensation and carried on largely by the Christian missionaries were an attempt to ‘civilize’ these “savage” people of the colonies through their knowledge, philosophy, science, language, literature and religion. Roy, much to his credit, foresaw the advantages of learning the Western education in order to respond to the colonizers in their own language.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play that is much concerned with colonization and the controlling of wild environments, Caliban the archetypal "savage" figure delivers a speech to Prospero and Miranda:

You taught me language, and my profit on't  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language! (I.ii.366–368)

These memorable lines make it clear in a very succinct form the vexed relationship between the colonized and the colonizers where language (knowledge) is the determining factor. Like Caliban, the archetypal "savage" figure, the natives in colonial India could retaliate/ respond to their colonial masters by learning their language (knowledge). The re-awakening of socio-cultural and political consciousness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India, centred in Bengal was a result of learning the Western mores, which has come to be known as Bengal Renaissance.

In the far north-eastern end of the Indian geography, a similar kind of 'Renaissance' occurred among an indigene ethnic tribe known as Bodo (or Boro), who were archetypal "savages" even by native standards, as the influence of Bengal Renaissance gradually spread far and wide. The Bodos, primarily inhabiting the western part of Assam are geographically close to Bengal sharing spatiality, climate and cultural mores as well; therefore, it did not take much time for them to come under the spell of Bengal Renaissance. Significantly, by this time the Christian missionaries as well had come to make their presence felt among the Bodos, as in other parts of north-east India, who as part of their proselytizing mission began to collect, compile, document, write and publish the vast repertoire of Oral literatures of the Bodos by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the history of the Bodos as an ancient primitive tribe took the initial steps of change towards progress and modernity as a result of the contact with the Western mores. With changes in every aspect it is revolutionary in nature transforming the fate of the entire community. It is a period of 'Renaissance' among the Bodos which materialized as a result of two factors, the influence of Bengal Renaissance on the one hand and the driving force of the Christian missionaries on the other. Although, these two driving forces occupied the opposite spectrum of ideological, political and cultural divide, these two factors combined together and acted as catalysts bringing about socio-religious and political awakening among the Bodo people.

By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a vigorous socio-religious reform movement known as 'Brahma Dharma', practiced and propagated by Kalicharan Brahma brought about the first ripples of the Bodo 'Renaissance' from *circa* 1906 (when Brahma adopted the new faith) and began preaching the same among his people in the western part of Assam. Around the same time Christian missionaries had started their 'civilizing mission' among the Bodo people, beginning their venture in and around the then Darrang and

Kamrup districts of Assam in the eastern part. The Christian missionaries aided and abetted the spread of literacy and education among the Bodo people and significantly the germination of a written literature which brought a paradigm shift from orality to writing, illiteracy to literacy, and tradition to modernity. With it began gradual reconfigurations of political and cultural ‘locations’<sup>3</sup> in the form of reform movements, which were both political as well as cultural, led by the new Bodo enlightened class.

Kalicharan Brahma (1860–1938), originally Kalicharan Mech, was one of those earliest enlightened Bodos who received his primary education in Bengal (the then undivided Bengal, now a part of Bangladesh) and came under the influence of Brahma Samaj movement of Bengal, practised and propagated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore in Calcutta (now Kolkata) *circa* 1906. Kalicharan Brahma was in essence a social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore who brought revolutionary changes in Bodo society by his continuous and sustained programme of socio-religious reformation of the prevalent *Bathou* socio-religious practices caught in a time warp. Ably assisted by Modaram Brahma, Rupnath Brahma, and others their multi-dimensional reformation movement brought about the first ray of light or consciousness amongst the “savage” Bodo people, in the western part of Assam, through the dissemination of knowledge and education as well as political activism. Kalicharan Brahma, Modaram Brahma and Rup Nath Brahma were the earliest of the enlightened Bodos who brought about the early ripples of Renaissance among the Bodos, later carried forward by the likes of Pramod Brahma, Satish Basumatary, Ishan Mushahary, Samar Brahma Choudhury, Prasenjit Brahma, Sobha Brahma, Nileshwar Brahma among a host of others contributing immensely in diverse fields of literature, art, music, education and politics beginning a new era of consciousness in the history of these subaltern people.

With these two factors of change, led by the enlightened natives on the one hand and Christian missionaries on the other; modernity arrived among the Bodos which is palpable in the emergence of a written literature and socio-religious and political consciousness. Gauri Vishwanathan in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and the British Rule in India* (1989) vehemently argues that the ‘civilizing mission’ of the colonizers (British administrators and missionaries) was essentially a mask to conquer the ‘uncouth’ and ‘uncivilized’ by the ‘civilized’ Whites in the garb of ‘civilizing mission’ in so far as the Indian sub-continent was concerned, at least, if not for the entire British Empire where the sun never set. Without getting into a quagmire of moral arguments, the fact is, the contact of the Bodos with the Western mores brought about a Renaissance paving the way for cultural revival and political consciousness.

Notwithstanding the differences of cultural and religious ideologies, the two driving forces of Bodo Renaissance, one led by the enlightened natives influenced by Bengal Renaissance and the other led by the Christian missionaries brought significant social

reform and politico-cultural consciousness. The birth of the 'written' tradition, a direct result of the contact with Western mores brought about by the influence of Bengal Renaissance (which itself is a result of Western contact) and at the behest of the Christian missionaries set the tempo of change towards development of the Bodo people. The works of missionary linguists and ethnographers like J.D. Anderson's *A Collection of Kachari Folk Tales and Rhymes* (1895) and Sidney Endle's *An Outline Grammar of the Kachari Languages* (1884), *The Kacharis* (1911) [to mention a few] manifest the influences and effects of the contact with the Western mores. This transition from orality to writing a century ago was a *coup de grâce* in the history of the Bodo people; a dying community got a whiff of a new lease of life, with it a new era of consciousness began among the Bodos. This humble beginning towards literacy and a written tradition is nothing less than a 'Renaissance' in the history of the Bodos; it shaped a new trajectory towards a political and socio-cultural awakening, as well as political assertion and emergence of a marginalized ethnic minority. The last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century broadly divided as (i) Missionary Period [1846 to 1920], and (ii) Bihar and Olongbar Period [1920 to 1947] in Bodo literature are therefore, watershed episodes in the history of the Bodos. It is a time in Bodo history when 'enlightenment' began with the pioneering endeavour of the early group of learned Bodo people (who were the early beneficiaries of Bengal Renaissance) and the works of the Christian missionaries. In particular, the part played by Christian missionaries are enormous as they led the way in collecting, documenting, compiling, printing, and publishing the essentially 'oral' literature, folklore, socio-cultural practices, tales, legends, myths, rhymes, etc. of the then largely 'illiterate' Bodos.

With these feverish attempt at social reform and emancipation, led by a few learned Bodo individuals and the Christian missionaries, a new era of Bodo nationalism began with an awareness of their alienation and deprivation from the political and cultural mainstream leading to a protracted political struggle for 'homeland' in the form of separate state movements which continues to this day, which is basically a political assertion of cultural identity. The realisation of the threat posed by cultural assimilation by the dominant ruling classes of Assam, and the need of political patronage and protection under these circumstances being the main reason for this often violent political struggle. For the Bodos, politics have been a necessary evil in their attempt to secure their rights and identity which have had no meaningful voice in the political and socio-cultural discourses of the region and deprived of spatiality in the narratives of the political and cultural landscape of the region and country. The contact with the Western mores in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a fundamental factor in the rise of Bodo nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that gathered pace post-Independence. Written Bodo literature that emerged out of this contact with the West played an immense role in this rise of Bodo nationalism.

However, beyond literature, it is important to note the role played by other arts in carrying forward the Bodo nationalist frenzy kicked up by social reform movements of

the early days and the rise of written Bodo literature. Visual and performing arts like the documentary and feature films carried forward the idea and imaginations of Bodo nationalism with its images, sound and music; adding a new and different dimension to the discourses of Bodo nationalism. The beginnings of cinema in Bodo culture are shrouded in mystery nevertheless, the traces of its roots can be found in the widely prevalent and popular traditional 'theatre' in the Bodo society in the olden days known as *Jatragaan*<sup>4</sup> which can be called a derivation of Bengal's traditional folk art and the influences of Indian cinema. In this regard, the geographical contiguity of Bodo inhabited areas of western Assam with Bengal and the shared history have much to do with the evolution and appropriation of some cultural traditions of Bengal in the early days. Particularly, *Jatragaan* which shares similarities of plot and characterisation with Bengal's folk traditions has had a tremendous impact on the Bodo psyche which in the past was an important medium of entertainment and instruction in the Bodo society. The preoccupation of *Jatragaan* with legends, folklore and mythological characters had a particular resonance with the audiences. As such, the scope of visual and performing arts had a firm grip on the psychological and emotional horizons of the rustic Bodo people. Later, the fluidity, dynamism and scope of 'modern' Indian cinema went a step ahead to broaden the imaginative faculty of the Bodo people in their rush for a discursive exploration of their cultural heritage; cinema instantly touched a chord with the Bodo masses.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the great studios of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras began producing/ making cinema (in this era cinema is studio based) which became classics in the annals of Indian cinema. It was the cinema of a handful of auteurs viz. Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Guru Dutt, et al who carried forward the traditions from Dada Saheb Phalke's 'Silent Period' of Indian cinema with aesthetics of 'magic' and Western style 'perspective' through Indian images that set the tone of modern Indian cinema with its characteristic 'hybridity.' Post-Independence, particularly from the 1960s onwards Indian cinema increasingly split into two directions—the increasingly commercial and consumerist popular film creating and satisfying the hunger for escapism and glamour, better known as Bollywood<sup>5</sup> cinema and the 'cinema of the auteur'. This Indian cinema, particularly its popular Hindi entertainment films produced by what is commonly called Bollywood film industry (India has a number of auteur and regional film industries) extended its reach to the diverse cultures influencing and 'connecting' the linguistically and culturally diverse country. Presently, Bollywood with its 'razzmatazz', glitz and glamour represents the collective dreams, imaginations and the aspirations of a nation which otherwise has humongous discourses and speaks a cacophony of voices.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the popular variety of Indian cinema became a rage among the Bodos as it was during this era that television began to enter the households and the quickening pace of urbanization in India brought movie theatres

within the reach of average people. Popular/ commercial cinema with its entertainment and magical realist portrayals of issues confronting the common man became an important means of escape from reality; a genre where romance, song and dance and the imaginary worlds where good always triumphs are characteristic features. It is an irony that this is what makes it popular among the people. In the far North-Eastern corner of India, for people living in marginalized spaces like the Bodos away from the glitz and glamour of Bollywood this aspect of Indian popular/cinema, after the obsolescence of *Jatragaan*, became a popular entertainment and a means of escape from the harsh realities of life.

Cinema with its aural and visual dimensions became an influential medium to tap the growing spirit of Bodo nationalism. Realising the reach and influence of cinema in bringing about social change and cultural consciousness, individuals like Kamal Kumar Brahma and Jwngdao Bodosa<sup>6</sup> (earlier known as Pradip Brahma) tapped the potential of this medium in the early 1980s and are the pioneering Bodo auteurs. It was during this time that the Bodo nationalism was shaping up in the form of political movements for statehood for the protection of cultural identity. Although, these celluloid enterprises were independent and not directly related with these political mobilizations these pioneering ventures can be seen as an attempt to bring about social reform for the protection of cultural identity in an era of unprecedented changes unleashed by modernity and cultural assimilation by the dominant ruling classes.

Like the pioneering works of the missionaries in putting into black and white the 'Oral' literature and culture of the Bodo people in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which played an enormous role in bringing about political and socio-cultural consciousness, the Bodo documentary and feature films played a similar role. Telling stories through sound and images that reflected the predicaments, dreams, imaginations, and aspirations of the community in the cusp of change the Bodo documentary and feature films can be called 'ethno-cinema'.

With the increasing influence of Indian cinema (both commercial/popular and art cinema/ cinema of the auteur) the Bodos realized the power of this medium and dreamt of making films in their own language so as to disseminate new ideas and social messages to the Bodo masses, preserve the Bodo dance forms and songs of their tradition and culture. It was only in the early eighties that this came into fruition with a humble beginning made by the short documentary film by Kamal Kumar Brahma (of about thirty minutes) titled *Daina*<sup>7</sup> (wizard) in 1983, directed by Amar Hazarika. The film captures Bodo culture and traditional beliefs at a time when there was a growing apathy amongst the Bodo people towards their own culture. It seeks to dispel the notion/ misconception of the people with regard to the Bodo customs and witchcraft. The film captures some important aspects of the Bodo culture and traditions such as Bodo wedding, *Kherai Dance* (a ritual dance with a female shaman in the community worship),

the play of *Kham* (Bodo Traditional Drum), the cowherds tending cattle in the field, harvesting, community fishing, etc. In the film, an old man is ostracized by the villagers suspecting him to be a wizard as he teaches the art of playing the traditional musical instruments; ironically, he is banished to the fringes of the village. Despite his ordeal the old man persists with his passion and does not give up teaching the art to those willing to learn it. In short, the film attempts to capture the wonder and beauties of a culture on the verge of decay and death due to apathy, lack of socio-cultural consciousness, belief and practice in witchcraft that often results in witch-hunting (which is rampant even to this day) and illiteracy of the common Bodo masses. It is a critical period in the history of the Bodos, a time when they confronted the dilemma whether to evolve with the change of times and adapt with modernity or remain confined to age-old traditions.

Enlightened by modern education, the traditional cultural practices of the Bodos were seen as interlinked with witchcraft and evil spirits by a section of some conscious Bodo people. However, a few conscientious Bodos having a strong sense of cultural rootedness persevered to maintain the culture and customs by dispelling the myth and misconceptions and rescue it from the morass. It was an attempt by a few conscientious individuals to imbibe a sense of love and respect as well as to preserve the cultural identity of a marginalized ethnic minority leading to this pioneering effort in making the first film (documentary) in Bodo titled *Daina* in 1983. The aural and visual dimensions of this art caused a lingering effect on the masses as they could now fathom with a different sensibility their state of affairs, opening up a culture of self-questioning, need for rationality and affirmative action for social reform and protection of cultural identity thereby putting in the fast lane the growth of Bodo nationalist spirit. This short documentary film *Daina* (1983), although limited in scope is a momentous one in that it helped to negotiate the socio-cultural complexities that stands like a mirror reflecting a community in turmoil.

The initial crack at film making, inaugurated by the short documentary film *Daina* in 1983 showed the potential of celluloid as not only a source of entertainment but an important means of resurrecting a decaying and dying culture, customs, traditions and language of a community living in the margins. Consequently, it resulted in the birth of the first full-length feature film in Bodo *Alayaron* (Dawn) in 1986, adapted from Nil Kamal Brahma's short story *M'wdwi arw Gwlwmd'wi* (Sweat and Tears). The film directed by Jwngdao Bodosa, a product of FTII, Pune fetched the Rajat Kamal award (33<sup>rd</sup> National Film Awards, held in Pune) for the best film in non-scheduled languages category (Bodo language was not Scheduled at that time) in 1986. To this day this film remains the most versatile and accomplished full-length Bodo feature film that combines both the genres of popular (commercial) cinema and the cinema of the auteur (art/parallel cinema) with a 'Magic Realist' story-telling complimented by song and dance

sequences and drama (characteristic of Indian 'Bollywood' Cinema) yet, poetic as it has cinema's artistic finesse capturing the pulse of the socio-cultural traditions in vivid images.

The theme of *Alayaron* (Dawn) is important in the context of the Bodos' attempt to come out into the world from their cloistered traditional way of life characterized by agricultural economy and rustic existence. Trade and commerce was something alien, only in the late eighties did the Bodos begin to learn the skills of business. The protagonists' venture into the world of business is a clear message of the film that the Bodos need to evolve with the change of times, seamlessly adapting with modernity for the development of the community as a whole. The conscious and educated section of the Bodo populace realized that the community has to come out of the cloistered life if they are to develop and prosper. The title *Alayaron* (Dawn) is a metaphor for a bright future, like the dawn with its shining bright rays, the auteur portrays a ray of hope in the darkness. This positivity and optimism provides the film with a sort of commercial cinema's characteristic happy ending and melodrama which touched a chord with the audiences, symbolizing the growing 'nationalist' spirit and fervour of the Bodos during the formative years.

Thereafter, another Bodo film based on social issues *Jiuni Simang* (Dreams of Life) materialized in 1987, a screen adaptation of the story *Mimang ni Simang* (Dreams of Mimang) by Kamal Kumar Brahma and directed by Amar Hazarika. This film is based on the theme of land alienation and its concomitant problems. The film reflects on the 'nomadic' nature of the Bodo people that was characteristic of them in the early days. They showed a characteristic tribal nature of 'shyness' of coming into contact with people of different cultures and abandoned their hearth and homes whenever they felt uneasy with the contact with the outside world and sought to remain secluded by venturing into remote forests. This brought a lot of collateral problems as it wrought social upheavals and demographic changes. Inadvertently, it created a constant pressure on land as their lands were usurped by the non-tribals and outsiders alienating the tribal Bodos from their land and resources who mainly subsist on agricultural economy; bringing about tremendous resentment and social disharmony across the length and breadth of the villages inhabited by the Bodos. To this day land alienation has been a great cause of concern that has often led to violence and political struggle for a 'homeland' in the form of separate states to protect the hearth and homes of the indigenes. It is not surprising therefore, to find that early social films like *Jiuni Simang* dealing with this theme. This film *Jiuni Simang*, like *Daini* and *Alayaron* earlier served as an eye-opener for the common Bodo masses in realizing the value of land and cultural identity for survival.

Taking off from where he left earlier Jwngdao Bodos made another feature film titled *Khwmsi Lama* (Road to Darkness) in 1991 which is an adaptation of Kamal Kumar

Brahma's play of the same name. Although this film was not as successful as his earlier venture *Alayaron*; nevertheless, this film continues with the earlier trend of films based on social issues. Using the same method that combines the two genres of commercial and art cinema this film too is a tragic story of a family shattered by the culture of consumption of *jou* (rice liquor) in the Bodo society; an awful part of the Bodo society which holds it back from the path of progress as people and families become economically and morally weak. The protagonist of this film, a relatively 'rich' person in the village marries a second wife influenced in large measure by consumption of liquor after which his life goes into a tail spin. Polygamy is prohibited in the Bodo society yet, in general there exist a number of individuals in the society with influence and wealth who often break this social norm. This film lays bare this open-secret portraying the fact that there can be nothing more tragic for the family and the society than polygamy. The protagonist comes to realize at the end that there is nothing more bitter than the food served by the sororates.

Subsequently, after these two successful feature films Jwngdao Bodoso produced three remarkable documentary films that deal with issues confronting the community. In 1995 he directed and produced *Hagramayao Jinahari* (Rape in the Virgin Forests), a film that won a national award for best film on environmental issues. Bodos are ethnic tribals that mostly inhabit North-East India particularly, western Assam once known for its verdant evergreen forests of thick *Sal* trees. Pressure on land with increase in population due to unabated illegal immigration coupled with greedy and corrupt forest officials, administrators and politicians have taken a toll on these forests as timber smuggling by these unscrupulous elements have caused widespread and rampant deforestation. Apart from the larger environmental issues that this deforestation has wrought, it has furthermore, wrecked the socio-economic balance of the essentially agricultural economy of the Bodos, who has thus far lived for generations in the lap of nature, causing discernment among the people as a new class of people emerged with the ill-gotten money. Here, the auteur fervently shows the evils of modern capitalist economy, the way it has spread its tentacles with ever-increasing greed and corruption in the hearth and homes of the tribals who had thus far revered, loved and respected nature. Manoj Barpujari in "Assamese Cinema: Dreams, reality and dichotomies" states that:

*Hagramayao Jinahari* is a direct criticism of government apathy to deforestation. It swoops down heavily on the nexus between influential people in the administration and unscrupulous timber smuggler for whom he is cutting down trees in the forest. The name of the girl was Mithinga, which in Bodo means 'nature.' The rapists of nature, in this allegory, are smugglers and foresters who are understood to work at the behest of

legislators including ministers. (Gokulsing & Dissanayake: 2013, pp. 58)

In the film, Mithinga, the daughter of the village woodcutter Budang is raped in the forests by the same people who employ him to cut wood for smuggling. The auteur, Jwngdao Bodosa, in his film wonderfully represents the growing greed of the woodcutter and the smugglers by using an allegory to put forward the case of rampant deforestation likening it with rape of a virgin. Budang has to pay for his increasing greed with a price he might never have imagined, the integrity of his daughter's body. All these while without ever realizing the ramifications of his actions he had cut the woods rather, 'raped' the virgin forests at the behest of the smugglers. He comes to realize the repercussions of his actions only when he confronts the reality of the brutal rape of his daughter. Here, the auteur shows that deforestation is akin to rape of a virgin girl, which is a heavy price to pay by any means.

The acclaimed Bodo auteur further made two documentary films—*Gwdan Muga* (New Generation) in 2001 and *3 Girls and a Golden Cocoon* (bilingual Bodo-English) in 2005 which are thematically similar. Apart from agriculture another mainstay of Bodo economy is sericulture and handloom; the Bodo women are known for their craft in weaving exquisite *endi* (Non-violent silk) cloths and other dress materials which they weave to meet their needs and economic sustenance of the household. In *Gwdan Muga* (New Generation), the protagonist Jaikhleng, a thirty year old educated Bodo youth takes upon himself the task of promoting the ethnic Bodo fabrics produced by the womenfolk of his community. He endeavours to set up an industry to enable the Bodos to produce modern garments from their handlooms. In this film the auteur is attempting to promote the need of entrepreneurship among the indigene Bodos building upon the traditional knowledge systems and skills of the community which has the potential to transform the economic condition of the community as a whole instead of relying on government jobs provided there is vision and hard work. Jaikhleng, which means 'rainbow' in Bodo allegorically, stands for the promise of a new beginning. Initially there are resistances in this project from the old order, as is seen in Jaikhleng's mother's reluctance to let his son pursue his goal but his persistence and perseverance is rewarded.

In the same vein Bodosa continues to espouse the idea of entrepreneurship in his subsequent venture *3 Girls and the Golden Cocoon* in 2005; a bilingual Bodo and English documentary film. It's a story about three girls—a white American (Natalie Roth), an Afro-American (Brandee Tucker) and a native Asian (Onjaali Bodosa), who like Jaikhleng, the protagonist of *Gwdan Muga* (New Generation) seeks to travel in the uncharted waters of entrepreneurship. The three girls together want to promote *endi* (silk) cloth woven by Bodo women in the global fashion market. Bringing together protagonists of different nationalities and cultures is an artistic attempt to hammer the

point that this particular knowledge and skill base has a global potential that can be carried forward by the *gwdan muga* or the new generation of Bodo youths.

Although these last two documentaries *Gwdan Muga* (New Generation) and *3 Girls and the Golden Cocoon* were not as successful as his earlier films nevertheless, it continues to carry forward his vision for the Bodo community that he has steadfastly espoused from the beginning. His films deal with socio-cultural and socio-economic issues of the Bodo community and carry a social meaning; combining the elements of commercial (popular) and artistic (cinema of the auteur) cinema it entertains as well as instructs. It is what is called 'meaningful cinema' that has contributed towards the rise of Bodo 'national' consciousness in the sphere of modern economic sustenance based on the traditional knowledge system and skill of the community. Since, the ancient times the Bodo people have displayed tremendous knowledge and skill in sericulture and handloom, the women folk of the community rearing silk worms (*endi*) for its cocoon producing fine fabrics out of it. In the early days almost every household reared it and produced cocoon for the need of the family which had a large commercial potential that could uplift the economic condition of the community particularly its women. Presently, the fabrics, especially the *endi* (non-violent silk) fabrics produced by the Bodo women in their handlooms have come to occupy a particular place world over for their qualities which are conducive for health and the environment. The *endi* silk is popularly called 'non-violent' silk because while rearing the silk-worm, the worm is not killed for its cocoon. Besides *endi* fabrics, the Bodo women weave many other fabrics for attire and other uses which are now being produced commercially. The transformation of this traditional knowledge system and skill of the community into a means of economic sustenance in the modern market based economy is in large measure the re-awakening brought about by these meaningful films made by Jwngdao Bodosa.

Besides, these films by Jwngdao Bodosa, there are a significant number of meaningful cinema made by other lesser known but equally significant Bodo auteurs like Jones Mahalia and Kanak Basumatary who directed a film *Swr Mwn Nwng*<sup>8</sup> (Sorry, I Fail to Recognise You) in the year 1992. One important aspect of the Bodo traditions in the early days is *Jatragaan*, which were immensely popular cutting across gender and age in the past that espoused social issues by interpolating myths and legends in the performances. However, with the passage of time and the onset of modernity these traditions have died a slow death. It is seen that the contemporary Bodo films, both popular and parallel cinema, has been influenced to a great extent by this traditions. Yet, it has not been able to replicate its popularity even to this day. One of the reasons of its popularity was the 'connect' that this genre had with the rustic people with its earthy humour. Performed by 'professional' artistes, both men and women, the common Bodo people, irrespective of gender, flocked to these performances in droves. Women were a part and parcel of *Jatragaan* performances where the characters of women were

largely performed by women, except on a few occasions was performed by men. However, it was an exception and not a rule.

Paradoxically, however, women artistes of *Jatragaan* were not received with open arms in the society and were largely treated as social outcasts. They were not considered 'ideal' women (in terms of moral character) in the Bodo patriarchal social norms and were viewed with suspicion and considered 'unfit' for marriage and family life. This aspect of the Bodo society reveals the underlying gender issues in the Bodo society imposed by a patriarchal social set-up. Considering this paradoxical social attitude and social taboo against women (artistes of *Jatragaan*), the short feature film *Swr Mwn Nwng?* (Sorry, I Fail to Regognise You) is an effort to put this issue into perspective and stir a social debate. In the film, Mainao (Anjali Daimary) is a popular woman *Jatragaan* artiste, loved by the audiences for her performances but, her popularity and social space is confined within its narrow boundaries. It is an irony that, without, her world is a tragic one as the society despises women who performs in such theatres. She struggles to settle into a married life for being an artiste of *Jatragaan*, this aspect of her life becomes a painful baggage. The question, *swr mwn nwng?* (Sorry, I Fail to Recognise You) haunts her as it becomes a constant refrain which hinders her in soliciting suitors. Khansai (Madhu Mohan Lahary) is one such suitor of Mainao but, his parents raise serious reservations in his choice of a bride, the reason being that Mainao is a *Jatragaan* artiste. *Mainao*, in Bodo, means goddess of wealth; therefore, the representation of this character in such light in the film is an artistic way of problematizing the extant social norms which is paradoxical and biased towards women. *Khansai*, is a Bodo word which literally means 'to choose'. In the film, Khansai 'chooses' to marry Mainao (which is what a man does after all) but his 'choice' is questioned by his parents and the society at large.

This film, *Swr Mwn Nwng?* (1992) questions the existing social norms of the Bodo society vis-à-vis women which appears biased and out of tune with its own behaviour in the ways that it treats its women differently in different situations, circumstances and contexts; the social constructionism of gendered roles for women. The need of social reform for the advancement of the Bodo society is the understated message of this film which serves as another important example in the repertoire of meaningful Bodo cinema that has served to re-awaken the Bodo people socially and culturally.

In the annals of meaningful (Parallel) Bodo cinema, Kamal Kumar Brahma should be credited as the first Bodo auteur, although he did not direct the film himself, it was his professionalism evident in his riveting screenplays with a poetic touch that had a mesmerizing impact on the audiences. This tradition of Bodo cinema was later carried forward by a trained auteur Jwngdao Bodosa, a product of FTII, Pune. He remains the most influential figure in the Bodo cinema whose contributions remains unparalleled. After him another product of FTII, Pune in Maharashtra (India), Pinky Brahma Choudhury added meaningful cinema in Bodo language and traditions. (she has been

working as an independent filmmaker since 1992) A widely acclaimed figure in the film circuit her first film *Ether*, a student film produced by FTII was screened at various international film festivals which received wide critical acclaim. *Duphang ni Solo* (An Autumn Fable) directed by Pinky Brahma Choudhury came out in 1997; her first celluloid work since her student film at FTII, Pune, it was screened at Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) and was the opening film at the recent 30<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in the Indian Panorama Section.

In *Duphang ni Solo* (An Autumn Fable), the auteur uses myth and legends to the discourses of the present predicament of the Bodos struggling for cultural identity and a place to call their home, an artistic depiction of a community caught between the devil and the deep sea. Taking its inspiration and setting from the traditional Bodo *Jatragaan*, the film *Duphang ni Solo* (An Autumn Fable) has a shrewd muscleman with the strength of a dozen men at his command and kidnaps a young prince to seize his throne; the prince returns to claim his throne disguised as a beast, added to it is a beautiful princess whose swordplay defeats everyone. The film is a critique of the intrigues of politics which results in violence and bloodshed and obliquely rebukes the present political situation of the Bodo people marred with political intrigues and violence. In olden days, (it still exists in some remote villages) every autumn, the Bodos thronged the *Jatragaan* after toiling hard in the fields during the monsoons where legends/myths from ancient traditions were enacted under the open night sky. Older generation of Bodo tribesmen often recall the popularity of this art form that has song and dance, fighting sequences and entertaining dialogues set against lively music providing a temporary escape from the harsh realities of life.

The auteur skilfully borrows this tradition to provide a modern twist to the tale of conflict-stricken people and the region. The director, Pinky Brahma Choudhury states:

The Bodos are one of the tribes inhabiting the state of Assam in the northeastern part of Indian territory. The community has been fighting for political identity, demanding a separate state on the ground that they speak a different language and live a different culture. Getting caught in the web of intra-faction fights and narrow politics, the movement turned violent and got consumed by it. The community suffered immensely. Fear, uncertainty, and suspicion rule the minds of the people. There is silence in the valley. Silence born out of fear and mistrust. Nobody wants to either remember or speak. Everybody seems to drown in amnesia. Against this striking silence are juxtaposed the most conspicuous features of the land - the slogans on the walls, the armed soldiers, the relief camps and the bombarded broken bridges. They stand as

testimony to the ravage of the place. Along with these, are the whispers of this land echoing since time immemorial in the form of stories and plays. Tales that were always a part of the language but now lost in the turmoil of the times. These stories are used in interplay with reality to reflect the void left in the present times with a hope that memories are invoked to link life with a desire to live.<sup>99</sup> See Director

She invokes cultural memory to see things in a larger perspective and seeks answers for the tough questions confronting the community; a movement, a struggle for rights and cultural identity gone awry. In artistic terms, Pinky Brahma Choudhury goes a step ahead of the other Bodo auteurs as her cinema has a poignant narrative and cinematographic sophistication that uses legends and myths in the discourse.

The making of meaningful Bodo cinema is at best intermittent; lack of patronage, financial support and the monopoly of the popular Hindi cinema have cast a long shadow on its growth. In spite of these a few die-hard aficionados have come forward to make meaningful cinema in regional languages. In 2015 acclaimed Assamese auteur Manju Borah has contributed towards meaningful Bodo cinema with her film *Dau Huduni Methai* (The Song of The Horned Owl) based on an Assamese novel by Rashmirekha Borah *Hudu Choraiyor Gaan*. This film is a pertinent rendering of the pain and sufferings of the common Bodo people caught between insurgency on the one hand and counter-insurgency on the other.

The last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been painful and disastrous in the history of the Bodo people as it witnessed sporadic violence and suffering of the common folk. A journey that started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with a nationalistic fervour and spirit with dreams of a cultural identity and homeland by the end of the century lapsed into violent insurgency and fratricidal killings. *Dau Huduni Methai* (The Song of The Horned Owl) recounts the effects of insurgency and counter-insurgency on the common people, the loss of innocent lives, and sexual violence against women as they become victims of rape and torture. Narrated through the eyes of Raimali, a young rape victim, the beauty of the landscape contrasts with the painful lives of the common people as she lies in an abandoned house recalling how the separatist violence has violated her dignity, devastated the lives of her lover and their families. The auteur has used indigenous folklore and the verdant landscape where these common people have been living for generations together to demonstrate the loss of innocence and the intrusive character of violence. The film states in uncertain terms that there are no winners in this battle and that violence in the name of ethnicity, race, religion and language is futile and sooner the victims and the perpetrators realize it the better.

*The film Dau Huduni Methai* (The Song of The Horned Owl) captures in celluloid the heartrending denouement of the Bodo ‘Renaissance.’ A struggle which started with a ‘nationalist’ fervour and promised *Alayaron* (Dawn) has come to witness a painful anti-climax. This handful of meaningful Bodo cinema (documentary & feature) dealing with socio-economic and politico-cultural themes since 1983 is a larger narrative of the subaltern Bodo people’s attempt to move from the marginal spaces towards the centre, a struggle to find a space and voice in the political and cultural landscape of the region and the country. To a considerable extent, like its literature, Bodo cinema with focus on ethnicity has contributed towards assertion and resurrection of the distinct cultural ethos and identity of the Bodos, vividly reflecting its dreams and imaginations which can be called ethno-cinema.

#### Notes:

- # N.B.: Oral sources and inputs from Anjalee Basumatary, Anjali Daimary, Indira Boro and Loknath Goyary.
- 1 Term borrowed from Virginia Woolf, a compilation of extended essays first published on 24 October 1929.
  - 2 Other: a historically and culturally specific process of differentiating. It is important to recognize, however, that the other is not, in any simple way, the direct opposite of the self. Rather, the two exist in a complex relation that undermines any simplistic conception of self/other, inside/outside or centre/margin. Nor is the other a stable or unchanging entity. Rather, it is best thought of as a site or location upon which we project all the qualities that we – as individual subjects, social groups nations most fear, or dislike, about ourselves. In other words, the other is a construct.
  - 3 Concept borrowed from Homi K Bhaba’s *The Location of Culture* (1994).
  - 4 An open air theatre held under the open night sky in the Bodo villages in olden times.
  - 5 The motion-picture industry in India located in Bombay (Mumbai).
  - 6 Bodosia: (Literally meaning, children of the Bodos), this surname is not an original part of the Bodo clan names but a recent invention which emerged during the Bodo nationalist upsurge of the 1980s and 90s.
  - 7 Produced by Bodo Film Society, Story/Screenplay by Kamal Kumar Brahma, Music Director Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Directed by Amar Hazarika.
  - 8 Produced by Burlung Butur Bodo Film. Story written by Manab Ramchiary.
  - 9 See Director’s Statement in <http://www.yidff.jp/99/cat061/99c071-e.html>

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## THE PLIGHT OF BODO CULTURE IN THE MODERN TIMES

Dr. Arup Sarkar

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### ABSTRACT

The word 'Bodo' denotes the language, community and culture of the Indo-Mongoloid or Tibeto-Burman migrants to Eastern India. The Bodo culture is quite unique and rich as they possess their own language, religious practice, festivities, songs, dance forms, food habits etc. Their pro nature religious practice, called, 'Bathouism' and dance forms, called, Bagarumba and Bordoisikhla has earned them international repute. However, the emergence of postmodern globalised world has been posing considerable threat to this naturally shy and introvert tribe community. Besides, the historical threats from the elite and dominant religious schools like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, the recent unprecedented spread of the globalization of popular culture and western influence has brought some serious question marks to the survival of such native but minor cultures. Normally, habituated with mono cultural and mono linguistic environment, the 21<sup>st</sup> century's growing multicultural and multi linguistic contexts causing considerable headache for adjustment and create space to practice their indigenous culture. Hence, in the present paper, the scholar tries to foreground some of the serious concerns of the survival of Bodo culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as to enlist their reasons, analysis and probable suggestions to find solutions.

Keyword: Bodo, culture, challenges, globalization, multicultural.

### Introduction

Survival of the minor cultures has not been an easy task in the globalized world scenario of 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the recent years, the mono cultural contexts have rapidly been overhauled by the multicultural environments. If not affected, this latest phenomenon has certainly brought some challenges of survival for the indigenous cultures of different parts of the world, in general, and India, in particular. India is a place where cultural diversity flourishes to its climax. But the said phenomenon has posed a serious threat to the existence of such cultures in their indigenous self. The struggle of survival of Bodo culture is not an exception in this regard. Prior to the analysis of the challenges an introduction of Bodo culture is given below.

### **Bodo Culture: Identity and Characteristics**

The word 'Bodo' denotes both the language and the community and the culture of the Indo-Mongoloid or Tibeto-Burman migrants to eastern India. Bodos are widely accepted as the aboriginals or the earliest inhabitants of Assam. However, presently, Bodos are primarily found in Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, and its adjacent areas of New Jalpaiguri in West Bengal and parts of Nepal. According to 2001 census, the population of Bodo speakers was 13, 50,478. As far as the physical features of the Bodos are concerned, "they are the people with short head, broad nose, flat face, short and muscular body, and yellow skin with less hair in the body" (Brahma Chaudhury, 1993, p. 2).

The sixth schedule of Indian constitution recognizes Bodos as plains tribe. By nature they are peace loving, simple, sincere and truthful. They follow patriarchal social and family order. Normally, the senior most male member is the head of the family. But despite having patriarchal order, the Bodo society is not oppressive for women. They live with the spirit of community life and teamwork. The ancient system of social governance under the leadership of the village headman is still prevalent in the Bodo villages (Boro, 2010, p. 6-7). Some of the major livelihoods of the Bodos are rice-cultivation, tea-plantation, pig and poultry farming and silk rearing. They also excel in bamboo and handloom craftsmanship. Dokhna, Phali, Aronai and Endi clothes are some of the examples of their handloom craftsmanship, which is internationally renowned.

The indigenous religious practice of Bodos is called *Bathouism*. *Bathouism* is very close to *Saivism*. Infact, "the super God of the Bathouists is *Annan Gosai* or *Bathouborai* or *Sibrai* who is the counterpart of *Siva*, the Hindu God (Brahma, 1993, p. 2). Besides *Bathou Barai*, Bodos also worship other Gods and Goddesses at home such as *Mainao Buri*, *Asu Mainao*, *Song Raja*, *Kumari*, *Bhandari* etc. Other than the above mentioned domestic deities, they also worship many village deities like *Mahadeo*, *Joman Borai*, *Barai Raja*, *Alai Khungri*, *Bilai Khungri*, *Bira*, *Basumati* etc. Interestingly, Bodos do not have any fixed or permanent community place of worship. Rather, they have a *Siju* plant (*euphorbia splendens*) on the alter in every house to be worshiped. The concept of idol worship is absent in *Bathouism* (Boro, 2010, p. 8).

Bodos also have a rich culture of festivals. They have two kinds of festivals, namely, religious and seasonal. Among the religious festivals of the Bodos, Kherai, Garja and Morai are the major festivals. Celebrated for the well being of people and better harvest, Kherai is the most popular and remarkable religious festival of the Bodos. During this festival not less than 18 dance forms are performed after the musical instruments like kham (drum), Ciphun (flute), and Jotha (cymbal) to satisfy different Gods and Goddesses. The Garja puja is the next important religious festival of the Bodos. They observe this puja as a religious festival to expel the evil spirits or harmful

Gods and Goddesses from the vicinity of the village (Brahma, 1992, pp. 186-187). Similarly, among the seasonal festivals Baisagu, Domasi and Katigasa are the chief festivals. Baisagu is a springtime festival that continues for seven days. It is chiefly a festival of feasting, dance, merry-making, and love making. It is led by the participation of the youths with their dance and songs of love and joy. On the other hand, Domasi and Katigasa are related to the agricultural ritual of the peasants (Boro, 2010, p. 9-10). Bodos also have rich dance forms and genre of songs like Bagarumba, Bordoisikhla, and Habajanai. Normally, Bodo dances are classified into five classes. They are as follows:

- a) Kherai dance
- b) Habajanai dance
- c) Bagarumba dance
- d) Bwisagu dance
- e) Raijw Janai dance.

Most of these dance forms have originated from the Kherai festival (Brahma, 2003, p.17).

As for the language, Bodo is one of the major Tibeto-Burman tone languages. Sri Bishnu Prashad Rabha claimed of discovering a few specimens of Deodhani script, arguably the indigenous script of the Bodos from an informant of Dimapur (Brahma, 1992, p. 13). In the past, Christian missionaries used Roman script for writing Bodo folk literature. Later, Bengali and Assamese scripts were also adopted by Bodo writers. However, as a result of the script movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, “an agreement was adopted by the Central Government of India and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, where it was decided to accept Devanagari script as the standardized script” (Basumatary, 2005, p. 10).

As far as the literature is concerned, Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya (2007) claims, “The Bodo literature consists of a vast amount of oral literature including folktales, ballads, idioms and proverbs and of the considerable amount of written and published literature in Assamese and Roman scripts. The published literature comprises mainly of books relating to poems, stories, prayers, and songs on the one hand, and journals and magazines with different types of compositions on the other hand.....(p. 14).

## CHALLENGES

Though the survival of Bodo as a culture in its indigenous form has never been easy, the struggle has become even tougher with the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ever-growing postmodern phenomenon of multicultural contexts and popular cultures has brought renewed challenges for them. The invasions into the Bodo culture have been in different fronts, namely, religion, language, customs, livelihood etc.

### Religion

As mentioned above the Bodo indigenous religious practice is termed as Bathouism. But with time, they were influenced to convert into the major religious institutions like Christianity and Hinduism. Presently, the Bodo society has three major religious sections. First of all, about 5% of the Bodo population embraced Christianity under the influence of the Christian Missionary (Brahma Chaudhury, 1993, p. 10). Secondly, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of Hinduism, one major school of religious belief called the Brahma was introduced by Guru-Deva Kali Charan Brahma (in 1906). It primarily aimed to reform the traditional systems of the Bodos. Based on Vedic philosophy, this Brahma religion rejected the traditional practice of sacrificing animal and having rice bear during religious festivals. It preferred *Jagya-Abuti*, the mode of offering to eternal God through fire. Their offerings normally consist of various fruits and agricultural products. Beside the two major above-mentioned categories a small number of Bodos also converted themselves into some purely Hindu sects like, Joyguru, Islam, and Buddhism. However, though till date the numbers of Bathouists are a majority, the challenge of survival of this age-old religion is ever increasing.

### Language

The journey of Bodo language has not been smoother so far. It remained confined in its spoken form till the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the aftermath of social awakening and movement launched by the Bodo organizations since 1913, the language was introduced as the medium of instruction in 1963 in the primary schools in Bodo dominated areas. The language was included as the medium of instruction in the high school level in 1968. Thereafter, in 1977 the Gauhati University recognized it as one of the modern Indian languages (Brahma Chaudhury, 1993, p.15). Presently, the language has been recognized as the medium of instruction up to the secondary level and an associate official language in Assam. The language received highest boost when it was included under the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2003. But, at present, the language is facing stiff competition from Assamese, Hindi, and English. Since, Bodo is not available in higher education and job markets, the Bodos prefer the other languages, particularly, English more. Hence, the desertion of the Bodo medium schools is ever growing. Besides, the Government's step motherly attitude towards the Bodo medium schools in regard to the recruitment of teachers and infrastructure is also responsible for the same.

### Livelihood

Bodos basically depend on an agrarian economy. Besides cultivation, they also earn their livelihood by rearing animals like cattle and pig, weaving clothes and bamboo craftsmanship. But "Now a days urban influence, heavy influx of outsiders, scarcity of

land, growing unemployment amongst Bodo youths have caused a serious threat to the very fabric of Bodo economy” (Brahma Choudhury, 1993, p.19). The biggest casualty has been the weaving industry. The demand of their cultural attires like Dokhnas and Arunais are being met with the imports from other states like Gujrat leaving hundreds jobless. Similarly, their cultivation is also affected either due to the generationwise fragmentation of lands or for selling to others. The arrival of cheap labours in the form of immigrants has also left them high and dry to explore this age-old livelihood. The recent diversion into the govt jobs and others sectors like business has been limited to only a minimum number of people.

### Effect of popular Culture

The latest trend of the globalization of popular culture has also thrown huge challenge to the survival of indigenous cultures like Bodo. “Popular Culture as a term refers to the variety of cultural forms in circulation in a society which are characterized by their being available in common consumption” (Choudury, 2013, p.343). The music, literature, garment and lifestyle including food habits have been markedly influenced by the commodities of popular cultures from western countries and mainstream India. Particularly, the young generation has been noticed shifting away towards the commodities of popular culture. As a result, besides music and literature, the Bodo cottage industries like garment and food have been badly affected. Their indigenous dress of dokhna and gamocha have been replaced by jeans and tea shirts, Bagarumba, Bordoisikhla, and Habajanai....by Bollywood and Hollywood numbers, rice bear and others edibles ...by imported liquors and fast foods etc.

### The Reasons

The reasons of threats to the survival of Bodo Cultures are more than one. The few alarming ones have been enlisted below.

1. Religious conversion
2. Negligence of government
3. Rising popularity of English medium private schools
4. Lack of policy to cope up with the commodities of popular cultures
5. Legal and illegal immigration causing a demographic change
6. Growing multicultural contexts
7. Lack of awareness
8. Lack of marketing policies to promote the indigenous commodities
9. Political instability
10. Insurgency problem
11. Loss of lands
12. Lack of work cultures

### **Probable Solutions**

It is high time that the government as well as the Bodos be proactive to protect this indigenous and one of the oldest cultures of the world. Some of the measures that can be undertaken to safeguard and promote the same are enlisted below.

1. Government and Bodo organizations should take measures to stop further religious conversions.
2. Government should be sincere to safeguard and implement the rights of the people of tribal belt in the protected areas.
3. Government should take immediate measures to provide adequate teachers and modern infrastructure to the Bodo medium schools besides promoting their language and literature.
4. Measures should be taken to stop the illegal immigration at the earliest.
5. Measures should be taken to popularize the indigenous commodities through marketing and awareness programmes.
6. Bodos should be an unifying force overcoming the political conflicts and insurgency problems.
7. There is a strong need of developing work cultures and work ethics to cope up the immigration and multicultural contexts.
8. Release of government funds and their proper implementation to develop the infrastructure.
9. Need to develop realization of the survival of the culture for identity and existence among the youth.
10. Provision of inner line permit.

### **Conclusion**

The optimistic sign is that after the prolonged political movement, Bodos have been given the right to self-governance through the formation of B.T.C. in 2003. Since then, they have been observed progressing in different directions including professional and academic fields. Moreover, the Bodo political and non political wings like ABSU and Bodo Sahitya Sabha are working day and night to confront the challenges aforesaid. However, the risk continues unless the above-mentioned worries are not addressed properly in time. In fact, such challenges of survival are not a unique case of the Bodos only, but of most other native cultures of North East India in particular and of the other parts of the world in general. Due to the recent trends of cultural studies, provisions of space have been being made to accommodate for the practice and protection of each cultures. Ways should be discovered to find space and explore the possibility to promote such indigenous and ancient cultures.

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**“REPRESENTATIONS OF CRIME AND DEVIANCE  
IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF MAYA ANGELOU :  
A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE”**

Pallavi Gogoi & Dr. Liza Das

*“I speak to the black experience, but I am always talking about the human condition” about what we can endure, dream, fail at and still survive.”*

*(Maya Angelou in an interview with David A. Dillon)*

### Introduction

Life writing is an umbrella term that encompasses varied forms of reflective writings such as biography, autobiography, autobiographical novels, memoirs and diaries that often contain components of the other. The very fluidity of the form explains the difficulty of defining each of these genres individually but they are common in terms of reflecting and providing deeper insights into the various aspects of life, experience and the human condition. Stephen Shapiro in “The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography” (1968) significantly discusses how the autobiographical genre unfurls multiple facets of human life and the enriching elements of the literary form. Shapiro reiterates both the educational value of autobiographies in its positive influence in our lives and its influential role in the “dialectical drama of historical evolution” (422).

The significance of breaking silences through the power of words, of translating lived experiences into exemplary writing and the importance of celebrating the trials and tribulations of the human spirit had given rise to the black autobiographical tradition that came to explain the prominence of the literary form in American Literature. Robert F. Sayre in “Autobiography and the Making of America” (1978) describes autobiography as “a common form of American expression” (1). Moreover, the autobiographical tradition can be traced to the slaves and ex-slaves narratives, Indian chiefs and Indian captivity narratives, settler and pioneering narratives, spiritual autobiographies and personal narratives, journals and diaries. These forms of reflective writings were in practice long before it came to be formally recognized as a literary genre in the eighteenth century.

Autobiographical writings by black authors originated in the early antebellum slave narratives and the spiritual accounts of the seventeenth century that were iconoclastic in terms of their thematic content and the power of expression.

### The Black Autobiographical Tradition

The Black autobiographical tradition was enriched with narratives of the black struggle and experience, socio-cultural history and political transformation, black social consciousness and identity, resistance and celebration of life. In the late 1930s and 1940s, significant autobiographers such as Claude Mc Kay (*A Long Way From Home*, 1937), W.E.B Du Bois (*Dusk of Dawn*, 1940), Langston Hughes (*The Big Sea*, 1940) and Zora Neale Hurston (*Dust Tracks on A Road*, 1942) had highlighted the struggle for self-definition, black experience, sociological issues and a self-formulated style of expression. Maya Angelou's autobiographical works had paved a way for other Black women writers to positively channelize and pour their experiences into words and most importantly present themselves as the central figure in their own narratives. Some of the contemporary black women writers of the time were Anne Moody, Gwendolyn Brooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Itaberi Njeri, Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw among others.

Angelou in her personal essay titled "Further New Directions" (1993) wrote thus, "[s]ome people who exist sparingly on the mean side of the hill are threatened by those who also live in the shadows but celebrate the light" (79) and indeed, the black race not only sang through their struggles but also emerged strong from experiences of being overshadowed for far too long. Thus, from Angelou's initial fear of 'writing' which she considered similar to "jump[ing] into a frozen lake" to her later association with the Harlem Writer's Guild, she took on the challenge of not only experimenting with her writing but literally weaving her own life into a series of six autobiographies, taking the entire genre to a new level (*The Heart of a Woman* 661).

### Maya Angelou

Marguerite Annie Johnson (April 4, 1928-May 28, 2014) widely known as Maya Angelou had significantly articulated the 'black experience' through her literary works and her political activism. All through the struggles of her life and career, she proved to be a living embodiment of relentless hope, shining resilience and undying courage with a strong belief in her cultural values, her inherent strength and her Southern roots. She bore an exuberant spirit of celebration with regard to her humanitarian values that also found a reflection through the significant literary contributions of her lifetime.

Angelou wrote thirty six books which had also comprised her six autobiographies, five anthologies of personal essays and eight volumes of poetry among other relevant works. She is widely read for her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and the autobiographical series include *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986) and *A Song Flung up to Heaven* (2002).

Her autobiographies are significant as they are a combination of her personal history and the larger socio-cultural and political history of America. The beauty of her literary work lies in its universal appeal and the wide ranging themes that delve into the realms of human understanding and experience. Some of the dominant themes that emerge from her autobiographies are Black socio-political history, identity, racial injustice, intersectional issues, family, sorority, motherhood, travel, affinity towards multiple cultures, cultural traditions, witticisms, celebrations of life and the human spirit.

They reveal the ways in which the black experience had been saturated with both the historical and the contemporary issues of racial discrimination and injustice, racial segregation and hatred, exploitation and violence, psychological alienation and marginalization at multiple levels. Moreover, these factors seemed to have found a vent through various categories of 'crime' and 'deviance' in the American society. The paper shall explore both these aspects of crime and deviance as represented in the autobiographies of Angelou with particular reference to the black community at the social level and her own self at the individual level.

### **Angelou's Representations of Crime and Deviance**

There are several instances in her narratives, where Angelou examines the black condition at length and points towards the factors of neglect, deprivation, helplessness, and frustration that shape the psyche of the younger generation, often misleading them towards violence and unlawful activities. Moreover, she expresses the belief that equal or rather balanced 'opportunities' and 'freedom' (in every sense of the word) were crucial to the progress of the black youth in particular, who held tremendous potential and talent that remained untapped. Angelou's account in *I Know Why a Caged Bird Sings* (1969) represents the general psyche of the Black youth and their attitude towards crime and deviance in which she writes thus,

“[s]tories of law violations are weighed on a different set of scales in the Black mind than in the whites. Petty crimes embarrass the community and many people wistfully wonder why Negroes [sic] don't rob more banks, embezzle more funds and employ graft in the unions. 'We are the victims of world's most comprehensive robbery. Life demands a balance. It's all right if we do a little robbing now.' This belief appeals particularly to one who is unable to compete legally with his fellow citizens.” (173)

Perhaps, the clarity in her understanding of the general psyche of the younger generation was owing to her own experiences and insights into the black condition. For this reason, in an article published in *The New York Times* titled “I Dare to Hope” (1991), she expresses her optimism towards a bright future for the black youth, in the belief

that they would rise up from the mire of crime and violence to establish themselves as lawful citizens of the nation.

*Gather Together in My Name* (1974) depicts the cityscape (as opposed to a conservative small town in Arkansas in *Caged Bird*) and the presence of a shady underworld operating under cover, reveals dubious black men and women involved in working against the law and committing crime and deviance of various nature such as 'prostitution' involving young women, 'pimping' a completely male dominated crime, 'gambling' stemming into other illegal businesses, committing 'perjury' considered a crime whether unintended or on purpose, 'homosexual involvement' more of a deviant category, widely prevalent 'juvenile delinquency' such as formation of sub-cultures and youth gangs, 'kidnapping' a punishable offence and breach of trust together with the menace of 'drug-peddling' and drug abuse. Also, there is a prevalence of racial lynching and internecine violence, illicit relations and promiscuity, rape and exploitation in the first two volumes of her autobiography.

For the black criminals and deviants, money circulated within their circles and helped in smoothly running their underhand activities. The economic boom after the Depression years had opened up a thriving industry for the opportunistic criminals and deviants. While the whites were mostly involved in crime in order to keep the blacks in their place, the blacks had little opportunities or privilege that often led young black youth to the Underworld or its fringes.

Further representations on crime and deviance include political assassinations, death threats, sexual openness, promiscuity, gang and sub-cultures etc. The instances of crime and deviance that feature in the textual representations of the fourth volume, *The Heart of a Woman* (1981) are the widespread racial killings and lynchings, racial bombings and race riots, rape and violence that take place during the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s in America. Again in the sixth volume, *A Song Flung up to Heaven* (2002), the reader finds Angelou narrating her experience as a witness to the Watts riots that had taken place right before her eyes on one of her visits to the town that was inhabited predominantly by black folks.

Political analysts had pointed towards the fact that blacks had begun to burn their own neighbourhood and localities. Perhaps, this was an explosion of the rage that the black people had suppressed for too long, after having lived for years without their basic rights or opportunities, without work or steady incomes, left with only impoverished families and uncertain futures. During the Watts Riots, hundreds were arrested for looting and ravaging stores and supermarkets, burning of cars and buildings everywhere, creating havoc and danger to the lives of civilians. Such a violent outburst that even saw the senior black civilians take to the streets in order to join the rebellious black youth did indicate the saturation point of black resistance after years of resentment and deprivation.

To cite other instances with regard to Angelou's own personal experiences of residing in various towns and localities, one finds that she could never be free from her nagging worry regarding the security of her home, thereby also hinting at "the possibility of crime" owing to the lurking presence of professional burglars around her neighbourhood (*The Heart of a Woman* 689). Also, she had confronted the experience of protecting her son from the death threats of a terrorizing boy gang called the 'Savages' (that also comprised of young school going boys). The Savages as they called themselves were a terror to people in their localities that also included the cops. And yet, at a moment when her own son had been threatened by the Savages, she had also found herself examining the psyche of this juvenile gang. To quote her thoughts:

"First I had to understand the thinking of the Savages. They were young black men, preying on other young black men. They had been informed, successfully, that they were worthless, and everyone who looked like them was equally without worth. Each sunrise brought a day without a hope and each evening the sun set on a day lacking in achievement." Whites, who ruled the world, owned the air and food and jobs and schools and fair play, had refused to share with them any of life's necessities" and somewhere, deeper than their consciousness, they believed the whites were correct. They, the black youth, young lords of nothing, were born without value and would creep, like blinded moles, their lives in the darkness, under the earth, chewing on roots, driven far from light. I understood the Savages. I understood and hated the system which molded them..." (*The Heart of a Woman* 697)

Also, unlawful activities and getting into trouble with the cops was more the case with black juvenile gangs who cared little about messing with the law and frequenting jails. Significantly, Angelou had also taken note of the defiant attitudes of the black youth and the formation of their subcultures while raising a son into college. In her early years as a teen Angelou herself had the brief experience of living with a juvenile gang that had been involved in supporting its members to gather food and helping each other survive the struggles of poverty. Angelou had noted the circumstances that led to the formations of numerous juvenile gangs particularly those that were led by black adolescents, in the following words,

"The bootless children, with discipline removed, without steady hand of a present parent who cared, begun to run like young tigers in the streets. First their need drove them to others like themselves, with whom they could make a family. Then their rage made the newly formed families dangerous. Gangs of abandoned children bullied their way up and down the sidewalks of Watts, growing bolder and angrier every day." (*A Song Flung up to Heaven* 1091)

Again the last volumes of Angelou's autobiographies contain a series of political assassinations, first in the case of Patrice Lumumba, followed by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Significantly, one also finds the presence of 'internecine violence' where blacks attack blacks, for an instance Malcolm X is assassinated by black men which Angelou in her disbelief stated thus, "[i]f a group of racists had waylaid Malcolm, killed him in the dark and left his body as a mockery to all black people, I might have accepted his death more easily. But he was killed by black people as he spoke to black people and in the presence of his family" (*A Song Flung up to Heaven* 1077).

Angelou also narrates her confrontations with some of the difficulties of living as a wife of a freedom fighter, having to live with constant worry, frequently received unknown phone calls, warnings and death threats that had created a psychological fear in her mind. Moreover, in the radically charged political period, nothing could have been taken for 'assurance', nor could anything be taken for 'granted'. Apart from are several instances of deviant activities indulged in the bureaucratic circles such as adultery or promiscuous relationships.

### Sociological Perspectives on Crime and Deviance

From a sociological perspective, 'crime' is the severe violation of a written law. The government, police and the judicial authorities are vested with the powers to act against crime and criminal offenses. Deviance is milder form of violation of social norms that differ with regard to time, place and socio-cultural contexts. Erich Goode provides a fresh perspective on 'deviance' as a political act which has come to be reconsidered as "violations of human rights-imperialism, racism, sexism, exploitation, oppression" (100). Significantly, all types of crimes may be termed as deviance but all deviances do not amount to crime or criminality. Edward J. Clarke in *Deviant Behavior* (2007) writes thus,

“.[O]f all the social sciences there is perhaps no better clear-cut illustration of the importance of conceptions than in the field identified as criminology and the study of deviant behavior. As we shall see, the history of the field can be described best in terms of changing conceptions of crime, criminals, deviants and deviation.” (1)

Allan and Steffensmeier examine the striking gender gap in the “overwhelming” male dominant world of organized crime both in the “underworld” and the “upperworld” (466). Through their discussion on crime and deviance, they discuss the application of traditional theory to the explanation of gendered crime patterns, the male and female patterns of offending, recent trends in crimes committed by women and establish the gender gap with regard to crime. Also, they highlight the role of men in involving, manipulating, exploiting or even compelling women into crime which is also a consistent finding across research.

In the essay, “Deviance, Crime, and the Greying of America” (1983) Don C. Gibbons provides significant observations on the aspect of criminality and deviance that have created and shall further create social trouble in America. Sampson and Laub examine the relationship of crime and deviance with regard to multiple social factors such as age, opportunity, occupation, marriage, childhood and socialization where such behavior, its consistency and transition is concerned. Significantly, Mitchell, Wright and Daniels in “Is Deviance Dead?” (2001) cite the work titled *The Sociology of Deviance* (1994) by the liberal American social scientist, Colin Sumner that traces the history of research on deviance that had begun in the 1890s and literally reached an abrupt end around the mid-1970s. This was due to the fact that scholars and intellectuals were unable to formulate theories that could help explain crime and deviance.

The Marxist perspectives on crime and deviance can be traced to the emergence of Marxist literature by Bongers, Renna and Gramsci which focussed on theorizing crime and law. Also there are various strands of sociological theories such as learning theory, strain theory, control theory, labeling theory, conflict theory, integrated theories and radical criminology etc. that provide theoretical perspectives on ‘deviance’ and social policies. Significantly, the Radical and New criminologists and the various Marxist schools introduced newer perspectives in the sociological study of crime and deviance with distinct approaches to relation between class and gender, marginalization and racial segregation, together with the condition and exploitation of the working classes in the ghettos. A broad review-of-literature on the sociological and Marxist perspectives on crime and deviance reveals various interrelated factors that generally determine these categories. Thus, it provides several keys to gaining a deeper critical insight into the representations of crime and deviance in Angelou’s writings.

## Conclusion

Maya Angelou’s representations of crime and deviance significantly reflect several intersections of race, class and gender among other such factors. This also introduces one to the sociological concept of ‘intersectionality’, a term coined in the 1980s by the American Critical Race theorist Kimberlie Crenshaw. As discussed by Christine Bose, intersectional studies are concerned with sociological research methodologies and scholarship focusing on the “perspective of those who are ‘multiply-marginalized’” (68).

Moreover, scholars and critics point towards an apparent research gap and scarcity of literature that investigates or addresses the issues of ‘women and crime’ in particular. In an article titled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (1989), Crenshaw compares the multiple intersectional experiences of black women to an unexpected accident at the cross roads, that may take place for more than one reason (149). Having escaped the fringes of the world of crime and deviance in her adolescent years, Angelou at the tail end of her autobiographical series expresses her reflections thus,

“I thought about black women and wondered how we got to be the way we were. In our country, white men were always in superior positions; after them came white women, then black men, then black women, who were historically on the bottom stratum.” (*A Song Flung up to Heaven* 1166)

Thus, the near absence of study on the areas of ‘crime; and ‘deviance’ particularly in Maya Angelou’s autobiographical works establishes it, as worthy of a comprehensive study and further exploration.

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- \* The paper is based on the ongoing research in the area of Crime and Deviance in the Autobiographical works of Maya Angelou.

## FROM ECOCIDE TO TRAUMATIC HOMICIDE : REPRESENTATION OF NATURE IN MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI'S *CHENABAR SONT*

Ratan Deka

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While presenting human-nature face-off in *Chenabar Sont*, Mamoni Raisom Goswami has suggestively drawn our attention to two extremes – Wordsworth's Nature as 'sublime sustainer' and Hardy's nature as 'indifferent destroyer', but moved over to highlight the human contribution to the swing from one to the other. This paper tries to show how Goswami has pitted not the Victorian's inherently malevolent nature, but the modern 'developed', 'exploited' nature against the Romantic's ideal of peaceful human-nature co-existence. In this attempt Wordsworth and Hardy are taken as two reference points. Her portrayal of traumatised characters caught in the web of nature's fury exposes the demonizing and dehumanizing impacts of the frenzied taming and exploitation of natural resources. While the narrative clustering of chaos, anxiety, starvation, hunger, and death superficially echoes Tennyson and Hardy's idea of nature as 'red in tooth and claw' – fierce and harsh, at a more substantial, deeper level it raises the finger at the self-centered human interventions as the real culprit.

*Chenabar Sont*, Goswami's first novel, is an eye witness account of the plight of the group of migrant labourers, mostly women, precariously engaged in a project of bridge construction across Chenab (*Chandrabhanga* in Sanskrit) river in the Riasi region of Jammu and Kashmir of India by the British Company. The plot brings together narratives of subjugation and oppression endured by labourers and the resulting trauma of displacement while working under the persistent shadow of nature turned hostile by human intervention. Life in Kalahandi before the displacement is life in an ideal Wordsworthian nature, in Paradise. What follows is a kind of 'Paradise lost' with poverty, disease, displacement and death. Goswami seems to suggest that 'growth,' 'development' through human intervention, based on machines and ruthless exploitation of nature, are mere self-goals. The text thus, justifies a deep sanctity of relationship between man and nature, violation of which leads to trauma and fall. In short, 'development' as an agenda of enlightenment project has been pushed too far by man, the Anthropocene. These issues are suggested by Goswami only as artistic moorings not propaganda or activism.

The images of nature harboured by Hardy and Wordsworth are starkly contrasting- Wordsworth wants us to be part of the ‘sublime sustainer’ wholeheartedly without the least protest, and get submerged in it, while Hardy warns us of nature, for the untamable and unpredictable monster in it may confront us at any time and at any place, much like Eustacia and her lover Wildeve getting drawn into a deep weir in a harsh and hard weather with no mercy to its protagonists; while the same nature to Wordsworth is adorable for its idealism as in the case of Lucy, Lucy Gary and the Solitary Reaper, nature - kind, gentle, pitiful, merciful and reasonable in each and every step in their lives. For Hardy “man’s lot is to endure in a malevolent universe” (Coombes, 1977, P. 210) and resisting nature is useless and futile. Rapid Industrialization and development projects gradually undermine Wordsworth’s belief in the healing connection between human beings and nature. Theorist Hartman points out how Wordsworth’s writing foretells modern environmental decay, and how “the slower trauma of industrialization coincided with Wordsworth’s inner sense of irreparable change: they foreboded a cosmic wounding of Nature – of natural rhythms, of organic growth – which reinforced his fear of an apocalyptic rate of change and nature-loss” (Hartman 1977: xvi). As observed by Hartman, Wordsworth feared that if we, as a result of industrialization should “invest our imagination elsewhere, then and only then is there danger of the fading of nature” (in Caruth 1996b: 638). According to the preservationist John Muir, Wordsworth’s concern about nature extended also to the American continent and “the despoiling effects of industrial revolution on the American landscape” (Pace 2003: 241), and this links Wordsworth’s works to American pastoral, and the land destruction in the US. In Goswami’s *Chenabar Sont* the alienation of human beings from their natural environment that Wordsworth fearfully anticipated seems to have occurred, at least partly: the novel portrays the ecocide that has occurred due to enlightenment driven development project stretched too far and which turns the landscape into a barren, dull piece of land and the river into a mighty monster:

At some nights Chenab’s soft murmur turns into something ominously terrible. No trace of the pebbles can be found on both the banks. It is only water and water everywhere. Company’s soil bags, rods, shuttering plates are washed away. Right at this moment Soni pities the labourer who works above this terrible water (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 17).

Goswami’s novel registers and fuses the related concerns of trauma theory and ecocriticism in its focus on landscape and female sexual abuse. Despite their apparent differences, there are points of similarities between the two disciplines as academic movements, the very ground of each being the notion of a crisis, a threat of annihilation and isolation – either physical or emotional. Both developed in American literary studies in the 1990s as a result of activist struggles in the late 1960s and 1970s – by Vietnam

veterans and the women's movement in the case of trauma theory and by environmental activists and environmental writings in the case of literary-environmental studies (Carr 2000b: 19; Glotfelty 1996: xvi-xvii). Trauma as well as the ecological crisis have been described as a disruption of the Lacanian symbolic order and as belonging to the Lacanian real, hence as being disruptive of representation. The Lacanian scholar Slavoj Žižek diagnoses the ecological crisis as having to do with the real in the sense that it radically disrupts the very ground of our belief in nature as an ordered and balanced domain, and also in that our reactions to the crisis usually oscillate between denial and obsessive activism (1991: 34-36; Kerridge 1998: 2-3). Current responses to a global ecological crisis have been ones that bespeak the notion of periodic repression and hence echo the reactions to trauma in the history of trauma studies. Drawing on Žižek's interpretation, Richard Kerridge presents the environmental crisis in psychoanalytical terms as an occasion of the return of the repressed: it "is elusive," "data [...] can grow in significance until they overshadow everything else; they can shrink until they are almost forgotten. Notoriously, environmental issues come and go," cast in "the role of a 're-repressed', which is frequently pushed out of sight and which always returns" (1998: 1, 2).

Goswami indicates that the sexual abuse in the novel is linked not only to the exploitation of land but also to the suppressed history of the displaced, especially the females. The corruption of natural landscape and the abuse symbolize each other, but the domestic violence in the novel is indirectly linked to India's colonialist history itself. The novel is therefore a critique of industrial and technological capitalism, which is seen as connected to that past. Thus, in an effort to unmask the power relations within the labour households, Goswami suggests that these are interrelated with other forms of oppressions. The novel suggests a link between the domination of women by men and the exploitation of the natural environment, stating that this is made visible in the denigration of both women and nature and criticizing the androcentric values behind these. It is expressed in the way Soni ponders over commoditization of Parbati's body as bait by her husband Sahadeo to the brutal Punjabi, who ripped Parbati's body apart like a hungry tiger devouring its prey:

Her entire body bears the injury mark of the teeth and nails. The old man's teeth tear one portion of her breast. She is lying for quite a few days on the floor of company hospital (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 38).

Nagma's deformed body is another case in point:

Everyone including the *khalasi* (the man who unloads), and the Labour Babu say that the Old Man (her Husband) pushed her into this state by thrashing her all the time (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 31).

The powerful hierarchal human/nature dichotomy of Western philosophical tradition upheld by conceptualizing the human as non-nature and part of other hierarchized and inter-connected oppositional pairs such as "mind-body, reason-nature,

reason-emotion, masculine-feminine,” where the second term in each pair is devalued (Plumwood 1996: 156), is seen as constituting the basis of the justification for the exploitation of both women and nature. *Chenabar Sont* counters and rivals the romanticized myth of rugged individualism of displacement stories by revealing the cost to be paid by generations of women, including Soni, Parvati, Nagma themselves, their mother, grandmother, and other women in the county, while also hinting at the “‘originating’ act of colonialism” (Sanders 2001: 205). According to Romantic thought, the natural world is threatened because human beings hubristically tamper with it without thinking about the cost, and in this regard Hartman questions the possibility of a Wordsworthian memory place “after entering an era of mechanical reproduction” and also in connection with Holocaust sites, which have robbed the mind of reflective moments in actual and imagined pastoral places, and thus destroyed the symbolic function of these regions (in Caruth 1996b: 645).

A rhythmical thaw and gradual adaption is lifeline of Nature’s harmonious life. But, in *Chenabar Sont* the representation of the river with its entire negative attributes, implies some mystery. The transformation of river into a site of death is closely linked to human efforts at taming it. The cultural discourse of civilization does not seem to go well with the writer which superficially echoes Hardy’s representation of Egdon Heath. But unlike Egdon Heath, Goswami’s river does not kill man on its own; but it invites man to try its potential. Bridge construction project can be seen in this light. Labourers must intercept the river’s current in the anthropocentric way within the register of development and cultural project of civilization and modernity. Labourers are displaced from Kalandhi and now they have forced their displacement upon the river in its natural ambit, to tame and dominate it; a symbolic departure from its nature and space by pushing it too far. But Nature/River is too strong for the human being to tame it. The repeated references to the deadly sounds and sights of Chenab’s current ridicule man of his meanness and he is warned to stay within the limits. Inability of decoding nature’s signal has conditioned people like Sadasiv, Gaurisankar and other labourers doomed to death in this fateful co-existence. They are drowned to death in this *sont/sroot* of Chenab, a homicide and ecocide at the same time. Unlike in Hardy, the river is shown to have metamorphosed into a monster when challenged by man. The blasting of the rock on the riverbed kills Sadasiv, and the river is flowing as usual as if to warn against “threatened loss of landscapes”, “the industrialization of countries” and health issues such as cancer and “fertility and reproductive health” (Kerridge 5):

The blasting stone hits Sadasiv’s abdomen travelling with the speed of a bullet after it pierced the tin shed ... there is no injury mark on his body except the slightly bloated bare abdomen. It appears as if Sadasiv is sleeping very peacefully. But, Sadasiv is no more. Sadasiv have died! Sadasiv is dead (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 70)!

The loss of natural landscape and greenery traumatises Soni who helplessly releases a deep, cold sigh that assumes the proportion of a wound in the beginning of the narrative:

Today, suddenly the brass coloured rusted tools that have covered the soft green grassland appeared as an ugly scar to her (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 7).

Soni often finds the natural elements, especially the green pasture, to be the source of strength and support, degradation and disappearance of which leads to emotional wounding. Responding to a question on human-nature coexistence in her novels Goswami refers to some of the central philosophical concepts of Hinduism mentioned in *The Upanishads*:

There is a *sloka* in the *Upanishads* (*Upanisad* in Sanskrit) which tells that in the relationship between human being and nature one should not encroach the other's (space). The world will be beautiful if that relationship exists ('*Narir Samashya-Prakrati-Paribeshok Loi Dr. Mamoni Raisomor Soite Alosonaroto: Samir Tanti aru Ankur Deka*', from *Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Rachna Samagra*, Vol. II. 574).

The transformation of lush green, fertile Kalahandi into a dull, barren piece of land may be accounted for by the thoughtless anthropocentric activities under the guise of development project. The apparent loss of balance hurts Soni the most, making her aware of the corruption of landscape as well as the abuse of female body. The beautiful landscape that has already disappeared re-emerges in Soni's memory which becomes an "emotionally invested space". This becomes a point of connection between past and the present time, and proves crucial to the protagonist's efforts at recalling a traumatic past. Thus, the psychological disintegration of identity inherent in individual trauma is invariably intertwined with the loss of landscape in the novel. Industrialisation transforms the greenland to a heap of "crane's bucket, oxygen cylinder, crab, pipes, concrete plate, crusher tools etc (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 7)" threatening "fertility and reproductive health" of the land. Whenever Soni thinks about her lost Paradise called Kalahandi, her tone bears sadness issuing from the tormenting memory that becomes a persistent scar. Natural calamities force them out of Kalahandi; but the writer suggestively presents the displacement as the results of self-centred mismanagement of Nature's sublime gifts by human beings, in an apparent denial of the Romantic ideal of love and solace found in Mother Nature. The markers of Kalahandi, after the draught, keep haunting them like a nightmare, a persistent memory:

What would they do by going back? They have sold their cattle, utensils. They would die starving if they go back. After the third and fourth round of thunder storm the government has asked them to remove their camp, so they have started leaving the camp one after the other. She has a lot more to tell about the Kalahandi. But Soni does not tell anything (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 9).

However, with increased awareness of the human responsibility for many environmental catastrophes, the boundaries between human inflicted suffering and “natural” events have started to blur of late. Often, ‘natural’ calamities are the results of human intervention; for example, environmental catastrophes may be linked to political or economic forces, in which trauma frequently have its origin. In *Chenabar Sont*, the death of Sadasiv is a clear instance of the side effect of human interruption of nature’s force, and this shows human vulnerability in the face of nature. In the words of Herman:

To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature (7).

Present day trauma theorists put emphasis on exploring the connection between social issues and trauma and what can be referred to as cultural-political dimension of trauma. The cultural and socio-political aspect leads us to explore the environmental aspect of trauma as well. Human beings often put the blame on nature for problems like displacement induced by draught, famine, starvation etc. But in reality numerous such problems lead to environmental degradation and critical issues beyond repair which may accumulate to serious threats (Bennett 2001: 33; Garrard 2005: 29; Rigby 2002: 155; Coupe 2000: xi; Buell 2005: 8). So, it becomes imperative to broaden our focus and move beyond man-made artificial environments in order to do justice to the link between human suffering and manipulation of nature. Ecocritic Greg Garrard correctly points out that “literal and irreducibly material problems”, should be identified as it is no more necessary that “scientific problems are never separable from cultural and political ones” (2005: 168). The deprecation of both nature and women can be viewed from this perspective. This is what the writer suggests through the figure of Neer Amma, the first victim of Kalahandi’s famine. There is no escape from the fate she is destined to - ‘fota kotha (ragged blanket)’, ‘soot like dark mosquito net’, ‘resembling a vulture groping a dead, rotten, lacerated cow whose innards lay scattered everywhere’ (Goswami *Chenabar Sont* 77). This woman can be taken as representation of the end point of life of the labourers and their destiny. In the text, Sarbamati and Neer Amma testify to the deprecation of women as bodies exposed to violation. It will not be wrong to say that all the females in the novel face the same kind of fate - neglected, terrorized, victimized but with a difference in degree only.

We are living in a time of machine, and a period of strategic departure from Nature. We have been transformed into machines on a daily basis, in each second of our lives. *Chenabar Sont* implies that human trauma and psychological wounds are results of forcible repositioning and interchange of subject/object poles or domains by the self-centred pursuits of man, to fulfil the materialistic need neglecting Nature’s nature. By doing so man, the anthropocene, invites only disaster upon him. In other words, ecocide is leading to traumatic homicide.

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## MAPPING THE GANGES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POETRY OF KEKI N. DARUWALLA, ARVIND K. MEHROTRA AND SUSHEEL K. SHARMA\*

Nikunja Kishore Das\*\*

Discussing the motifs in Indian poetry in English Vilas Sarang writes, “Indian English poets are ‘river poets’. Poems on rivers abound. ... One can gain interesting insights into the work of all these poets, simply by comparing their river poems.” (13) Had Vilas used “Ganga” in place of the “river” he would not have been much off the mark as the Ganges has evoked a pasticcio of responses among all kinds of writers from the yore to the present. Ganga is not merely a water body, but holier than the holiest thing on the earth for the people of India especially the Hindus. From among all the rivers, it stands apart as something special and is even worshipped as a mother figure – a divine being. That is the reason why the river is closely related to Indian life and culture – connected with the lives of people from their birth to death through various rituals and festivals that go particularly with this river. Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* has talked about the significance of the river in the following words: “The Ganges ... has held India’s heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old times to new, is the story of India’s civilization and culture, of the rise and fall of empires, of great and proud cities, of adventures of man ... .” (51) Everything about this river is sacred and purgative so far as the spiritual contentment of the people is taken into account.

The Ganges has been a favourite subject of the poets in Sanskrit and regional languages. Indian poets in English too have engaged themselves with this river. Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s “Address to the Ganges” (1878), Joteendro Mohun Tagore’s “Moonlight on the River” (1881), Jayant Mahapatra’s “On the Banks of the Ganges” (1976), Chandrashekhar Kambar’s “A Pond Named Ganga” (1994) and I K Sharma’s “To the Ganga Maiya” (2010) are some of the poems to illustrate my above contention. However, the present paper makes a comparative study of the poetic ruminations on the Ganges by three contemporary poets viz. Keki N. Daruwalla, Arvind K. Mehrotra and Susheel K. Sharma. Interestingly, Daruwalla’s *Crossing of Rivers* containing his several poems on Ganga and Mehrotra’s *Nine Enclosures* containing “Songs of Ganga” were published in the same year i.e. 1976. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra resembles Daruwalla

“particularly in [his] capacity for sharp perception of environment and for forthright statement.” (Ezekiel 67) In this article Daruwalla has been placed above Mehrotra on the ground of their age and also on the basis of his poetic achievements, critical accolades and recognition in the form of prizes. Susheel Sharma though comparatively a new voice, with only two collections to his credit, has widely been reviewed. His “Ganga Mata: A Prayer” which first appeared in an electronic journal from Ireland has drawn accolades from all over the globe.

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla’s third volume of his poetry *Crossing of Rivers* records his impression and observations on the Ganges in a series of poems under the section “The Waterfront”. In his “Boat-ride Along the Ganga” Daruwalla describes and narrates his experiences on the banks of the Ganges at Banaras. In the evening while scouring along the waters upstream on the boat the Ghat only emerges in sight. It looks like an amphitheatre, palm-leaf parasols can be seen on the platform raised close to the water. The *panda* talks on the legend concerning Dasasvamedh Ghat while calculating the amount of merit that accrues to the folk. The sail boats are on anchor. There are poles scattered on the river to provide some room for birds to perch on. As the poet disembarks he feels confused seeing corpse-fire and cooking fire burning side by side.

Dante would have been confused here.  
 Where would he place this city  
 In Paradise or Purgatory, or lower down  
 Where fires smoulder beyond the reach of pity?  
 The concept of the goddess baffles you –  
 Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.  
 What plane of destiny have I arrived at  
 Where corpse-fires and cooking-fires  
 Burn side by side? (“Boat-ride Along the Ganga” 42-50)

What is obvious is Daruwalla’s helplessness to fathom the depth of religious and cultural heritage that continues at the Ganga Ghat in Banaras. The simple reason is his upbringing in a different culture. His parents were Zoroastrians and he was born in Lahore before the partition of India. His father was a professor of English. He too had a post-graduate degree in English and as such his acquaintance with European literature makes him to refer Dante’s “Divine Comedy” while narrating the Ganga Ghat at Banaras. It seems he does not belong to the place he describes:

... It is as I feared;  
 hygiene is a part of my conscience and I curse it  
 and curse my upbringing which makes me queazy here.

(“Boat-ride Along the Ganga” 13-15)

In the next poem “Nightscape” he notes down his observations on the Ganga at night and here too his bewilderment overpowers him:

Is this a ridge  
 black with pine  
 rising out of mists  
 or a city of the dead  
 brooding over a ghostscape? (“Nightscape” 17-21)

His vision becomes blurred in the next poem ‘Dawn’.

a silhouette lost in prayer  
 develops feet,  
 a frayed anchorite walks  
 like a fossil saint  
 who has crawled out  
 from the sediments of time.

... ..

dawns on the Ganga  
 Like a bizarre illusion. (“Dawn” 15-20, 29-30)

Then the morning fierce with its heat and humidity makes Daruwalla feel like a “cat on a hot tin roof”.

“Daruwalla is at his best when he works with selective image and metaphor, as in ... ‘Vignette I’”. (Sarang 22) In “Vignette – I” Daruwalla shows his feelings of angst. The opening lines describe the sun.

The sun comes up  
 like the outer husk  
 of sure fiery despair. (‘Vignette – I’, 1-3)

Then follows his snap shots on lepers, a dwarf, monkeys and the blinds on the Ganga-ghat:

Lepers huddle along the causeways  
 like shunted shrubs  
 black with frost burns  
 A thin dwarf, smeared blue with ash,  
 spiked with a beard  
 forested with matted hair  
 cavorts ape-like. Overhead the monkeys gibber. (Ibid 5-11)

At that time a group of women, having taken their bath, walk on the path dropping coins in the coconut shells held by the beggars:

Crisp from their river-baths, women  
 Drop coins in coconut shells  
 But no avarice flickers  
 In the eyes of the palsied. (Ibid 12-15)

The last snapshot is about a sail:

A sail is hoisted,  
 the colour of musk-melon,  
 the colour of daggered flesh,  
 Beggars hoist their deformities  
 As boatmen hoist their sails. (Ibid 19-23)

The sun is presented here as a metaphor of “outer husk”, that is, likening the sun with the dry outer covering of a seed. It is further likened with the explosion of “some fiery despair”. This sets the tone of the poem as it conveys the poet’s feelings and attitude of detest at things which he sees. In the next line “The Ganga flows swollen with hymns” is full of compressed images. But the satiric tone becomes obvious. The lepers have been likened to “stunted shrubs black with frost burns”. This kind of metaphor brings back the metaphor about the sun “like the outer husk of some fiery despair” used in the beginning of the poem. The aim of the poet in both the cases is to make his intentions clear since his purpose, it seems, has nothing to do with anything that invigorates but to show abject poverty and misery in a place of pilgrimage in which he does portray in describing a thin dwarf smearing his skin with blue coloured ash, sporting a beard on his chin and matted hair over his head giving the appearance of a sadhu as well as a monkey as he moves and jumps in a noisy manner. The poet has shown the ability to expand one idea vividly in the follow-up pictures. The way the poet describes women dropping coins in coconut shells of the blinds indicates that he does not approve of such practices. In his description of the sight of a sail, Daruwalla demonstrates his poetic technique of supple imagism. The images in the poem compare and contrast with each other to sustain the theme. The poet proves his ability to establish observation vividly in order to strike artistic tension between image and statement.

In these vignettes Daruwalla keeps his focus on the stark misery of the human lot on the banks of the Ganga and in doing so he not only displays his own frustration and despair, but also his incapacity to belong to the life and culture of India. Daruwalla’s disapproval of the rituals at Ganga Ghat is discernible in the vignettes that follow:

All is spider-thread ritual here  
 sandal-paste and *mantra*  
 Chanting of the *gayatri*  
 shaved head and the *pinddan*. (“Vignette – II” 16-19)

Though “Vignette – III” is written after the 1975 coup in Dhaka, yet here too despair returns to Daruwalla.

Perhaps they come to Varanasi  
 the unloved, the hungry  
 looking for their souls like  
 the blind looking for their lost children.  
 In the street of the Lord

the sepia teeth of pandas.  
 In the street of virginity  
 The raucous laughter of whores. (“Vignette – III” 17-24)

In ‘Death Vignette’ Daruwalla lampoons the death rites performed on the Ganga Ghat in Banaras.

They walk in time  
 outside time  
 walking with death on  
 their copper-shoulders  
 ... ..  
 They turn mindless with  
 the rhythm of their feet  
 till licked by their wet tongue  
 of the river wind  
 they wake up reassured  
 to find it is not their own death  
 they are carrying. (“Death Vignette” 55-59, 64-70)

“The Dip” encompasses the poet’s strange experience when he takes a dip in the Ganga.

I shoo away my thoughts like goats over a cliff  
 and plunge into the waters, temperature of blood.  
 I who came to feel her frozen paws  
 find myself in her warm, dark heart. (“The Dip” 23-26)

Indeed, here comes a sea-change in Daruwalla’s attitude towards the Ganga as a result of which he casts off all his earlier disillusionment and blasphemy on the Ganga. This becomes obvious immediately.

Sleeping on your banks  
 as you flow by  
 I find you flowing within my body (“Mother” 30-32)

This sort of appeasement within his own poetic-self, somehow clearing his initial blurred perception about the Ganga, gets closer to atonement in the next poem “Beads”: “The river is a vibration; it is the spine of the Goddess.” (“Beads” 6)

“River Silt” tells in a bizarre way the half burnt skull one day may be probed and researched “[t]en thousand years hence.” The outcome will be “the blue and white and amethyst interiors/ of the racial memory/ of a nation preserved here!” (“River Silt” 3:19-21)

The last long poem “Crossing the River” sums up Daruwalla’s transformed attitude towards the river in a manner of prayer. He renders his submissions:

Accept my oblations!

Favour my undertakings!

And remain now and forever with me! ("Crossing the River" II:38-40)

However, the poem "Crossing of River" narrates the pitfalls of a girl coming from the hills and gets corrupted as she moves along from Haridwar to Varanasi. It is allegorical about the river Ganga itself as it comes from the rapids of bhabar— a forest area around the foothills of the Himalayas through which the Ganga flows. There is also a personification of Varuna and Asi – tributaries of the Ganga near Varanasi.

It has to be admitted that Daruwalla is not an expressionist putting together blurred impressions. He worked and moved around Varanasi and the river Ganga seasons after seasons. The impact of his first hand experiences is replenished with a natural poetic fervour. His gradual oneness with the river is noticeable though his initial sceptic attitude was rather of a displacement arising out of immature groundings from early prejudices which placed him as an outsider preaching gospels on the river and its reality.

Coming to the predilections on the same river by Arvind Mehrotra and Susheel Sharma, one finds areas of expressions from Daruwalla's poems which can be compared and contrasted. In Mehrotra's "Songs of the Ganga", one finds altogether a different picture – not the picture of a fiery sun and the vignettes on the poor, diseased or deformed beggars who 'huddle along the causeways' of the Gangaghat, but the picture of the people and their actual activities along the embankment. The poem is a soliloquy, or in other words, the thoughts of the Ganga are spoken aloud in the manner of a dramatic monologue. Mehrotra makes the river speak of itself and the readers get what the river would say if it could talk.

In the opening lines, it hints at its humble beginning and its own course of path:

I am Ganga

Snow from the mountains

The keeper of water

I am the plains

I am the foot hills

I carry the wishes of my streams

To the sea. ("Songs of the Ganga" I:1-7)

In the brief description the entire geographical terrain covered by of the river has been traced. The river is presented only in materialistic, physical and geographical form with embellishment from mythological or reverential epithets. It is in the form of snow from among the Himalayan glacier, a host of small streams joining its water body and then other rivers and rivulets too mingle with it to form the mighty river and finally carry their water to merge into the sea when the Ganga merges with the Bay of Bengal. The reader from this description of Mehrotra easily feels relieved from the harsh vignettes superimposed by Daruwalla on the Ganga ghat. One should not hastily construe that Mehrotra's poem is very simple in comparison to Daruwalla's. Quite contrary to it

Mehrotra's renderings are so tight and terse that the reader finds himself encircled with ambiguity at the hints and suggestions dropped here and there. Let us have a look at the Section II of the poem:

I go out into the world  
 I am the world  
 I am nations, cities, people  
 I am the pages of an unbound book  
 My room is the air around me ("Songs of the Ganga" II: 1-5)

Again from Section III:

Billy goats  
 Come down from the mountain  
 Without finding solitude  
 Camels return from the desert  
 I make two lines in the sand  
 And say they are unbreakable walls  
 I make the four directions one.  
 I know the secret of walking  
 I am the death of fire. ("Songs of the Ganga" III: 1-9)

This reminds one of T. S. Eliot's famous line in 'The Waste Land': "I will show you fear in a handful of dust". Further in Section IV:

From smoke I learn disappearance  
 From the ocean unprejudice  
 From birds  
 How to find a rest-house  
 In the storm  
 From the leopard  
 How to cover the sun  
 With spots ("Songs of the Ganga" IV: 1-8)

"The poems [in *Nine Enclosures*] teem with unexpected collocations of imagery." (Sarang 29) From the above quoted lines from different sections of the poem the reader's thought process gets compressed as quite new and opposite images begin to cascade on his mind gurgling forth sudden associations of meanings that surprise him at once. The lines that arrest the reader's mind can once again be quoted from different sections to have a fresh look:

I am both man and woman (I: 8)  
 I give life and I take it back (I: 17)  
 My room is the air around me (II: 5)  
 I make the four directions one (III: 6)  
 I know the secret of walking (III: 7)

From the leopard  
 How to cover the sun  
 With spots (IV: 6-8)

These lines pose a challenge to the reader who would rather take these lines as caesarean cut to insert compressed images in the manner of Ezra Pound and the Beat poets. "Arvind Krishna Mehrotra has effectively combined an Indian involvement and sharp social comment within a Beat speech and manner." (Peeradina x) The lines from Sec. III and Sec. IV have meanings interlinked when one realizes how the Ganga often flows underneath. "I make the four directions one" implies that the Ganga is omnipotent and it has the potentiality to make sudden changes by curling around. It makes its own path, own bed, its own banks and its own geometry. Therefore the line follows "I know the secret of walking" (Sec. III) which further implies that it is whimsical on its own to change its course all on a sudden, but, in fact, it knows the secret of walking down smoothly. The lines may as well refer to the people who throng to its banks from all the four directions.

In Section IV the image of leopard with spots metaphorically conveys the game of hide and seek that a leopard plays while living in a dense forest; it knows how to hide itself in the sun. This aspect of the leopard is likened to the Ganga's sudden disappearances at many such spots as it glides down from the Himalayas to the ravines of north-India. In doing so the Ganga flows underneath and thereby on its own covers the sun. The beauty of the lines lies in the way the ideas have been conveyed. "...Mehrotra's poems astonish with their quicksilver movement." (Sarang 29) He provides a magic touch to his poems and thereby ushers in a new era of modern experimental poetry in the Indian English literature. As a student of English literature he is fully conversant with the new trends in art, music and literature in France, Great Britain and the USA. Because of the experiments made in his poetry he is a poet to be reckoned with. What distinguishes him from Daruwalla is that he does not go on harping on the plight of poverty and misery stricken people of India for the sake of realism. It has also been a trend in the early seventies among the poets writing in English in India to be ealistic rather than dallying with any sort of romantic overtures. Those who have struck to this trend are usually carried away by the notion of making things as bare as possible so that they might get credit for showing the seamier side of Indian life. But they seem to be oblivious of the fact that Indian reality rather consists of ravines as well as sunshine, rivers as well as festivity, poverty as well as placid contentment the people in India usually enjoy in their tropic surroundings. It will not be out of place to quote Peeradina again who maintains, "In his later poems ... [he is] unashamedly romantic and arrogantly non-poetic with the intention of arriving at a zero degree purity of language that 'says' nothing but just is." (x)

This brings us to Susheel Sharma who too has written a poem on the Ganga, but

which is quite different from Daruwalla's and Mehrotra's. Sharma is a new generation poet. The opening lines of his "Ganga Mata – A Prayer"<sup>1</sup> give an unambiguous clue to the reader to his approach:

O Ganges!  
 The dweller in Lord Brahma's *kamandala*  
 The abider in Lord Vishnu's feet  
 The resider in Lord Shiva's locks  
 The sojourner in the Himalayas  
 The daughter of Sage Jahnu  
 The co-wife to Parvati and Lakshmi  
 The redeemer of Bhagiratha's race  
 The atoner of Sagar's progeny  
 The mother of brave Bhishma  
 O *Ganga Maiya!*  
 Homage to thee.  
 Accept my obeisance  
 O *Punyakirti!* ("Ganga Mata: A Prayer" 1-14)

Sharma's above lines show a similar thought process as that of Mehrotra's "Songs of the Ganga". Arvind briefly touches upon the coming down of the Ganga from the Himalayas carrying other tributaries with it but Sharma, instead has touched upon each and every mythological connections of the Ganga as narrated in several Indian religious scriptural verses. The Ganga, which was kept in Brahma's waterpot, came to flow from the toe of Vishnu, chief of the Hindu Trinity and when brought on to the earth fell on Shiva's locks. On the prayer of Saint Bhagirath the Ganga left her sojourn in the Hamalayas and flowed upto Ganga Sagar at the Bay of Bengal to save sixty thousand sons of King Sagara from the angry glances of sage Kapil by whom they had been burnt to ashes. She became the daughter of sage Jahnu and the wife of Shantanu giving birth to Bhishma of the *Mahabharata* fame. One is reminded of appropriation and abrogation of the past myth and history as propounded by the post-colonial critics. How does a reader benefit from this and how does it further Indian English poetry must be the preponderant concern of the readers? Verily it sets the mytho-religious portrait of the Ganges upfront and dares to place the Sanskrit words in a poem in English. It goes well because English currently being a window language has the elasticity and room to absorb words from all other languages of the world. Sharma's Indian readers will take it as a duck takes to water because all these Sanskrit words are very well known in every Indian region.

Like Daruwalla, Sharma observes the realistic picture surrounding the Ganga. So he writes:

From Kolkata to Gangotri

Just one scene —  
 Poverty, squalor, dirt, sloth and melancholy.  
 Everyone is weeping bitterly.  
 Everyone is crying hoarsely.  
 Everyone is worried knowingly.

No one has a solution! (“Ganga Mata: A Prayer” 263-269)

The tone of these lines is quite different from that of Daruwalla’s ‘Vignettes’ where poverty and misery concerning the lepers and the blind have been the sole focus without any expression that passes understanding. If one understands the actual situation and the suffering arising there of, then only one can have a say as though one belongs to the same mass and does not take photographs as an outsider. That is the problem with Daruwalla whereas the present day poets like Sharma do share the sorrows about which they write. Therefore, he laments:

What is the use  
 Of my education —  
 This engineering  
 medicine  
 agriculture  
 law  
 mathematics  
 botany  
 physics  
 chemistry  
 literature  
 language  
 commerce  
 management

If I don’t have my *Visbnupadi*?

What is the use  
 Of my lovely house  
 refrigerator, wife  
 television, son  
 car, daughter  
 lawn, grandpa  
 book-shelf, father  
 furnace, niece  
 hearth, grandma  
 rolling mill, grand son  
 egg plant, uncle,

radiogram, aunt

If I don't have my *Punyashloka*? ("Ganga Mata: A Prayer" 199-227)

The nouns like "Vishnupadi" or "Punyashloka" used as synonyms of the Ganga are used here as symbols of the identities of the race, the nation and the country. Therefore, the lament of the poet as to what use will be all these modern day materials of an individual if the race, the nation, the country as a whole does not find a total prosperity.

Sharma is a part of the modern liberal India aiming at a higher economic growth but he is not ready to accept it at the cost of social degeneration. He therefore, points to a perfect social picture:

The daughter

Has not to return

To her father.

The mother

Has not to complain

About her son.

The wife

Has not to protest

About her progeny. ("Ganga Mata: A Prayer" 230-238)

However, everyday newspapers are full of the news stories contrary to the above stated ideal family picture.

The purpose of pin-pointing these aspects in Sharma's "Ganga Mata - A Prayer" is to reflect on the new generation poet's concern with present day society which is so different from that of the first generation poets like Daruwalla and Mehrotra. Sharma's concern is firmly based on his proper understanding of Indian culture and trying for an inclusive improvement not like a stranger's or an outsider's sooth sayings and shedding crocodile tears. The sages in the past sat on the banks of the Ganges to find answers for all their enquiries and metaphysical questions by meditating in silence. Herman Hesse in *Siddhartha* has written so many pages describing the flow of the river water being watched by the seeker who sits on and on silently finding ultimately the satisfactory answer. In another of his poem "Liberation at Varanasi" Sharma gives vent to the same feelings:

If I can just survive by meditation

If I can just survive by '*Shivoham*'.

It is a call to find answers

On the banks of the Ganges and

In thy narrow streets

That brings me to you, O Varanasi. ("Liberation at Varanasi" 53-58)

What is interesting to note is that all these poets have divided their poems into

sections. Daruwalla has divided his poems on the Ganga into two sections viz. “The Waterfront” and “Crossing of Rivers”. While the former is further divided into thirteen smaller poems (three under the title “Vignette”) the latter remains one long poem. Mehrotra divides his poem into four sections and has just numbered them. On the other hand Susheel’s poem stands as one long poem which has apparently does not have any sections. But if one reads his poem slowly one realises that the verses in praise of the river culled and quoted from the vast repository of Sanskrit serve as the dividing lines in the sections of the poem. After these verses in Sanskrit, which also serve as chorus on the banks of the holy river by the individuals and the groups, the tone and subject of description in the poem immediately undergoes a change. This technique serves a dual purpose: it is very useful in making the description realistic as the scenes of such prayers in Sanskrit being sung on the river front are a common sight; besides they serve to hint that river is an ever flowing river as no two *ghats* have the same Ganges though the water in the river may appear to be the same.

It is now pertinent to deal with our predilection with the tone of the poems set by Daruwalla, Mehrotra and Sharma - the three poets we have selected to compare with. Tone is considered as the soul of the poem. It is the inner voice engaging itself for the right communication in a sustained manner. It makes the attitude of the poet obvious. From the outward veneer of rhetoric and other such embellished arrangements put up in the poem, the reader peeps through to find out the poet, his voice, his tone, his attitude, his perception of the objects he describes, his sum total outlook towards the subject matter he deals with. Such an attitude which the poet fosters is usually covered by the position on which he stands, by his personality moulded by his religious moorings, by his familial upbringing and the social milieu. The three poets selected for comparison need to be assessed on these three factors that set the tone of their poems.

Born at Lahore in 1937 Daruwalla professes Zoroastrianism. The language in his home was Gujarati though his father was a professor of English. Daruwalla too completed his Post-Graduate degree course in English. As an IPS officer he also travelled widely. Initially Daruwalla admired Ezekiel’s for *A Time to Change* for bringing into play a modern sensibility and the way it confronts the disillusion of time. Like Ezekiel he also won Sahitya Akademi award in 1982. Like Ezekiel he too remained out and out an outsider. “Daruwalla’s *The Waterfront* sequence is another instance of an Indian English poet seeking reconciliation with a tradition from which he feels alienated and about which he is rationally sceptical” (King 8-9). Bruce King maintains, “The man-alone-in-a-hostile-world attitude, with its sense of opposition, cynicism and the ironies of life, found in the poetry of Daruwalla, has its affinities in American Literature, as does Daruwalla’s trust in the speaking voice. [Daruwalla has continued] to use traditional prosody and formal stanzaic shapes, the voice seems closer to the experience of the senses than in previous Indian poetry where there was often a distance between moral

reflection and actuality. There is also an openness, especially noticeable in the middle portions of the poems as if association were taking over from logic. Narrative becomes experience itself instead of an example in an argument.” (6) Daruwalla’s keenness to understand and absorb the age old tradition is discernible obviously from his series of poems on the Ganga that he wrote in “The Waterfront Section”. His tone and attitude is that of one investigator putting on the table the clues, the proofs for the media to acknowledge how much time he has spent patiently to keep the Ganga on watch and has methodically he is now going to present his case on the river through the images and metaphors, he has gathered through his feelings and sensory perception. But he is not sure how his case, that is, his series of poems on the Ganga, is going to be appreciated and accepted by the Jury Bench – the readers.

In case of A.K. Mehrotra it is found that despite his firm founding with the place and the river, he seems to make throwaway remarks about the Ganga. In doing so, he proves himself a spoilt one by not making proper use of the wealth of knowledge he had acquired. During 1960s his uncle was a Professor of English at the University of Allahabad (located in the town on the banks of the Ganges) which he also served as a Professor of English during the first decade of 21st century. He, of course, showed great promise as a poet of new generation with “increasing openness and immediacy noticeable in” (King 7) his first famous poem “Bharatmata: A Prayer”, but his willing adoption of western ideas ranging from French surrealism of the 1920s to his contemporary Beat and constructionist poetry written then in the USA in the 1960s made his poems a conscious assemblages of references in disorder. His means of control is to enclose the reader within the poem itself. In the “Song of Ganga” from *Nine Enclosures*, the same early tendency added with the influence from Ezra Pound and his American followers, is noticeable - the compressed metaphor, the wit and elegance in the lines that mark precision:

I make two lines in the sand  
And say they are unbreakable walls  
I make the four directions one  
I know the secret of walking  
I am the death of fire. (“Songs of the Ganga” III: 4-9)

In Mehrotra’s “Songs of Ganga” the language has lost its ability to express reality by imagination. In trying to construct Indian reality through his poems on Ganga, the poet only puzzles the readers by dragging them to be enclosed with a focus on the text rather than on myth, history, society or the traditional belief on the holy river.

What has never been lost with Mehrotra is his desire to be the part of the international avant-garde of 1960s, especially as represented by the San Francisco scene with its Beat poetry, counter culture and rebellion against conventional and traditional values. This adolescent “stick-your-tongue-out” attitude shows the poet to

be effective, promising, but faltering. Therefore the tone in “Songs of Ganga” is that of an adolescent’s playful buildingblocks which merely amuses the reader for the criss-cross reference and the ideas as in a jig saw puzzle or the maze (*Bhul-Bhuleya*) in Lucknow.

Susheel Kumar Sharma, on the other hand, though aware of the international literary trends, has not been an enthusiast like Mehrotra to write experimental poetry to bewilder the Indian/Western reader. Perhaps Mehrotra was eager to bring like Hanuman all the ‘isms’ from Europe and America for his otherwise ignorant/ not so well informed Indian readers. He too worked to acclimatize the readers with the imagist movement of Ezra Pound. But he failed to realise that a plant does not grow in every/ any soil. Even in Europe the life span of Imagism was of about a decade only; the climate of Indian literary tradition has always been in favour of vivid narratives. True to this heritage, Susheel Kumar Sharma has made a unique attempt to sing his song for Ganga in a long narrative by using the Sanskrit and English words together like the waters of two different rivers glide on at their confluence in Allahabad. It is now pertinent to mention what the reader receives from Sharma’s ‘Ganga Mata’: first of all the mythic lines from Puranic narratives, secondly the awareness about the sages and poets of the yore who have composed songs, *shlokas* and *mantras* on the Ganges, thirdly the modern day Indian reality, the poverty and the gradual degradation, fourthly the parody of urban middleclass lifestyle with a well built house furnished with all modern gadgets starting from a refrigerator to all that goes to provide a comfortable living, fifthly the middleclass mindset to go for degrees and diplomas for self-upliftment, sixthly the sham of the so-called welfare government constructing dams more with political motives than with actual motive to alleviate poverty.

Sharma’s tone is remorseful at the sight of these gradual deterioration though the Kumbha mela and all other religious rites and festivals associated with the Ganges go on and on. The poet addresses the Ganges as mother in so many names that have been enumerated in ‘Ganga Sahasra namah’ or the one thousand names given to this very river. All these make the attitude of Sharma quite clear that he is here as one who stands up and sings the glory of this sacred river that gave birth to Indian civilization and nourished India’s nationhood. This kind of faithful tone or attitude shown by Sharma for his readers is rather conspicuously missing in Daruwalla’s or Mehrotra’s poems for Daruwalla stands as a sceptic unable to assimilate fully into the Hindu ethos and on the other hand Mehrotra deliberately confuses the reader by imposing compressed ideas after being newly baptized by Ezra Pound and all other ‘isms’ of 1960s.

So far the assessment of these three poets has been made from the stand point of their attitudes towards the Ganges. The basis that forms Indian writing in English has been about Indian lives and conditions. Ezekiel had set the model; Ramanujan, Parthasarathi, Daruwalla, Mehrotra, Jayant Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Shiv K. Kumar

and others gave new dimensions to Indian poetry in English. But the former ones were alienated by their marginality and English education. In the mean time a new crop of poets has come down to this arena and they express a heightened awareness of actual Indian experience. In the present comparative study it is noticeable that Sharma (b. 1962) is quite younger to Daruwalla (b. 1937) and Mehrotra (b. 1947). The generation gap is obvious. In case of Daruwalla it is like Satyajit Ray's film showing every tit-bit and more so about the poverty and deprivation. But Satyajit Ray had pinned hope on the future and symbolically depicted it in the picturization of a glowing smile in the wide-eyed face of a poor girl looking at the passing of a train, at a distance, through the paddy fields in *Pather Panchali*. Perhaps Daruwalla was affected by the naturalism displayed in Albert Moravia's writings. Finding no worth in romanticizing or eulogizing an Indian situation, he thought it better to tear apart the veneer of seemingly quiet, orthodox, age-old foundation of Indian social life based on religious faith, charity and non-challant activities. On the other hand, Mehrotra, having exposure to western cults and new waves in poetry and literature at large, took to the course of basing his poems in a kind of surrealistic atmosphere juxtaposing the good and the bad, the faith and the faithless, the spiritual and the mundane together.

Sharma, a new generation poet having more exposure to post-colonial theories, times and practices, does not have to buy the western way of thinking or creating anything thereof. He has by his side vast literature of Sanskrit poetry that speaks volumes about the Ganges. His use of some from the one thousand Sanskrit names of the Ganges creates apt images reverberating right kind of feelings in the hearts of the Indian readers. Perhaps, Sharma writes for his immediate neighbour or at large for the pan Indian readers while Daruwalla and Mehrotra had western readers in mind. Both the latter poets were not sure about their art and were rather eager to be accepted by their western counterparts. It seems, Sharma is sure of his ground and displays his unstinting faith that his kind of poetry will forever flow like the Ganges nourishing the reader with the therapeutic water of his delightful poems on this sacred river.

### Notes

1. There are three versions of Susheel Sharma's "Ganga Mata – A Prayer" — two in electronic form in *Carty's Poetry Journal* (2011) and *ken\*again* (Fall 2012) respectively and one in print version in *The Door is Half Open* (2012). I have dealt here with the print version.

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## RELIGIOUS CENTRES OF ASSAMESE HINDU SOCIETY- A BRIEF STUDY

Dr. Lilabati choudhury

### Introduction

Religious centres play a great role in the propagation of sacred ideas. In Hindu society the importance of temples and other type of religious centres in this regard is paramount. During ancient and medieval periods, religious institutions were the centres of education and education was given by religious specialists. So religion and education were closely related. Moreover, religion induces man to lead a moral life and man also tries to mould his character according to those ideals which religion establishes. Generally, indirectly religion has educated man since ancient days.

In folk societies of Assamese villages, there are different forms of Hindu religious centres. In the traditional Assamese society these centres played multifarious roles. Even to-day, in rural societies religion is an important channel for transmission of education. They have imparted specially religious, cultural, social and moral education to the Assamese People. This resembles a pan- Indian pattern because in India, education developed as a part of religion and religious persons imparted education in their *gurukuls* and *ashrams* (Chaube and Chaube 1981 : 35). For their important educative roles they have occupied an important places in rural societies from the ancient period.

Temples (In the local context *mandir* and *devalay*) and *than* and *peeth* were the major religious centres in Assam before the emergence of neo-vaishnavism. After the emergence of vaishnavism *namghars* (prayer halls) and *satras* (vaishnava monasteries) became most important religious institutions. It is very important to observe how these different religious institutions interact and institutionalize a system of mass education. This system of popular education had close relation with religion in Assam. Because common people derived knowledge of different things from the activities of religious institutions which were necessary for their day to day life.

### Religious Centres of Assamese Hindu Society

Hindu religious centres of Assamese society are of several types. These are *mandir*, *Devalay*, *namghar*, *satra* and *than*. Besides *namghar* and *Satra*, which are central institutions

of medieval *Vaishnavism*, others can be of all kinds of sectarian affiliations. Mandir is a Hindu temple with distinct physical structure largely pan Indian in character with regional variations where elaborate worship is performed. A *devalay* cannot be easily distinguished from a *mandir*, as people say, but practice of regular worship and no rigid architectural pattern is a feature of it although its structure is often identical with a *mandir*. In many instances terms are interchangeably used, No attempt has been made to elicit the difference at the folk level. *Than* is a religious centre which cover broad ranges of religious centres, from a shrine of folk deity to almost formalized *devalay* to shrines created in memory of different vaishnava preachers. As Sarma notes (1966:101) in the context of Assamese society the word *than* carries different meanings, “Although the word *than* is used loosely to mean any place of public worship, it has a special connotation amongst the vaishnavite circle. The places where the principal apostles of Assamese vaishnavism worked and died and where some of their relics have been preserved are called *than* (skt. *Sthana*). Therefore, those *satra* which have been preserving some relics of the early saints are called *than*. In *Kala Samhati*, the places of cremation of religious heads are also called *than* or *agnithan* by the disciples”. When any of above centres rise in fame then the word *peeth* becomes applicable for them.

Three major sects of Hinduism-Saivism, Saktivism and Vaishnavism flourished in Assam in between the ninth century and tenth century (Neog 1985: 3-4). As mentioned above religious centres of Assam can be classified according to these three types of affiliations. For an approximate estimation of the nature of impact of three sects of Hinduism in Assamese society, sample of the religious centres mentioned in *Pabitra Asom* (A book, Based on the Survey of Religious centres of Assam) are classified below. In this survey *namghar* has not been included because it is found in almost every hamlets of Assam. Other wise, the sample is representative of the universe (Table-1). The table shows that vaishnava *satras* and *mandirs* outnumber religious centres of the other sects.

**Table -1** : Sactarian affiliation of different Hindu religious centres of Assam

District	Saiva	Sakta*	Vaishnava	Others
Uttar Lakhimpur	0	12	24	3
Dibrugarh	3	3	14	1
Sibsagar	11	7	59	4
Jorhat	1	3	10	
Golaghat	2	3	50	
Uttar Cachar & Karbi Anglong	0	4		
Nagaon	21	13	159	6
Tezpur	18	8	48	11
Mangaldoi	5	9	21	5
Kamrup	21	45	200	14
Goalpara	14	21	40	1

\*Mandirs of Lord Ganesh has also been included in the category.

### **The Influence of Saivism in Assam**

In the Hindu religion there are three principal Gods namely Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar (Siva). Siva is the God, bestower of good blessings and he becomes satisfied with a nominal worship. On the other hand, he is also called Rudra the creator of Hail-storm, cyclone, falling of bajra and epidemic. To get relief from all such calamities and destruction people offer worship to God Siva. Those who worship Siva are as Saiva. However, in Assam the sect has nowadays merged with other. According to them he is the creator of the universe. Saivism is prevalent in Assam from ancient times. In Kalika Purana and Yogeni Tantra it had been mentioned that several places in Assam became holy centres due to worship of God Siva and there still exist many Siva temples in Darrang and Kamrup District (Sarma: 1966:3-4). Even now the Siva Douls or temples which were constructed during the seventh/eight century with the support of Ahom Kings gives evidence of the existence of Saiva *dharma* since early period. Siva puja is performed on "Siva Linga" (phallic symbol). Kiratas who were the ancient inhabitants of old Kamrupa were the followers of Siva and worshipped him. In this connection name of King Bana can be mentioned.

Till today many people perform Siva puja on the Krishna Chaturdasi tithi (14<sup>th</sup> lunar day of the dark half of a month) of Falguna (Feb.-March) of the year. Many people observe this day as Sivaratri Vrata. There are Siva temples as Sukreswar, Baneswar, Umananda in Guahati and those are presumed to be of the Mahabharata era. In the Siva temples besides daily worship, festivals and ceremonies are held on some auspicious days during the year. Sivaratri, worship of pushyabhisek<sup>1</sup> and Trinath<sup>2</sup> are the main festivals of Saiva sect in Assamese society.

### **The Influence of Sakti Cult in Assam:**

Coming down from time immemorial, Assam or ancient Kamrup is being recognised as a centre of Tantra-Mantra and Saktism. It is seen that there are differences of opinion among different scholars about the origin of Sakta *dharma* or of Devi puja in Kamrupa. Yet some of them opined that the birth place of Sakta *dharma* is eastern India specially Assam and Bengal (Sarma 1978:171 and Neog 1960:23).

According to Kalika Purana, King Narakasura was the first originator of Devi puja in ancient Kamrupa. Besides Kalika Purana mentions that Devi Puja in ancient Kamrupa is described in Shastras like Devi Purana and Yogini Tantra. Kalika Purana (58,42) and Yogini Tantra ( Uttorardha 6,151) mentions that "Anyatra Birala Devi Kamrupe grihe grihe" (which means although worship of Devi is rare in other places yet Devi stays in every house in Kamrupa) (Neog 1960:22).

From the historical points of view, it is seen that the sakti puja was prevalent during the period of Banamali Barman (9<sup>th</sup> century) and Indrapala (11<sup>th</sup> century). Besides,

since the sixteenth century with the support of Koch Kings and Ahom Kings, the sakta religion flourished. Since ancient time, Kamakhya temple is being regarded as the centre of the Sakti-Puja and such Sakti-Puja is also found today (Neog 1960:23 and Sarma 1978:171).

Generally Saktism means the worship of the Sakti (feminine energy) in her different manifestations. Sakti signifies Devi Mohamaya (Parama Sakti) Durga who holds the Biswa-Brahmanda. Hence those who worship Durga are called Sakta. The main worshipping centres of Durga Devi within Dakshin Kamrup area are Kamakhya, Bhuvanewari, Chandika, Bagheswari, Tiamara than and Patgaon Durga Mandir. Kamakhya temple is known as “Joni Peeth” and it is a most holy place. Elaborate descriptions about Kamakhya are found in “Kalika Purana”.

The Saktas established some temples even on the peak of mountains and in impenetrable forest for spreading Hindu religion and culture among the original inhabitants and tribal people.

Among the Sakta festivals Durga puja, Kali Puja, jagaddhattri Puja, Basanti Puja are widely observed. Besides ceremonies like ambuvaci, Kumari puja celebrated in Kamakhya are worth mentioning.

Except Kamakhya adoration of Sakti is practiced at Ugratara, Bhuvanewari, Chandika, Joydurga, Byaghreswari of Kamrup. Besides Tamreshari mandir of Dibrugarh, Hatimuria Mandir of Nogaon are the famous temples of Assam. Here it may also be mentioned that the Devi Puja in Kamrup was in such extensive manner that the Vaishnavites also began to adore Durga as Vaishnavi-sakti among them.

In the temples occasionally various sessions of recitation of scriptures, singing of devotional songs and performance of dances are held. These provides channels for mass education. Siva Puja is the root cause of the outcome of dramatic performances in India. Nritya and Geet are performed daily in some temples in Assam for satisfaction of deities (Barua 1963:138-139).

Very old dramatic forms like *Oja-Pali* which is also prevalent in the contemporary society are often performed in the temple. Common people were educated about the fame and distinction of the Gods and Goddesses by the performance of *Oja-Pali* in the temple and other places (Sarma 1991:4). The real picture of the Assamese society was exposed clearly before the audience in the art of narrating divine power of the God and Goddesses.

Besides with the help of puppet dance, various descriptions and religious stories were exhibited in the courtyard of temples which disseminate knowledge for the common people and such practices is in current even now.

1. Pushyabhisek: It is celebrated at Kamakhya during the month of Paush (Dec.-Jan). It is celebration of marriage ceremony between Hara (Mahadeva) and Gauri (Uma). Hundreds of people from different parts throng to this holy place for witnessing the functions.
2. Trinathar puja : it is a function of worshipping of Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Preserver) and Siva (Who gives shelter to all after destruction) together at a time.

Temples were part of all India network of Hinduism and paved the way of filtering down of the ideas and knowledge of the wider society. On the other hand, such temples served the purposes of educational institutions. In ancient period, gurus gave training to their *sisyas* in the courtyard of the temple, but now such system is obsolete. In temples, the *sisyas* got religious, moral, social, cultural and educational training from their gurus. They gained different knowledges about different conditions to adjust themselves at different times. Also at the present time, the temples offer facilities to the ignorant people to know many unknown matters, and priests offer spiritual teachings to different people.

Over and above many pilgrims arrive at those places during different festivals. Besides regular worship or oblations at the maths, peeths, sacred places and temples, the system of worship and offering homage to the deities by the village people for getting protection from diseases, to have good blessings for a marriage and to secure success of desires are very common in Assamese society since ancient time.

From above discussion, it can be said that activities in temples are not confined only to performance of worship, festival and sacrifices; but also they made long term contribution in different spheres of life. Temples preserve social amity and integrity, help in moral education give a purpose of life and ideal of good life.

### **Vaishnava Centres:**

Since the ancient time the Vaishnava religion was practiced in Assam along with Saiva and sakta dharma. Barganga Lipi of Maharaja Bhuti Barman, Harsa-charit of Banabhatta, Puspabhadra Lipi of Raja Dharmapal (12<sup>th</sup> century), Anantasayee Bishnumurti of Aswaklanta (12<sup>th</sup> century ) show continuity and ancientness of Vaishnavism in the region. During ancient period Vishnu was worshipped in a pancharatra system (i.e. worship with offering milk, fish, meat etc.). There was a synthesis of Vaishnavism and Tantricism. The Vaishnava *dharmā* which adopted the Tantric process is termed as Tantric Vaishnava *dharmā* (Sarma 1978 :174 and Neog 1960:25)

In Assam, the *Ek-Saraniya nam dharmā* or Mahapurusia *dharmā* of Sankardeva which emerged during the fifteenth-sixteenth century is known widely as Vaishnava *dharmā* (Barua 1960:92). In scholarly discourse Sankardeva's Vaishnavism is known as neo-vaishnavism because there was Vaishnava practices in the society before the *bhakti* movement. To introduce such *dharmā* Sankardeva gave sole emphasis on the recitation or chanting of holy names of God, as the procedure of devotion and rejected ritualistic Hinduism. In performing worship, however, a sacred book specially the Bhagavat, Purana or any section of it is placed on a *thagi* (pedestal), on a raised or elevated spot of ground thus forming what is called thapana or *guru-asana* and homage to paid by recitation of the name of God from the holy texts. Gurujana laid more emphasis on the application of morality against formality in the day to day life. In this religious system devotees maintain

direct communion with the Lord without the intermediary's help. It is divorced of the system of devotion by proxy. He prescribed a very simple mode of religious worship which is absolutely free from ritualistic complexities and is simple, liberal, tolerant and easiest way of attaining God. In this *dharmā* all people are equal and all people of a village together pray God. However, in later period various changes took place.

In different parts of Assam, neo-vaishnava religion began and *namghars* and *satras* were established for meeting collectively to offer prayer and hold discussion about the religion and other matters. This *dharmā* changed the social life of people of Assam and Kamrupa (Neog 1960:26)

Majority of the people of Assam are the followers of Vaishnava *dharmā*. Specially this *dharmā* has become more popular during this modern age in Assam.

Namghar is a prayerhall of a Vaishnava village. *Gosaighar* which is constructed by *raij* (people) for offering daily collective prayer and also used as public hall for various puposes. Villagers adopt the "haj" (rendering of collective labour) system to construct such *namghar* or *gosaighar*.

The physical structure of *namghar* generally contains two and some time three or four parts, such as –*batchara, choughar, namghar* and *manikut*. But there are some *namghars* which does not posses *batchara* but they have small flat roof instead and such small flat roof is called "*Dhekeri chali*" (Barua 1961:141)

*Namghars* which were set up as central religious institutions of villages contributed to a large extent towards spread of intellectual and cultural activities in the village and in the course of time became nerve centres of the village came to co-ordinate all the aspects of social, economical and political life of the Assamese people.

Generally the primary function of the *namghar* is the daily prayer of hymnsinging. In this institution the main functionary is the *pathak* (who recites religious text). *Pathaks* regularly perform daily *namprasanga* and also fourteen *prasangas* accompanied by claps or instruments of the devotee. The word *prasanga* which here literally means about God, is acts of devotion towards God, The *Pathak* start the prayer so that the others follow him. Of course, on special occations musical aspects are more prominent (Goswami 1983:135).

Barua (1960:108) says that "not only through daily *prasangas* and *nam-kirtans* but through celebrations of regularly recurring festivals followed the year around, the *namghars* create religious enthusiasm among all ages and sexes of the people, and become the main centre of attractions and cultural activities".

Namghar has also been serving as the village public-hall and collective functions are generally held there. Congregational chantings of prayers on all important occasions, religious recitations and dramatic performances known as *bhaona* are also held in the *namghar*. Although the *bhaona* has created only for propagation of religion but almost it is used as a mediator of mass education (Barua 1963: 140).

Besides the *namghars* serve as panchayat hall or *mel*, the greater problems of life, philosophy and religion are also discussed and debated here and many day to day problems are solved (Goswami 1983: 136).

*Namghar* is the museum of national culture of the Assamese. *Namghar* is the national theatre house. It is theatre house which helps the people to preserve the social equality among the Assamese Hindu people Barua 1963: 141)

Besides the *oja-pali* group which narrates scriptural stories to the accompaniment of dance and gestures is performed in *namghars* and all performances of religious plays are arranged in the *namghar* (Goswami 1983-136).

On the other hand the *namghar* develops a dramatic out-look among the people. All people are selected for different services to *namghar* by this system. As devotional songs, dances, dramas and art are performed and cultivated in *namghars*, it can be said that *namghar* is the central institution of art of the Assamese people (Barua 1963:141).

Evidently the *namghar* have been playing religious, moral, judicial, cultural and social role in the Assamese Hindu society from the ancient period (Goswami 1983: 139). Therefore, *namghar* is a very useful institution which constantly reinforces good conduct, ethics, morals and cleanliness and personal hygiene to carry on the daily life of the villagers (Barua 1960:109).

*Satra* is another important institution in the Assamese society They have been doing some important functions which helps every people in day to day life. *Satra* has been enriching the Assamese life morally, socially and educationally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art (Sarma 1966: 154)

The word *Satra* is derived from the Sanskrit word “*Sattra*”. In Sanskrit the meaning of *Sattra* is a “*dirghadiniya jaynga*” and the holy place for distributing “*anna-jal*” etc. In course of time the meaning “*Jayanga*” disappeared and began to be called *Satra* instead of *Sattra* in Assamese (Sarma 1966: 103 and Sarma 1978:215).

Evidently it can not be ascertained how much old this word *Satra* is in Assam, the central place of preaching vaishnava *dharmā*. In this way Bhattadeva gives one definition of the word *satra*<sup>3</sup>. He said that *satras* are a place where in discussions by devotees relating to glory of the God, which are pleasant to God Himself are held through practice of *Nabadba Bhakti* i.e., *Sravan*, *Kirtan*, *Smarana*, *Vishnu-Padaseoun*, *Archana*, *Bandana*, *Dashya*, *Sakhitya* and *Atmanebedan*, etc. (Barua 1980:36).

Generally *satras* have huge establishments, departments and a great number of structures. A *satra* consists of *karapat*, *namghar* or *kirtanghar* or *manikut*, *hati* and *satradhikar*'s or *mahanta*'s residence. Generally each *satra* has four *karapat*, gateways and in the midst stands the *namghar* which is the main prayer hall for all people. *Manikut* is a small building in which *singh-asana* or *thapana* is placed and the sacred *puthi* Bhagavat-purana is placed on *thapana*, that is the main object of worship of *satra*. Around the

*thapana* there are many sacred objects. The *hatis* are group of huts placed on the *satras* compound in which monks live (Barua 1960: 102).

It is also a place of residence of the devotees. Therefore, *satra* is a seat of religious learning and a residential school. The *bhakts* generally live here under the guardianship of *satradhikar* who is mostly responsible for *bhaktas* welfare and specially progress. Besides these education, *bhakts* are engaged in the learning of arts and crafts. Through the *gayan* and *bayan* the vocal and instrumental education are given of the monks. Besides various forms of dance are taught to the young pupil monks. Many monks try to cultivate and enrich Assamese literature with their important contributions (Barua 1960: 105-106).

Assamese people accept *satra* as a sacred place. The word *satra* is used in various forms in Kamrup District such as *satsangi*, *Satra* or *math* and *satsanga* or *sacang* etc. It can be said that such institutions originated and established during last part of Ahom reign and most of them were supported during the reign of Sargadeo Siva Singha (Neog 1960:34).

The *satra* follows two main religious rites. These are *nitya* and *naimitikka* (Sarma 1966:119). The *nitya* rite includes daily *prasangas*. The number of *prasangas* are different in different *satra*. Generally fourteen *prasangas* are performed in Mahapurusia *satras* and twelve *prasangas* are performed in Damodaria *satra*. These fourteen and twelve *prasangas* are divided in three times at a day namely: *pua*, *beoli* and *rattri*. Every time it includes different *prasangas* (Chutia 1985: 1-191) (Table 2).

Time	Prasangas
Pua	Puargeet, Puarbhatima, Puarnamkirtan, Puarbhagavat or Geetapath, Puarpath or Upadesh.
Beoli	Beolirpath, Beolirnamkirtan, Beolirbhagavat or Geetapath.
Rattri	Rattirgunamala, Rattirleelamala, Rattirbhatima, Rattirgeet or Seuakirtan, Rattirnamkirtan and Bayakirtan, Rattirpath or Upadesh.

Table-2: List of Fourteen Prasangas

3. "Jatrasaranti Sadadharman Kayala Bhagavatpriya Nabadha Bhagavati-Bhakti Pratyabong Jatra wartate. Tat-Satramutamong khetrang Vishnavang Surabanditam Tattratha Vaishnava sarbe Harinam Parayana (Neog 1960:206).

Generally all rites are not followed by all *satras*. Specially in the *grebee satra* it is followed, only occasionally (Sarma 1991: 24).

The *naimitikka* rites include Janmastami, Rasyattra, Phalgutsab, Jhulanyattra, Rathyattra, etc. (Sarma 1966: 131). Besides these festivals, *satras* celebrate the death anniversary of Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Damodardeva and other Burha Atar *tithies*.

The initiation system is another important rite of *satra*. The initiation rite is called *sarana* which is performed with in the *satra* campus. “*sarana* marks the formal entry of a person into the vaishnavite order” i.e., the first stage of initiation. The second stage of initiation is called *bhajana*. *Bhgana* means devotee is recognised as a confirmed devotee by laying bare before *satradhikar* (*ibid*: 120). These rites help the people to lead their life properly.

*Satras* brought together various communities of Assam. Barua (1960:110) says “one other notable contribution of the *Satras* is their works towards the uplift and betterment of the backward classes and the bordering tribes of Assam. Sankardeva, from the very beginning of his missionary career led crusade against caste exclusiveness, untouchability, for a recognised equality of all men irrespective of caste or character in the eyes of God, and exhibited deep sympathy for the lower castes and downtrodden classes. He again and again emphasised on the Bhagavatas saying that even a candala is purged of the impurity of his caste by firm devotion of God; and sincere faith and devotion alone can uplift the soul to eternal communion with God.”

*satras* through various devotional activities and artistic performances create a cultivated mentality of the people. One other notable contribution of the *satras* is that they make earnest efforts to familiarise people with liturgical and religious texts (*ibid*: 108). The *satra* tries to give practical knowledge to the people for everyday living. Through the *bhaona* performance *satras* give some direct Knowledge to the common people and encourage to learn dance, song and different performing arts.

Thus, *satras* have been making contributions to the Assamese people from the sixteenth century. They play a considerable role in the society for the all round development of the people.

From the above discussions, it can be said that the *mandirs*, *namghars*, *satras* and *thans* occupy important position in Assamese Hindu society. These centres are carrying a long tradition of Assamese Hindu society. Over and above they have helped in a special manner particularly in the case of moral and spiritual development, to establish affection for the fellowmen and to bring national and cultural unity.

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## POETRY OF AHMAD ZAKI ABU SHADI : AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

Abdus Salam

### Introduction:

Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi is considered to be one of the most prominent figures of Arabic literature in respect of romanticism and free verse as well as blank verse. He was a remarkable poet from Egypt. He also occupied a unique place among the North American Mahjar poets. He was the founder of Apollo movement which tried to revive the Arabic poetry from cage of classicism. He was born on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1892. His father Muhammad Bek Abu Shadi was a renowned lawyer and was a head of the Egyptian Bar Association, who published several collections of poems and also conducted a literary *salon* (*a small place of literary discussion*) on Thursday night at their home in Cairo. Abu Shadi's mother Amina Nagib, the daughter of Mustafa Nagib came from a Turkish literary family, who was a poetess. Thus Abu Shadi grew up in a literary environment. He took his primary and secondary education from '*al-Tawfiqiyya*' in Cairo in between 1905-1909. After that he was send to the medical school '*Madrasa al-Tibb*', but for some emotional troubles at home which forced him to go abroad where he travelled for a year. Then he went to England in 1912, where he lived for ten years and continued his medical studies at the University of London. He obtained a diploma in bacteriology in London in 1915. He also studied beekeeping and founded 'The Apis Club' in Benson in 1919, Oxford shire, launched and edited its periodical *The Bee World*, which was later edited by Annie D. Betts and then by Dr. Eva Crane.

In 1920 Abu Shadi married Anna Bamford of Stalybridge, a descendent of Samuel Bamford the Lancashire poet, author and labor organizer. In 1922 he returned with his English wife to Egypt, and almost immediately he got his literary and social activities. In fact he saw himself as an ambassador of Anglo-Egyptian relations. Thereafter Shadi went to work for short duration in various laboratories and also took up residence at Benson near oxford, where he became the managing director of an apiary. As a bacteriologist Abu Shadi worked in Cairo, Suez, Port-Said, Alexandria and Cairo and again in Alexandria. He published the magazine *Adabi* (My Literature) in Alexandria from 1939. When the second Egyptian University was founded in Alexandria in 1942,

he was appointed to the Chair of Bacteriologist and made Vice Dean of the medical faculty.

Thereafter Shadi moved to the USA in April 1946, where he established a society called '*Minerva*' as well as a magazine '*al-Huda*' (Guide) and '*al-Imam*' (The Leader). Shadi was interested in painting, who kept a studio in New York and on 10<sup>th</sup> December in 1952, an exhibition of his oil paintings was opened in New York, which lasted till 20<sup>th</sup> December. After settling in New York, he edited newspapers and magazines of the Arab community in New York and was a Professor of Arabic literature at an Asiatic Institute. Abu Shadi also worked for the Voice of America and produced radio broadcasts in Arabic. He was not only a Honorary Fellow of the American Medical Association and member of many medical, scientific, and literary organizations in multiple countries but also a member of the Board of Directors of the International League for the Rights of Man and the World Parliament of Religions.

#### **Literary contribution of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi:**

The Egyptian poet Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi had a delightful contribution in the literary world of Modern Arabic Literature, especially in the field of Modern Arabic Poetry. He composed a large number of books in various fields, such as: poetry, operas and plays, essays, and also translated several books from English to Arabic, similarly from Arabic to English. Few of Abu Shadi's literary works are given bellow:

- i) Dew Drops of Dawn, 1910
- ii) The Weeping Down, 1927
- iii) Rays and Shadows, 1931
- iv) The Torch, 1932
- v) Spring Phantoms, 1933
- vi) On the Torrent, 1935
- vii) From the Heavens, 1949 etc.

#### **Poetry of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi:**

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a new and revolutionary stage in the history of Arabic poetry. Many poets, even the best neo-classical representatives tried to find new media and to introduce some techniques, themes, ideas and forms from European poetry. But in many cases they did not know how to do this or from where to start. Thus many poets were deeply involved in continuous endeavours to find a suitable medium, generally through direct imitation of Western forms and themes.

Romanticism was to spread very fast indeed in Arabic poetry, shaping to works of an unusually large number of gifted poets who were active particularly during the inter-war period i.e. from 1919-1945. Mention may be made of few outstanding writers and poets namely: Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi, Ibrahim Naji and Ali Muhmud Taha in Egypt,

Ilyas Abu Shabaka in Lebanon, Umar Abu Risha in Syria, Al-Shabbi in Tunisia, and Yusuf Bashir al-T'iani in the Sudan in the USA: Gibran Khalil Gibran, Nasib Arida, Mikhail Nuaima and Iliya Abu Madi and in South America: Rashid al-Khuri, Ilyas Farhat and Fawzi al-Maluf. Their works are marked by a great lyricism and spontaneity, simple and evocative language, subjective feelings, a sense of mystery and wonder, reverence for nature and life in general.

Among the above mentioned great writers and poets Ahmad Zaki abu Shadi was one of the major literary figures to rise to fame in the twenties and thirties in Egypt. He is regarded as a pioneer and innovator in modern Arabic Poetry.<sup>1</sup> The North American Mahjar Romantic poet left no stone unturned in developing and modernizing the Arabic Literature either as an Egyptian or North American Mahjar poet.

During his lifetime, Abu Shadi's poetic contribution was the object of praise and as well as a matter of criticism in the field of Modern Arabic Literature. From his earlier days Abu Shadi was a prolific writer and the high priest of the Romantic Movement in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> His lasting contribution was to the development of romantic poetry both in his own work and his work inspired and encouraged others; he also played to the full traditional role of the poet in the cultural milieu.

Shadi has a keen interest in English literature, so he studied the same, especially in the field of Romanticism, as it clearly shown in his two collections of articles, *Echoes of Life* (covering the years 1910-25) and *The Field of Literature* (1926-8). He admitted his great debt to Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Heine. His mastery of the English language reveals itself in the number of quite competent poems he composed in it. In the meantime, he retained his deep interest in Arabic literature, writing poems and articles which he continued to contribute to Egyptian papers and reviews while he was away. His contribution to Arabic literature was in two ways:

- i) By his own valuable works
- ii) By establishing the important contribution towards the development of romantic as well as based on nature.

It may be mentioned here that, in the field of Arabic poetry Abu Shadi's experiments along with Al-Zahawi and Al-Shukri are significant because at first they tried to reflect a real and persistent search among early twentieth century Arab poets for a change of form and secondly because they were the beginning of a series of continuous experiments aiming to change the traditional pattern of Arabic poetry. Abu Shadi did research on Arabic poetics and wrote articles of literary criticism. He translated Eastern and Western European poets, including the ghazals of Hafiz, the Rubâiyât of Omar Khayyam, and the tragedies of W. Shakespeare.

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<sup>1</sup>. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, "Trends and Movements In Modern Arabic Poetry", Vol.2, pp-370

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid, pp-370-371

Apart from establishing Apollo society and editing the review, he was the author of about 19 collections of verses, several scripts, a number of translations and literary studies as well.

As early as 1908, the first volume of *Qatra min Yara fi'l Adab wa'l Ijtima* was published, followed by the second volume in 1909. This was a collection of early poems and critical essays. He also published several long poems separately, and left four more unpublished diwans which he wrote during the last year of his life.<sup>3</sup>

Not less than five diwans of Abu Shadi appeared in between 1931-1935. Many of his diwans are much more romantic than collections of poetry and also containing numerous articles and critical commentary on poetry, literature and a wide range of cultural topics in which the fine arts were usually accorded a prominent discussion, to the extent that some of his diwans look more like literary and cultural review than volumes of poetry. Few of Shadi's diwan also present a similar mixture of romantic poetry of considerable quality and originality which is often almost lost amidst numerous passages of verse journalism which are no more felicitous than they had been when produced by Ahmad Shawqi or Hafiz Ibrahim.

The themes of most of his diwans are from classical mythology, biblical stories, ancient Egyptian motives, western art as well as a certain number of contemporary Egyptian paintings. Besides these, the nude female form was one of the most popular subjects of the above illustrations, which are being presented with a frequency and frankness that were astonishing for the time and context.

Abu Shadi provides poems on the subjects treated in the canvasses. Among the poetic collections of Abu Shadi, '*Anda al-Fajr*' (Dew Drops of Dawn) was his first and major Diwan, which was published in 1910 and reprinted in 1934 with some later additions which were not included in the first edition. Between this diwan and the last, '*Min al-Sama*' (From the Sky/Heavens), published in New York in 1949, he issued at least fifteen diwans some of which were collections of selected poems. It is the fact that Abu Shadi's real poetic production was started with *Zaynab* which was published after his return from England. The collection was written in lyrical although sometimes rather formal tone.

One of his most important collections is '*Al-Shafaq al-Baki*' (The Weeping Dawn, 1927), again edited by Giddawi. The size of this volume is bulky containing some 1336 pages, which include several articles by Shadi, all manner of subjects, such as literature, art, social problems, science and religion, occasional poems, romantic as well as love poetry and at last but not the least poems on blank verse. Besides these it contains a number of literary essays and translations, sometimes the original text is printed along with the translation. In this anthology he also praised Mahjari poetry as

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<sup>3</sup>SalmaKhadra Jayyusi, Trends and Movements In Modern Arabic Poetry, Vol.2, pp-371

well as the Lebanese poets in North America as examples of brotherhood and co-operation in literary fields which Egyptian poets should follow.

On the other hand, Shadi's collection *Misriyyat* (Poems on Egypt) was published in 1924. In this collection a large number of poems are dedicated to Sa'd Zaghlul, who was then the leader of the *Wafd* party and also addressed to a wider public. He embodied finer ideals than other contemporary poets of his native land Egypt, whose culture and vision were far wider and less subjective.

His another collection *Ashi'a wa Zilal* (Rays and Shadows, 1931) was an interesting one, because it is full of reproductions of paintings and most of them European and some by Egyptian contemporaries.

Moreover, he produced three volumes in English, two of which were published in 1953 under the title, 'The Songs of Nothingness' and 'Songs of Happiness and Sorrow', while 'Songs of Love' was not published. Despite the huge number of poems and books he left, the majority of his writings remained unread except by specialists.<sup>4</sup>

After an in-depth study of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi's poetry, we find different features which are as follows:

- i) Abu Shadi's poetic works reflects the romantic use of nature as a mirror of man's alienation and an image of his search for self i.e. himself as a poet. In symbolic and idealistic poems, he preserved the Arabic tradition by using formal language yet creating rhythmical innovations in free verse. In a Qasida, which known to all is the most common Arab verse form, titled 'The New', Shadi introduced the new poet who refuses the classical tradition of fitting the words to the rules and initiates a trend where the poet frees his rhyme scheme as part of an awareness of nature.
- ii) Abu Shadi opened the path to self-recognition through questioning nature and the world around him. Yet the nature Abu Shadi invokes is described only in abstract, non-realistic terms.<sup>5</sup>
- iii) Shadi has the credit of poems of high order which are free from faults and characterized by deep passion and purity in style. His poem 'The melody of the orange tree' shows the obvious romantic slant, which was written in rhyming couplets. That reflects the new romantic sentiment as well as attitude. He was the worshiper of beauty in nature to which he prays in the manner of mystic and the custodian of his peoples glorious past.

Abu Shadi's first major *diwan*, entitled '*Anda al-fajr*' as mentioned earlier was published as early as in 1910. It was reprinted with some later additions in 1934, which were not included in the first edition. The dedication to this

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<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Akyeampong, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Dictionary of African Biography. Vol-1, pp-131

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp-351

second edition is to the mysterious woman Zaynab who became the *leitmotiv* of much of his later poetry.

- iv) Some of the amatory verse by Abu Shadi certainly contains powerful erotic overtones, much of his love poetry published in the 1920's in the collections *Zaynab* (1924), and *Al-Shafaq al-Baki* (1926-27), shows a tendency to produce the idealized, almost disembodied images of womankind, which were becoming typical of the female ideal in the new Romantic imagination.

One can observe similarly ethereal visions of women in many of the statuettes produced by Mahmud Mukhtar in the 1920's and which are on display in his museum in Cairo; some of the more notable examples are *ila 'l-Nahr*, *Munajat*, *'ala difaf Al-Nil*, and *Fellaha*. These are remote Madonna-type figures whose effect is anything but erotic. They are the three dimensional versions of the nude goddess figures which illustrate many of the series of *diwans* by Abu Shadi, usually depicting personalities or events from Ancient Greek or Egyptian mythology. The sculpture of Mukhtar and the love poems of 'Abd Al-Rahman Shukri and Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi created idealized and platonic representations of female figures, emphasizing the fact that relations between the sexes prior to marriage had more to do with flights of the imagination than with any tangible physical contact. Romantic love is played out in the realms of fantasy both blissful and anguished. Thus Abu Shadi composed the poem 'Oh My God' in which it is clear that the object of his adoration is a woman, but a woman who has a divine, unattainable quality which makes it impossible for him to gain her in his life.<sup>6</sup>

In 1949, Shadi's diwan, *Min al-Sama*' appeared and published in New York. The poetic Society of America honored the appearance of this diwan and its poet in a great celebration held at the Waldorf Astoria in New York on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1950 to which poets and men of letters (both Arab and American) were invited, as well as eminent Orientalists and members of the Arab diplomatic corps in the United States.

*Min al-Sama*' comprised his poetry from 1942 to 1949. Between 1949 and 1955, Shadi wrote enough poetry to fill four big diwans, which he prepared personally for publication, giving them the titles of *al-Insan al-Jadid*, *al-Nayruz al-Hurr*, *Anashid al-Hayat* and *Izis*.<sup>7</sup>

By 1955, the year of his death, he had already prepared four volumes for the print, which in probability had not yet been published, although some of their contents were included in M. A. Khafaja's book on the poet. This list may give an idea of the amazing output of this highly productive man, to say nothing of his translations from English poetry, including his translation of *The Tempest*, from Umar al-Khayyam or Hafiz of Shiraz, or of his literary and critical studies, of which three volumes appeared posthumously: *Islamic Studies*, *Literary Studies*, and *Contemporary Arab Poets*, or of his

<sup>6</sup> Shadi, A.Z.A., *Zaynab*, pp. 38-40

<sup>7</sup> Jayyusi, S.K., *A Short Account of Abu Shadi's Life in the United States*, pp-39

countless scientific publications or of his excursions into painting which resulted in an exhibition of his paintings held in New York shortly before his death.

### Conclusion:

By above discussion statement may be made that Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi's name will always be associated with romantic Style of Arabic Poetry which flourished primarily in Egypt in the decades between the two world Wars and also with the name Apollo, which was the title both of the literary journal which he founded and edited in 1932, to improve and promote the cause of literature and to help and increase cooperation between Arab writers both beside and outside Egypt.

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## WOMEN AS 'OTHER' IN INDIRA GOSWAMI'S *THE MOTH-EATEN HOWDAH OF A TUSKER* AND ISABEL ALLENDE'S *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*

Satya Nath Pegu

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### Abstract:

Throughout history, women are marginalized and oppressed by the patriarchal ideology. They are often regarded as an inferior being in which they are deprived of their rights. They have been socially, politically and economically neglected. The reasons behind these are the rigid conventions of tradition, custom, culture, religious beliefs and practices. However, in the twentieth century with the deep impact of education, technology and modernization, women are able to recognize the difference that has been the construction of male chauvinism. Women's issues are represented through their writings and they at present oppose the male dominated literature which ignores women's potentialities. Keeping in this mind, in the contemporary period, women writers critically respond to the binary opposition of 'self' and 'other', and represents women issues through distinct themes and techniques. Indira Goswami's, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* (2004) highlights the discrimination of widows and unmarried women in the 'sattrā', a vaishnavite monastery in Assam. Women are victimized with the strict patriarchal, religion and social norms. Set in the post-independence period, it also presents the transition of socio-political set up during the period. Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982) portrays the traumatized experiences of del Valle-Trueba women against the patriarchal tyranny of men. In the novel, Allende bring out the resistance of women in reconstructing their history and identity during the boom period of 1960s and 1970s. The focus of the paper is the comparative analysis of the two writers.

**Key Words:** Discrimination, Marginalization, Patriarchal, Self and Other

### Introduction

Throughout history and across cultures women have been treated as inferior to men. Due to male chauvinism, women received no recognition as rational individuals

from male counterparts. They are marginalized economically, politically and socially. The reasons behind these are biological difference, tradition, custom and patriarchal ideology in the society. Identity classification is based on sexual difference, a binary opposition. Women are the 'other' and male counterparts are the 'self'. This distinction leads female to be treated as an object by the male counterpart. Though women are capable as men, they are subjugated in every sphere. So, women are victimized in the outdated traditional beliefs and practices. But, over the decades with the development of technology, education and politics, women have been able to be recognized. Thus, women writers change the conventions of male dominated literature in which it examines with contemporary issues in terms of different themes and techniques. In connection with the presentation of women as 'other' in the society, it will discuss with Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* (2004) and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982).

In both the novels, one finds the discrimination of women in the male dominated society. Goswami and Allende bring out the socio-political condition that women are treated as inferior by the patriarchal values. While representing the silence of women, the two authors significantly give a voice of the oppressed and marginalized women in the society. Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* examines the plight of widows in the 'sattrā', a vaishnavite monastic institution of Assam. The fall of new feudal politico-economic set up and the communist agitation form a turmoil in the orthodox society. Along with the issue of caste struggle, Goswami protests orthodox religious institutions that violate equal rights and status of women. Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* chronicles the experience of male dominated del Valle-Trueba women. It blends both fact and fantasy in revealing the tyranny of men against women. The patriarchal dictatorship subverts women's history and identity in the novel. Both the novelists represent similar and dissimilar issues of women from different cultural perspective and geographical locations. Goswami represents the othering of women from North-east India and Allende represents this particular issue from Latin America.

### **Objectives**

The aim of this study is to bring out the factors related to the marginalization of women from different sections of the society. Attempt will also be made to trace the consequences of such wrong configuration.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. It includes books and other critical references that are used in discussing the proposed study in detail. The study will be based on the theory of *Feminism*. For citing the sources, it will follow *MLA* style.

### Hypothesis

Women novelists challenge the conventional representation of women through their literary interpretation and are able to have thereby equal position along with the male counterparts. The voice of protest shows how patriarchal ideologies treating women as the 'other'. To overcome this problem, characters in the novels confront the male violence with resistance and complicity. However, not every woman character is successful in overcoming the trials of gender discrimination.

### Discussion

Goswami examined the problems of unmarried and widow women in the orthodox community. In the sattra, widow women are treated as inferior one against men. They are subjugated and victimized due to the religious laws and ethics. In the novel, the position of women is determined by religion, custom, culture, beliefs and practices in the vaishnavite sattra in South Kamrup of Assam. The marginalization of women is not only from the religion, but also from the patriarchal ideologies. The feudal patriarchs who literally own the land as well as the souls of their numerous disciples are also the pillar of moral laws. The widows and unmarried women have no rights to possess property, they are deprived of their freedom and decent livelihood. They are all ground to dust by the grinding wheel of the system. Goswami describes their vulture-like habits in razor sharp prose. The evil custom is that every Brahmin girl should be married before she reaches puberty. Married women are also not able to escape the dark fate that religion has assigned to them. They are continually cheated on by their husbands and abused by their laws. The fear of social censure and the absence of financial freedom force these women to accept their own victimization. Widows are not allowed to leave their homes and are supposed to make themselves invisible, because their touch may bring misfortune on others. The harsh rituals make them threatened. One of the customary laws of the widowhood is the continuous fasting which includes abstaining from cooked food and have to stay only with raw foods like vegetables. As per by the customs, widows sleep on a bed of bamboos and wear the areca nut tree's bark. Moreover, if their body is touched even by the shadow of low-caste men, they have to undergo more purification rituals.

The novelist intricately weaves the indignation of women from humanistic angle in which she expresses the repressed desire and freedom of women. Marriage as an economic exploitative arrangement binds the unmarried and widow women to domesticity. In such situation, widows are identified with their bodies and recognized as vulnerable. They are degenerated in to an 'other' object of male subject. However, Goswami has given a voice of the silent sufferer with pity and horrors. As a widow, older Gossainee has led a trouble life. After the death of her husband, she is victimized as an object by the religious norms and feudal patriarch ideologies. As a widow, older

Gossainee's widowhood has brought more grief and worries in the form of indifferent ones in the society. She is more burdened with the task of conforming to the prescribed religious ethics. Eliman, a twelve year old girl suffered, whom her father proposed to sell to an opium addict person. Eliman refused and again when she refused second time to another groom, she is punished. Saru Gossainee, another widow is also a victim of the narrow minded 'satra'. She is the young and beautiful widow of Indranath's uncle. Coming from a prosperous family of Pathaldi, she is a Gossainee of three 'satras' with lands and disciples scattered over a large area. During the time of her husband, they used to get enough revenue from the lands, but sudden demise of her husband and the communist agitation brought the bad days. From this time Saru Gossainee is betrayed by the low-caste villagers. Because of widowhood, Saru Gossainee is overlooked by the society. For the fear of social censure, she even hesitated to go to court. At this situation, Mahidar, a young widower, comes forward to help her. Saru Gossainee falls in love with Mahidar and believes that he understand her feelings. Belonging to a community that shuns widows, she feels very fortunate on being chosen as the object of a man's love. Saru Gossainee not even realizes that she is being cheated on and exploited by Mahidar. Kindness makes her trust over Mahidar. Saru Gossainee's dreams shatter forever. In spite of all these incidents, she is unable to fight for the justice against the rigid social conventions. So, she accepts and express her grief "Durga, it's our fate that we are born as women. We should learn to live with patience and tolerance. As it is, our lives have been shattered by the death of our husbands" (Goswami, 46). It is a conventional construction of the value of women. Simon de Beauvoir in the book *The Second Sex* stated that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (5).

Durga, the elderly widowed sister of the *adhikar* is an unhappy woman harassed and rejected by her husband's family as an inauspicious woman. She is treated as a poor relation in her brother's house. Widows like her are not given any status and space where they have to undergo the misfortunes. Durga hopes that the growing prosperity of her in-laws will make them share properties with her or call her back to their establishment in Chikarhati. But when these expectations are not fulfilled, she plans to go on a pilgrimage to Puri and Prayag and immersing the ashes of her dead husband in the holy waters. In her excitement to go to Puri is unfulfilled when she discovers that the trinkets have been stolen. Finally she is condemned to remain a prisoner in the "satra" forever. Durga's health begins to deteriorate rapidly and she desires to die to escape from her misery. She requests her nephew Indranath to send her to Chikarhati to die at her husband's place so that she can enjoy the dignity of a high-caste Brahmin widow. Giribala's fate is similar to Durga. The tragic consequences as a widow is miserable when she exclaimed to Mark, "My father the *adhikar* said: Your future and Durga's future are now linked together. Durga has found her path, and you must follow her! You must observed all the rituals. You must offer flowers, *tulsi* and water daily to

your dead husband's wooden sandals" (Goswami, 172). On reaching her puberty, she is married to the worthless son of the 'adhikar' of Bangara who neglects and humiliates her. After the death of her husband, she is tortured by her mother-in-law and sent back to her parents. However, to cast off her melancholy, her brother, Indranath engaged her to the American philanthropist named Mark. The touch of Mark to Giribala marks breaks of the conventions of the 'satra'. At one time, she consumes a bowl of meat curry. After this incident, she is locked in the airless room. When her in-laws come to reclaim her, she refuses to go because she realizes that her life would become more miserable. Instead, she runs away to Mark's hut. Giribala desires to release from the turmoil by escaping with Mark. She revealed Mark to go along with him. But, Mark hesitates to take this decision for his scholarly work and as a missionary. Accusing of clandestine affair, they want to purify the girls through rituals by using water and fire. Giribala as a hopeless woman refuses to perform any ritual and immolates herself in the fire. Giribala's desires to free from the orthodox community remain as fruitless.

Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* gives an account of Latin American women in the time of patriarchal authority. The novelist narrates the male violence from the perspective of subjective/objective position. The patriarchal ideologies subvert women's history and identity. In the novel, the male counterparts discriminate women as the 'other'. The otherness politics operate from the monolithic ideas of 'self'. This is a cultural conditioning that makes women inferior beings. Women as an 'object' can be understood from Esteban's aggressive and patriarchal attitude towards women. Esteban's female members in house are the victims of male dictatorship. Their oppression depicts how the representation of female history is different from the past truth. Along with Esteban's female generation, the peasant women are victimized as sexual object. The incidence of Rosa's death reveals an aspect of Esteban's character. His extreme violence, uncontrollable anger and possessiveness prejudiced Rosa. He curses Rosa for her death and relates that, if he knew she was going to die soon, he "would have kidnapped her and locked her up, and only he would have had the key" (Allende, 36). Rosa is rejected as a women in which Esteban has unable to remember the violence against her. In the cemetery Esteban says: "Damn her! She slipped through my hands! They say I shouted" (Allende, 34). These possessive and aggressive behavior are indicative of Esteban's general attitude toward women, which is later demonstrated in his relationship with Clara, Rosa the Beautiful's younger sister. Esteban's wanted Clara to depend on him. He wished to control her mind and body. Women's struggle for freedom is violated to be immanence, and this situation, they are more like animals in which it excludes them from their liberty and knowledge. Esteban's transcendental being exploits del Valle-Trueba women as an immanent that is passive like animal and nature. The difference arises within the sexual identification between the Trueba women and Esteban.

The peasant women are a sexual object for Esteban. He used power as patron; no one can escape from him because he views them as property. His cruelty spread throughout the region and peasants hide their daughters where they cannot confront him. He thinks that he owns not only the land but the people as well, and as he is both patriarch and tyrant, the peasants are powerless to stand up against him. He thinks this sexual violence as normal behavior for a man of wealth and stature. The sexual violence continues in his relations with Transito Soto, a prostitute. Though he treats her as the 'other', Transito played a crucial role in her life. Esteban tried to hide this incidence because he wants all the incidents deal with women to be subverted. As a political figure, Esteban is conscious of what he should and should not include in his memoir, Esteban should certainly would not have written about the prostitute with whom he consorted throughout the novel, nor the bastard children whom he fathered at Tres Marias. The case of Transito Soto forced to incorporate her in his story because she rescues Alba from imprisonment and torture; otherwise it would have been unknown.

Apart from the discrimination of women, the narrative of the novel also examines the resistance to the male narratives. The switch from first person narration to third person narration is not accidental, but it symbolizes how it overcomes the male dictatorship. Alba's mixing of subjective/objective position in the narrative is to reflect the misrepresentation of women's ancestors and identity. By narrating in first person and the third person, Alba acknowledges the past and present history of del Valle-Trueba women. And it gives Alba to recognize the difference in Esteban's narrative. Alba is not only a victim of male violence, but she is exploited by the political struggle. In the prison, Alba and other women are raped and harassed mentally and physically. The women in the prison are mute spectator in which they are restricted to reveal and know the truth of their own identity. In spite of all these circumstances, women support Alba's rewriting of women history. While writing, Alba reclaims the traumatic experience of the past and to overcome this terror, she consulted Clara's notebooks, Nivea's photographs, Blanca's letters and her own experience. Alba asserts that "Clara wrote them so they would help me now to reclaim the past and overcome the terrors of my own. The book is an ordinary school copybook with twenty pages, written in a child's delicate calligraphy. It begins like this: Barabas came to us by sea" (Allende, 433). Alba destabilized the grandfather Esteban's account. To exclude the male dictatorship's history, she narrates in a circular manner in which it undermines the traditional linear narrative. Through the characters, Allende justifies the politics of representation of women in the context of 'other' that is in the mode of breaking the dominant ideology of the patriarchal society. In her *Writing as an Act of hope*, Allende states that "Now finally, women are breaking the rule of silence and raising a strong voice to question the world. This is a cataclysm. It is a new literature that dares to be optimistic - to speak of pornography, of compassion against cruelty" (Allende, 54).

### Conclusion

Both the novelists Indira Goswami and Isabel Allende write from different cultural contexts that bring out the trials and tribulations of women across the globe. The two novelists examine the discrimination of women in different sphere of their society. Writing from North-east India, Indira Goswami in her novel, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* highlights the cruelties of religion and the feudal patriarch against women in Assam. From the humanistic point of view, Goswami critically respond to the miserable situation of women in 'sattrā' in which they are deprived not only as women, but also as human. Isabel Allende who writes from Latin America presents the tyranny of patriarch and male dictatorship in *The House of the Spirits*. Though the characters of two novelists belong to distinct culture, tradition and country, it justifies the oppression of women as an inferior being. In *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, Giribala's desires to free from the restraints of the rigid conventions become hopeless. As a widow, she has to sacrifice her life in the fire. In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende deals with the marginalization of women. Alba's resistances against the male violence recovers the lost past and history. The women characters are more active in the resisting the politics of 'other' in Allende in comparison to Goswami. On the otherhand, Goswami's women characters act passively due to the fear of conventional norms. For this reason Giribala, Saru Gossainee, older Gossainee and Durga are exploited economically, socially and politically. Allende's Alba, Blanca and Clara represent the active involvement in resisting the difference. But, the weaker women in both the novel present the sympathetic and passive figure. Thus, both the novelists explore the image of women from the humanitarian ideals in the male dominated society and bring out the similar problems of women.

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## READING NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN FICTION

Pratusha Bhowmik

This paper is an attempt to study the different narrative strategies employed by selected South Asian novelists in their respective fictional works. Central to my analysis is the writers' use of the perspective of the child to carry forward their novelistic enterprises. In all the novels under study, viz. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea*, Elmo Jayawardena's *Sam's Story*, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Ru Freeman's *On Sal Mal Lane*, the novelists explore the mouthpiece of a child to render conditions of conflict. In novels like Elmo Jayawardena's *Sam's Story*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the narrative strategy being used is that of a first person narration. In novels like *Ice-Candy-Man*, *Funny Boy* and *The Shadow Lines*, it is the adult reminiscing the experiences of childhood whereas in *Sam's Story*, the first person narrator is a dim-witted individual working as a house boy in the River house whose age is difficult to discern as he provides information according to his personality in the novel. Again in novels like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea* and Ru Freeman's *On Sal Mal Lane*, the narrative strategy being employed is that of a third person omniscient narration with the child or children as the focalizer in the novels.

With regard to the nuances and complexities associated with first person narration, Amy Faulds Sandefur in her work, "Narrative Immediacy and First-Person Voice In Contemporary American Novels" maintains:

In the majority of first-person narrated novels, the writer creates an adult narrator who recalls earlier events so that a substantial time lapse is established between the experiences and their narration. Typically through this durational gap, a novelist constructs a narrating persona clearly distinguishable from experiencing subject, even though the two are the same person. (Sandefur 5)

In the light of the above statement it can be argued that in novels like *Ice-Candy-Man*, *Funny Boy* and *The Shadow Lines*, the narrative persona remembers the childhood experiences of his or her own past, so that there is a sufficient gap between the time of experience and the time of narration. In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa employs the narrative voice of the five year old narrator Lenny with occasional renderings by the older Lenny reflecting on the issues of Partition from her memory. The novel is an interesting interplay of the child Lenny narrating from her experiences and at the same time the narrative is also enriched by the older self of Lenny recounting events from her memory. Similarly, in the case of the novel *The Shadow Lines*, there is a series of juxtapositions in the narrative of the novel with the adult narrator remembering, recollecting and narrating events from his childhood along with the narration of his present day circumstances, i.e. his adulthood being lived with his experiences of childhood. The novel *Funny Boy* also offers an intriguing narrative with the young narrator Arjun Chelvaratnam describing his childhood days and his movement and awakening to the days of his youth and maturity. The first person narrator Arjie's narration is actually the adult Arjie narrating events from the past which landed him in the present circumstances of irreparable loss and "exile" (Selvadurai 5). As reflected in the text:

Those spend-the-days, the remembered innocence of childhood, are now coloured in the hues of the twilight sky. It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka years later because of communal violence and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada.

Yet those Sundays, when I was seven, marked the beginning of my exile from the world I loved. Like a ship that leaves a port for the vast expanse of sea, those much looked forward to days took me away from the safe harbour of childhood towards the precarious waters of adulthood. (Selvadurai 5)

From the above lines of the text it can be easily established that there is a distance between the period of the self who has already experienced and the self who is narrating those experiences of the past, although both the selves are of the same person. However, it has to be pointed out that the narrative persona is now an adult who is describing the transition and development from his childhood to his adulthood. In the novel, *Sam's Story*, the first person narrator is Sam who is telling the events he has already experienced to the novelist who is the narratee in the novel. In the novel it is perhaps the adult Sam's remembrances of his childhood days which is definitely the past experiences happened long

time ago. The age of the experiencing self of Sam i.e. of the past is distinct from his narrating self of the present. Sam is a dim-witted boy who is unable to provide the exact date of his age, but undoubtedly his perspective is that of a child because of the way he behaves, articulates and understand events. In this connection mention may be made of Manfred Jahn, who while illustrating about the literary representation and focalization in relation to Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield* observes:

Indeed, in many first-person (homodiegetic) texts, such as this one, the point of perceptual origin hovers between two co-ordinate systems because first-person narrator and protagonist – also called the “narrating I” and the “experiencing I,” respectively – are separated in time and space but linked through a biographical identity relation. This creates an – occasionally unstable – union between the current, remembering self and what French critics term *un autre* (literally, “an other”). (Jahn 100)

Jahn here talks about the dynamic co-relation between the narrating self and the experiencing self in the narratives of the first person narrators. According to him, both the selves of the first person narrator belongs to one biographical identity of an individual separated in terms of time and space. Similar to what Jahn stated, Vogrin Valerie in relation to the first person narrator and unreliable narration mentions that,

“In a sense, all first-person narrators are somewhat unreliable. . . . The narrator’s unreliability adds to the story’s unsettling effect. . . . The unreliable narrator emphasizes the fact that there is no such thing as a single, static, knowable reality.” (Vagerie, 84-85). According to Valerie, the first person narrator is bound to narrate events depending on his or her own criteria of selection and rejection. The narrator’s present context and his or her reproduction of the past in terms of memory will definitely influence the narration and hence can never be an accurate representation of events. He is of the opinion that this very characteristic of the first person narrator produces an unsettling kind of narrative as there can not exist any unified, stable, factual truth.

Mark Currie in his book *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* discusses about the analogical relationship between past and present in fictional narratives. He states:

. . . that of a melody in which the now is understood as the sounds which are still present to consciousness, and concludes that this presence is structured by retentions and protentions, or elements of the past which are retained in the consciousness

and those which are present as anticipatory expectation. (Currie 13)

Currie in his text establishes the fact that there cannot be any strict compartmentalisation of the past and the present as the present is created by elements of the past and so the presence of the present is always elusive. Currie's theorisations on time can be helpful in reading the narrative strategies of child as first person narrators, as such narrations also exhibit characteristics of interlinking between the present and the past or so to say the experiencing I and the narrating I. Thus, there exists a juxtaposition of the past and the present in the narration of a first person narrator which further is responsible for the unreliability in such narrations. Again, Tamar Yacobi in his text "Authorial Rhetoric, Narratorial (Un)reliability, Divergent Readings: Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*", points to the importance of context in relation to the understanding of unreliable narration. According to him unreliability is not merely a characteristic of the narrator but it is more dependent on the normative design of the context. His formulation can best be explained in terms of Sam as a narrator who is dim-witted according to his fellow servants and the people around him but this very quality portrays a certain innocence which perhaps is in correspondence with the greater aims of the novelist to create a genuine and unbiased portrayal of the crisis as a result of conflict in society. Not only does Sam possess tendencies which can be equated to that of a child, he also lacks in a normal kind of intelligence. However, whatever Sam narrates entails a kind of trust among the readers in spite of the obvious limitations of him as a narrator. Being like a child he more often does not necessarily understand what he witnesses. In fact Sam as a narrator is unreliable in nature owing to his status as a child.

At every meeting there were always about five people on the platform. They drank orange barley from bottles and took turns to speak to us. Both colours had the same kind of meeting and both colours promised the same things... That was fine with us. We didn't need to worry about who won and was elected. Either way we would win and get what they promised... There were so many promises that we simply couldn't wait till the elections were over and the good times began. (Jayawardena 64)

Sam as a child lacks the ingenuity and depth of perception of understanding the falsity of the grand rhetoric of the politicians which gets exposed after the elections. The child narrator might not understand certain elements but the reader are likely to understand the significance of the situation.

Yacobi's formulation on the nature of unreliable narration can also be explained in terms of Lenny, Arjie and the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines*

as the child narrators, as their very unreliability as narrators invoke a greater degree of honesty and veracity in the readers. Lenny, the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, Arjie and Sam as individuals do not understand things very clearly but as witnesses their narration sets up interesting narrative gaps which demands a full participation from the reader and engages his attention in a dynamic way.

Lenny, the child narrator in *Ice-Candy-Man*, is unable to grasp the intensity of the atmosphere charged with discussions of Independence and the probable division of the country. As is depicted in the novel:

‘If we want India back we must take pride in our customs, our clothes, our languages . . . And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English!’ Obviously he’s quoting this Bose. (Sometimes he quotes Gandhi, or Nehru or Jinnah, but I’m fed up of hearing about them. Mother, father and their friends are always saying: Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this, Jinnah did that. What’s the point of talking so much about people we don’t know?) (Sidhwa 29)

In the above lines it can be seen how Lenny’s understanding is limited in relation to the current state of affairs but nevertheless she reports whatever she witnesses around her which the readers are very likely to understand. Similarly, the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* seems to be obsessed by Tridib’s idea of looking at everything in the novel. As a child he is gullible and is fascinated by the way Tridib views and understands the world around him. The whole narrative of the novel is an attempt to form a coherence of information that leads to the final truth of Tridib. In one of the instances the narrator is himself conscious of the susceptibility of his childhood visions. In the text the narrator states:

It was a table, the largest I had ever seen; it seemed to stretch on and on. I used to wonder later whether this was merely a legacy of a child’s foreshortened vision: an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale. (Ghosh 53)

As a child whatever he witnessed and experienced has a certain sense of limitation because of his inability to understand and articulate the full significance of the events but the readers are capable enough to comprehend the meanings hidden behind in his reporting as a child. But the events (most of it) which he experienced as a child is again being revisited and remembered as adult to provide the readers a better and clear understanding of the same events. This is perhaps

one of the strategies to overcome the limitation and unreliability of the narration by a child.

Similarly Arjie as a child narrator is also unreliable because he lacks proper understanding of most of the situations he narrates. As seen in the novel:

The intensity of Ammachi's reaction had shaken me. I wondered why Anil's being Sinhalese upset her so? I was in a Sinhala class at school and my friends were Sinhalese. My parents' best friends were, too. Even our servant was Sinhalese, and, in fact, we spoke with her only in Sinhalese. So what did it matter whether Anil was Sinhalese or not? . . . "She's such a racist," Radha Aunty said to me. I looked at Radha Aunty. I did not understand the meaning of the word "racist," but I could tell it was not a nice thing. (Selvadurai 59)

As seen from the above lines of the text, Arjie as a child narrator is also unreliable because he lacks proper understanding of most of the situations he narrates. He could not comprehend the implications behind the behavioural tendencies of the other characters like Ammachi and Radha Aunty, leading up to conflict and tension that was generating due to reasons of ethnicity and race.

James Phelan in "Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers – and Why It Matters", argues that ". . . narrators can be focalizers . . ." (Phelan 51). Following the theoretical precepts of Phelan, it can be maintained that the child narrators are not only made to perform the role of a narrator but they are also interestingly the focalizers. They are not only the narrating self in the novel but they are also the self undergoing various experiences in the novel. Although the child narrators has his or her own limited perceptions, but still it cannot be denied that they are devoid of any kind of perception of the world they occupy.

The narrators Lenny, the unnamed narrator, Arjie and Sam reports with great familiarity the pangs and sufferings of living through the conflicting times. However the narrators' position as narrators in the novel is not merely restricted to reporting the events and incidents. Rather, being child narrators their role in the text has serious underpinnings related to it.

In novels like *The Shadow Lines*, *Ice-Candy-Man*, *Funny Boy* and *Sam's Story*, the viewpoint is that of the involved, unreliable first person narrator and focalizer, whereas in novels like *The God of Small Things*, *In the City by the Sea* and *On Sal Mal Lane*, the narrative technique adopted is that of the omniscient, third-person God-like narrator focalizing through the consciousness of a character or some characters. Paul Cobley in his book *Narrative: the New Critical Idiom*, discusses about the all knowing, godlike authority of the omniscient narrator but while doing so he focuses on the feature of the omniscient narrator's capacity to

privilege certain characters' voices to be heard over the voices of other characters. This quality can well be connected to what Gerard Genette talks about focalizations. Jonathan Culler while elaborating on Genette's terminology of focalization states that:

In what Genette calls *internal focalization* the narrative is focused through the consciousness of a character, whereas *external focalization* is something altogether different: the narrative is focused on a character, not through him. For example, in Hemingway's "The Killers" or in the novels of Dashiell Hammett we are told what the characters do but not what they think or see. (Lewin 11)

Culler discusses how Genette formulates his theory on focalization by making a distinction between internal focalization and external focalization. Internal focalization according to Genette is mediated through the consciousness of a character while external focalization he argues focuses on a character and does not include the thought processes of the focalized character. In the novels like *The God of Small Things*, *In the City by the Sea* and *On Sal Mal Lane*, there is omniscient narration with internal focalization. In these novels the omniscient narrators are presenting the narrative through the consciousness of some focal characters. In *The God of Small Things*, the omniscient narrator focalizes the narrative of the novel mostly through the characters of Rahel and Estha. In the novel *In the City by the Sea*, the narrative is presented chiefly through the eyes of Hasan as a child. And in the novel *On Sal Mal Lane*, the narrative seems to be more in consonance with the child protagonist Nihil.

Genette while discussing about Internal focalization further categorizes it into fixed, variable and multiple focalization. According to Genette, fixed focalization entails depicting the narrative from the perspective of one focal character. Variable focalization means the use of more than one focalizer in the narrative and multiple focalizer implies that the same event is reflected by several focal characters. In all these novels we find instances of variable focalization. In *The God of Small Things* we find the narrative being projected mostly through the consciousness of the characters of Rahel and Estha and so can be said to be an example of variable focalization. In the novel, *In the City by the Sea* the novelist seems to employ fixed focalization where the narrative is almost in keeping with the consciousness of Hasan and in the novel *On Sal Mal Lane* we find the narrative to be reflected through several focal characters like Nihil, Devi, Mr. Niles, etc. and so variable focalization is there in the novel. In all these novels the narrative strategy being employed is that of a third person intrusive narrator narrating the circumstances and events in the novels.

In *The God of Small Things*, the narrative comprises of the adult Rahel and Estha's present circumstances being juxtaposed with the days of their childhood. With regard to the focalization of the narrative of the novel through the characters of Rahel and Estha. Richard Lane states that it gives "access to the children's minds, making apparent the often incomprehensible and threatening adult world" (99). Emily Stockdale also while discussing about the use of language and characterisation of the characters in the novel mentions:

Analyzing the words as the characters use them, rather than as Roy or a narrator might use them, allows the reader to more fully understand the motives and feelings of the characters, especially the twins Estha and Rahel. Put another way, when reading the thoughts and words of the twins the reader should dismiss the idea that the words were created by Roy. Rather, as the reader makes meaning from the text, this meaning is filtered through the lenses of children with a unique view of the world. (Stockdale 3-4)

In the above lines, Stockdale emphasizes on the childhood lens of Estha and Rahel that renders meaning to the narrative. According to her the narrative of the novel should be read more in terms of the children's perspective in the novel rather

than the novelist or the narrator depicting the events. The use of the perspective of children allows the novelist to present a somewhat honest and innocent rendering of events and expose the hypocrisies of the world in a nuanced and subtle manner. In relation to the significance of point of view Vogrin Valerie mentions that, "... things look different, depending on who is doing the looking and what their vantage point is. Points of view, like microscopes and telescopes, can reveal things ordinarily unseen." (Valerie, 11). As pointed out by Valerie, the points of view adopted, lends a specific element and can help in showing things which are somehow not ordinarily visible. The use of children's language, their vulnerability. Their confused understanding of the world around them, their reactions and responses to situations in the novels allows the novelists to highlight things in a very artistic way.

In the novel *In the City by the Sea* Hasan is the 11 year old boy who is shown facing the world, eventually getting overwhelmed by conditions of conflict.

The perception of Hasan allows the novelist to criticise and denounce the silenced political oppression of the country which might otherwise be considered hostile if written from an adult point of view. The omniscient narrator in this novel is making use of the imagination of Hasan, his perceptions and experiences as a child to focus on the truths of conflict leading to personal loss, fear and

terror. The emotional responses that arises in Hasan as a child attempting to make sense of his individual and social circumstances becomes a major aspect of the employment of a child's point of view. As reflected in the text:

That night, in the stillness of the bedroom, Hasan felt as though he was surrounded. People in uniform watching him, listening to every breath, wondering why he was not asleep. From the lounge he could hear Salman Mamoo's and Aba's voices raised in argument. Hasan picked up an empty glass from the table beside him, crept to the door and interposed the glass between his ear and the door. (Shamsie 19)

The perspective of Hasan as a child characterized by his observations and gradual awakening to the realities of a complex world, actually leads to the understanding of the processes of conflict and terror and also explores issues of marginality and identity. The omniscient narration in this novel is mostly concerned with Hasan and his responses as a child and offers us details of the events in the novel where Hasan is present as a witness to it as is shown from the above lines of the text. So the narrative of the novel moves with movement and trajectory of Hasan as a child protagonist. The narrative is focused through the focalization of Hasan, as the narrator is not describing things when he is not there but rather how he sees it.

In the novel *On Sal Mal Lane*, the third person omniscient narrator very finely reports the factual and historical details regarding the changes in the political realm of the country and several incidents of clashes and conflicts that was taking place in various regions of the country of Sri Lanka, and juxtaposes it with the daily innocent lives of children belonging to a particular neighbourhood of Sal Mal Lane. Although the novel is an instance of variable focalization, the narrative being reflected through several characters, but still it is the consciousness of Nihil as a child which acquires predominance in the narrative. Regarding the supposed role of the omniscient narrator and the nature of its narration has been artistically pointed out in the prologue of the novel:

And who, you might ask, am I? ... I am a composite of dreams ... To tell a story about divergent lives, the storyteller must be everything and nothing. I am that.

If at times you detect some subtle preference, an undeserved generosity toward someone, a boy child, ... forgive me. It is far easier to be everything and nothing than it is to conceal love. (Freeman 5)

In the prologue, the narrator clarifies about its position in the narrative. It expresses its difficulty of being a narrator to be everything and nothing at the

same time. At the same time it also very honestly reveals its inclination towards a particular character i.e. a boy child. Thus, the narrator on its own acknowledges the focalization of the narrative through the perspective of a child and the close reading of the novel tells us that it is none other than Nihil as a child protagonist. Hence the preoccupation of the narrative of the novel with the perspective of a child or children is marked right at the very beginning of the novel.

All the novels under study has incorporated the language and behavioural tendencies of a child or children to reflect the novel from their perspective. Whether the novels are written employing a first person narrator or be it an omniscient narrator focusing on the lives of children, the language of a child has been exploited as a resource in the novels to critically comment on the conditions of conflict. The confused understanding, the partial observations, the flat statements, innumerable questions, etc. characteristic of a child's mannerisms are part of the narrative of the novels. For instance, the way Nihil in *On Sal Mal Lane* displayed his habit of reading anything backwards, very typical of being a child. The utterance of words in a reverse manner shows the playfulness of children and expresses their innocence. This kind of harmless activity of a child and the accompanying simplicity is depicted to be in stark contrast to the corruption and malevolence around them which gradually unfolds their ingenuity and wit. Again, in the novel *The God of Small Things*, we find this same tendency of reading the words in backward movement in Estha and Rahel as children. Stockdale in her work while examining the use of language in the novel notes that, "The games the children play with language continue to serve as an escape. The more words they read backwards the more obvious it becomes that they are (consciously or unconsciously) trying to ignore the actions around them." (Stockdalee 17) According to her, this playful exercise of children are an attempt to escape from the sordid realities around them. Their indulgence in such type of activities conveys a sense to move beyond the activities surrounding their lives. Stockdale's observation can also be read in terms of Nihil as a child performing a similar activity. The narrators of both these novels uses the child protagonists like Estha, Rahel and Nihil to articulate innocence of children as against the rational and mature world of adults full of trouble and turmoil.

The perspective of a child or children introduces interesting narrative gaps through which critical and sensitive issues are put to question. The viewpoint of a child allows the novelists to interrogate and investigate situations of conflict which is otherwise difficult in normal circumstances if done from an adult or mature perspective. H. Porter Abbott in his text on "Story, plot, and narration" discusses about the significance of narrative gaps and states:

Finally, in seeking to fill the gaps of what happens in the storyworld we must cope not only with what is left out of the narration but also with what is given. This is because the narration is inflected everywhere by our sense of who is narrating. We offset for perceived biases – self-interest, love, hatred, envy, fondness, immaturity, personal agenda – that may affect the reliability of the narration, not so often regarding the facts, which we usually (though not invariably) accept, but frequently regarding the emotional and evaluative coloring of those facts. (Abbott 45)

According to Abbott, our understanding of the narrative of the story is deeply influenced by the fact of who does the narration. He observes that the reliability of the narration may get affected by various factors and one among them is immaturity (which is an important quality of narration in relation to a child or children). The factual details and information being rendered in the narrative by such a narrator may be accepted but it will obviously bear a different sense of emotional and evaluative colouring of such rendering of facts. Thus, the child perspective not only influences the reading of the narrative with whatever information is being given to the readers but more importantly it makes the reader to infer what is not there i.e. to interpret the silence or read between the lines which is otherwise not written or suggested directly.

In conclusion, it can be said that the use of perspective of a child allows the novelist to critique and analyse various other larger issues like nation, race, ethnicity, etc. The manner in which a child reflects the situation of conflict evokes a sense of poignancy and arouses a kind of powerful pity which can be highly persuasive to the readers. In conclusion it can be said that in spite of certain limitations, the way a child protagonist sees and describes things has provided the novelists to present the conditions of conflict from a new angle and allowed them to exploit the freedom and freshness of the perspective of a child or children.

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