

Glimpses of 6th Writers Festival-Chennai-India



Some foreign writers with Dr. Madhu Dhawan & others



Dr. Ratnakar Pandey honouring the delegates

Kafla

Intercontinental



Jan-April, 2011

Glimpses of 6th Writers Festival-Chennai-India



Dr. Ratnakar Pandey inaugurated the festival by lighting the lamp. He was joined by Dr. Pradeep Sharma, Dev Bhardwaj, Dr. Sr. Jasintha Quadras f.m.m., Dr. Madhu Dhawan & others

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A view of the delegates



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Releasing of books

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Editor's Note

An old adage rightly goes, 'when you start your long journey, remember the first step is under your foot'. IICCA, an organization devoted for the cause of world peace started its journey with the first Writers Festival at Chandigarh in 2004. Although, only 10 writers participated from other states and the number was quite small, we were never discouraged since the future path had been paved by the event. The *Kafla* went ahead and in the consequent four more festivals held in different parts of north India (Kurukshetra, Agra, Ambala and Jaipur) the strength kept on going up. Meanwhile we were also feeling the need to organise one such festival in the south but because of lack of associates from south we couldn't realise the same. However, it was just like a boon for us when we received a letter of invitation for the same from Dr. Madhu Dhawan, General Secretary of Tamilnadu Hindi Sahitya Academy. About Madhu Dhawan I had just a small recollection since once she mailed a paper 'Meri Raksha', an anthology of multi-lingual writings to me. 'Mere Raksha' also contained Punjabi articles and I thought that she might be having a link with Punjab that turned out to be true. It was this communication followed by more correspondence that led to the finalising of the venue for the conference of the year 2010 at Chennai.

The 6th International Writers Festival was organised in Chennai on 4th and 5th December 2010 with the help of Department of Hindi, Stella Maris College and Tamilnadu Hindi Sahitya Academi, Chennai. More than 200 poets and writers from different states and abroad attended the festival. It was but for the consistent help from Dr. Madhu Dhawan that the event could become a success. To organise a function at a far off place with arrangements of boarding and lodging facilities, travel modes, food, sound system and public relations etc. was not an easy job. However, the positive engagements of Dr. Sr. Jasinthra Quadras f.m.m, Principal of Stella Maris College, Chennai and Prof. Sharabani Bhattacharya, Head in the Department of Hindi and the other staff of the college that worked very hard made this festival a grand success.

The Eminent writer from Varanasi Dr. Ratnakar Pandey was the chief guest of the inaugural function of the festival. In his inaugural speech Dr. Ratnakar Pandey applauded the role of a writer since it is writer who gives new direction to the society and remove darkness of times. He hailed the writers present in the festival to carry the flambeau of light and peace to every nook and corner of the society and work as the true legislators of people. Speaking on the occasion Dr. Madhu Dhawan also stressed the need for the positive role of writers in developing the bonds of brotherhood and oneness. Besides these two dignitaries Mr. Pradeep Sharma of Assam, Prof. Sharabani Bhattacharya of SM College also addressed the participants. More than 50 papers were presented during the different sessions of the festival on various topics concerning Literature and World Peace. Besides inaugural and valedictory sessions the festival was divided into four sessions each one presided over by poets and writers. Some Roma scholars from different countries of Europe also participated in the festival and expressed great happiness over their visit to India - the land of their ancestors who left India about 1000 years ago.

During the two days of the festival poetry was recited and papers presented on various topics. In the evening poetry sessions were held on each day in which poetry in song and music was presented. Dr. Parinita Goswami, a well known scholar and classical singer from Assam also spell bound the audience by singing *Raag Dhanashri*. One thing that startled me was the participation of the south Indians in a great number. Their participation was considerable even during the previous festivals organised in north India. However, against it the participation from north was far below our expectations probably because of distant venue. Now since all the festivals held in the north were well attended by writers from south I believe that writers from north should also learn from their counterparts of south. They should believe in—east or west, north or south all is near and nothing is far.

The current issue of *Kafla* carries some papers and poetry presented during the festival. The writings which didn't find space in this issue would be inducted in the next issue of *Kafla*.

Dev Bhardwaj

Chaks

Shyamal Bhattacharya

Would you explain the concept of ‘disorientation’ Sir?

All right. Let me tell you a story then. It was monsoon. A dark fortnight. Though the nearby sky kept clear, but from the met-office source, I knew about the possibility of a couple or more, dense Cumulus Nimbus like clouds. Where was the horizon? The sky and the earth have conglomerated into a confused mass in the dark. Or as though, our dear planet was passing through a Black hole. A single star couldn’t be located anywhere.

My thundering fighter plane was slicing through that pitch darkness. It was quite hot inside the cockpit. Reaching the air exercise site, I started the routine exercises. At that very moment, the control station informed me over the radio telephone that a cargo plane would fly over that particular altitude too. And I would have to climb another four thousand feet up.

Certainly some kind of emergency plea. National and foreign commercial pilots make short cuts by sending SOS, 95 percent of them being fake. And thereby, acquire company shares. In the process, it is we, who suffer. But there is no way out. Flight safety is the top priority. Compelled, I quickly obey the order. I take the aircraft some four thousand feet up like a storm. And then, once the commercial cargo plane leaves, come down at the original altitude like a comet. And during this rapid ascend and descend, like an ideal fighter pilot, I turn my head around, moving my neck every now and then. I keep an eye on the commercial plane. Don’t know why, I feel as though the plane is moving in the opposite direction. Or, could it be that I myself is flying in the opposite direction? I wonder. Switching on the direction finder, I find, I am flying in the right direction, indeed. Then? I have no time for indulging in such thoughts, either. Perhaps the cargo itself is flying in the opposite direction. The controller has transmitted wrongly. I meticulously keep following every rule of instrument flying.

Telling the story this far, Ranjan has a glass of water. The trainee pilots in the briefing room sat with rapt attention. Slides, in the projector, are in place. A bee like, unknown insect, attacking the projector head on now, and the screen next time, times without count. The shadows, at different stages of practice interceptions, on slides and that drawn by OHP pens, mixed with the shadows of the flying insect, made quite a funny sight on the screen. It felt like as though a fighter acquired life.

Snarling, Ranjan says, ‘this delusion is the result of the interaction between man and machine’. To make it more understandable, he goes back to the story-in-reminiscences again. Wiping his face with the handkerchief he says ”I kept feeling that the belly of the aircraft was facing the sky”. I turned the craft belly towards the earth. But strange!

The finder showing the belly was facing the space! I declined to believe! I had more than a thousand hours experience in this very aircraft. Not believable at all. The finder must be making mistakes. It was very dangerous indeed. Following the finder, when turned the craft belly towards the earth, felt like I was hanging on the strap around my waist and armpit. I couldn’t reconcile my feelings with the readings on the machine. Slowly my feelings grew stronger and defied the machine. First is man and then comes his creation - machine. My whole body got wet with cold sweat. Sometimes the sweat slid from the thighs down the knees and at other, it felt as though, originating from the belly, flowing up the furrow between the chests, it was getting accumulated in the throat. Hair inside the headset gone fully drenched. Tiny and warm cockpit has become a deathtrap within seconds only.

Sensing a soft murmuring, Ranjan halts. That bee-like insect’s repeated dives on the screen, under the bright light, detracting the attention. At Ranjan’s indication to drive it out, two trainees, boards in hand, started jumping all around the room, chasing the insect. At that moment, an earthy smell, from nowhere, flows in. This smell is natural and it is unconceivable that men would ever make this kind of essence. The smell takes Ranjan’s mind to another world.

Being a man of few words, the student pilots secretly call him Chaks the serious' All the Chakrabortys in the Air Force are nicknamed as 'Chaks'. Ranjan is disciplined like a machine. His colleagues call him 'Chaks the instrument' with respect. Ranjan does not mind either. As a reward of his grit and seriousness he has now become the Chief Instructor, superseding many seniors. There is no one in the squadron above him, excepting the Commanding officer. The student pilots are surprised to see the same Chaks telling a story. Ranjan, himself is no less surprised. Insects or waves of natural scent never made him unmindful before.

It was different kind of a day for him, since dawn. He woke up by a banging noise. The morning light just broke on the eastern sky. The night gown was rolling on Nubra's thigh and ankles. Shifting her feet very gently, taking his gown in hand, Ranjan comes out of the mosquitoes-net . Slipping into the gown quickly, he opens the net door. Removing the curtains, he steps on the back lobby and finds a languor family.

He has surely seen languor many a times before. But never seen so many at a time. Mangoes on this tree , also growing for quite some time now. The languor family, as though, got the news today only. Perhaps, the mango and other fruits in their forests have been exhausted all together. Quite possible. Forests, per se, are disappearing from the surface of the earth. The animals from the jungles coming down to human habitat, every year. Only the other day, two elephants, entered the fighter hanger, breaking three high wire-fencing and were playing with the fighter planes. What an effort it took to drive them out.

It was quite painful for Ranjan to see the consumption of each mango that fast. Like hailstorm, the small-medium-large sized seeds, completely fleshless, lay on the backyard. Nubra wished, so intently, to prepare mango pickles and send them home . Shouting zhu-hush-zhu ,with sleepers on, as he stepped on the backyard, the ring-leader, a huge, hefty languor heads towards Ranjan. He was not quite prepared for the sudden attack. To go forward or to retreat, he slipped and fell flat on the backyard.

Panicked, Nubra cried out .. Ranjan did not realize when she came and stood on the lobby. In the midst of fourteen or fifteen languor of different sizes all around, on tree trunks and roof tops, Ranjan, naked, with the gown ajar, felt totally lost. Lubra came running and pulled him up quickly. Getting nervous at Ranjan's sudden fall, nay, by Nubra's running, the ring leader got on the roof by a single jump. These bungalows are from British days. Height of a single floor measures upto that of double floors of today.

What a shame, Ranjan felt extremely ashamed of himself. He could never imagine that, he would ever fall flat, thus. He got a long cut on his waist line. A snail fell under his back. In this place, Snails of different sizes and shapes, regularly walk around the walls of each bungalow or on the backyards. Falling under the waist, the shell of the huge snail got crushed . A bunch of yellow eggs seems as though that of a tortoise. This is the first time, he saw the eggs of a snail.

He had fried egg of tortoise in his adolescence. There was no derth of tortoise in Punarbhaba river in those days. Ranjan wonders, how long since, he has not had tortoise eggs. The last time he ate it was on that night of *holy* (festival of colours), when his father returned with his Dhanwantari (Master physician) award from Delhi. Flushing the sky with bright light, a huge moon was painting the water of narrow Punarbhaba with illusive lights. In that floodlights, the nomad young boys and girls of the riverside, seeing them two, started dancing, encircling them.

Their ring leader sang –

Chba-rab-rabrab-rabrab –rabreb- re

Dickchalia dickchalia dunderbabu

Barobabu barodiler log – Iss des ka shan

Dickchalia dickchalia-jadu aachhe tor dawaie

Dagderbabu mohaana –

Others joined in chorus –

Tub mobashaktiman

Tub debota soman

In this exultation, there arrive waves, over the quiet river water from no where. Riding the high waves, father and Ranjan get transformed into fairy tale characters. From the river bank, gliding over the high bank of the paddy land-bound, irrigation canal and through the closed shops of the quiet market place, they reached home. Alongside, on the moon-light canal, floats a scuttle of tortoise egg. And, a smell, as though from rain-watered dry soil, mixed with strange and pleasant stupor. This intoxicating smell makes one feels sleepy. And the reality seems to be a dream.

While shaving, bathing, having break fast or on the way to the squadron on scooter, the burning sensation from the after shave lotion, put on the back by Nubra, its faint smell mixed with the wet air of monsoon, keeps him unmindful. Reaching office, he tries to concentrate with a training note. There is no scope to be unmindful in this profession. For a split second carelessness, with crores of rupees worth of machines, anybody can become a bird any moment. At that moment, the mail-orderly, saluted and handed over a letter. Letter from home.

Dada (elder brother) writes very cumbersome letters. His own life itself, is disorderly. Ranjan keeps getting that mild scent while on dada's letter. Having passed his Higher Secondary Examinations with letter marks in three subjects, its only when Dada went to Kolkata to study at a college there, he burnt his hands in the fire of politics. He was kicked and belabored with danda (strong Stick) by police. Police have incapacitated his controlling power of defecation by inserting rule in his rectum. His sweetheart disappeared for good. Now, dada offers tuitions only, from morning till night. Here, compensation is much less compared to the efforts. In quest of question papers, in disguise of suggestions, students crowd more around school teachers. Their rates are three times higher. With repentance and sorrow, dada has written- jobs will not come to us, you know, Ranju. Aren't we Brahmins'! This croaking, since morning till late in the night, is intolerable. Do you remember that story of the tiger and the poor Brahmin? Out of greed for money, the man invited near-death by letting the tiger out of the cage! I too have foregone my past and living in the present only. The tiger of the

imperfect competition with the teachers, in the consumer market place is chewing me up.

You will be surprised to learn that, the other day, I have got an offer to become a priest! Perhaps, during the coming puja holidays, you will find me, reciting slokas, at pandals (stage), wearing Dhoti and shawl. Only there, the competition is little less now. Only because you send money, going out of your way, the loan incurred for Pratima's marriage is getting paid back in installment. We manage the daily expenditure with father's meager pension and my tuition fees. The younger two got separated since last month. I instantly had agreed. They run about with light-mike-video show in the morning and evening. Undertake catering services in all the occasions like Marriage, Rice-Ceremony, Sradh. The same persons who in the olden days served with towels around their waist, now with shirt-pant-ties on, are sophisticated catering boys, like your mess boys.

They have no jobs, still got married. How long would they wait for? With very little income they are managing their families as per their individual capacities. Quite normal. Still, on occasions, emptiness engulfs me. But What to do? Do you remember that rime, your class mates used to incite you with? "Chakraborty bokroban, jol khabi to maloi aan, maloi dhore murbo taaan, Chakraborty chitpatang!" (Chakraborty with bent sex organ, bring the coconut pot, if you want a drink of water. We will pull the coconut pot, Chakraborty will lie flat)

Getting cross, you used to start fighting. Like nomads, shouting Chara-rarah and flexing muscles, you used to say, "Chakraborty saktiman – tora giye maloi aan, ja salara...!" (Chakraborty strong- you rather bring the coconut pot, and get lost, rascals.)

Like the Finance minister of our country, when I fall flat after the 10th of the month, and I look forward to patenting my mind's flower-fruits-crops in return of few rupees, then the memory of your muscle flexing Causes me intense pain. Frogs keep croaking on both sides of the road. I keep walking under the the light of stars at the distant sky and that of fire fly.

Give my affection to Nubra. And kiss to Tiya. God only knows, what would have come off, if you people were not by my side, during this adversity. Father is totally bed-ridden since the last two and a half years. He cannot move at all. I clean his stool and urine every day. Change the bed. Spray powder on his back. Mother too, cannot at all, tolerate these days. How you people will take it, I do not know, but, lately, I also wish his death. It does not go well with a man like Dhanwantari Chakraborty to carry on a disfigured, tumbled down existence. But why only our father, it is equally true for the state and the social system too.

Reading the letter, Ranjan's eyes get wet. Slippery, thick viscous nitrogenous serum coming out of the roundish sentimental snail-egg like alphabets. The alphabets seem like tiny ballons. Ballons of wishes, ballons of dreams. The extracts from them getting the pilot's hands and his gear wet. Out of intense detest, upturning the bowels, comes the urge of vomiting. He tear and throws the letter into the dust bean. Then entering the toilet, takes the garments off and sips them into the bucket. Washing hands, rubbing with soap he slips into flying overall and enters the class room. Quickly concentrates on some complex flying related calculations. Tries to explain in a simpler way, the various methods of more complex practice interceptions. And thus, he revisits the story of disorientation. Stories make him nostalgic.

Then, how did you come back Sir? How did you survive this disorientation?

Ranjan gets his senses back at the question of the young pilot. The pictures on the slides held in the projector are glittering on the screen. The two bee-like insects, as usual, are flying around the screen. How long can boys will chase them. Switching the projector off, Ranjan shrugging, says 'confidence'. Yes, I try to strengthen my self confidence. I hold the joystick, strongly with both the hands. We take these "joystics" as "pleasure wands" in true sense. These very pleasure wands will bring you the pleasure of touching the sky, various ways, thousand of times. Keep faith in instruments. What else could be done at those moments. Getting wet in that

cold sweat and while getting lost, I suddenly get the feeling that, there is lot that I can do, still. Concentrating all the attention the artificial horizon I balance the wings accordingly and think with rock strong confidence that,- Yes, all the problems will be over right now. Everything will be normal immediately. I contact the Air Traffic Control through radio telephony. Ask for homing. At last, make a complete instrument-led landing on the air-field.

A long sigh comes out from deep within. Why long sigh? Ranjan counsels himself, an Air force pilot should never be emotional. No thought of country-people, government-corruption, balloons of dreams and that of one fallen Chakraborty with coconut pot in hands should come in his mind. To fly like a machine and machine-driven landing is the only desired reality. To reduce the speed of a fighter aircraft on the runway at the time of landing, a parachute comes out from the back. In this hectic time, if he could take dada's letter so easy, Ranjan could get some peace. But the letter is raising the Aristo barrier in front, time and again. That's why, as soon as the story tellying ends, stiffening the jaws he becomes 'Chaks the instrument' again. Delivers the briefings of tonight's flying. And then, walking like a robot he returns to his office room.

As soon as he pulls the curtain aside, he observes, with surprised eyes, a scene, just out of the world. The alphabets from the torn-into-pieces letter, flying all around the room under the draft of the ceiling fan. They are colliding head-on at one wall to another at different beam angles exactly like the insects, seen in the class room. The colour of the walls changing rapidly. Hummings creating vibrations. Dripping at places like deliquesced bee-hive.

Translated into English by Subir Labiri

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THE TREE

Bushra Naqi

The tree stood in the middle of a narrow alley, its branches entwining into each other. It had its monopoly in the closed alley simply because it was the only tree there. Lately it had begun to wither, its leaves curling into brown parched leaves. Still it had no intention of surrendering though it had drawn a great deal of hostility from the inhabitants around it for its audacity to encroach on the already limited space. Its state of decay was another reason for the scorn that it invoked, and that it was bereft of any shade and provided no benefit to anybody.

Then there were those amongst them who adored the tree, its overhanging branches, its bedraggled look (a symbol of an aging past) and its courage to stand there and withstand all the opposition and scorn. The tree looked on nonchalantly, internalizing all that it perceived within its domain.

In its lifetime it had seen many people come and go. There were many houses and families that dwelt here, whose lives resonated through its alley, and were colored by many ethnic flavors, all coexisting in harmony. In its memory were stamped images and shadows flitting to and fro.

One was of an elderly lady, Mrs. Rose who would stand on her upper floor terrace for hours looking below at the intermittent flow of passersby. Having retired from a long career with the Salvation Army and then worked in a local college, she was now shedding herself in her twilight days. Hers was a reclusive lifestyle, and the view from her terrace was the only activity she could vicariously engage in, not being able to actively participate in life. A steep flight of steps and her failing health prevented her from climbing them frequently. She had to content herself with chatting with neighbors and passersby from her lofty height and discuss current events, and the gossip of the inhabitants of the lane.

Since she was not mobile her daughters, Alys and Aniqah would visit her on weekends and bring with them her weekly food

supplies, cook for her and nurse her.

Her situation was a peculiar one in Pakistan where relatives would volunteer to look after the elderly. But she being Anglicized in her ways would not demand or impose on the time and space of even her own children. Neighbors would sympathetically shake their heads and lament her lonely predicament. They did not know Mrs. Rose at all. She was never lonely, for her life was fuller than other women of her age.

She was an avid reader and lived life vicariously through her books. An enlightened woman, she could talk at length on any subject. The fact that she never engaged in petty and trivial conversation set her apart from her peers and excluded her from the typical social elite. Part of her time was spent watching television, one of her favorite pastimes, and she always stressed the need for selective watching.

Rose was frail as a withering flower yet she never gave up the things she enjoyed most, and this was smoking despite a chronic lung infection. She continued this self-indulgence and nothing would persuade her to give it up. Careful as she was in her diet and daily routine she still continued with this lethal habit. She would never let anybody know of the worsening condition of her health and stoically she continued to live alone. Having led an active working life she would not surrender to her weakness and disability.

Instead she continued to nurture her daughters and grandchildren who would rally round her to talk and play with her. Her family, which included her daughters and son-in-laws, came to see her and were eager to oblige and care for her. She would counsel her daughters on issues of marriage and raising children. A good listener she was patient and refrained from being judgmental or partial when dealing with their issues. So they all loved her and valued her company and support.

Her daughters would at times plead to her to come and live with them but Rose would only say that she would leave this house only when she was dead. Knowing her condition they were afraid for her and could only pray silently that all would go well.

Then one day there was a frantic midnight call to Alys, her daughter. It was Rose.

- Come at once darling, I am in great pain.

- Mother why didn't you call me earlier? I will be there in minutes.

When her daughter reached her house she saw her mother in the midst of an asthmatic attack. Immediately an ambulance was called and she was taken to the nearest hospital. Her condition gradually deteriorated and after being discharged from the hospital she remained bedridden. Despite her ill health she remained undaunted and kept a firm upper lip, never for a moment giving in to her pain and disability.

Finally one day this strong yet feeble lady succumbed to her corroding disease and died as quietly and peacefully as she had lived. Her daughters held a small Christian funeral and the inhabitants of the lane came to pay their last respects to Rose. A priest said a prayer and extolled this lady who had lived a heroic life of independence born from her innate strength. She passed on as quietly as she had lived leaving no trace of herself.

The indomitable tree sighed as Fall descended and its green foliage crumbled into parched leaves. These humans, he thought, consider themselves superior to all other living beings yet have the silly habit of wearing themselves out. They will work out day and night to improve themselves and at the same time squeezing their strengths by abusing all that they create.

The tree turned its face to the other house in the small alley. It was a small household, unpretentious in its size and bearing. Resembling a colony of ants, the occupants busied themselves in their daily chores.

Belonging to the Parsi community they quietly observed their religious rituals. In a small room in the house a fire was lit all the time and here the family congregated to worship. Belonging to a minority community they had become insular and kept to themselves. Except for Sana, one of the daughters of the Shah's, who was a vivacious girl bubbling over like a mountain stream, singing merrily yet keeping its dark secrets in its bosom. She was

a single parent raising a young daughter. This did not deter her from having a career and enjoying life fully. Her parents gave her all the support and stood like a wall behind her. They themselves were like shadowy images imprinted on a canvas, merging into its different colors to form a whole picture. Like different waves indistinguishable from one another, they blended with people in a quiet way. Their lack of assertiveness made them almost invisible like an abstract painting speaks volumes, yet conceals its actual identity in a voluminous mass of imagery and color. They were a working household and not in the habit of sitting around idly.

The lives of the Shah family moved on in a routine manner as the lives of most people moving with small ripples surfacing, yet with many undercurrents flowing under its calm surface. The family was too simple to apprehend what lay ahead. Even if they stood on the edge they would be oblivious of it, such was their preoccupation with themselves. In some ways their complacency or naiveté was a blessing for them, for even if they had seen the pitfalls lying ahead they would not have done anything to avert them. They were not able to see their own son, Azhar, devastated over his best friend's death. He was an eyewitness to a gruesome incident when a man was gunned down by his friend as they sat together at a small restaurant in the heart of the city. As he looked on with horror the man fired three shots at Omar killing him instantly. A stricken Azhar picked up his bleeding friend and took him to the nearest hospital where the doctor pronounced him dead.

What happened after that was a nightmare he would never forget. His mother and sisters cried hysterically and his father was benumbed with shock. They were a peace loving family who had no enmity with anybody. Yet being a member of a minority sect they knew that the assassin must have been a demented man with a deep hatred for their sect.

The murder changed his life as he lived in fear and horror all the time and shunned his friends and family. He became quiet, keeping to himself and withdrawing into a shell.

The Shah's continued as if nothing had happened. But then their situation was no different from most people as they expend

their daily lives in an ambivalent state of awareness and ignorance. It is only when the crisis looms larger than life do they become aware of it and then desperately try to tackle it to the best of their ability.

Then one day a terrible thing happened which shook the Shah family forever. The police knocked at their door. They were asking for Azhar and said that they had come to arrest him. They had information that Azhar was implicated in a murder of the member of a religious sect.

Mr. Shah categorically denied it and said their son could never be implicated in a crime, especially that of murder. The officials said they had evidence and had brought arrest warrants. Azhar they were told was away and would not be back for a few days. The officials left with a warning that they would return soon.

The Shah's feared that Azhar might have retaliated for his friend's murder and killed the man. When Azhar returned and was questioned by them he disclosed that a group of friends had had a skirmish with this man called Abdul when he cursed them and called them disbelievers. In the fight Abdul had been injured and died.

Two days later Azhar quietly boarded a plane to England to stay there till the matter subsided. There he lived a couple of years as a young man displaced from his home and family.

Thus life moves on like the ocean currents, continuous in its pursuit, bearing a calm exterior for people to see.

The tree watches and shakes its head shedding a cluster of leaves. It wondered at the tribulations which struck this creature called man. Why did he have to mess up his comfortable life by playing with the lives of others, when all he needed to do was live in easy co-existence. With all his intellect and wisdom, he was quite pathetic in his constant floundering with whatever he handled.

The tree now looks at the house lying adjacent to it. Here lived a young couple, who were occupants of this small alley yet never became a part of it. They were too engrossed in raising their young boys and had entertained themselves with no other interests. The woman Nina, was even more obsessed than her husband, Rohan, in nurturing their kids. They dreamt of raising

model kids who would grow up to be a feather in their plume. An onlooker who observed their insularity did not see much beyond what lay on the surface. Cut off from the mainstream their children would probably grow up oblivious of the complexities of life and would then have to learn the skills of dealing with it. They were known to do very well academically and were well groomed, but beyond this nobody knew much about them.

Adnan and Sami their two boys were raised by their mother according to the book. Their physical and emotional development was monitored in a very systematic way. She believed in complete freedom for young children, even at the cost of their playing truant. Their personality, she believed, should not be marred by curbing their actions. They were never refused anything, never upbraided for being naughty, even when they posed a nuisance value for others. The neighbors dreaded having them over as they would be all over the place, bouncing around as if they were in a playground.

The boys' father too was very indulgent. He was a proud man and would never sacrifice the respect of his family on the altar of disloyalty. His family's honor was dearer to him than anything else. An orthodox man he raised his sons to observe strictly religious rituals and on these issues he was uncompromising. He would bring to task the boys if there was any neglect or omission here. Since they were never given a choice here they always did what they were told.

Rohan was a contractor and constructed houses for people. A pragmatic man, he ran his affairs on a daily basis. Having none of his wife's idealism and intellectual bent of mind, his was a mundane existence like a young man assiduously performing his routine chores, and at the end of the day happily retiring into the coziness of his home where few people bothered to disturb him.

The couple lived with a strong commitment to preserve their precious brood. Their life revolved around them and they too likewise grew in maturity and experience. Thus life moved on and they managed to sustain whatever they aspired to achieve.

The tree from its age-old experience knew that the man who kept his focus on his goals, managed to achieve everything, crossing chasms by building bridges over them. So great was his commitment that he did not see the pitfalls lying in his way and crossed over them blithely like a new born babe.

The tree watched all this and shook its head as the morning light filtered through its leaves. Now it looked askance and faced a white architectural façade gleaming in the sunlight. Here a garden is bedecked with flowers and verdant foliage sprucely in place, and trimmed to size. All this cast a reflection on the character of the occupants of the house. A woman of advanced years, Ms. Sarosh, lived alone in the house, having lost her husband a couple of years ago, and her children being in faraway lands. Meticulous and finicky, she tended to her house like a parent to a child. It was spotlessly clean and sparkling, hinting an obsession with tidiness, and a pride in everything that was a part and parcel of her house. Her concern extended to the small alley as well, which she wanted to keep clean and well lit for all the inmates of the alley. Her disdain for filth and chaos was extreme, and when she glanced at the tree opposite her habitat, at its ungainly posture and withering leaves scattered everywhere, she would quiver with anger. She prayed that the tree would be wiped away from her presence so that harmony and uniformity would come to her precious blind alley. Painstakingly she had maintained its privacy and invasion from scavengers all her life when she would stand as a sentinel at the gate and shoo away unwanted people.

Her deceased husband, in his days, would stalk the alley regularly with his walking stick and clear away any rubbish littering the lane. A commitment to the community was the hall mark of the couple's life. Their three children had decided to live abroad permanently. Having been displaced at the time of partition of India and Pakistan, they had never overcome the trauma they had undergone. The nightmare of deprivation and extremity never left them and a feeling of affiliation with their country never really took root. More than anything else they wanted their children to be well settled and live comfortable lives even if they had to live

in foreign lands. The hardships they had gone through, was something they never wanted for their children.

Mrs. Sarosh would sit in her garden daily surrounded by colorful flowers. Her loud voice would rise above the sound of birds and insects as she kept a vigilant eye on the gardener pulling out weeds from the ground. Simultaneously she kept an eye on the street for rowdy trespassers who might spoil its beauty by throwing rubbish here. The gardener seeing her eye wander paused to get some respite from his labor, but only for a while for she would rivet her focus on him quickly. Nothing would deter the lady from her strict supervision, not even the hot rays of the afternoon sun slanting down on them.

As she sat there bathing in the warm setting sun, her eye would again and again fall on the stooping tree. She wondered how something so ugly and decrepit could stand the strains of time. Why ugliness had no justification to exist let alone thrive. And the tree was not only alive it gathered all the leaves under it forming a huge heap of dead leaves, which no one bothered to sweep away.

The tree stood there stubbornly refusing to be wiped out. Equally obstinate were the other inmates who made no attempt to cut it down. It had lost its productivity yet like a sick patient persevered to stay alive.

Yet everybody knew it was dying and so was Sarosh, who was afflicted with a terminal disease that she battled with an indomitable will. She was withering away despite her strong perseverance and strength. The aging tree and the sick lady seemed to be fighting in unison and together losing their vitality

Then one day the woman succumbed to her disease and breathed her last breath. She had wanted to live with health and vitality but her days were over. The battle with death was ending and the burning candle extinguished into smoke.

Her children were gathered around her, something she wanted most in life. Like a chicken with her brood she had raised with her blood and sweat she died in their loving arms. All that they had achieved today was what she had aspired for them and they

buried her fulfilling the last rites. Having been a vibrant part of their lives it was difficult to let go, for she continued to live in their hearts as they remembered her words counseling them with wisdom and foresight which was unique to her.

The following day the wind blew through the blind alley with exceptional velocity, lashing to and fro, and stirring a storm within its limited space. By the next morning the tree was found lying prostrate on the ground, its dead leaves scattered everywhere. The same day people came and dragged away the tree from the blind alley, leaving a deep pit where it had stood with remnants of forlorn dried leaves. Slowly the hollow pit was filled in leaving a clean and even patch, leaving no trace of where the tree had been. The neighbors were relieved to see the hurdle cleared and their mobility improved. The alley wore a deserted look as if a chapter of its life had closed.

* * *

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There is universal delight in the literary treatment of petty themes whose scope is not permitted to exceed the capacity of small enthusiasms and which are sustained by their polemical possibilities. Insults, intended as literature, roll back and forth. What in great literature goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day, what is there a matter of passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death

From *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*

In a dream-real land

Sunil Sharma

It is a blue country swirling around!

Between waking and dreaming is located a light realm; an ethereal region where past is in present, present in future imperfect. You time-travel in this land, picking up memories the way prancing children pick up the dancing daffodils on a sunlit meadow. Faces met in the crowded trains, subways, malls or offices stare fixedly, in a state of stasis. The scenes shift dramatically fast and intercut. I see crowds, then empty expanses rolling down. The winding alleys and arching bridges remind of a picture- postcard German town or a well-preserved European tourist town of the early 1930s, radiating a sense of peace and serenity. Then, the future is foretold by arresting visuals. There are sub-conscious messages in the grammar of dreams. I see changing landscapes...

Right now, I am travelling in this vast blue territory. The skyscrapers suggest I am in **NYC**.

The / Vertical / Iconic / New York City / Beckons the hordes / Across the world / Through / The / Statue of Liberty.

Everybody wants to be in New York. Its sexy appeal gets transmitted fast through the nether regions of mind and I feel its power. Spires shine in the blue haze. Tall and thin/ tall and squat perpendicular buildings, viewed from a low-angle, stand as symbols of affluence, power and domination.

You feel the magnetic pull.

The NYC, although never personally visited, is familiar through the Hollywood iconography. I see the familiar buildings in the Times Square. The Fifth Avenue. And I see the lone *drummer*.

The Reggae beats!

The black man is creating heavy notes out of odd objects: buckets, pans and refrigerator cabinets, while sitting painfully hunched on the plastic bucket upside-down on the pavement, in the cold December air. It is a strange symphony. He is producing loud beats out of the discarded household items. The destitute musician is using sticks in both his hands and producing sounds that are rhythmical and sweet. *Music in most unlikely places, out of most unlikely instruments, yet divine.* He is a great composer—unknown, poor and homeless, finding

cadence and harmony in the most hopeless urban situation. Another vagabond sleepwalks, while men in hoods drift nearby, the ghosts of the dream-city, perhaps part of some street gangs.

The focussed street-performer goes on drumming feverishly; the notes float in the air thick with the scent of dollars. He is completely concentrating on his orchestral pieces. Everyday appliances and drab items, in his strong hands, get transformed into excellent musical instruments. It is a spectacular feat for the vagrant composer. The crowd largely ignores this artist. Some linger on. He stops his livewire performance and stares blankly, sweat dripping down his broad forehead. The corner of the Fifth Avenue ceases to be an open-air music studio and reverts to its desolate character: lonely, vulnerable, insecure and accessible public spot watched by the cops and haunted in the nights by the thugs, hookers and addicts. A young pony-tailed guy drops few coins in the mug, while the gifted nameless composer looks on, exhausted and indifferent, a picture of abject poverty amid affluence and glitter. The automatic crowds move on. “Folks like the 50 Cent earns more, while talents like this unnamed guy sit and die unknown here on the mean streets,” says a business suit to his slender and tall companion. “Art, street art, unless packaged and marketed properly, has no future. Where are the patrons? Who cares to stop and appreciate this live performance. Create a hype around it. Bring TV journalists, turn it into a commodity and you have a cult performer selling millions of records worldwide. Publicity is an art that can turn kitsch into top-selling artistic commodity,” says she, munching a burger. The anonymous performer sits rigid, alone, abandoned amid his pans and buckets that he makes them sing so beautifully. His sad impoverished human form melts suddenly and becomes part of his accumulated junk on the street. Without his music, he is nothing, a guy nobody notices on the busy day in New York City of million self-fuelled power dreams. The destitute is excluded from the society formed for the rich and the privileged only. His watery eyes see, yet see nothing. He is in NYC, yet light years away, a drifting cast-away of the system...

...It is raining heavily in Mumbai. The cities—Asian and American— getting merged and becoming one big City. Urban

decay is everywhere. The homeless are sitting on the wet pavements, in rainwear, the rain whipping them sideways and from the top, water dripping down the caps of the mackintoshes, invisible. Brown muddles form. The plastic sheets precariously protect the battered families in cramped space of few feet. I see faceless figures moving about. There is filth and mud and garbage and broken pavements and shrieking packed trains and buses and crowded beaches, platforms, terminals. Nightmarish Asian city now. Western city now with its own vagrants and homeless hungry folks huddled under the grey whipping rain, driving snow and grey smog. Automobiles choked streets and toxic fumes killing everything...

It is *unreal* city of defied film stars and garbage-like pavement-dwellers. The film posters are everywhere. The houses are filled with costly furniture. No residents, only furniture. The houses are all empty of human forms. I see only the gliding zombies, the ghosts, white-faced, featureless figures in polluted air...

Suddenly, I see the City invaded...By the Godzillas, lions, hippos, monkeys, foxes, wolves and bears—all the fanged/horned creatures unleashed from a big zoo. Elephants are marching on, trumpeting, chimps follow. They overturn cars, smash buses, attack the bins. The real Predators have arrived, finally...

In my office, I see colleagues turning into predators, fanged animals baring their sharp teeth, behind their cultivated smiles and three-piece suits and clipped English. Neighbourhoods turn into a battleground fierce and bloody...

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down.

I see a bunch of elephants chasing me in the urban jungle. I am trying to flee. They are catching me. Finally catch up with me and about to attack me...

And the blue haze continues to swirl. There are no humans left, only the walking shadows. An unreal city. Or, is it the real one?

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Water on a Hot Plate

Murli Melwani

One of the first persons I phoned when I came to spend the summer with my son, Anand, in Toronto this time was Vivek. Vivek was in the wholesale trade in Curacao. In the course of our conversation he told me that his two daughters were on holiday in Canada, staying with a cousin of his, Dina. Courtesy demanded that I offer to take my friend's daughters for lunch. Courtesy also demanded that he not refuse the offer. Dina lived in Pickering, which was a bit of a drive from Toronto. Calls were made and the time and date worked out for taking the girls out to lunch. So here we were Anand, my wife Rajni and I outside Dina's door.

The door swung open and Vivek's daughters, Resh (the shortened and westernized form of Reshma) and Shal (ditto for Shalini), flew out. "Hi Uncle, hi auntie, hi Anand," they chirruped. Dina followed behind them and invited us in.

We had never met Dina before. But talk of that wonderful destroyer of inhibitions, food, made us feel at home. The claims of Indian, Italian and Chinese were discussed. Chinese won out. But Chinese cuisine always begs the question: Hunan, Cantonese, Szechwan, or any other?

Anand remembered that Canada encouraged a variety that was not known even in China: Indian Chinese food. The Chinese who moved to India evolved a blend over the years that appealed to the Indian palate. Now when the descendants of the Indian Chinese moved to Canada, they brought with them the flavors their parents had perfected. Chinese restaurants in Canada advertised "Indian Chinese Food" as proudly as others announced: "Our specialty: Peking Duck". So Indian Chinese it was to be.

Dina recalled the name of a restaurant in Brimley which served exactly this variety of Chinese food. "Newton's. A lot of Indians go there," she said.

"Left at McGowan, and all the way down," Anand repeated the directions as he memorized them.

I visited my son in Canada once a year, during summer, and used the occasion to renew contacts with client/friends like Vivek. After graduating from the Wharton School of Business in the U.S, Anand had joined the marketing team of Nokia Canada. When the time came for him to renew his contract, I suggested that he join the family export business which I had been running out of Taipei for the last twenty one years. He agreed to join me, but on condition that he work out of Canada: he had grown to like the lifestyle here.

"It's a deal", I said, because his condition made business sense too. Our clients were located in the Caribbean; liaising with them from Toronto, because there was no time difference, would be easier than from Taiwan, which would be asleep when the Caribbean was at work. My son's decision meant, in effect, that our company would be working twenty four hours a day.

Both Resh and Shal were lively, and, as the SUV sped on, our conversation, like a beautifully plumaged Caribbean bird, hopped from subject to subject.

How could the talk not turn to the timeless questions Hindu Sindhis ask each other? How many Sindhi families are there on the island? How often do you get together? Do you observe all the religious functions on the calendar? What do you do for entertainment?

"Dad, what is with you that you always talk about Sindhis? We live in the West." Anand said, a little impatiently.

"Yes, even our dad talks like this. Imagine talking about ethnic groups in the Internet age," one of the girls said.

How could I explain to them that the Hindu Sindhis had no home, that they had scattered all over the world after India was divided in 1947, that there were only 2 million of them left worldwide? Anand and his generation understood the Sindhi language, but could not speak it. Teenagers and younger children nowadays neither understood nor spoke it. They spoke English, Hindi, Tagalog, Portuguese, whatever, depending on the country they lived in. People like Vivek and I saw it all; it was like a puddle of water on a hotplate, effervescing and evaporating, vanishing.

In a sense we were like the Chinese, who went to every part of the world, were mostly apolitical, and hugged memories of home and tradition.

But all I said was, “We exist only as a diaspora. We do not know how long we will last as a separate entity.”

“Well, the restaurant seems to be a long ways away,” Rajni said, obviously to change the subject. She always got nervous when Anand and I argued over issues.

When we came on Ellesmere Road we passed mini malls, a South Indian restaurant, a North Indian one, two Chinese restaurants. There was no sign of “Newton’s”

“We’ll drive for another five minutes, then it will have to be one of the restaurants we passed. Okay with you girls?” Anand divided his driving into units of five minutes!

“Okay”, shouted the girls in unison.

We swung off Ellesmere on to a narrower road to the right. “Look there’s a Chinese restaurant here,” said Rajni. The restaurant was set in the corner of the strip mall, which stood between two roads. A sign announced: “The Wok”

“Let me go in and ask where Newton’s is”, I said. Anand pulled into a parking space in front of it. I noticed two signs on the glass door, one above the other: “Set lunch \$3.99”, “Halal meat served.”

A middle aged Chinese lady sat behind the counter. “Do you know where Newton’s is”, I asked her in Mandarin. I haven’t the faintest idea why I broke into Mandarin. Even as I was talking to her I wondered whether it was some instinctive urge to speak what for me had become a third language, a memory of what I called my second home, Taiwan?

She answered in Mandarin. “I don’t know. We are new here.”

“*Seh seh,*” I said and left.

“Let’s go to one of the Chinese restaurant we saw on Ellesmere,” I said as I got into the car.

As we were about to swing out of the mall, Rajni, ever the observant one, exclaimed, “Hey, look it says, Indian Chinese

food.” These words were on the hoarding of “The Wok” on the other side, the side facing Ellesmere Road.

“It should have struck me, when I saw ‘Halal Meat served’ on the other door.

Should have known the place had something to do with South Asian food,” I said, knocking the side of my head with my knuckles.

Anand made a U turn and swung back into the parking lot. The woman at the counter did not show any surprise at seeing me, with others in tow.

“You could have told me that you serve Indian Chinese food,” I told her as she laid our table.

“I didn’t know that is what you wanted. You asked for Newton’s”, she replied in English. Her English had a strong Indian accent.

“Which part of India do you come from,” Rajni asked her.

“Bombay”

“Can you speak Hindi?”

“Why won’t I be able to speak Hindi? I was born there. I grew up in India”, she replied in Hindi.

For the first time I became aware of the soft piped music in the background: it was popular Hindi movie music.

While Resh, Shal and Anand studied the menu, Rajni and I learnt that her name was May Lin, that her husband had started “The Wok” in Bombay and later opened a branch in New Delhi by taking on a partner. I recalled that “The Wok” in Bombay had an excellent reputation.

The menu had the usual exotically named dishes. Resh and Shal wanted to know the difference between “Singapore fried rice,” “Tsong Hai fried rice”, and “Manchurian fried rice”. I confessed that I had come across many types of fried rice in the two decades I had lived in Taipei, but these three varieties were new to me.

An Indian family of three entered the restaurant and sat at a table next to ours. May Lin handed them the menu and came to take our order.

The Indian sun had burned the original ivory of May's Chinese complexion to a darker hue. The rich Indian curries, likewise, had given her figure a plumpness that one rarely saw in women in the Far East. Instead of the customary jade bangle, May wore a gold bangle with an intricate Indian design. Round her neck was a delicate gold chain; the pendant, also of gold, was embossed with a symbol of the Hindu deity Ganesh. Had she been wearing a bindi on her forehead, I would have thought that here was someone who had deliberately tried to go native!

In between serving us, May would go to the next table and ask the Indian family whether they were ready to order. It had been years since we had eaten Chinese food with this particular flavor. Whenever we went to India, which was once every three or four years, we were too busy trying out the twenty or so provincial varieties of food to bother about trying Indian Chinese. "We are always eating Chinese in Taiwan anyway," seemed to be our general attitude, "Let's try a Gujarati thali today."

Suddenly, above the clicking of our chopsticks, we heard an exchange of words between May and the Indian family. "Now it is after 3 o'clock. We don't serve the set lunch after 3," May said in a firm tone.

"In that case, we will not order anything," the man said huffily and rose. May watched them leave and continued to stand next to their table.

"Does something like this happen often," I asked May in Hindi. I presumed that May, having lived so long in India, would understand that I asked the question less out of curiosity, more as a gesture of assurance that May should not be embarrassed by what had happened. In Chinese terms it was a failure to provide the right service, hence a cause for loss of face.

"I kept telling them to order," she replied, taking the figurative hand I had extended to her. "But they kept delaying"

While Anand and Resh and Shal bantered as they ate, May opened up to Rajni and me. In India it is not uncommon for the owner of a restaurant to engage in conversation with a regular patron. In fact it was seen as a bit of special attention reserved

for the select few. May assumed this liberty, stood next to our table and did what she would have done in Bombay: talked about personal matters. She told us that it had been hard when they first landed in Canada. She said her husband often wondered whether they had done the right thing in uprooting themselves and their two daughters and moving here. In the beginning they had felt a sense of isolation since they did not know too many people. To compound their discomfort, business had remained slow. It took time to pick up.

Fortunately, their location had helped. There were a number of factories nearby which employed Indians and Sri Lankans. Once the workers at the factories discovered "The Wok" and started patronizing it, the word that the food at "the Wok" was good and reasonably priced had spread fast. And now, just a year and a half after their move, their clientele was as varied as Canada's population.

She showed us her welcome by turning up the music every time she went into the kitchen to fetch a dish we had ordered. The music belonged to a style which had become popular about ten years after I left India. It recalled a period I had heard about on the grapevine. She had lived through those times and identified with them. The music seemed to pin her, like a butterfly, to a certain time line. It also told me that the India she belonged to was not the India I had left.

She asked us about what we did in Taiwan. We told her we sourced household items our clients wanted, contracted them, inspected the finished goods and looked after the shipping.

"How do you like Taiwan?" Her question had the same casualness as her appearance. She had cut her hair short; it was parted in the middle; the parting was a straggly line, not a neat division. Her shirt and pants had the crumpled air of a person who put work before the allure of a mirror.

"We wouldn't continue to live in Taiwan if we didn't like it." Then, looking mischievously at Rajni, she asked me, "Twenty one years! So have you taken a *syau lau po?*" That is the Mandarin expression for a second, generally a younger wife. Just as I had gauged her to

be Indian enough to understand my reason for extending my figurative hand earlier, she knew that I would take her question as the compliment she meant it to be. Among the Chinese, a younger wife often has less to do with lust than with power; it tells your peers that you have arrived. The more gorgeous the lady on your arm, the sharper the cock of the snook.

I smiled. "Do you think the lady by my side looks like someone who can brook competition?"

"One of the reasons I learnt karate was to nip any competition in the bud," Rajni bantered. She continued in Hindi, "So, is there someone who shares your husband's attention, May?"

"I have told my husband to go and find another wife for himself. Especially when we quarrel. But he says I am good enough for him, inspite of my occasional crankiness. The man is basically a good-hearted person."

Our conversation turned naturally to the different ways the Chinese and Indians did things. She told us about her first and only visit to Guangzhou as a girl of eight or so.

"The first thing I noticed was that the buildings in Guangzhou were as old and faded as the ones in parts of Bombay."

She said she remembered vividly almost everything that happened during that month long visit.

She asked how, as Indians, we reacted to certain Chinese customs, which she described at length. I told her that these customs were no longer practiced in Taiwan in the form she mentioned them; maybe they were still practiced in Mainland China. We are often frozen in the customs which existed when we left the old country; the country moves on, our memories don't

"It is true I have never visited Taiwan or Hong Kong," May added.

It became clear as we talked that her idea of the Far East was not the reality I moved in, just as her India was not my India.

I tried to guess the sort of life she had lived in India. What with help readily available for peanuts she wouldn't have been the cashier-cum-waitress that she was here.

"In India I imagine you would have lorded it. Just sat at the counter and taken in the cash. Your husband too would have just moved among the tables, watching the waiters do their job."

"In India", she replied, "I never even went to the restaurant. I spent the day with friends. Talking and drinking tea."

"Playing mahjong, you mean."

"No. My Indian friends didn't know the game."

"I assumed that your friends would have been other Indian Chinese. I had a few of those too. But I spent my afternoon with the neighbors in our building. Maharastrians, Gujaratis, Madrasis, Punjabis."

I was familiar with the mix that lived in an apartment complex in cosmopolitan Bombay. May continued, "In India there is so much to do. Help each other to make *mithai* or cook for Diwali or Holi or prepare for a child the woman upstairs is going to deliver."

I was able to visualize the extent of the change the Lins had made by moving to Canada. I wouldn't have been surprised if she had said that here her husband was the chef and that their two daughters helped mop and clean the place at night.

"So why did you decide to move?" I asked

"For the sake of the daughters. The schooling here is good." That was her polite way of saying that Canada offered their children a brighter future.

"Dessert time" cut in Anand. But no one was interested.

After May cleared our table, she asked whether I would give her my business card. I did. "My nephew is planning to leave Bombay for Taiwan. Two or three months later."

"I will be there by then. Why is he going to Taiwan?"

"To look for a job. Could you help him find a job?" I was aware that some immigrants came to Canada after a stint in a third country.

"Can he read and write Mandarin?"

"He can. He can also speak Cantonese." She told us about his education and work experience.

I knew where there might be an opening for a person with the sort background her nephew had.

“Sure I will. Tell him to give me a call when he lands in Taiwan.”

“His name is Andrew Lin.”

And so the present extends into the future. Stories seldom end with full stops, as they do in books. In life they end with commas, one story blends into another just as a third weaves out of the first two. And so when Andrew Lin’s call will come, a bit of Canada will be resurrected in Taiwan. More important, another story will unfold of a talented and enterprising wanderer carrying diminishing bits of home with him in the countries he moves to, becoming, a few generations down the road, a puddle of water on a hot plate.

* * *

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I will try, gradually, to group everything certain in me, later the credible, then the possible, etc. The greed for books is certain in me. Not really to own or to read them, but rather to see them, to convince myself of their actuality in the stalls of a bookseller. If there are several copies of the same book somewhere, each individual one delights me. It is as though this greed came from my stomach, as though it were a perverse appetite. Books that I own delight me less, but books belonging to my sisters do delight me. The desire to own them is incomparably less, it is almost absent

From *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*

Two poems by M.V.S. Sathyanarayana

Some Hope

There’s still some scope for hope, I hope
Let lines divide the world and restraints our esprit;
Let guns prevent our hand-shakes
And let bruise the barbed fences, our bonhomie!!

Let currencies balance our luck and stocks our stakes
And let violence thrive and hunger glee!

There’s still some scope for hope, I hope.

Once kings harassed and despots oppressed.
Bygone were the days of imperial gore.
Those were the times when one man devoured
a millions’ life bread.

It’s time we shred those chronicles sour of lore.

There’s still some scope for hope, I hope

We stepped into this nonce when all hands
are seeking power, money and clout;
by vigorous shake of political wands.
For votes they strangle the throats and tout.

Whether we turned from pungency to bland
Or bland to pungency; I don’t know; but
there’s still some scope for hope, I hope.

Let the sceptics say something bitter, they said always.
For the end of the world,
let the cynics sing hymns with cadence.

Never mind the distorting caws, cries and brays!
There’re voices millions, shouting in silence;
there’re men with brawn with unknown sway
working for light, in utter darkness;
there’re hidden harbingers ready for their field day
to array before us holy canons of new age; hence
there’s still some scope for hope, I hope

We soon hear voices joining voices and sing
stirring gospels aloud, ending parochial mumblings.
We view for sure, muscles locking with muscles
to pull out the thorny pickets and selfish sills.

There's still some scope for hope, I hope
Let remain the dividing lines as scars of the past
injuries;
dump the old schools as fossils,
underneath the new green leas;
let the earthly distance between man and man
be a sheer visual illusion
and let stay our diverse skin colours,
as God-made errors, in spite of His real candour.

There is still some scope for hope, I hope
We live to see the day when the world
treads over the memorials
of caste frays, blind faiths and nuclear arsenals;
when world thinks with one brain
and makes one expression
of love, peace, harmony and happiness
as indelible hallmarks on the sacred times
speeding towards us!!!
There's still some scope for hope, I hope

Boundaries

Blossomed human acumen
Brokered what? A broken Earth!
Caveman became a craving man
To Creator's regret
Tied tight rights around his mien
Carved out lines between man and man
Made canons and framed bastions
Yet felt not safe; built deadly weapons!!
Running away galaxies lampoon

“Free cruisers we are
In the endless Empyrean!
No stops, no restrictive laws
And no bounds to our celestial caravan!
No need for us to take passports and visas!!”

“With love-nectar, the God made us all
We sip it all along, with great devotion
Basking ever, in its eternal elation!
But spilled it all over, you humans
And your fatal brains;
And alas licking with greed
Bitter satanic toxins!!”

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She's in the Nether World

M.Meena Devi

Praised as an angel
Silky flower, delicate darling
Really becomes she such a one.

Born in the same way
Just like her counterpart
But called as the fair sex
While the other as strong,
Not knowing the real thing
Not aware of the differences
Glad over the offerings
Of word and gold,
She thinks she's for all
But she has no world at all.
Where lies the difference

Between man and woman?
How comes the difference?
What is it
That differentiates 'her' from 'him'?
What makes her 'girl'?
They told something
That is 'sacred' for her.
Is it not for man?

She fell a prey
To the clutches of
The vulture of desires
By force or fate.
The world says
She's spoil'd;
She too knows
She's coil'd;
Knows she not
The way out of the snare,
None is there for her to care.
The world says
She is impure
Not fit to live here
Makes her too believe the same
Drives her to null in the world of game.
It's not her fault indeed;
Who sows in her the seed?

The scars left by it
can never be repaired;
But her despairs
can be shared and cured.
'Chastity' is in the heart,
Not in the body's part.
Who'll enlighten the world?
She is in the nether world. ***

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Two poems by Pradeep Kumar Tiwari

'T' Grows in Girth

'T's head,
Uprightly high,
Scales the height,
Of boundless sky,
But its feet,
Buried deep,
And firmly fixed in the earth;
Ever growing in its girth,
Of pleasure, pelf and profane mirth;
Ignorant of the earthly stir,
Known for human trust to burst,
All laic lures that attract and appeal,
Its flight in Spirit does seal.
'T' horizontally grows,
But vertically it has to finally go,
For a flight in freedom,
To its Beloved's kingdom,
Who is waiting and wailing for long;
Then why do ye your flying prolongs?
Is it for the fright to forfeit?
To lose your entity distinct?
In total loss is total gain
Leave all other beliefs,
Or a drop you are on lotus' leaf,
Before the sun shucks thee
Take a leap in Spirit's sea.

Untested DNA (self)

When I recall,
My first fall,
My initial descent

(Which was without my consent!)-
 In atomic ambush of atmosphere,
 I know I had no Karma
 To cause and compel my coming
 In an individuality of my kind,
 And get me doped and duped,
 In augmenting desires,
 As if a scapegoat bedecked
 To suit hellish fires.
 Yes, I sin , for I live
 But I suffer too-
 (To repay Thy earliest Loneliness)
 For Thy wish to delight in me
 And many of my kind
 But they take Thee for Brute not Benign,
 For they suffer,
 And see no end of their pangs.
 Ignite in them a hope
 In what savants say-
 Thou hast ever been benign to Thy beings,
 And none is made for eternal sufferings,
 Each carries Thy genuine genes,
 But the DNA(self) they must examine.

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Garland of Hearts

Rama Krishna Perugu

Slowly I open the life and look into
 There I find my self split into numerous shadows...
 I touch the warm bubbles of blood therein
 And I feel as if broken into pieces
 I wade through life as half dead
 Feeling lonesome , solitary in a crowd
 Having a monologue in a language
 I apply to myself
 Blinking eyes
 I stay here like a dog on leash
 Yes
 I am a loner in the crowd
 For that matter you, me, he, and all of us...
 Different may be
 Our ways
 Our languages
 Our problems
 And our thoughts too may be different
 But ours is an ancient humanistic outlook
 Let us be together
 As I know you
 And as you comprehend me
 Let us live becoming one along with humanity
 Placing heart to heart lets turn into a garland of hearts
 For we are the wounded
 If you call me to live together
 I shall spread my dreams in welcome
 Yours may be revolution or rebellion
 A battle or an internecine feud
 To make your dreams true
 You may divide the thresholds
 But I remain as the roof of the house..

Different may be
Our nations
Our borders
And our communities may be different too

But
Bearing the same color blood
We are all born from the world's womb
All the minutes I live I would sacrifice for a peaceful world
The property I have all
Is just the mad courage of love..!

To touch me coming from global family
One must be the personification of love
To shake hands with me
One must have bathed in the
Oceans of beauty of harmonious love and life.!

Translated from original in Telugu by Jagadhatri

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Two poems by Sunil Kumar Navin

A Letter

Years behind bars
On cleverly cooked evidences
Claiming my hands
Lay deep in the innocent blood
That in the streets spilled
In a series of blasts
That unleashed,
Paralyzed even the power of smell
In a dark and dingy cell.

Long after, a letter
From the hand so dear
Resuscitated my sense
And the warmth of the bed
Though it lasted no longer
Than dews in the summer
The long clipped wings
Strained to flutter.

Let Not Your Lips

Let not your lips quiver
What our souls concede
The pure unbound love
No need, no need.

I hope to guess
The language your eyes speak
Wherefrom the glow
And a dash of pink
Stolen by your cheek.

Perhaps the rising sun
Himself has offered his shine
And the rose
Its hue divine.

The tongue finds not words
To genuinely express
How the faint smile
Now dying at your throat
The quiver of your lips
Tempt my soul to quote
“Love is blind
Of divine kind.”

But are we free?
Do we have the air of freedom
As the love birds?

Here religion, castes and creeds
Flourish like wild weeds.

Let not your lips quiver
To utter
What our souls concede
No need, no need.

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Oasis of Peace

Y. Vidya

A sort of enigma with a
Multitude of interpretations
Disaster in mind is same as a
Natural disaster
Monster of terror devours
the entire world.
Ideological conflict, mental reservation of people,
Ranting and raving about the perceived
Wrongs done against one another,
The whole noxious network are the hurdles
The world passing through crisis
Of many dimensions.
Politics of violence yields
Nothing but vagaries of fear, sorrow
and pain on high altitude.
Nation in battleground
Littered with the bodies
Of the dead and the injured
The preaching is
Survival tactics.
Peace, has reached a panic point

Of extinction, to be sought, renewed,
Reshaped and developed.

A living truth for Humanity
away from groupism and narrow nationalism.
Inner integration, dedication to ideals
Transcend the human condition.
No parade and
exhibition in this sphere;
Let affection multiply manifold.
Assimilate care.
Peace in the world
coupled with the vitality of the people
can work wonders
Rise up with confidence and grit.
Arise, awake and move forwardly
on the path of
multidimensional love
Let enlightened patriotism
Spread over the globe.

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Three poems by R. Janakiraman

Peace Path

Christianity tells people
To pray before a Cross
Islam tells people
To pray towards Kabah
Hinduism tells people
To pray before idols.
Mankind spends much time

Focussing on such differences.

All religions

Tell in one voice-

Don't harm others,

Love others and help others.

Very few care

To think or act on these.

Path for peace is not

Where practices and beliefs

DIVERGE;

It is where higher thoughts

CONVERGE.

The Way of Living

Oh, The magnificent Himalayas

A stressful, peace less way of life

Dragged by excessive passion,

Creating ever increasing centers of

Living comforts and pleasures

Is being strongly advocated as

Signs of progress and prosperity.

Contentment and simplicity:

The essence of a life of wisdom

Is not laziness or indifference

Or excuse for shirking work.

Since hurried, pompous way of life

Destroys Nature's very life

Wisdom demands restraints.

Many with their aims greedy

Forget the message of history

That declares, "Too much greed

Results in too much grief."

If Your snow crown melts faster

Your peaks may become snow less

Many great rivers may dry up

Leaving fields and greeneries as deserts.

I thank for your sign of global warming:

A warning to all brothers and sisters

To review their way of living.

The Seed

One may sow in a lovely jar

Or in a beautiful earthenware

Pour river water or well water

Or corporation's tap water

Or a nicely bottled mineral water;

Put inland or imported manure

Of this or that manufacturer;

If the seed is not good enough

It will not grow well enough.

It is true for any spiritual position!

One may follow any religion

One may worship any God

Spiritualism won't make good

Without a proper spiritual seed.

That seed is very much within us

Within each and every one of us

With the good and bad of our deeds

Passed on from our earlier births.

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An Exploration of Feminine Sensibility in the context of Indian Society in A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry

Gunjan Agarwal

Ramanujan, a modern poet, presents a real picture of Indian Society containing both aspects – positive and negative. In a conversation with Rama Jha, A.K. Ramanujan asserts: 'You know that only test is the poetry itself. All I was saying was that poetry and teaching are not opposed to each other. For instance. I also teach poetry.' (*The Humanities Review* 06) Ramanujan's poetry presents a realistic portrayal of life with all its oddities, and he is also noted for his anti-sentimental treatment of subject. In this context P.K.J. Kurup observes: "To this extent the objective perception of the poetic self is essentially that of a comic observer of life's little ironies." (*CIPE* 194). In most of his poems, Ramanujan tries to explore the feminine sensibility and various roles played by a woman. He has presented her as a dedicated mother, sister, daughter and a wife but under this apparent glow of dedication, there is a subdued voice of a woman who is searching for her identity within the four walls of a house. This search is natural to a human being. Lord Krishna says in Srimad Bhagward Gita: *'Indriyani Parayanahu Rindriyebhaya Param Mana Manastu Para Budhiryobudhe Par Tastu Sa'* (*Sloka 41*) (The senses are greater than the body; but greater than the senses is the mind. Greater than the mind is the intellect; but what is greater than the intellect is he, the self). This one's self or identity is the supreme thing in the life of a human being.

In Indian society, a woman possesses a subordinate position, though she has been worshipped in temples as Durga and Kali. A woman is made woman in patriarchal setup of society. Amidst her family members she feels alienated and suffocated. One can find a streak of feminism in Ramanujan's poetry. In *Obituary* Ramanujan presents a general attitude of people toward a woman who has been treated as a burden:

*'Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table full of papers,
left debts and daughters'* (CP 111)

In south Indian society, daughters are considered as debts and there is no scope of providing equality to them everybody expects something positive from them and wants to enjoy the services provided by women whether they play the role of a mother, sister, daughter and a wife. Ramanujan's poetry is the product of his recollections, deeply etched in his mind and bring the memories around him. K. Venkata Reddy says: 'Memories, mostly of life seen through the eyes of a sensitive and observant boy growing up in a traditional middle class Southern Hindu Brahmin family, recollected during his long sojourn abroad, in the United States of America'" (*Reddy* 88)

In *Lines to a Granny* picture of a dedicated and loving grandmother has been depicted. Here she narrates the story of the sleeping beauty to her grandchildren. The poem *Difference* presents the picture of a modern woman who is equally competent in doing her job and is equally perspired while making picture- perfect clay models of men, women, toys and animals. Ramanujan writes:

*'The women mould a core of clay and straw,
wind around it
strings of beeswax on which the men
do the fine work fo eyes and toe nails'*. (CP 171)

In the poem *The Guru* Ramanujan depicts unrelenting attitude of society towards a woman. The poet prersona says that his guru provided him a practical advice regarding the position of women as they shouldn't be liberated.

*'Give the dog his bone, the parrot
his seed, the pet snake his mouse
but don't give woman her freedom'*. (CP 251)

These lines clearly reflect how patriarchal ideology terms woman as incapable of shouldering higher responsibilities and pursuing nobler ideals which leads to the legitimization of woman's

oppression : restricting her in turn only to the domestic field. Farhat opines “ Woman learns from early life that she is liked if she is helpless and dependent, she gets her needs met from her father and brothers when she sub-ordinates herself completely and serves them devotedly. She learns that her path to any type of fulfillment lies through them. She also notices that her prestige and way of life depends on her docility. She therefore represses her will for independent thinking and becomes completely domesticated” (*Women in India 53-54*) *Love 1 : What She Said* presents rapacious behavior and murderous aspect of a lover. Here an irony lies in the fact that a woman has to acknowledge her position without any complaint. Here the victim i.e. a woman herself is responsible for her suffering. Ramanujan peeps into the psyche of a woman who is ready to be seduced ignoring his heart, a piece of lead.

*‘Yet I grow lean
his heart is gold
to my greed. My eyes
are fed
when he turns his head’* (CP 219)

Ramanujan provides an analytical study of human-relationship through his poetry. He throws light on the dark unfathomed depth of female psyche as women feel tortured and exploited in male-dominated society. The poem *No Amnesiac king* takes readers back to the legend of king Dushyant and Shakuntala, a deceived one. King Dushyant marries Shakuntala and forgets her due to the curse of Durvasa Rishi. Later he accepts Shakuntala as his wife when he sees the ring which was once gifted by him to Shakuntala. The agony of forsaken Shakuntala is indicated by the poet to reveal the real position of Indian woman, a passive sufferer and helpless person.

The Opposable Thumb presents a testimony of husband’s cruelty. Here the poet-persona mentions his grandmother as a passive sufferer who is bereft of one finger, indicating uncontrollable temper of her husband.

*‘..... a real thumb,
no longer usual, casual or opposable after her husband’s
knifing temper one Sunday morning half a century ago.’* (CP 06)

The poem *Not Knowing* throws light on the position of a woman who has been treated as an instrument of sensual gratification rather than as a companion for a life-time. Through his poems, Ramanujan draws the attention of his readers toward the pitiable condition of a woman having sexual appeal. In the poem *The Day Went Dark* the poet-persona delineates the physical appeal of his beloved. Here the lover is emotionally sterile, regardless of her feelings, he remains busy in enjoying carnal pleasures –

*I loved a woman
with turquoise eyes,
navel like a whirlpool
in a heap of wheat
and the day went dark
my hands were lizards,
my heart turned into a bound.’* (CP 232)

Ramanujan doesn’t confine the portrayal of woman in the web of personal relationship alone. Many of his poems portray woman outside the gamut of personal relationship, for example, *Son to Father to Son* depicts the vulnerability of a woman graphically.

*‘It is no dream
to see a son skewered
by a bamboo arrow
in a jungle trap,
or a daughter lowered
like a match
into a sulphur mine
of hungry men.’* (CP 155)

Commenting on the institution of marriage, Simone de Beauvoir remarks, “There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband – on in some cases a ‘protector’- is for her (woman) the most important of undertakings – she will free herself from the

parental home, from her mother's hold. She will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master ..." (*The Second Sex* 352) In the same vein. Ramanujan throws light on the carnal aspect of marital relationship in the poem *Love-5*. The status of woman has been reduced to an instrument of procreation and sensual pleasure.

*'Though, at night, or anytime at all
in bed, he flashes lightnings, strips stark
naked, won't even wait for the half dark
to watch her watch him rise and fall.'* (CP 229)

This male – dominated society doesn't provide any space to a woman and she can enjoy the freedom provided by her male counterpart. Marriage has become a compulsory thing to provide her a dignified career and sexual gratification as Simon de Beauvoir puts it : "Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others : it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfillment as loved one and mother."¹

A woman is not supposed to show her carnal desire in a conservative society while a man can openly admit his desire for sexual fulfillment. The same is the case with a newly wedded bride in *Mythologies-3*. Here a wife pretends to be indifferent to a physical relationship with her husband. *Any Cow's Horn can Do It* peeps into a women's heart and paints her a deeply sensitive person as she is easily affected by the happenings around her. The slightest hint of discord can disturb her and she falls victim to insomnia. *Routine Day Sonnet* enhances the study of man-woman relationship in Indian Society. Here the poet-persona depicts his experiences of every day routine. He watches 'a red lorry' passing the window at two; or sees a sailor 'with a chest tattoo' across it. In the evening he goes for a walk with his daughter to be followed by a dinner, coffee and bedtime story of dog etc. Then in his reverie he sees a bullock cart. Suddenly he wakes up with a start when he hears the hoarse volcanic voice of his wife. Conjugal love is missing in their life. Both feel alienated as emotional fulfillment is not there in their relationship. Ramanujan writes :

*'But I wake
with a start
to hear my wife cry her heart
out as if from a crater
in hell; she hates me, I hate her
I'm a filthy rat and a Satyr.'* (CP 68)

OF Mothers, among other things presents a picture of typical Indian housewife who has a devotional attitude towards her family. She loses her identity and sacrifices everything in taking care of her family members. Here the poet remembers his mother who had no spare time for herself. Youth & beauty are sacrificed at the altar of domestic responsibilities. The mother's hands are compared to a wet eagle's two black pink crinkled feet' and her saree hanging loose on her body to a 'loose feather of a one time wing'. The poet's sense of surprise over his mother's hard work in kitchen is revealed here :

*'My cold parchment tongue licks bark
in the mouth when I see her four
still sensible fingers slowly flex
to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.'* (CP 61)

Commenting on these lines S. Nagarajan says that "*the metaphors in the first two lines emphasise the futility of the poet's language to express the rough, bitter taste of the memory, and the last two lines provide an irresistible objective correlative of the emotion*" (CIPE 19)

Still Another View of Grace deals with an internal strife of a gentleman whose morality begins to waver before the irresistible attraction of a woman. The poet persona finds fulfillment beyond the threshold of marriage. It is an indirect blow on the archetypal image of the woman. It is a spark of rebellion against the institution of marriage.

*'I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam the street
beyond the constable's beat. But there She stood
upon that dusty road on a nightlit april mind
and gave me a look ...'* (CP 45)

The poem *The Hindoo* : he doesn't hurt a fly or a spider either

depicts a woman who is dissatisfied with her conjugal life and tries to derive sensual pleasure outside wedlock. This new liberated woman wants to live for herself ignoring all traditional and moral considerations. The deviation from the moral code of conduct is the result of long lasting suppression of women in the male dominalad society.

In brief, Ramanujan has endeavoured to touch the inner layers of feminine sensibility. He has depicted her real position amidst hre circle and records her reaction. Rama Nair very aptly says that Ramanujan's poetry reveals a 'psychologically creative tension.' (Nair 22). The intensive study of Ramanujan's poetry leads one to the conclusion that we have a streak of feminism in his poems as the poet has depicted the sensibility of a woman through her reactions whether she has been playing the role of a dedicated mother, sister and a wife or a dissatisfied and revolting individual searching for her identity.

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Storytelling and its Oral Tradition

(With special reference to children's literature)

Dr. Jayanta Kar Sharma

The literature of any country or language is indebted to its folk-literature and its art of communication. It inherits its base materials from the oral traditional. So, if the folk literature of a country is richer, it helps in keeping the tradition alive and assimilating the new knowledge. The importance of oral tradition was more in case of the children who were deprived of the Gurukul ashram education. At that time education of all class of students was not possible due to the lack of the administrative facilities. So the help of oral story telling was being taken to fulfill the entertainment need of the people and to preserve them for the next generation. Therefore, it can be said that the oral storytelling art has evolved not only for the entertainment, but also to educate and inform the people and also to preserve and enquire into history, tradition, behavior, cultural symbol and myth.

Probably in the beginning of the civilization man must have tried to describe in an exaggerated but entertaining and tasteful manner about some wonderful thing or event and naturally he must have felt the need to narrate them to others. As a result, there must have enveloped a tradition of telling and listing again and again about those experiences in an interesting manner and that must have generated a collective urge to know more and more about those experiences.

Since prehistory time, lesson, morals, history and practical knowledge have been passed from generation to generation through this common oral tradition. Storytelling implies a listening audience and willing to hear the narrator's words. Its oral tradition requires cooperation and inclusion in comparison to its written counter part which keeps in isolation. Through a rich and descriptive oral tradition, societies without a written historical record maintain the knowledge that could otherwise be lost. Keeping the knowledge

alive a part of survival, allowing the experiences of the older generation to be passed to the younger ones.

The child learns the words and their meaning from the mother's nursery rhymes and the interest to listen to stories does not end till death. There is the beauty of imagination and as a result the worlds became living, meanings come out spontaneously. In spite of being imaginative its description is so documentary, aesthetic and lively that the listener flows along with it. The storyteller is in direct dialogue with the listeners here.

Human lives are surrounded by stories. Stories from folk tales, fairy tales, legends, myths, fables, epics etc. are generally told and retold in our families and villages. Fairy tales like Cinderella and Sleeping beauty, humans and non-humans, fairies and monsters are told in this section. Folk tales are stories about humans and animals who act like humans. There may be a wicked witch or talking animals and unreal characters are found in folk stories. Legends are stories that may have been told about a real person or happening, but they grow and change in the process of storytelling. Stories like Johnny Appleseed, Pecos Bill, Wild Billhickock, Daniel Boone, Bruce Lee, Elvis Presley and the Beatles are some of the examples. Myths are the stories about Gods and Goddesses or superhuman and who are worshipped by humans because of their superhuman qualities. In many countries the myths are told orally. Fables are stories with a moral lesson that have animals as the main characters. The most famous fables in India is the Panchatantra. Epics are long stories with many stories inside them. The Iliad, The Odessey, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the epics with full of stories. They span many years and even generations.

It not only confined to children and adolescent rather it reaches the people of all ages and all classes. Many oral storytellers had accepted telling stories to kings and emperors as their occupation. Even Goswami Tulsidas has presented the beginning of his 'Sri Ramacharitamanas' through Kakabhusandi – a crow telling the story. Similarly, in the great philosophical sacred book Srimad BhagaVat geeta, Lord Shrikrishna tells and Arjuna listens

as a mere listener. So also Sanjaya narrates the entire Mahabharat to Dhritarastra who listens.

People in all times and places have told stories. Even through the art of storytelling was very popular among all classes and all age groups of people yet it was more popular in case of women and children. Generally, the elderly members of the family such as grand mother, grand father, maternal grand father and grand mother and aunt take up the responsibility of telling oral stories to the grand children.

Due to the interest and love for oral storytelling in spite of the lack of publishing facilities and broadcast media in the past, the oral story-telling has gone abroad crossing the frontiers. The entire folk literature is really very much indebted to the art of oral storytelling. A bright example of this is the popularity of the 'Panchatantra'. It has been accepted with minor modifications in almost all countries of the entire world. Today, in spite of the media expansion, whatever fame and popularity 'Harry potter' has achieved, 'Panchatantra' has much more than that. The 6th century Greece born Aesop fables are sufficiently influenced by the 'Panchatantra'. Aesop was capable of presenting the principles and practical knowledge through his stories. So, his stories traveled many countries of the world through oral tradition. Birbal's Collection of stories, 'Vikram-vetal', 'Battish Simhasan', 'Boudhha Jatak' and the stories of 'Gopal Bhandu' are great sources of entertainment for the children and adults even today. It is said, the kings and emperors were forgetting the royal court affairs while listening to the oral storytellers.

The word 'Kahani' indicates that it is something which is heard. The art of oral storytelling is fully involved in it. The children prefer listening stories to reading stories. While listening a story, there is no pressure on the child's brain which is generally felt while reading. The child grows with the message which he receives from the story. The personality of the characters of the story develops in child's mind. The child develops attachment for good characters in the stories. It is easier on the part of the child to receive the message as

there is intimacy between the story-teller and the listener and the whole process goes through conversation. This helps in the growth of the child's personality. The story-teller very carefully applies creative strokes to match the taste of the child. This is the reason for which those writers of children's literature who are close to the art of oral story-telling are more popular.

The child tries to remain away from the textbooks because he has the pressure of getting by heart the knowledge of text-books which creates a tension in him. Apart from that, the textbooks are research oriented and content based and hence they are too complex for the children. The syllabus is imposed on the child and he considers it as an encroachment into his freedom. Compared to the boredom and monotony of the prescribed textbooks, the intimacy of storyteller, the art of storytelling, the story and characters all taken together are more encouraging and inspiring for the children. Here the desired knowledge is imparted indirectly and the child learns it gradually without any pressure or tension. Knowledge is more acceptable when it is mixed up with imagination.

Folk literature is the source of children's literature, The horizon of folk literature is very wide and vast. Folk literature keeps a vigilant watch on the development of every aspect of life from the children to old age. Oral literature is accepted as the first step of children's literature. The various elements of oral literature are the sources of folk-literature. Folk literature creation was not intentional rather it was the successful presentation and creation of the actions and creations in the surrounding atmosphere. So, the folk-style and folk-story of the different languages are the containers and vehicles of the different images of the folk literature and folk-mentality is the children's literature

The folk literature is full of uncommon wealth for the children. Remaining away from the complexity of philosophy, folk-literature prefers the spontaneity of life. Folk-literature prefers simplicity to complexity, light to serious, spontaneity to artificiality and this has inspired and encouraged the creation of literature useful to children.

The forceful sources of inspiration for children's literature are folk-song and folk-story. In some stories society and man as a social being has been portrayed in a symbolic manner where as in some other stories the human character is portrayed directly. Specially, the symbolic aspect of the fairy tales appears real even though it is not based on realism. There is sufficient material for the child's mental recreation and joy in the oral tales and stories. The following are the heart touching entertainments mainly found in the fairy tales. From the various descriptions about the animals and birds in the oral tales the child gets interested in the life style of the animals and birds. The child gets thrilled by listening about the human behavior and human sensibility in animals and birds. The child gets surprised by the adventurous expeditions and miraculous behaviors of the characters of the princes.

Oral storytelling since too formal that are told and retold in families before or after dinner. A more common kind of storytelling takes place in families and among friends. They give us a sense of family unity. As we tell the stories we have a sense of our family's importance and we are sharing something of ourselves. They give us a feeling of belongingness when we know the same stories we feel like a community. The strong moral messages given by some stories help in the creation of morality in the child's mind. In some cases the picture of heavenly divine characters' human behavior and the divine blessing got by the helpless force, the child to think of God positively. The child gets real satisfaction and happiness when he finds in some stories that the negative and dishonest characters are punished. The sense of mercy and pity arises in the child's mind when he sees the tragic suffering of the helpless and innocent characters. Sometimes, the wicked activities of the monsters and magic disturb the child psychology but in the process of the joyful experiences of listening to the story the child forgets that pressure.

Storytelling has a deeper motive. The storyteller can protest a situation in which they feel they are victims. Stories spread like wildfire. They can let us react almost instantly to events that make

headlines. Writing takes time. All cultures in the world were mainly oral cultures until the development of printing technology.

Oral storytelling is an improvisational art form. The child is generally art loving, so he is thrilled by the highly imaginative and the eventful realities of the external world. He tries to discover the nature of life in the imaginative subject matters. The oral stories are descriptive and in some case informative. The situation, environment and the condition of the characters and their descriptions helps the child to learn about the external world. The oral stories use repetition. This makes the rhythm and meter stronger. It emphasizes parts of the story that are important. Children can remember the chorus and join it with the storyteller. Another device used often is onomatopoeia, making sounds that imitate sounds in nature like zzzzzz for a bumble bee or a snore which gives children more pleasure. As a result a type of sound beauty is created naturally. This audio effect enhances the receptibility of the story and comparatively the listener gets more joy and satisfaction.

The simplicity of structure in the oral stories is enjoyable to the child. In such stories sometimes a lot of things about a condition or surrounding is said in one single sentences. The day to day simple spoken language is used in the oral stories, so this is easily understood by the children.

Due to the highest use of the art of storytelling in the oral story it is interesting. If the art of storytelling is attractive it generally draws the attention of the listeners. The beauty of the story depends upon the beauty of the style of narration of the storyteller. Generally, the mother and grand mothers play the roles of story-tellers. The beauty of the story lies in their beautiful expression. They can even make the shortest story very interesting by virtue of their art of storytelling.

Though the content of the oral stories are imaginary, yet they based on the skeleton of some truth or the other. So, the excellence of the narration is more important than the excellence of the story teller. The concept of the oral story is very vast. Starting from the lowest strata of the society till the highest, the

clown and king, the fool and the intelligent, the heaven and the earth and the underworld all three worlds are reflected in the oral stories. It helps in the growth of the imagination of the imaginative child. The oral story in spite of the differences of the variety is very helpful in the flowering of the child psychology.

Oral stories can and do change over time and from place to place. As they are passed from person to person they are reinterpreted by each storyteller. These are not deliberate, but choices to suit the teller's interests and creative and artistic sense. The story teller might make up additional scenes or descriptions that make the story better. The storyteller might change the story to match the current situation. The characters might be described so that they are recognizable as someone in the audience. Storyteller also hears stories. When he comes upon something that seems more interesting or new or fits their audience, he can simply add it to the original story and merge the two stories into a new story.

Oral story was not originally created for children intentionally but created on the demand of time and environment. It has been acceptable to the children. Oral story from the stand point of shape, structure and type may not be based on modern psychology yet in giving pleasure to the game loving child, in developing imagination and intellect, inspiring to be ethically upright, developing knowledge of external world and so many other useful matters, it is very rich. So, it would not be exaggerated to say that the stories of oral tradition are not only the source of children's literature but they are the first-ever attempt and base of it. Children's literature may not be the result of a conscious creation for the children but the character building of children can never be over looked. The proud canvas of oral story telling is timeless and even to day it remains as an indirect but strong source of inspiration for the creators of children's literature.

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Srimanta Sankardeva and his Philosophy Of Assimilation

Paresh Baishya

One name that emerges strong amongst the pioneers who helped build unified Assam is that of Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568). Counted amongst the greatest saints of the end of the fifteenth century and early sixteenth century, he is one of the leading names in the Bhakti Movement in India. Today his name emerges every time one makes a mention of the necessity to end social injustice and evolve a casteless society. He is the *mahapurusha* in the history of Assam.

During those days when Srimanta Sankardeva got actively involved in the Bhakti Movement, Assam and in one of the darkest phases in history – under the conservative forces of various religious practices. Education and everything good was a privilege of the upper class. Srimanta Sankardeva initiated a consistent effort to open the doors of education for all classes of people. It was a tremendous effort at making life worth living for the people, who for centuries, had been bearing the brunt of age - old negligence and humiliation. His concept was to develop the ideals of ‘one humanity’ and he can be called a crusader in his attempt at transforming the society into an abode of truth, perpetuity and beauty (*Satya, Shiva and Sundara*). He propounded the cult of Bhakti for cementing the bond of unity, peace and progress amongst different communities. At the same time, he worked for development of the society and the mental upliftment amongst the various sections of the community. It was his firm belief that devotion to God cannot be the exclusive right and property of any individual. He strongly advocated the necessity to have faith on humane values and that every individual has the equal right on such humanity- based religion.

According to Sankardeva, communalism lies in considering self as perfect and others as mean. Unity in society and social justice is torn asunder if such a contagious disease exists in society. It is quite natural that if we defame others’ religion, others too will do the same thing. In such a situation, mutual division and distrust raise their ugly heads and communal forces get the upper hand. Srimanta

Sankardeva fully realised this and worked hard for a cultural awakening in order to bind the society through the thread of unity and fraternity.

Sankardeva can be seen in close correspondence with ancient Indian thoughts and traditions. His personality, ideals of life, his talent, theoretical knowledge, knowledge of art, his realization and message having started in the Vedic period on the one hand gradually reached its height and integrated into Indian Philosophy, education, reforms and the theory of art and beauty. It was from such a tradition that he derived an independent philosophy and also a firm philosophical basis. Treating Assam as his place of birth and India as his place of work Sankardeva discovered the perfectly smooth way of assimilation. It was Sankardeva who had built the bridge of communication between Assam with the rest of Indian national consciousness. As a result of this attempt at assimilation, we have his *Mahapurusha Sadhan Marg* built with the backdrop of Assamese society. However, he did not allow the followers of Mahapurushia religion to alienate from the mainstream of Indian society and its ideals. One important fact that emerges in his writings is that he seldom mentioned the name “Assam” in his literary writings, though, the ‘Bharat’ has been repeatedly used. It is a proof of the fact that he considered himself to be more an Indian than merely an Assamese.

Srimanta Sankardeva was also the advocate of the Krishna culture that was very popular in the middle ages in India. *Kanya, Naat, Geet, Nritya* and *Chitra* all these streams of art got a new dimension and shape during this period. Srimanta Sankardeva’s songs and dramas, kavyas and dances, Meera’s *Bahjans*, Tulsi Das’s *Ramcharit Manas*, Chaitanya’s *songkirtan*, Guru Nanak’s *sarad* and *Doha* of Kabir etc got new life throughout the country. The streams of Bhakti religion had integrated itself with Indian spiritual thinking and idealism.

Srimanta Sankardeva emerges as a scholar of the ancient Indian texts and he exhibits one of the rarest of coordination - between knowledge and realization. Sankardeva’s idealism, his thinking, his assimilation of various customs and traditions, his evolution of a system and principle for life itself which is based on the local Assamese foundation is today known to the entire world. His philosophy for life is not confined to any religious community and hence his preachings appeal to all sections. On the other hand, these have been transformed into systems of life and culture. The remarkable changes

that the preachings of Srimanta Sankardeva have brought into the lives of the people, have given a new shape to the entire Assamese community. He can be said to have brought about a renaissance - affecting not only the lives of the people and the society they live in but also their souls. The Assamese community, having bathed in the said renaissance, have got the required purification and achieved double-life (*Dwijatva*). No other saint of India has brought about such all pervading changes. According to Bishnu Rabha, Lord Sri Krishna, Leonardo Da Vinci the eminent artist of Assam, Srimanta Sankardeva and are the three topmost artists in the world. Born three years elder to Da Vinci, Srimanta Sankardeva can be said to be at par with Da Vinci as an artist, musician, artist, sculptor and architect.

To speak in simple terms, the complete picture of Sankardeva's personality has been exhibited between religion and art. The glow of his talents is astonishingly refracted in diverse ways. A well-knit sovereign mental entity has been exposed through all these. In Sankardeva, the vast development of spiritual, mental existence of human being is observed. Such talent is really uncommon. The *Eksaran Dharma* propounded and spread by Sankardeva is universal since it advocates religious toleration. Srimanta Sankardeva's mass appeal can go a great way in the unification of modern India. With a view to establishing equality and fraternity amongst the people, Sankardeva established *Namghars* (place of prayer) and *Satras* (institutes of Sankardeva's culture).

We can conclude this: it is a matter of great regret that this great *mahapurusha* – with his alluring appeal, his principles of the neo-vaishnavite movement like liberation of mankind from religious obscurantism, awakening of social consciousness, reorganization to the sense of unity and brotherhood above religious considerations, equality of all lives before God, opposition to caste system, recognition to Bhakti (devotion), the necessity of abandoning all self destructive activities etc., he still remains unrecognized in many parts of India and the world. We can safely say to the world that the people of the world will be able to derive the unparalleled strength of brotherhood and peace by way of systematic study of the ideals and philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva. ***

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English Literature, Academic Culture and the Political Purpose of Literary Theory in Twentyfirst Century

Prasanta Kumar Panda

How, then, do we write ourselves into our texts with intellectual and spiritual integrity? How do we nurture our own voices, our own individualities, and the same time lay claim to “knowing” something?

Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play*

ONE

What readers of literature were up to in the second half of Twentieth Century is not solely a historical question; it is also a political and global one. As in politics so also in the academics, a Ph.D. or any other Degree in literature does not guarantee authority. To understand this one need not go to an intellectual and authenticate it with evidence. What readers do with texts of all kinds, then, involves admitting at least the possibility that they are there for an interpretation and response the academy will be happy with, and not with what a society can translate in practice. “Universal person and universal Reason” are easy enough to disprove and mock when one is reading the Eighteenth Century. But some basis for moral judgment begins to look attractive to the academician when he or she analyses the Nineteenth Century, and when it comes to the next Century, everything is decided by the capacity to consume things. I understand the temptation but urge that we look to theory to resist it like the world of ethics would like to resist the world of values decided on the basis of capacity to consume.

Ethics always has a cultural basis; we do not have to cite it as something exclusive in any field. But literature is different in the sense it is written in one place, read there and in many other places, despite the difference of the cultural bases of the society in these places. It gives a hard time to the critics to decide what the given

work of art is doing, to give it a context for reference and record its merits and deficiencies. This consideration is a political paradigm also used in literature when theoretical consideration takes the toll. Thematic considerations have taken a back seat for quite sometime and the people working on this aspect for their research are considered to be a bit lesser in status to their counterparts dealing with theory exclusively. I will deal with this aspect in the second part of the paper in detail.

Theory focuses attention in signifiers as opposed to signified, to the sign as 'empty and promiscuous' and to 'discourse' and/or 'language as material' and productive. If it is so, what might be called the representational anxiety of contemporary society the suitably ironic triumph of theory, albeit one that ignores the variety of things that the reader might be up to? Theory is not only a sign of times, it also participates in the time of the signs, because the contemporary society ascribes power to the signs it creates.

What is going on in the academy regarding, culture, literature and literary theory are the recurrent bouts of censorship that mark our history of literature. We are not just witnessing what is conventionally and incorrectly described as the effect of our puritan heritage, the usual explanation preferred and accepted in these cases while anxiety over the power of representations- an anxiety that more or less dates from the beginning of the printed material and the consequent dissemination of information and images to an audience in some sense beyond the limits of cultural ethics has marked the theoretical domains and empowered new signs with new meanings to decide parameters for reading literature. The explosion of technology has helped us in producing and distributing signs of power and hence discourses also. The aura has moved from the unique work of art and from an elite audience to all of us as readers.

Somewhere along the line of transformation is always something less fulfilling than intellectuals have reflected in their mention of a word "discourse". Even if we admit the vast and unconscionable inflation which the word 'discourse' has undergone, making it compulsory to use it whenever one might

previously have used its alternative 'language', the word does signal a significant distinction. Discourse theory requires us to grasp the fact that we don't merely use language as a neutral medium of exchange in which to conduct or reflect on our social life, for our social life is the language in which we conduct it. So literature as a part of culture and as an influence of theory conglomerates into a discourse

Both theoretician and practitioners of cultural studies have sought to make for this replacement a professional opportunity. The movement of theoretical dominance away from literature and arts to reading is getting into the sphere ever increasing number of signs, media, and signifying practices. Finally all these become a part of culture itself, as a movement spurred by theory's apparent capacity to decode. All this in turn function to extend the authority of the academy into and over the world of literature and culture which is not acceptable to many art practitioners. Now it seems clear that the academy's understanding of its mission has been transformed, and with it has come the prospect of a professional authority beyond the academic world.

Cultural studies as theory's successor might best be viewed as a tactic to recapture authority for potential elite not simply through more fully extending range of analysis but crucially through the call for political intervention to reclaim what never was the vanguard role of the intellectual. If it is possible to welcome such a development as a sign of the long overdue politicization of some aspect of literary theory, it is also possible to see the ethical as the latest alibi for, or development of, the political. As a result there are as many varieties of the ethical as there are critics to recommend them.

The illusion of those within academy that controlling interpretation in the classroom necessarily will determine the world outside is operative only in an economy of society, perhaps such was the case with I. A. Richards who trained a small group of young men to run the empire through close reading of a relatively few texts or Gandhiji wished by preaching an order of life in Sabarmati Ashram. It is unlikely to be the case now. Education in

liberal Arts and Aesthetics prepares one for unemployment in part because Indians in the present global economy believe; this kind of education is not good for any job.

Theories and cultural studies undoubtedly are better understood as a symptom than a cause of this condition and these anxieties. The end of theory, its apparent replacement in the academy by approaches that stress history and politics as reflected in recent times in the form of postcolonialism and multiculturalism, is thus act just the usual swing between formalism and historicism and certainly not the progressive triumph of better interpretive models supplementing their predecessors. In this conjecture theory's importance passing from the scene may be understood as the corollary of an ascription of power to signs, in this process signs derive, deriving their power from themselves rather than from reference or representation, have a very short shelf life. History in this process of encoding in the academy occurs first as commodity, than as a sign. The frame of system, ritual and sings that support the earlier two becomes an operational entity and gathers the respectability of a valid practice.

More than any previous period, writers in twentieth century have declined to find an answer to the question of right or wrong in literature and culture by involving themselves in politics. But they have rarely done themselves much credit or their readers much service, with those who committed themselves wholeheartedly. What I am trying to suggest in this paper is: it is possible consider reading as a process primarily dissociated to a theoretical tag, if it is done in the academia as it is possible elsewhere. This smooth phase can see the near oxymoronic splicing of two subjects who have traditionally been seen as antagonistic- namely the writer and the critic. The other way round, it can also be suggested that instead of going through the texts of the past read so variously one should better shift attention to new avenues in not only the time of their publication but also the ones that time has forgotten due to no conceivable reason.

TWO

In the world of literary criticism it is commonplace experience to read and reread works of the past masters and interpret them according to the whim of the time and the trend in the academia. The pretext may vary, but the decision to reread from a different point of view makes the difference. We call this literary endeavor by different names - rereading, reinterpretation, intertextual¹ criticism, deconstruction, feminist criticism, and so on. Under these captions we try to put a different context for the whole atmosphere of the literary text in question. In the jargon of literary criticism we call it 'foregrounding'². When we foreground we are aware that this text is already read and if there is any chance to say anything more about it we need an extremely systematic approach to justify our position. Fortunately, we have to our rescue an 'encyclopedic' context which supports our attempt to take this new position and explore new undertones of the text in question.

Thus, the difference between a 'text' as defined by the postmodern critics, and particularly Jacques Derrida, is the difference between the new critical 'work' as a 'organic whole' and the poststructural text which transgresses the boundary to subsume different levels of meaning, So construction of the text has replaced the previous stance of the critics to only interpret as the prerequisite of the job of criticism. To simplify the situation one can say 'work' is concrete and it occupies space, bound between two covers of a book. Opposed to this, the 'text' is a construction that oscillates between a clearly perceptible origin and the 'end' and subsumes imperceptible layers of meaning. This provides the critic the scope to become a collaborator in the authorial endeavor so far as the 'construction' is concerned. In other words, the critic is considered to be a co-author in production of the text he is supposed to interpret. In this way, the critics of the past like Mathew Arnold or T.S. Eliot who offered critics a secondary position is reversed now. According to the postmodern critical trend, the author is no more the only origin of a text. The critic partakes in the fabrication of the text and

what he supplements in the form of criticism becomes a part of the text for the other reader of the same text. The tall claim that a postmodern critic makes can be well perceived from the following quote; “Postmodern Intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. It is not a modernist desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look square in contrast to the richness of the past. It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead, it confronts the past of literature- and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts” (Hutcheon, 1987, 298).

In this context, ‘theme’, as the tradition of literary criticism has been accustomed to call it, is pushed into a secondary position. This happened because ‘indeterminacy’ became the catch word with the critic who dealt with the thematic aspect of such works, by calling them “open ended” according to postmodern parameter. Contrary to this assumption, in the early part of the twentieth century, indeterminacy was considered to be a blemish in the literary artist. So literary artists were conscious about the thematic position they were taking and their implications. So the reader became free to subscribe or discard the point of view of the author and justify his or her own by giving a theoretical position supplemented or supported by the text. The antagonism between the creative and the critical endeavor came to an end with this new way of reading, or as the post- modern critic would say; ‘rereading’ came to stay in the academia as a mode of literary/ critical activity as a simultaneous process. Keeping this in mind it will not be an exaggeration to say, both the author and the critic participated in the formation of a literary trend which does not allow an upper hand to either of them.

Though postmodernism as a literary trend depends upon a rationale difficult to violate taking the support of other available – isms, it also embodies some innate epistemological contradictions. Most important among them is, the contradiction postmodernism highlights at the cost of other types of critical tradition, is in itself contradictory. The concept of “Death of the author”, propounded by Roland Barthes, can only be a temporary phenomenon; and

therefore, the critic cannot be totally independent to perceive the text as a construct on one’s own accord in a perpetual ‘structuration’. The reason is that the absence we create in the theoretical domain (like a political one) is automatically filled by the presence of the text which is nothing but a trace of the author’s presence. This trace as the presence is felt when we wish to appreciate, interpret, reread, criticize or construct depending on our whim and the whim of our readers. To elaborate this idea one can add, you can forget the author as the originator when the work under scrutiny is of considerable length. But when it is a short poem, and particularly when it is delivered in the first person narrative form, it seems impossible to create the atmosphere of the absence required for the task of postmodern criticism.

Transformation of the first person narrative of the author to the first person narrative of the reader is a vicarious experience, both in the case of creative faculty as well as the critical acumen. What I want to highlight is that one should be aware that the author is indispensable in act of reading, for it is the author who reads the text first. In this reading (or often several reading) he decides to eliminate or/and add, which is an act of self criticism. Since the Critic involves in a similar activity later we cannot afford to hoodwink the fact that the author’s effort is not that of the critic in the literary parameters. So the inflections and derivations the critics make to frame a text cannot be considered to be the prerogative of the critic alone. This concept is at the root of the deconstructive reading of a work of art which is re-designated by Derrida as “intertext”.

Deconstruction brings its source of inspiration from bricolage- a concept in the civil engineering and best reflected in the toys that give you the opportunity to change the same toy into several shapes if you are capable of perceiving it. However, this indicates, from a period of time when art was considered as an ‘organic whole’ having an interior autonomy, we have moved into a point of literary history when ‘indeterminacy’ has engulfed our emotional as well critical faculty – which together can be called literary entity. Under the spell of indeterminacy as a mode

of postmodern reading practice no art form is considered as 'self sufficient'. My conjecture is that, the condition does not arise because art as an independent entity demand this approach but our minds are overflowing with the cross-section of several critical paradigms. The consequence is that postmodernism does not allow us to read and enjoy, it forces us to examine our intellectual expertise and get entangled in the exercise of reading a text endlessly. If it is not an exaggeration, I may be allowed to say, there cannot be as many papers as we want to be written about a given text; it must be, there can only be as many as there should be. Unless this fact is endorsed by the English departments in the universities it will be very difficult for the researchers to cope with the load of papers they encounter in their effort to put something new on record. Criticism with an end in mind or only to prove the means good enough in the theory classes should be reasonably debated to find out a solution to this problem.

Notes

1. 'Intertextuality' is a dynamic definition of 'text' as an ongoing process which Derrida calls 'Structuration'- involving the recurrent play of referentiality between and within texts. In this sense, a text is a fabric simultaneously woven and unwoven.
2. 'Foregrounding' is an important concept in stylistic which provides a bridge between the relative objectivity of linguistic deviation, description and the relative subjectivity of literary judgment. It is a criterion by which we can select a mass of linguistic details from a given text for analysis. This analysis is possible because the difference between foreground and background is a relative one, and a subjective response can ultimately decide what is and is not foregrounded (Abrams).
3. Encyclopaedic context is basically inconclusive in nature as the flow of information and its transformation is an incessant process. Hence, the writer's context and capacity to tie the text he produces and the capacity of the reader to untie it for his purpose can vary from each other. Thus, the meanings of encyclopaedic context vary from the writer's perspective and the reflection of it in the reader's interpretation.
4. A 'text' is a text only if at first glance and to the first comer it hides its levels of composition and the role of its internal play. Besides a text always remains imperceptible (Derrida, 1972, 71).

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Changing Names, Shifting Identities: A Discussion of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

Priyanka Tripathi and H S Komalesha

If we broadly survey the contemporary theories that have hit the scene over the last couple of decades, we at once realize that all of them at once try to grapple with a common issue: identity. In other words, identity has become a buzz word in the contemporary academic world. Though, there are several markers which silhouette the borders of identity, 'name' has become one of the prominent markers of identity. Especially in modern times, 'name' has become such a loaded term that it is not just a symbol with which a person is referred to or addressed by; rather, it has turned out to be a major defining factor of an individual. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* appears to be an illustration of the fact. The novel, through a series of changing names, portrays the protagonist beyond the boundaries of gender, race and class. The protagonist goes through various transformations in her name, place and personality, which is symptomatic of her ever changing and the already changed identity. *Jasmine* is a story of a young girl, Jyoti, from Hasnapur, a small village in Punjab, who migrates to America and undergoes a series of changes in almost all ways possible. Several names are attributed to her in the course of novel. The novel ends with her name as Jane but in the process she becomes Jasmine and Jase too. With every name, she discovers an altogether different woman in her. The novel is thus a diasporic saga of crises in – identity, existence and experience. This paper examines these elements in the backdrop of other issues the novel raises such as racism, sexism, multiculturalism and social oppression.

In Mukherjee's novel, the protagonist is given several names by different people associated with her life, and she goes on performing different roles that come along with the different names.

Jasmine is about Jyoti's metamorphosis from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jase and finally Jane. Recently in the story hour in the library of University of California, Berkley, 9 Oct, 2008, Bharati Mukherjee said that when she finished writing *The Desirable Daughters* she

thought of how much she knew of her family on the male side but wasn't too much aware of what has shaped her. What was the historical oppression and what were her individual choices in becoming what she was now today. She is American but not in a way her other fellow African and White American women are because she always has to play in line with the colonial past and post colonial present. Probably that has been there in her mind always and hence most of her novels reflect women's life, generation after generation, a conscious and creative way of storing what she knows of the 'female side'.¹

Jyoti is a simple girl from Hasnapur, a fictional village in Punjab. She grows up in traditional, conservative, semi-feudal, patriarchal and rural society where girls are nothing but curses. To quote from *Jasmine*:

God with infinite memories insisted girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations.²

Her mother had tried to kill her as soon as she was born. Since her childhood, she had to face the consequences of being born a girl.

Nothing is fair. All over our district bad luck dogged dowry less wives, rebellious wives, barren wives. They fell into wells, they got run over by trains, they burnt to death heating milk on kerosene stoves. (41)

An astrologer had also told her that she would be a widow while she was just seven. But she is not somebody so fragile in mind. She proves herself as brightest of all other students with her. Even to the prophecy that she would be a widow later on, she fights to revive her married status beyond the person and place she is married to. With a wish to change what has been told by the astrologer she goes on making bold attempts. She had to struggle for education because her father believed that girls were meant only for housework. Against all opposition, she determines to study. Later on when her teacher in the village 'Masterji' comes to know that she is likely to be wedded to a Ludhiana widower, he comes to her father. He asks him not to marry his daughter. He wanted to assure her father that she had the potential of taking up some job in a bank. When they ask her regarding her education and career she says that she wants to become a doctor. To quote from the text:

I want to be a doctor and set up my own clinic in a big town. Like the moustached doctor in the bazaar clinic, I wanted to scrape off cataracts, fit plastic legs on stumps, work miracles. (51)

She is very young and does not have a very elite educated upbringing still she is aware of what she wants to become in due course of time. Later she marries Prakash Vijh. He is a bright engineer and he is looking forward to continue his higher studies in America. Of Prakash she says,

He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. (77)

However, Khalsa Loins shot him down. This leaves Jasmine shattered. She wants to travel to America and perform Sati, which is a ritual a Hindu wife should perform after her husband is dead. She has heard of Vimla, her widowed friend committing suicide by burning herself with fire from the kitchen stove. She also saw her mother attempting suicide after her father died. Having failed in the attempt she shaved off her head and now sits in a corner all day. She is reluctant to eat and that is the reason she has to be forcibly spoon-fed. With that intention, Jasmine also sets off her journey but on her way, she is raped by Half-face that has helped her in illegally immigrating to America. She is taken a back but instead of committing suicide after being raped, she gathers herself, slices her tongue like Goddess 'Kali' in Hindu mythology and kills the Half-face with a knife. All this might be symbolic of the fact that thought deep down in her mind she follows the traditional rules of living in a patriarchal set up like India, but she is ready to defy the radical standards of 'Sati' 'Ideal wife' 'Ideal woman' and create her own standards in the new travelled land. She precedes her journey with confidence and ventures American cities on her own. 'Professorji' who was a teacher and well-wisher of her dead husband takes her in. Soon she gets tired of the suffocated Indian type environment. She asks Professorji to arrange a green card for her. He does that secretly and she leaves his house.

She takes up the job of nanny for Taylor and Wylie's daughter Duff. Taylor calls her Jase. The name is new for her but she adopts herself with the new name. She tries to absorb herself

with the culture of America. She wore T-shirt and cords and felt that American clothes disguised her widowhood. She avoids even talking about Hasnapur as even, "memories are sign of disloyalty." She says:

I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family. (165)

She gets 95 dollars a week and she doesn't save for the future. She lives for the moment. She buys herself spangled heels and chartreuse pants. She says:

Jyoti would have saved. But Jyoti was now a *sati*-goddess; she had burned herself in a trash-can – funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijh and Wife. Jase went to movies and lived for today. (176)

She also enrolls herself in some extension courses at Columbia University. She truly is a cosmopolitan citizen in that sense. It is strength and intensity of her will power to live and sustain the pressure offered by life that she goes on playing one role from another with equal efficiency. She herself states:

I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself into nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet-proof vest, was to be a coward. (185)

When Wylie falls in love with another man, she leaves the house and moves to Paris. Taylor then proposes Jase. She feels restless and threatened, and once again, she leaves - this time for Iowa.

In Iowa, she meets and falls in love with Bud. Bud Ripplemeyer is a successful Middle Western banker. This shift provides her with a new name. She is Jane here. He divorces his wife Karin and shifts to a tiny house with Jane. Distraught over losing his farm he is shot by Darrel and as result, he is crippled for life. She is also an adoptive mother to Du who is an adopted son of Bud. Of late, Du leaves them to go to his sister and decides to live with her than with Jane and Bud. Jane also leaves Bud when Wylie and Duff come to take her from the city of Iowa. Jasmine doesn't feel guilt at all as she walks away from Bud. She says:

I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and the old word dutifulness. A caregiver's life is a good life, a worthy life. What am I to do...? It isn't guilt I feel, its relief. I realise I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation...watch me reposition the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove. (274)

Thus, Bharati Mukherjee tries that her characters do not bind themselves from either the authors' perspective or readers' point of view. To quote Roopa Malavally Belur:

Bharati Mukherjee ends the book on a novel note, and re-emphasizes the complex and alternating nature of identity of a woman in exile.³

She also quotes from the text to support her statement.

Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope. (241)

She undergoes change of four different names/roles in the novel. In an interview with Alison B Garb, Bharati Mukherjee has said, "I believe that our souls can be reborn in another body, so the perspective I have about a single character's life is different from that of an American writer who believes that he has only one life."⁴ Each name has significance of its own and in spite of certain overlapping in the basic attitudes; each in itself is very different from the other. If Jasmine is a reliable caregiver, Jase is the prowling adventurer. She goes on adapting her from one role to another. It seems Jasmine is trying to exfoliate various layers of a woman's potential for survival and pursuit of happiness. To quote from the text:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's aupair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer..."(127)

It also makes one realize the sense of self. In spite of being raped and have faced various other traumas she goes on surviving. Michael Gorra says:

...by the end of the story she's learned to see herself, as she makes love to the man whose child she takes care of, as "a bright pretty

girl with no visa, no papers, and no birth certificate. No nothing other than what she wanted to invent and tell . . . a girl rushing wildly in the future," an American with an American's freedom to shape her own destiny.⁵

In the process of narrating survival strategies of Jasmine Bharati Mukherjee also attempts to diagnose the problems caused by the troubled psyche of the people who migrate either officially or unofficially. The inability to adjust in a cross-cultural situation is one of the basic features in her writing. With each transformation, Jasmine learns that,

In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate.(181)

She tries to strike a balance between the donor and the recipient culture. *Jasmine* particularly was written after she shifted to America where her experience was pleasant as compared to her stay in Canada. This positive approach towards immigration is clearly reflected in *Jasmine*. Jasmine does not just survive, she finds in her every role a man to support her, love and care for her.

I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half face for Kali. (197)

Mukherjee uses three types of immigrants to show how different the hardships of adhering to life in an adopted country can be. Her main immigrant characters fall mainly into three categories: the refugee, the hyphenated immigrant, and the chameleon. The refugee immigrant type is seen in Jasmine's father, Pitaji and in the Professorji and his wife, Nirmala. The character Du is representative of the hyphenated immigrant, and the chameleon immigrant type is that of the main character of the novel, Jasmine. Her immigrants survive and do well in an alien land with an alien language, people and environment. There is always a sense of displacement and loss but they struggle to deepen their roots throughout and do not give up. To quote Michael Gorra:

...the characters in "Jasmine" are all exiles, expatriates, wander-

ers, people on the move, shucking off old lives as easily as a snake sheds its skin. They are third-world refugees, fleeing poverty and oppression; but they are also Americans moving from coast to coast, small towns to cities, exchanging one partner for another in search of a dream that always seems to elude them. Although they possess a seemingly infinite freedom - the possibility of becoming whatever they want to become -the price of that freedom is rootless ness and dislocation, a feeling of perpetual displacement. Indeed, everyone in "Jasmine" seems to be reeling from the speed-of-light changes of recent history.⁶

Jasmine sways between the past and the present, thus attempting to traverse between the two worlds: "native" and the "immigrant". Thus, caught between the binaries of the east/west, past/present, old/new, white/black...Jasmine constantly "shuttles" in search for a concrete identity, which is at once a reality as well as a chimera.

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1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gczK8ZfwBIE> accessed on 23 June 2009

² Mukherjee Bharati, *Jasmine* (New York: Grove Press, 1989) p. 39

³ Belur Roopa Malavally, "Jasmine – Identity in Exile" <http://www.sawf.org/newedit/edit04302001/bookreview.asp> accessed on 27.3 2008

⁴ Shakuntala Bharvani, "Jasmine: An Immigrant Experience?" *Indian Women Novelists* ed. R.K Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige Books,1991) p.199

⁵ Gorra Michael, "Call it Exile, Call it Immigration" <http://query.nytimes.com/gstfullpage.html?res=950DEED C 1 2 3 1 F 9 3 3 A 2575AC0A96F948260&sec= & spon = & pagewanted = 2> accesses on 31 March 2008

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The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu: An Appraisal

Sandeep Kumar Sharma

Sarojini Naidu, the eldest daughter of scientist-philosopher, Aghornath Chattopadhyaya, and Barada Sundari Devi- a poetess, was born on 13 February 1879 in Hyderabad, who carries forward the task left incomplete by the early demise of Toru Dutt, that of interpreting the soul of India to the West and creating an authentic Indian atmosphere. Her father was also a linguist, a crusader, who established the Nizam's College in Hyderabad in 1878, pioneering English and women's education. Sarojini was a bright child who passed her matriculation at the age of 12 standing first in the Madras Presidency. She studied at the King's college, London and Girton College, Cambridge for a while. During this period her creative urge found expression in poems. She also happened to be a good singer.

Sarojini Naidu is one of the most illustrious Indians who have immensely contributed to the cultural, political and social advancement of the nation in numerous ways. A prodigy, she has given new dimensions to Indian English poetry, both thematically and technically. Her uniqueness as a poet is obvious that her poetical work is strikingly different from that of her compatriots like Tagore, Dutt, Ezekiel and Ramanujan etc. She is simply majestic as far as folk element, lyricism, nature imagery and some of the basic themes like love, nature, death and faith are concerned. Inevitably, her poetry can never be dated and faded, and shall continue to delight the readers by its sheer simplicity and sweetness. This is evident from the fact that though written about a century back, it is still read with pleasure by both the common reader and the academics. Sarojini Naidu unquestionably occupies a prominent and distinguished place among Indian English poets. Poetry came to her as naturally as fragrance to the flower. She is a poet out and out, and the poet in her never dies. Indian –English poetry with her prophetic eyes penetrated through the enveloping mist. She felt the pulse

of the moving time and came to the conclusion that she must redefine the function of poets and poetry. More than a patriot, she was a poet, the composer of beautiful songs. Poetry came to her as spontaneously as a song to a nightingale. That is why she was called '*the Nightingale of India*' and poetry dominated her very mode of life, her feelings, thoughts, actions and expressions.

Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title '*Golden Threshold*'. It was followed by the publication of two other collections of poems—'*The Bird of Time*' and '*The Broken Wings*'. In 1918 came her famous collection '*Feast of Youth*'. Then after she published '*The Magic Tree*', '*The Wizard Mask*' and '*A Treasury of Poems*'. Her published poems impressed Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru. There were thousands of admirers of her poetic work. It is said that her poems had English words, but an Indian soul. Shree Gopal Krishna Gokhale inspired her to compose patriotic songs and thus, to use her poetry and her beautiful words to give new life or energy to the spirit of Independence in the hearts of Indian villagers. He asked her to use her talent to liberate Mother India. In 1916, she met Mahatma Gandhi. It was a turning point for then after she totally directed her energy to the fight for freedom. She would wander around the country to sing poems and deliver speeches to pour enthusiasm among the hearts of Indians. The independence of India became the heart and soul of her poetical works.

Sarojini Naidu is chiefly concerned with some of the fundamental aspects of human life –love, life, death and fate. Evidently, the themes pertaining in her literary output are not of merely temporal value but of permanent significance. Many of her lyrics deal with the varied emotions and moods generated in man by love. She shows love as a great gift of God and an inevitable expression of joy and beauty. However her love poems mainly deal with physical, innocent love inseparable from joys and sorrows, though the mystical element is clearly interwoven into the sensuous and passionate side of love. In this regard her work '*The Bird of Time*' is quite noteworthy, a volume of forty six love poems divided into four sections. She opines that true love

knows no bounds of caste, creed, race and myths, as is presented in her beautiful lyric, '*An Indian Love Song*'. Moreover her other noted love poems like '*The Gate of Delight*', and '*The Path of Tears*' are also remarkable and praiseworthy.

The Gate of Delight deals with love's fulfillment. The woman offers her life to her love. According to her, love does not thrive on beauty, youth, glory or fame. In love, humility is pride, lowliness the highest exaltation and selfless service its own reward. Greater than glory and eminence is the passion of the lover's heart, a passion that gives all but demands nothing in return. In '*The Lute-Song*', the beloved explains the beauty of her lover and rejects all material emblems of luxury in love. Sarojini Naidu says that the soul of the lover for the beloved's passion and fears is perhaps the highest degree of perfection of human love. Her poem '*The Silence of Love*' is very meaningful where the woman's lover is in a very determined mood because she has given her lover the whole joy of her body and the treasure of her soul, and demands nothing from his reluctant hands. But in the last two lines, there is a note of pathos in the woman's voice and words, and we recognize her absolute self-surrender to the dominance of the lover. The beloved says:

“Still for Love's sake I am forced to bear
A load of passionate silence and despair.”

In her love poetry, Sarojini Naidu also presents how love may spiritualize man. One can have the vision of God only by following the path of true love. In her well known poem '*The Worship of Love*', she wishes that the fragrance of her love-worship will be held by stars as her love is pious, sincere, loyal and innocent. Here Sarojini Naidu spiritualizes love because the beloved wants to die in love to become immortal. She depicts in her love poetry that love is the most inspiring source in life. The lover can do the most difficult task, and can make impossible, possible at the command of his beloved. He can pluck stars from the sky and crush mountains at his beloved's words. Edmund Gosse also pays a glowing tribute to her poetry, “She is the most brilliant, the most original, as well as the most correct of all the natives of Hindustan who have written in English.” (Gosse, 2) Sarojini had

irresistible fascination for nature, she sings of the glories of seasons, particularly spring and summer and also about the individual manifestations of nature's beauty. Lyricism, love of nature, interest in the past, a melancholic note, dominance of imagination, concern with the common man, emphasis on emotional life, 'addition of strangeness to beauty', and the beauty of thought, vision, phrase and rhythm are some of the chief characteristics of romantic poetry. They are all profusely scattered all through her poetry. She has written more than 60 poems wherein the theme of love is dominant. This great poetess intricately presents the aches and ecstasies of love. "Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves." (Rameshwar, 73)

Sarojini Naidu expresses deep philosophy in her poetry. For example, *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus* is a great philosophic poem that refers to a popular idol of Lord Buddha. He is sitting on a lotus in the mood of meditation, with praying eyes and hands. There is a mystic delight on his face. The image inspires eternal peace of mind attained in human life through meditation. Meditation implies the search for truth. Lotus springs from dirt and mire but remains free from the evil effect of surroundings. It inspires all to remain free from evils and ills of worldly life. The poetess wishes to know how common people may attain this sublime state. The simple answer is hidden in Lord Buddha's life who was deified by people as Lore i.e. God. *Indian Weavers* is a philosophic poem that suggests how life is full of joys and sorrows. Both are inevitable. A wise man ought to do his duty like weavers who make robe for all occasions of joy and sorrow. Sarojini Naidu's famous poem *Guerdon* is an inspiring song. All objects and creatures in the world desire for something or the other. Mostly they wish for worldly gains but the poetess wishes for spiritual gain. She desires for the ecstasies of love and truth because she has no interest in material joys. It is the nobility of her nature that she wishes to see all satisfied.

Sarojini Naidu was a great patriotic leader and her poetry is rich with patriotic feelings. Her famous poem *Awake* is an inspiring

patriotic song where she wishes for India's freedom. In this patriotic song Sarojini Naidu depicts for the glory of the Bharat Mata. She wishes for a bright future with a call for unity to eradicate all the ills of the society. The people of India make a promise to serve the motherland with a true heart. They should give up their narrow differences of caste or religion and come together for this noble and common cause. She is sure that this dream of freedom will become a reality when all creeds are united. The song has a great importance in the present context when the country is again being divided in the name of caste, religion or region and even language. If such considerations are not forgotten, the country would again fall in the chains of slavery. *The Lotus* pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. *The Gift of India* is a poem beautifully depicts the chivalry of Indians during the World War I. This lyric is characterized by Sarojini's poetic and patriotic fervour and by her pride in her own country. In this moving lyric Mother India herself speaks of the gift she had offered to the world-the invaluable gift: her children and reminds to the world their greatness.

Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her valuable thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves. Though she has been criticized for her many poetic expressions yet there are a few critics who defended and asserted boldly that her metaphors and similes are quite meaningful and telling. "Sarojini's similes and metaphors are "pictorial blocks of imagist perception and new way of organizing poetic emotion." (Rajyalakshmi, 89). The work produced by this writer like John Keats, may not be great in quantity, it is great in quality. She will be remembered for a few fine poems like *The Indian Weavers*, *The Flute Player of Brindavan*, *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus* and others.

Life, to Sarojini Naidu was not a puzzle to be solved; it is a miracle to be celebrated and sung. She may be lacked the philosophical bent but her poems show accumulated wisdom and acumen rather than deep insight. In her poetic world life and light are supreme. There are, of course, poems in which she seems to be crushed by pain and grief, but the poems into which she has poured most of

her heart are those in which there is a note of defiance and of victory over circumstances, over pain and suffering. She is equally a poetess of the challenge of suffering, pain and death to life. Sarojini being aware that time is destructive, and nothing can escape its damages, she welcomes for it is the only way to bring it to new life. Despite the undercurrent of melancholy and pessimism, Sarojini's poetry is optimistic and forward looking – looking forward to the souls union with the eternal, the infinite, and Time and Death are the means to this union. That is why she can be justifiably compared with Robert Browning, the poet of optimism.

Sarojini Naidu has written only a few lyrics full of the spirit of delight. But in these songs of a rich and rare sensitiveness, we see several motives at work. In *The Queen's Rival*, it is the mystery of the new born child which makes Queen Gulnaar laugh like a tremulous rose. The glory of motherland expresses itself in the lyric *To My Children* which is full of tender affection. In *At Twilight*, her melancholy is cured at the sight of a passing bier and a finer note is struck in poems like *Songs of a Dream* and *To My Fairy Fancies*. The one enjoys the wealth of dreamland and the other shows how a thought-worn singer cherishes the laughter faces of fairy fancies. It is only when all her blossoming hopes are harvested, her joys garnered, her songs sung, her tears shed and all her human hungers fulfilled that the poet can reconcile herself to death.

It is important to mention here that Sarojini Naidu is also a poet of nature and her love for nature began in her childhood. She was always pleased by the sights, sounds, colour and tones of nature. She identified herself with nature and with the result that 'lyric child' in her was awakened. Some of the best lyrics of Sarojini Naidu are about beautiful and charming aspects of nature –changing moods of the day and seasons, the sun, the moon, the stars, flowers, birds, trees, rivers, lake, mountains and seas. They are in the best traditions of English romantic nature poetry and are characterised by Keatsian ecstasy and sensuousness. She was highly attracted by the beauty of Spring. She has written several poems like *Spring, A song in Spring, The Joy of Spring Time, Vasant Panchami, Ecstasy, Spring in Kashmir* and *The Magic of Spring*. In 'Spring in Kashmir', she gives charming images of the joyful songs of birds:

Thro' glade and thro' glen her winged feet let us follow,
In the wake of oriole, the sunbird and swallow.

In her well known poem '*The Joy of the Spring-time*', she asks the spring to tell her the secret of her spell:

Spring time, O Spring time, what is your secret,
The bliss at the core of your magical mirth
That quickens the pulse of the morning to wonder
And hastens the seeds of all beauty to birth.

Now I arrive at the conclusion that Sarojini Naidu is a born poet. The themes of her poetry, images, expression and her poetic excellence is undoubtedly commendable and praiseworthy. Though it is not appropriate to compare the intensity of her poetry to the poetry of Tagore or Aurobindo yet she has a style of her own. She has given a graphic and intimate picture of Indian life in her poetry. It is very convincing to say that her poetry is overtly Indian in spirit and the contribution of this learned poetess to the development of Indian culture is indispensable. "Sarojini Naidu is the most outstanding Indian woman of her generation. She is notable as a liberal thinker, a literary artist, a social reformer and a political fighter" (Sengupta, 39). Her poetry and many-sided genius cannot be tethered down to any age or any flux of time, but in her, Indian sensibility gets its most genuine and potent expression. She observes the inalienable link between life and art and tries to touch the life into art. Indeed, Sarojini Naidu is a versatile genius, erudite scholar, renowned literary figure and an illustrious star in the firmament of Indo-English poetry and her contribution to the realm of poetry is substantial, weighty and valuable.

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The Thinking 'Mind'

Aishwarya Singh

(14 years old student)

Spirituality can't be achieved by chanting 24/7 "Sri Ram" or by running away to forest, Himalayas or by living in a deprived state. To achieve it we need to act, think, and speak right. Our life is like a chariot. It is being drawn by five fierce horses which are our five sense organs. Mind plays the role of charioteer. The person who is able to control the senses through mind can achieve holiness.

Our liking depends upon our mind's mood. The thing is not bad or good, it all depends on our thinking and approach. Our organs serve as vehicles through which our mind perceives actions and emotions like joy, sorrow, lust, passion, greed, jealousy, love, kindness, pity etc...

Mahabharata characters are very like us. Dritrashtra, the blind king suffers from selfishness, illusions and tenderness. He always felt that because of his blindness he was deprived of the crown. To him it seemed an unjust decision. Similarly we also cry for the things we don't get. We should think about 'what we are, what we can, if we will'. If there is will, work and skill nobody can stop you from becoming illustrious.

Pandavas are the divine forces; Kauravas are the evil forces full of negative tendencies. Similarly our body is full of constructive and destructive forces. Many a times the evil forces outnumber the godly ones. In other words we can say that evil overpowers us. And then we unexpectedly realise and try to regain our dead hopes, wrong desires and lost power. Thus, one has to be ready for these sudden and changes.

Karan despite being a decent person had to side with the evil. He knew that Pandavas were his younger brothers. And if Pandavas had won the war he would become the king. But even then he performed his duty of a friend. So the situations around us are so complex that every time we can't get what we want. Most of us declare other's action wrong, we fail to understand their problems and state of mind they are going through.

Kunti knew that Karan was her son. But lifelong she denied this fact. She feared the society. Today too, people hide their views, truth and facts. It also means that often we escape from our responsibilities. We even bottle up are abilities and talents; fearful of what others would say. We are afraid of telling the truth.

Now, some characters like Shikhandi, Raja Drupda and others join in the Mahabharata for their own personal grudges and gain. Today too, some people side with us not because we are just but for their own selfish interests. They become our ally and appear to be saviour to help us from our insecurities but that does not last long. We should not trust these people blindly rather we should believe on ourselves.

Lord Krishna is an ethereal person. People say that he is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He says righteousness can be attained by doing 'Karma' (work) according to 'Dharma' (religion). The sorrows of a man are result of anger, greed, attachment and ego. Man is made of body and spirit. The body comprises of physical body, mind and intellect. The spirit is in direct connection to the almighty.

"To work alone you have the right, but never claim its results. Let the result of actions be not your motive, nor be attached to inaction"

Our duty is to work for one and all. We should never care about the result; it's not in our hands. Perform the right action without thinking about its fruit. If rectitude lies in fighting with your own relatives, community, friends etc...; you should do it without hesitation. The main motto of the Geeta is to motivate people to fight for "dharma". This may give rise to a revolution against the power of mights.

One should never curse ones destiny in unfavorable or difficult times. Whatever happened in the past was for the best, whatever is happening now is for the best and whatever will happen in the future is also going to be for the best. So don't feel sorry about the past and do not worry about the future. Just concentrate on the present.

When Arjuna saw his teachers, brothers and other relatives on the battle field he was filled with grief. He said to Krishna, *"I see no good in killing my kinsmen in battle. For I desire not victory, O Krishna, nor kingdom, nor pleasures. O Madhusudan, even for sake of dominion over the three worlds, how much less for the earth."*

Arjuna appears to be utterly confused. According to him this is a sinful act. How can he fight with Drona and Bhishma who are fit enough to be worshipped? If he killed any of them, his desires and enjoyments would be stained by blood. His heart overcomes with pity and his mind stands in conflict with duty.

Hearing this Krishna tells him that he should not lament for his relatives. He is not fighting for his own sake. He is battling for all those who side with dharma. He is teaching a lesson to his coming generation. As a warrior he should neither grieve for dead nor for living. A soul is never born, so it never dies.

Each of us in this world his/her own rightful place. We are born to perform a certain function. We can't run from our responsibilities as we are bound to perform them. Even those who side with evil carry out their respective actions. But only the people who practice dignified behaviour go to heaven.

Everybody gets punished/rewarded for his/her past deeds. When Krishna is questioned about the erroneous killings of Bhishma, Dronacharya, Karan and others; he says that if one uses unfair means to finish evil there is no harm in it. Those who are wicked can never follow the path of dharma.

The portrayal of Mahabharata shows different characters performing different duties, as a result some remain like a lotus amidst water whereas some became like a canker in the rose. The world in which we live is said to be a world of illusions. To escape the predicament is not to let free oneself from the burdens of worldly life or by from responsibilities but by facing them with righteousness and fearlessness.

In conclusion it is apt to write that the diverse thinking of 'mind' is unavoidable, yet surrender to the God's will and performing dharma and 'karma' can lead to peace and enlightenment.

(Sources: Internet, Geeta in Prose by Swamy Chinmayanand, Dr. A.K Singh (my grandfather and ex. V.C of MLSU University)

* * *

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This World-My Family

Macry Victor

(14 years old)

I have some friends
One is the Sun
With whom I have forever fun
And he always warms me up.
I also have a sister
I won't tell you her name
So soon
Because you already guessed
She's the moon!
I also have the water
The trees
The bees
And a million other things.
But except from all these
It's my friends that I love
Some say that we're not relatives
But deep down inside
I know
That the whole world is my
One and only
Family!

Macry Victor, School 186, Elena Vacarescu, 15, Cihoschi, district 1, Bucharest (Romania)
Teacher : Mihaela Mladenovici" mladenovici_mihaela@yahoo.com

My Family

Nestor Teodor

(14 years old)

Just stand up and look around
You'll see a beautiful world
That can give you what you want
If you know a magic word.

Watch and see what we have got:
A big planet with a lot
Of good people, small nice flowers
And large trees with wide green crowns.

But some people, day and night,
Don't do anything but fight.
And we ask them: 'What's the use?
You're making us feel confused!'

You must know that this wide world
Is made only to hold love:
Love and peace must remain here
Because if we're like brothers, all fear
Will disappear!

Nestor Teodor, School 186, Elena Vacaresu, 15, Cihoschi Street, district
1, Bucharest, Romania
Teacher : Mihaela Mladenovici" mladenovici_mihaela@yahoo.com

Poems by Roma children from Romania

My star

Marius Kovacs

I asked God for a flower
He gave me a garden
I asked God for a heart
He gave me a home
I asked God for wisdom
And He gave me a grandfather
I asked God for power
And He grew me up.
I know, that whatever I ask for,
My guarding star will help me,
The star that is watching over me.

Our Rroma people

Delia Balog

They have wandered all the world
And only bad things they have learned!
Now the time has come
To be luckier,
Happier and merrier.
Come on, brothers, don't lose time
Let all people know
Today it's our special day
We are Rroma, don't forget!
8th of April be for us
More and better every year.

My friend
Daniela Filip, Bianca Gherebenes,
Nicoleta Gyapias, Sara Tabita Martocean

Just like a brother,
Just like an angel,
My friend helps me
When I'm in need

When I need help,
He gives me a hand
With joy and kindness
Each day
He throws away my sadness
And brings me lots of joy.

At the puppet theatre
Teodora Varga

All of us, big or small,
Happy and playful,
Hurriedly went
To the puppet theatre today.
You should see and believe,
They are playing
"The she-goat with three kids"
We all know there were three kids
And only one was left,
The one who behaved the best.
And the bad wolf
Got what he deserved.

For the moral of the story says:
"What goes around, comes around"

Coordinating teachers: Valeria Bocsitan (Romanian language) Florentina Centeri (primary school teacher) and Loredana Mihaly (Romanian language), Roman Varga (school mediator). Translated into English by Brigitta Daniela Buda, English teacher (Romania) <danielab2105@yahoo.com>.

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