

Drishti: the Sight

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Films on immigrants' issues: hitting the road to big time

Although the globalization has in its wake brought fresh economic, political and social challenges to the humanity, ironically, there is a diminishing sense of the borderlines between man and man. The present time is time of migration and mobility and this impacts a paradigm shift in the survival-ways of the people at large. The shifts in economic and cultural landscapes have definite impacts upon the mental contours of man. If this all have their reverberations in literature, cinemas too show the stamps of the variegated impacts of this new scenario and context. The genre of humanist cinema enjoys a big time today with the proliferating presence of films on immigrants' issues. The immigration experience has become a focal point in several of the films released today. They are based upon stories about the migrants' lives and psyche.

The lives of the immigrants can be looked from various perspectives for they have their own exilic experiences, they retain for themselves an unrestricted store of nostalgia for home, they undergo umpteen number of vicissitudes during their journeys, they have their own anxieties over their alienation from their home-lands, they have their own transnational experiences besides cultural shocks and conflicts.

The globalization also has a hegemonic character of it. For instance, adoption of technology in marketing leading to the growth of e-commerce has been contributing towards rise in unemployment. Also, in certain parts of the globe people are being unable to catch up with the developments that are happening in the rest of the world. It is no use saying that such imbalances only add to the spurt in immigration (to many among these migrants it is imperative to move out for as they think, if they do not, their survival will be more at stake).

Many times, the migrants after the arrival in their new habitats come in sharp conflicts with the permanent inhabitants. At times their employers among the permanent inhabitants too look down upon them as if they are mere disposable commodities;-circumstances that may also stimulate in the mind of the expatriates an urge for emancipation and even may provoke them to explore some grounds for radicalization.

Films on immigrants' issues try to yield in their content, aesthetics and vocabulary a profound sense of humanism. Illustrations of recent productions in this context would make for a pretty long list. A randomly made short-list in this connection may include the films like: *Trance*

(Teresa Villaverde/Portugal), *Lorna's silence* (Luc Dardane and Jean-pierre Dardane/France), *Dheepan* (Jaques Audiard/France), *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz/France), *Fatima* (Philippe Faucon/France-Canada), *Siyah Karga* (Yonetmen M. Tayfur Ayoin/Turkey), *A Ciambra*(Jonas Carpignano/Italy), *All the Dreams in the World* (Laurence Ferreira Barbosa/France), *Birds are Singing in Kigali* (Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze/Poland) and *The Namesake* (Mira Nair/India).

These films are generally a mix of social realism and fiction. Due to their sensitive portrayal of the characters and the situations, the films appeal both to the immigrants and the others. Their ethical and ideological moorings too help in their drawing of rave reviews from all over the world.#

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From Oppression to Empowerment: Dual Representation of Female Identity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*

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Abstract:

The 1947 Partition of British India into two independent nations (India and Pakistan) was accompanied by communal violence unspeakable in its brutality and ferocity. In the months immediately preceding and following the creation of “free” nation-states, untold numbers of murders, kidnappings, rapes and arsons were committed by ordinary citizens of all the major religious groups (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) caught up in the turmoil. Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel Cracking India, which has garnered considerable attention as a trenchant portrayal of the violence surrounding the Partition, can profitably be explored as an examination of such violence, for it depicts a broad cross-section of Lahore society, both before and after the city became a part of Pakistan. Even though Sidhwa has created empowered female characters in Cracking India and has given to the story a female perspective from Lenny’s point of view, she has also shown to the reader the reality lived by women in India. We see, in the novel, a society where sexual objectification and exploitation of women is part of the routine. In Cracking India, we have a dual representation of female identity. On the one hand, we see Lenny’s mother as a powerful character because of her active role during Partition, but on the other hand, we also see Lenny’s mother fitting in the submissive, attentive, and serving wifely role in

her marital relationship. Likewise, we also see a dual representation of female identity in the character of Ayah. At the beginning, we see the power of her irresistible attractiveness and how she manages to keep a group of men from different ethnicities united around her. Then, her power is completely lost when she is kidnapped and transformed into a dancing-girl, abused by her friends and admirers such as Imam Din and Sharbat Khan, and married to Ice-Candy man, completely losing her power of decision. By appreciating the complexity of gendered power relations that Sidhwa portrays, we, as readers, gain a more comprehensive understanding not only of specific female character traits, but also of how Cracking India breaks free from the hegemony of patriarchal Partition narratives to provide a distinct female counter-narrative.

Keywords: Partition, Female Identity, Violence, Oppression, Empowerment

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The 1947 Partition of British India into two independent nations (India and Pakistan) was accompanied by communal violence unspeakable in its brutality and ferocity. In the months immediately preceding and following the creation of “free” nation-states, untold numbers of murders, kidnappings, rapes and

arsons were committed by ordinary citizens of all the major religious groups (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) caught up in the turmoil. Writings about Partition often portray the massacre, mutilation, abduction, and rape of citizens' bodies, particularly female bodies. Manju Jaidka specifies that many writers of Partition literature chose to focus on the marginalization and victimization of women because they served as "symbols of the community to be subjugated; their bodies became sites of contested power" (Jaidka 48). As Jaidka points out, not only do women function as "objects of oppression" in Partition texts, but their utter disempowerment often becomes "the focal point of the narrative, highlighting the impact of history on the meek and powerless" (Jaidka 46). Correspondingly, Rosemary George observes that Partition texts routinely depict women as "communal sufferers, familial victims, and second-class citizens" (George 138), while men are more often portrayed as dominant and powerful. Because of this focus on female victimization, much of the writings about Partition reduces both men and women to "perfect binaries - rapists and raped, protectors and protected, villains and victims, buyers and bought, sellers and sold etc." (George 142).

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* (1991), which has garnered considerable attention as a trenchant portrayal of the violence surrounding the Partition, can profitably be explored as an examination of such violence, for it depicts a broad cross-section of Lahore society both before and after the city became a part of Pakistan. Deploying a child-narrator, Lenny Sethi, the novel's plot focuses on Lenny's Hindu nanny or Ayah (referred to as Shanta twice in the novel), her abduction by a mob led by one of her (spurned) Muslim suitors, Ice-Candy man, and her eventual escape from his clutches. The Ayah's story is paradigmatic: like her, thousands of women were abducted and/or

raped by men of the "enemy" community during the chaotic months before and after Partition.

Much of the criticism of the novel has emphasized the victimization of women. In *Modern South Asian Literature in English*, Paul Brians declares that *Cracking India* is characterized by a "pattern of oppression that haunts all women in the novel, from highest to lowest" (Brians 107). Likewise, Manju Jaidka states that "the women sufferers in the story must find an escape route and bow to the dominant power, or else suffer" (Jaidka 49). While it can be acknowledged that the female characters in *Cracking India* experience oppression, it can also be asserted that they do not operate solely as victims; rather, Sidhwa's women possess distinct forms of power: Lenny, as the narrator, exhibits narrative agency, though her moments of agency happen largely prior to Partition; Ayah, similarly, enjoys influence over the male community before Partition - though her authority is primarily based on her physical appeal - which gives Sidhwa an opportunity to comment on the temporal and limited nature of sexual power and physical attraction. Through the events of Partition, Ayah's power evaporates; she is kidnapped by a group of local men and forced into prostitution. However, the strongest - and most subversive - examples of feminine power in the novel stem from women who are able to completely step outside their traditional domestic roles and utilize their community connections as a source of influence. Both Lenny's mother and Godmother demonstrate the power gained through economic status - both women are upper-class and educated - and both proactively exert influence and make changes in the lives of those around them. Whereas Lenny and Ayah's comparatively temporary

power is based on physical traits or childish willfulness, the power of Lenny's mother and Godmother is centered in their identity as influential and privileged community figures, and their ability to step outside their traditional feminine roles to enact deliberate change, working for the good of less fortunate women who have been damaged during Partition.

By appreciating the complexity of gendered power relations that Sidhwa portrays, we, as readers, gain a more comprehensive understanding not only of specific female character traits, but also of how *Cracking India* breaks free from the hegemony of patriarchal Partition narratives to provide a distinct female counter-narrative. Accordingly, Ambreen Hai has perceived *Cracking India* as a piece of "narrative border feminism that undoes binary oppositions" (Hai 390). By utilizing a female narrator, Sidhwa presents a uniquely gendered perspective of Partition. Moreover, Sidhwa's novel provides a comparatively inclusive view of the diverse feminine roles during Partition, roles in which the female characters are not entirely empowered nor entirely victimized. Thus, *Cracking India* is able to "describe, restore, and heal some of the damage done by male neo-nationalistic discourse" (Hai 390), facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the various ways women were influenced by and responded to, Partition. Rather than simply perceiving Sidhwa's women as perpetual victims, worthy of being "pitied and patronized" (Hubel 111), the present study examines how the female characters in *Cracking India* demonstrate not only survivorship, but also agency, using their familial and communal connections and unique perspective to affect change and bring healing. At several points in *Cracking India*, Lenny, her ayah, her mother, and her godmother are able to move beyond traditional female disempowerment to exercise autonomy and influence within their patriarchal society.

Even though Sidhwa has created empowered female characters in *Cracking India* and has given to the story a female perspective from Lenny's point of view, she has also shown to the reader the reality lived by women in India. We see, in the novel, a society where sexual objectification and exploitation of women is part of the routine; a society where women are not seen as individuals but as bodies men can possess. In *Cracking India*, we have a dual representation of female identity. On the one hand, we see Lenny's mother as a powerful character because of her active role during Partition, but on the other hand, we also see Lenny's mother fitting in the submissive, attentive, and serving wifely role in her marital relationship. Mother is an empowered woman outside her role as a wife, where she can become an active humanitarian person, but when she is at home, she is just another abused woman. Likewise, we also see a dual representation of female identity in the character of Ayah. At the beginning, we see the power of her irresistible attractiveness and how she manages to keep a group of men from different ethnicities united around her. Then, her power is completely lost when she is kidnapped and transformed into a dancing-girl, abused by her friends and admirers such as Imam Din and Sharbat Khan, and married to Ice-Candy man, completely losing her power of decision.

The narrative voice in *Cracking India* is a female voice, which is something that already positions women at the centre of the story and provides us with an interesting female perspective of Partition. The fact that the narrator of the novel is Lenny, a naive, vulnerable, and easily influenced young girl who is constantly learning from what she sees and who, as a child, manages to eavesdrop on many contexts and conversations, allows us to have a complete perception of the events and to connect with different characters. She is so transparent and

sincere with what she experiences that we can easily perceive the reality of what is going on. Besides, the fact that Lenny suffers from polio makes her even more vulnerable and dependent on others, though for her it is something to celebrate: "Having polio in infancy is like being born under a lucky star" (Sidhwa 20). While other children have to claim what they want, she just has to show her calipers and, immediately, people would feel sorry for her and give her whatever she wants. Besides, because of her disability, she is kept out of school; Lenny feels protected from a "laborious and loveless life" (Sidhwa 23) by her disability.

The figure of Lenny, as a narrator and as a main character, is also relevant because of her connection with Bapsi Sidhwa's childhood, which gives to the story a strong sensation of reality. Bapsi Sidhwa revealed that even though she had to create some distance between Lenny and herself, there is a lot of her own childhood experience in the book: "partially I took things directly from my own experience, but the rest is created." (Sidhwa & Singh 291). Like Lenny, Sidhwa was a young girl who lived in Lahore when the Partition of India and Pakistan took place. By having Lenny as a narrator, the readers are not only able to connect with Ayah and Godmother, two of the most inspirational and influential female figures in her life, but also with Ice-Candy man, a very controversial and interesting character in the novel. Through Lenny's eyes, the readers connect with her "compressed world" (Sidhwa 11) where women are empowered individuals but also victims of an oppressive patriarchal society.

In *Cracking India*, Lenny spends most of her time with Ayah, and consequently, with all her suitors from different cultures: the Faletti's Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, the butcher, Sharbat Khan, and the zoo attendant, but mainly with Masseur and Ice-

Candy man, both of them being Muslims. Through Lenny's perspective of Ayah and her suitors, the readers get to see the harmonious interaction among Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh cultures. Life before Partition seems to be peaceful, and the cultural and religious differences are left apart. Lenny goes everywhere with Ayah, being present even in the more intimate moments with her suitors, which allows her to learn from Ayah's experiences: "I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys. I also learn from her the tyranny magnets exercise over metals" (Sidhwa 29). Lenny is fascinated by the power Ayah has over men.

Ayah is presented as a sexually empowered woman and her physical presence is described as irresistible to men. The power Ayah exercises over men has been compared to the power India has exercised over many colonizers and ethnic groups. Some scholars, like Nilufer E. Bharucha, see Ayah as a symbol of the Indian earth:

Lenny's ayah, the chocolate-brown, desirable, round-cheeked, full-breasted woman, is symbolic of the Indian earth. The ayah, untutored, curvaceous but virtuous, is not naive; she appears to give in to the blandishments of the Ice-Candy Man, but maintains her distance. The Ice-Candy Man who is a Muslim is not her only suitor; she is assiduously courted by Hindus and Sikhs too, as has been the Indian earth. (Bharucha 81-82).

Even though she has many suitors chasing after her, she has the power to choose which man she wants to spend time with and she does not hesitate when she wants to refuse the companionship of any of her suitors. At the same time, Lenny's admiration and highlighting of Ayah's body might lead the readers to get the impression that Ayah is reduced to just a body, a symbol of an undivided India.

Nevertheless, as the novel proceeds, the situation starts changing; the country is being divided into Pakistan and India, and people are being divided too. Neighbours who have always been friends turn into enemies just because of their religious beliefs: “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols” (Sidhwa 101). The tension in the streets is unbearable and non-Muslim people are no longer safe in Lahore.

During the Partition conflicts, Ayah works as a unifying reason for her group of admirers: “Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her” (Sidhwa 105). In fact, even though Ayah is Hindu, she seems to be neutral among them, to impose a neutral position in order to leave religion aside and prevent conflicts among her admirers. Thus, it can be said that she has the power to unify men from different ethnicities in a context where people are killing one another precisely because of religious differences. However, Ayah is not only a central figure in Lenny’s life and in the union of a multicultural group of admirers, but also the protagonist of the most shocking moment of the novel; when she is kidnapped by a group of Muslims led by Ice-Candy man. This moment is crucial not only because of the horror it causes to see that Ice-Candy man is totally commanded by the beast that inhabits him and which Lenny so much fears, but also because Lenny is the one who tells Ice-Candy man where Ayah is hiding. Unconsciously and without being aware of the dangers and consequences involved, Lenny betrays Ayah.

Lenny is a Parsee girl, therefore, her family is in a neutral and distant position during the Partition conflicts. The Parsees are a very small minority in India and they are not considered a threatening community. During the British

colonial period in India, the Parsee community assimilated themselves to contemporary British norms and was influenced by Western education and ideas. Thus, during Partition they tried to avoid conflict and were not forced to leave or to convert to Islam, as they could remain the same and once more, adapt to the current situation by maintaining themselves as imperceptible as possible. Some scholars, like Bharucha, argue that Lenny’s betrayal symbolizes the betrayal of the Parsee community for turning their back on the conflict: “the wider and constant betrayal by all Parsees of the one land which has given them refuge” (Bharucha 82), implying that, by keeping the neutral and distant position of a witness, they are actually betraying the land of India that welcomed them. In fact, we can find many conversations in the novel where, in community dinners, Parsees are discussing where they should position themselves and whether or not are they betraying their neighbours by remaining neutral:

“I don’t see how we can remain uninvolved,” says Dr. Mody, whose voice, without aid of mike, is louder than the colonel’s. “Our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English.”

“Which of your neighbours are you not going to betray?” asks a practical soul with an impatient voice. “Hindu? Muslim? Sikh?”

“That depends on who’s winning, doesn’t it? Says Mr. Bankwalla. “Don’t forget, we are to run with the hounds and hunt with the hare.”

“As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers...” (Sidhwa 45-48)

However, we do not see Lenny’s family in a totally distant position from the events, at least

not its female constituents. We are told that her mother and aunty are involved in some way in the conflict. First, when Ayah tells Lenny, Cousin, and Adi about the petrol cans in the family car, they think that Lenny's mother and aunty are setting fire to Lahore, and that they are the arsonists. Then, we come to know what Lenny's mother and aunty are doing is smuggling petrol to help their Hindu and Sikh friends to escape and to rescue kidnapped women by sending them to their families across the border or to the Recovered Women's Camps. Thus, we can see how Lenny's mother and aunty take advantage of their Parsee position not to remain just as witnesses of the tragedy but to help their friends and abducted women, even though they are risking their lives in doing so.

Another female character that does not remain as a mere witness of the events is Lenny's Godmother, Roda. From the very first moment, Godmother is described as a fundamental pillar in Lenny's life: "The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic. I require no one else" (Sidhwa 17). Moreover, Roda is described as a very influential and respected character, and she proves to be so at the end of the novel, by finally extraditing Ayah from the Hira Mandi and restoring her to her family in Amritsar. In fact, Godmother is the strongest representation of female power in the novel. She dares to challenge Ice-Candy man, questioning his manhood and even threatening him with death. She makes him realize the wrong he has done to Ayah: "You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and *goondas* ... you have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood!" (Sidhwa 260) She makes him burst into tears and feel ashamed of himself. Furthermore, she decides to go with Lenny to his house in the Hira Mandi to see Ayah's condition by themselves and finally defy patriarchal power by defeating Ice-Candy man.

Sidhwa has managed to create very powerful female characters in a context where we would expect the prototypical passive and submissive women. As Kleist argues:

the strongest—and most subversive—examples of feminine power in the novel stem from women who are able to completely step outside their traditional domestic roles and utilize their community connections as a source of influence. Both Lenny's mother and Godmother demonstrate the power gained through economic status—both women are upper-class and educated—and both proactively exert influence and make changes in the lives of those around them. (Kleist 70)

Thus, in spite of being in a war context, where women are seen as passive subjects that must be protected from the enemy, we can see how Lenny's mother and Godmother take advantage of their Parsee and upper-class position to play an active role during the conflicts generated by the Partition.

Even though Sidhwa has created empowered female characters in *Cracking India* and has given to the story a female perspective from Lenny's point of view, she has also shown to the reader the reality lived by women in India. In the novel, we see a society where sexual objectification and exploitation of women is part of the routine; a society where women are not seen as individuals but as bodies men can possess; a society in which young boys like Cousin see the sexual abuse of women as normal and make fun of it because it is the example they have been given; and also a society where women are blamed for being women, for being abducted and raped, and for bringing dishonour to their families.

Thus, in *Cracking India*, we have a dual representation of female identity. On the one hand, we see Lenny's mother as a powerful character because of her active role during Partition, but on the other hand, we also see Lenny's mother fitting in the submissive, attentive, and serving wifely role in her marital relationship. Images such as: "She puts toothpaste on Father's toothbrush, removes his sandals, his socks if he is wearing socks, blows tenderly between his toes, and with cooing noises caresses his feet," (Sidhwa 75-76) evidence that Lenny's mother's role at home is subordinate to the men of the house. We are even made to think that Lenny's mother might be suffering from physical abuse: "Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body" (Sidhwa 224). Thus, Mother is an empowered woman outside her role as a wife, where she can become an active humanitarian person, but when she is at home, she is just another abused woman.

Likewise, we also see a dual representation of female identity in the character of Ayah. At the beginning, we see the power of her irresistible attractiveness and how she manages to keep a group of men from different ethnicities united around her. Then, her power is completely lost when she is kidnapped and transformed into a dancing-girl, abused by her friends and admirers such as Imam Din and Sharbat Khan, and married to Ice-Candy man, completely losing her power of decision. Nevertheless, Sidhwa conveys an encouraging message by doing so, and decides not to finish the story that way. Ayah is finally given back her voice and she is able to express her desire to go with her family in Amritsar, and more importantly, she is given hope for a better future.

As Kleist defends, "Sidhwa presents a uniquely gendered perspective of Partition. Moreover, Sidhwa's novel provides a comparatively

inclusive view of the diverse feminine roles during Partition, roles in which the female characters are not entirely empowered nor entirely victimized." (Kleist 70). In *Cracking India*, we find very powerful female characters that are restrained by their social and cultural environment. They find themselves in a context of a patriarchal society, where they are not given equal rights to men and are forced to live a dutiful life at home which prevents them from being totally in power of their lives. Sidhwa succeeds in representing both this impossibility for most women to be completely powerful and at the same time their rejection to remain passive and obedient.

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The Cosmopolitan Shakespeare: A Study of *The Merchant of Venice* in Modern Perspective

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Abstract:

William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice as a sixteenth century English drama incorporates many elements of cosmopolitanism and has a universal appeal. The title of the play is suggestive of the broader themes that Shakespeare wishes to encompass within the texture of his play. The play deals with the complex Christian-Jew antagonism in the medieval Europe and the typical renaissance spirit of expansionism beyond the national territory. During the late thirteenth century, Venice was the most prosperous city in Europe. A city built upon the fear of barbarian invasion was to be heralded as the most dazzlingly beautiful city in the world. While the Florentines were regarded as great thinkers, the Venetians are regarded as great performers. The London of Shakespeare's time bears striking similarities to the Venice where he set both his plays that specifically deal with the "other"— Othello and The Merchant of Venice. Like Venice, London was a thriving city whose wealth and commerce brought the whole world to its door, and it was also a city known for the strength of its law. But beyond the similarity of their flourishing economies and cultures, London and Venice were also cities where religious differences could prove life-threatening. Since its inception, cosmopolitanism has been a category marked by a need to negotiate with "others" and has reflected tensions between local and supra-local

realities and between particularism and universalism. Historically, cosmopolitanism has mirrored the ideologies of different periods and modes of integration to larger political and global realities. The paper aims at reflecting on the cosmopolitan aspects of the play which contribute to its uniqueness.

KEY WORDS: *Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, Jewishness, Renaissance, Anti-semitism.*

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The concept of cosmopolitanism has undergone a sea change with the passage of time and it has acquired different dimensions in course of time. Judged from the point of view of literature, cosmopolitanism is an integral part of world literature. Cosmopolitanism is the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared morality. The politics of the cosmos is the universal rational politics on the moral presupposition that there is a universal idea of mankind as the essence of the human being. While globalization is an almost tangible and concrete phenomenon, cosmopolitanism is much more conceptual. There is, however, a mutual dependence between the two. Shakespeare has amply demonstrated his cosmopolitan outlook in most of his plays. As a writer, he does not confine the

“locale” of his plays to England alone. He writes about the whole world as he is too much cosmopolitan in his attitude. He was probably preoccupied with the Jewish themes of the medieval Europe while imagining the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*. During the time in which Shakespeare was writing, Venice was one of the most important sovereign states in Italy. In 1600 its area and population size was comparable to London’s and, due to its key importance in the maritime traffic in the Mediterranean, it constituted also a melting pot of different cultures attracting, amongst others, Turks, Greeks, Spaniards, Jews, Moors and, of course, Englishmen. Venice was viewed by London as a competitor in trade. Two Charters issued in 1592 and 1600 gave the monopoly of the trades between England and Venice to a group of London merchants. Therefore, it is likely that Shakespeare wrote his two plays set in Venice, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* in a period when the English were greatly interested in the Italian republic. It is essential to consider the play in the context of the time in which it was written and think about early modern cultural attitudes towards Jewishness. Shakespeare’s literary contemporaries, such as John Donne, clearly believed the anti-Semitic propaganda around them and contributed to it themselves. It was popularly held that Jews ritually murdered Christians to drink their blood and achieve salvation. Christopher Marlowe’s theatrical depiction of Jewishness in *The Jew of Malta*, performed regularly in the early 1590s, is an obvious influence on the composition of *The Merchant of Venice*. As some accounts show, the English travelers to Venice, during the Renaissance were awestruck with the uniqueness of a city resting on a multitude of islands. These trade routes and the massive presence of foreigners on the territory ensured that Venice was regularly supplied with goods and products from across the globe. The city could rightfully be regarded as the ‘marketplace’

of the world, as well as, ‘a summary of the universe, because there is nothing originating in any far-off country but it is found in abundance in this city’. In Venice one could find spices imported from Egypt; silk fabrics from Byzantium; western woollens passing through towards the East; Italian raw materials like cotton, silk and glass; and an abundance of food, such as grain, meat and cheese. In addition to its status as a mercantile hub, Venice also operated a major banking system, which confirmed its status as the richest and most abundant city in the world. The city received profits not only through trades but also through very heavy taxation. Venetians were also sustained by the huge revenue which derived from the Jewish community practising usury. The political independence of Venice was also a source of pride: a ‘free’ city-state with its own rules and statutes, not subject to the restrictive laws of an empire. Venice was liberal and neutral in its dealings with foreign countries, representing a strong commercial power. In these conditions, multi-culturalism flourished: people from any country or creed were tolerated, as long as they respected the Venetian law. Some foreigners were temporary visitors, others were absorbed by the Venetians, and others united in big communities in order to retain their cultural identity. It was admired for its location at the centre of European civilization – the Jerusalem of Christendom, yet viewed with suspicion as geographically, it was somewhat displaced towards the East. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is the *other* who is isolated and humiliated, but he dominates the stage from the moment he is first introduced. The Venetians in the play almost uniformly express extreme intolerance of Shylock and the other Jews in Venice. In fact, the exclusion of these “Others” seems to be a fundamental part of the social bonds that cement the Venetian Christians together. We observe from the beginning that Antonio has been abusing Shylock for no other

reasons than his being a Jewish moneylender: “You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,/And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine,/ And all for use of that which is mine own”(I,iii).And Shylock , in spite of that, offers to lend him the money he wants at no interest except for a pound of flesh “ in a merry sport”. Later on ,he puts forward in a quite moving speech, the reasons why he hates Antonio so much: “he hath disgrac’d me, and hinder’d me half a million, laugh’d at my losses, mock’d at my gains, scorned my Nation,thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what’s his reason? I am a Jew: hath not a Jew eyes? (III,i). He goes on defending himself by showing his humanity, and claiming that he does not deserve the harsh treatment he receives on the mere basis that he is a Jew. It is appropriate to argue that Shakespeare himself shares his characters’ attitude that the Jews are naturally malicious and inferior to Christians because of Shylock’s ultimate refusal to show any mercy at all. John Palmer states that it is Shakespeare’s art in portraying Shylock as a real man with flesh and blood that makes the Jew such a dominant figure. Shakespeare aimed to make people laugh by writing “a comedy about a strange Jew involved in a grotesque story about a pound of flesh” (114). However, through his representation of his antagonist “Shakespeare has humanised him to such good purpose that this comic Jew has become, for many brilliant and sensitive critics, a moving, almost tragic, figure” (114). Despite the initial impression of a malicious moneylender, a closer analysis of Shylock’s nature reveals that he is a human being who is most of the time humiliated by the gentiles of Venice. Palmer points out that Shakespeare borrowed the story of *The Merchant of Venice* from various sources in which Shylock appears as a villain; yet as a poetic genius, “taking Shylock’s merry bond for a theme and accepting all the restrictions of the Elizabethan theatre, he expressed himself as

freely and profoundly as possible” (115). Being an antagonist in a play already familiar to the Elizabethan audience restricts the actions of Shylock making his “behaviour in the play settled in advance” (Palmer 114). However, Shylock presented in Shakespeare’s play is more like a human being than a villain condemned for his wrongdoing in the earlier versions. Although the play is constructed as a comedy, the way Shakespeare depicts Shylock makes him “cease to be a comic character” (114). Beneath the comic representation of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare reveals the kind of place the Jews occupied in Venice and how they were treated by the society in general. As it is suggested by Graham Midgley, being a Jew and the consciousness of being the other, have destructive effects on his personality since all he is and all he regards dear is “alien to the society in which he has to live” (196). All the time he has to live with the reality that he is an outsider, “only tolerated but never accepted” (Midgley 196). Moreover, Midgley raises the point that “his being a Jew is not important itself: what is important is what being a Jew has done to his personality” (196). Shylock’s Jewish nature makes him the *other* in Venice, which means constant disgrace and humiliation that he has to suffer. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock’s otherness is highlighted by the clear division of characters into two major distinctive and conflicting groups; the Jewish and the Christian circles. The former group consists of Shylock and the people who are closely related to him either by blood, like his daughter Jessica, or by status, like his servant Lancelot Gobbo, while the latter includes Antonio’s acquaintances who are Solanio, Salarino, Lorenzo and more importantly Bassanio. Through Shylock’s interaction with Antonio, his otherness as a moneylender and a Jew is revealed. The relationship between Shylock and Jessica, on the other hand, reflects Shylock’s otherness in his domestic life. The way Shakespeare introduces Shylock in the play

indicates the function he fulfils in the society as the source of money. It also reflects the mutual hatred that dominates the relationship between the Jew and the Christian gentry. Because he does not have any financial means to support his friend Bassanio, Antonio has no alternative but to ask Shylock, the usurer, to lend him “three thousand ducats,” which is the amount Bassanio needs to woo Portia (MV 1.3.1). Being a usurer, quite naturally, Shylock is very much money oriented, so he questions Antonio’s reliability to sign the bond as he does not want to waste his money. Until the moment he faces Antonio, the discussion about the bond remains only as a business deal. However, as soon as the Jew meets Antonio, Shylock becomes arrogant because Antonio had mistreated him several times in the past: “many a time and oft / In the Rialto you rated me / About my monies and my usances” (MV 1.3.98-100). One reason why he hates Antonio is his being a Christian, but the real source of his hatred is the fact that Antonio spoiled Shylock’s business by lending money without charging any interest. Because Antonio, “neither lend[s] nor borrow[s] by taking nor by giving of excess,” Shylock is filled with the desire of taking revenge (MV 1.3.53-54). He lends the money to the merchant on condition that Shylock will have “an equal pound / of your [Antonio’s] fair flesh” if he is not able to repay the money in three months (MV 1.3.142-143). Rather than charging any interest, Shylock demands the merchant to risk his life.

The conflict between Shylock and the Christian characters is one of the manifestations of the racial stereotypes and anti-Semitism prevalent in the medieval Europe. The Christians view the Jews as “Christ killers”. Like most part of Europe, England severely restricted the rights of the Jews. In fact, Jews were banished completely from England in 1290 by king Edward I and were not officially allowed to return until 1655, when Oliver Cromwell allowed Jews to return.

This exile was technically, in effect, during Shakespeare’s time. One of the reasons renaissance Christians disliked Jews was the willingness of the Jews to practise usury. There was a long tradition in classical and Christian moral thinking against usury. The other characters acknowledge that the law is on Shylock’s side, but they all expect him to show mercy, which he refuses to do. When, during the trial, Shylock asks Portia what could possibly compel him to be merciful, Portia’s long reply, beginning with the words, “The quality of mercy is not strained,” clarifies what is at stake in the argument (IV.i.179). Human beings should be merciful because God is merciful: mercy is an attribute of God himself and therefore greater than power, majesty, or law. Portia’s understanding of mercy is based on the way Christians in Shakespeare’s time understood the difference between the Old and New Testaments. According to the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament, the Old Testament depicts God as requiring strict adherence to rules and exacting harsh punishments for those who stray. The New Testament, in contrast, emphasizes adherence to the spirit rather than the letter of the law, portraying a God who forgives rather than punishes and offers salvation to those followers who forgive others. Thus, when Portia warns Shylock against pursuing the law without regard for mercy, she is promoting what Elizabethan Christians would have seen as a pro-Christian, anti-Jewish agenda. A sixteenth-century audience would not expect Shylock to exercise mercy—therefore, it is up to the Christians to do so. Once she has turned Shylock’s greatest weapon—the law—against him, Portia has the opportunity to give freely of the mercy for which she so beautifully advocates. Instead, she backs Shylock into a corner, where she strips him of his bond, his estate, and his dignity, forcing him to kneel and beg for mercy. Given that Antonio decides not to seize Shylock’s goods as punishment for

conspiring against him, we might consider Antonio to be merciful. But we may also question whether it is merciful to return to Shylock half of his goods, only to take away his religion and his profession. By forcing Shylock to convert, Antonio disables him from practicing usury, which, according to Shylock's reports, was Antonio's primary reason for berating and spitting on him in public. Antonio's compassion, then, seems to stem as much from self-interest as from concern for his fellow man. Mercy, as delivered in *The Merchant of Venice*, never manages to be as sweet, selfless, or full of grace as Portia presents it.

Throughout the play, Shylock claims that he is simply applying the lessons taught to him by his Christian neighbors; this claim becomes an integral part of both his character and his argument in court. In Shylock's very first appearance, as he conspires to harm Antonio, his entire plan seems to be born of the insults and injuries Antonio has inflicted upon him in the past. As the play advances, and Shylock unveils more of his reasoning, the same idea rears its head over and over—he is simply applying what years of abuse have taught him. Responding to Salarino's query of what good the pound of flesh will do him, Shylock responds, "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (III.i.60–61). Not all of Shylock's actions can be blamed on poor teachings, and one could argue that Antonio understands his own culpability in his near execution. With the trial's conclusion, Antonio demands that Shylock convert to Christianity, but inflicts no other punishment, despite the threats of fellow Christians like Gratiano. Antonio does not, as he has in the past, kick or spit on Shylock. Antonio, as well as the duke, effectively ends the conflict by starving it of the injustices it needs to continue. The realized Judaism and realized Christianity lying back of the property conflict

in the drama present a clash of universal principles of the Old Testament against the New. The final triumph of the spirit that embodies in its prayer, the earnest petition, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," has given to this play the popularity it has always known. For the play as well as the individual must live for universal ends, else the virtue of each soon disappears and the memory of each is buried among the unmarked graves that swallow up the multitude.

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Memory, Identity and Social Structure: Material Culture in Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's Songs

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Abstract:

Music being an integral part of culture is often used as a weapon for social reformation and revolution. It is possible to understand the culture of a region through music. In fact, culture can loosely be understood as the way of life of a group of human being. However, we need to pause here to ask ourselves a pertinent question: Does music form a part of material culture? How do we define material culture? Material culture includes all the physical things that people create and attach meaning to, and also provides us insight into the non-material culture, which includes the ideas, beliefs habits and values of people. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the cultural doyen of North-East India, has to his credit composed and sang a great number of songs. Besides reflecting humanism, revolutionary spirit, patriotism, history, romance and life, his songs represented material culture in all its nuances. Emphasis would be laid on the study of the subjects like the construction of identity, social disparity and representation of the past with the help of the selected songs of Dr Hazarika.

Key words: Material culture, identity, collective memory, social structure

Material culture incorporates all the physical things that are created by people and invested

with meaning. It also provides us insight into the non-material culture, which includes the ideas, beliefs, habits and values of people. Material culture is a study about the relationship between the people and the things; it is all about the culture of things. On the other hand, Non-material culture is about the culture of ideas. It consists of the intangible creation of society such as values, norms and beliefs. "Material culture" according to Jules Prown "is the study through artefacts of the beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time" (Prown, 2000, pp. 1-19). The objects, things and materials are the stuff of meaning and practices of everyday human activities. It gives us the insight to understand the social structure, global networks and cultural ideals. According to Ian Woodward, "objects are the material things people encounter, interact with and use. Objects are commonly spoken of as material culture. The term material culture emphasises how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, to carry out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity" (Woodward, 2007, p. 3).

The present study intends to explore the underlying meaning of objects as reflected in some of the selected songs of Dr Bhupen Hazarika. The study concentrates on the representation of the object in Hazarika's songs, and how the issues of identity, societal construction and collective memory are entangled in the network of such objects. According to Stuart Hall, "we give things meaning by how we represent them—the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualise them, the values we place on them" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pp. 17-26). It is apparent that Hazarika not only invests meaning to such objects but also deconstructs the normative meaning often associated with such objects.

One can study an object through music also. Music is one of the medium through which human beings produce beauty of contour, harmony and expression of emotion. It is always dialogic; its meaning is always produced and reproduced in its creation, expectation, reception and interpretation. Social issues get reflected in lyrical compositions of music; ecological factors do influence the musical structures. On the other hand, music forms a part of the non-material culture, but it constitutes material culture in a discursive form. Sometimes, in the lyrical composition, we find the use of certain objects whose possible meanings are produced in a symbolic or metaphorical form. Sometimes composers also add a specific value or function to an object. Thus, with the help of music, we can study the perception of people, their pride and their memory as connected with an object.

A material object can be read as a source of collective memory. The term 'collective memory' is used for describing the shared stories,

artefacts, food, drink, symbols, traditions, images, and music that bind the members of a group together. The discourse of collective memory apparently begins with the work of Emile Durkheim. According to him, a society requires continuity and connection with the past to preserve its social unity and cohesion (Durkheim, 1995). Maurice Halbwachs, on the other hand, is considered the first sociologist to use the term collective memory. He is stated to have build the foundational framework for the study of societal remembrance. According to him, all individual memory is constructed within social structures and institutions, and individuals organise and understand events and concepts within a social context. Thus, individuals collectively shape memory by ordering and organizing them within the same social structure. It can, therefore, be said that a group construct memory and the individuals do the work of remembering. However, Halbwachs states that, "collective memory is shaped by present issues and understandings. Groups select different memories to explain current issues and concerns. Leaders of a group reconstruct past using rationalisation to choose which events are remembered those that are eliminated and rearrange events to conform to the social narrative, to explain the present situation" (Halbwachs 1952).

Cultural study of things or objects gives us insight into the social structure of human life. It gives us the insight to understand how people constitute a society and create rules and regulations. Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory helps us to understand the form of social life and how people create rules and regulations in a social situation. According to him, "human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure. This means there is a social structure-traditions, institutions, moral codes and

established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently” (David, 2002). He believes that social structure exists through the way people use rules and resources. He talks about the normative rules that govern behaviour and signification code by which meaning is produced. For example, a way of speaking about a pattern can be used for conveying an argument. Such signification code can be used to analyze songs also. For instance, an expressive element of a song reproduces meaning, and it can reflect the social structure. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, a man of soil and masses, represents a set of ideas, values, and norms of Assamese society through his analysis of such kind of objects. In part, we can say that Dr Bhupen Hazarika employs language and expressive behaviour of the symbolic objects as a signification code in order to produce meaning and explore social structures. Thus, it can be said that, in a given situation, a material object has a role in creating the rules of human society. On the other hand, physical objects created by the society influence how people live.

Dr Bhupen Hazarika, a lyricist, artist, journalist writer and filmmaker from Assam, endowed with a magnetic voice and superb creative power, has produced pearly lyrics gained him immortality (Goswami, 2012). His lyrics are replete with a wide range of emotions and feelings. The main themes of his compositions are revolution, patriotism, feeling for the oppressed and the downtrodden, love, amity, harmony, romanticism and above all humanism. Some of his songs reflect objects which signify the culture, history, power relation and social structure of Assam. For instance, the song *Dola, he Dola*, reveals the suffering of the bearers of palanquin of kings: “through the meandering road/ I carry big men’s palanquin/ ... I hold on to a labourer’s life/ exhausting my body”(translation ours). Here, *Dola* becomes the

symbol of exploitation and domination. It bears the stigma of power politics. The song represents the two opposite situation: a sophisticated lord in silk, and sweating palanquin bearers who cannot give a cotton shirt to their children. The actions and attitude of the palanquin bearers suggest their subalternity. The tune of the song is suggestive of walking with careful steps and the hard labour of carrying a heavy weight upon their shoulders: “through the ages/they dumped the heavy burden on us/ our shoulders seem to creak/ the big men sleep in the palanquin/ but we sweat/ while we climb up the high hills/ we have to walk carefully/ if it slips from our shoulders/ the big men’s palanquin will go down” (translation ours). *Dola* is a covered litter designed for one passenger carried by two men on their shoulders by means of a pole. On the other hand it carries beliefs and people’s perceptions of the power, class and livelihood associated with this object. In part, *dola* creates a social system and class division in the society. Though it was a mode of travel for the royal/ rich people, it required the common people to carry it on their shoulders. Thus, it carries two types of meaning: for the royal/ rich people, it is a symbol of luxury, power, class and status. On the other hand, for the lower class, it is a means of exploitation.

If we look for *Dola*, the object used in the song, precisely in the history of Assam, we find that it was commonly used during the Ahom reign as a mode of travel. In historical context, during Ahom age, the use of a *dola* was restricted within the aristocratic circle of kings and nobles (Rajkumar, 2000). It was considered as the symbol of status and power. Here, the class division is distinct. The kings ignore the fact that the development of a kingdom depends on the hard labour of common people. Thus, Hazarika is attempting through this song to highlight the decadent Ahom history in order to emphasize the ugly existence of class division and social disparity in our contemporary society.

Let us consider the song “*Bulu o Mising dekati bojali je pepati xurere xojali dekhun dichang mukhor nixati*”. It expresses the cultural and social values of Mising community of Assam. The song starts with the sound of *Pepa* (a wind instrument) blown by a young boy. The song showcases the vibrant culture, dress, custom and rituals of the Mising tribe of Assam. The *mibugaluk* shirt, *dumer* (a kind of headgear), the *pererumbong* sadar (a piece of cloth), *riha* (a piece of cloth worn by women), yellow coloured *ribigaseng* worn by the missing girl, the *oinitom* (a love song), and *gungang* (a musical instrument) are the very essence of the of the Mising culture. The song expresses the culture of the Mising community by identifying objects which are visibly fetishized by the community such as dress. It also refers to the colour of the dresses, how women and men distinctly dressed up, the fabrics of these dresses, the process of weaving, designing and their usage. On the other hand, it bears the significant value of using certain colours and the unique identity of the community. Thus, the song represents the unique culture, tradition and heritage of Mising community in particular and Assam in general.

Hazarika’s songs also encompass the art and architecture of Ahom period. For instance, the song “*Deshar Hoke Moru O*” is based on nationalism ushering a revolution. The lyrics of the song reflect upon the fading colour of Ranghar: “*Ranghar Ranghar tejrongi Ranghar/ aji kio rang tur nai.*” Through this song, Hazarika is asking a very pertinent question as to why the colour of the Ranghar is fading away? To speak metaphorically, the vibrant colour of Ranghar denotes the robust energy of youth and the faded colour denotes the weakness of youth. His primary concern has been to awaken the youth of Assam from the deep slumber induced by colonialism. By symbolically representing the vibrant colour of

Ranghar, he invokes the power of youth to deter any qualms over the colonial power. At the same time, he urges the youths of the country to awake and fight for the nation. It may be mentioned that the Ranghar was constructed by King Pramatta Singha in 1746 A.D. During Ahom period it was the royal pavilion where Ahom kings and nobles would sit to enjoy the games like buffalo fights and performances like bihu dance. It is a two storied building having a unique pattern and architectural design. It bears the pride and past of Ahom history and culture of Assam. Thus, Hazarika draws the sentiment of the people by bringing in the significance of the Ranghar. Here, we can understand the people’s emotions, sentiments, public memories and values connected with the pride of Ahom architecture.

Let us consider the song, *Dukhore Upori Dukh*. Again, in this song, he projects Ahom art and architecture to denote past pride and history. The song reflects on the various socio-political and economic crises which the state of Assam has been enduring in the present time: “today, Rohdoi and Bhogai cry/ the buffallo horn is not blown/ the drum in the holly place of Lord Shiva is not there/ The drum and the gong are not pounded/... Snakes have taken shelter in the Barghar/ as it is surrounded by the grasses/ and a doleful tune is humming inside the Karenghar/ The company comes to the vicinity of the Soraghar/ in order to settle itself for a while/ but it passes the Soraghar and enters the Barghar/ piercing the chest with lance/ Ranghar Pavilion has lost its charm/ and Tolatolghar is surrounded by darkness” (translations ours). The song represents the obstacles faced by the Ahom kings at various times including the invasion of East India company. It also reveals the political demolition and cultural decay of Ahom kingdom. Metaphorically speaking, Hazarika tries to depict the present situation of Assam by referring to

the past events. It unfolds various cultural conflicts, political exploitations, economic imbalances, and the change in people's perceptions towards social values and norms. On the other hand, it carries a vast account of those architectures, their values and meanings which they hold during the Ahom Period. At the same time, the public memory, stories and historical events related to those objects are relayed forward. The playing of the drum in Shiva temple reveals the ritual practices of the particular period. The Shiva temple was constructed during Ahom period by the king or Bor Raja Ambika, the queen of king Shiva Singha in 1642 A.D. However, the song reflects on the changes that the society is afflicted with in the contemporary era along with the transformation of the ritualistic tradition. Hazarika, thus, urges the society to maintain the three important royal building of Ahom kingdom— Karenghar, Ranghar and Tolatolghar. He believes that these monuments are the symbol of the pride of Ahom rule in Assam. It may be noted that Soraghar is a room inside the royal palace where discussions and decisions on war and other matters of importance for the empire are taken by the king in consultations with his ministers. (Rajkumar, 2000, p. 139; translation ours). On the other hand, Borghar is the main house. The song, thus, untangle the pattern of houses and other architectural designs of Ahom period, and the idea of space and its usage. The song also reflects on the advent of the British and how the Ahom kingdom declined under the colonial power. Apparently, Hazarika is making a statement on the present socio-political and economic situation of Assam. Furthermore, by referring to the darkness in the Tolatolghar and Ranghar, he is hinting at the possibility of a catastrophic future for Assam.

In the song, *Rod Puawor karone*, Hazarika looks at the Assamese culture through the prism

of a metaphor: *Ajir mula gabhorue dopdopai ulale hengdane maku dekhi korobat lukale/ mulai aji homajxalot seneh seleng logale xojabolo pindhaboloji kak?* The song reveals how the social structure of the Assamese society has been undergoing transformation. Hazarika is optimistic to find the Mula Gabhoru (to denote young girls) of the present generation exercising power with boldness to show their chutzpah. She is also an accomplished weaver. In fact, Mula Gabhoru, as mentioned in the song, was the wife of Phraseng Mung Borgohain, an Ahom warrior. She established herself as a female warrior of the Ahom period by going to the battlefield to avenge the death of her husband against Turbak Khan, the Mughal warrior. Therefore, Mula Gabhoru, in the song, highlights the state of affairs, practices and traditions during the Mughal invasion of Ahom kingdom. During the Ahom period, the wife of a general or a commander used to offer a piece of cloth called *kabach kapur* to her husband before he leaves for the battlefield. It was believed that if a wife could offer the piece of *kabach kapur* to her husband, he was sure to escape death on the battlefield. However, the *kabach kapur* had to be made maintaining certain rules. The wife of a soldier would start spinning cotton in the middle of the night, make threads out of it and would finish weaving before the daybreak (Borboruah, 1981, p. 65). It is believed that in case of Phra-seng-Mung Bargohain, Mula Gabhoru could not offer *kabach kapur* for short of time. Hence, he died on the battlefield. Thus, it can be argued that most of the material objects relating to Ahom history are connected to their belief system and public memory. In the present-day context, the song depicts the power of *hengdan* and *the shuttle*. *Hengdan*, being a tool of war, has the power to save the nation. On the other hand shuttle, an object used for weaving, has the power to economically transform the Assamese society. The song also peeps into the

contemporary status of women in relation to the Ahom period. Moreover, during the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641 A.D.), he gave impetus to the cottage industry. Mumai Tamuli, the then Barborua, made it a rule that every woman before going to bed must spin a bundle of thread which was to be collected the next morning by an officer appointed for this purpose (Bhuyan, 1960, p. 127). Hence, the song reflects on the history, beliefs, norms, culture, tradition and the status of women of the Assamese society during the Ahom period.

In the song, *Bihuti Bosore Ahiba*, the Bihu and its importance in building unity among the masses is emphasized. As it is, the Bohag Bihu heralds the dawn of a new year, a new spring. Through this song, Hazarika is ushering a new hope and a better future for the people of Assam. The lyric marks *gamosa* as the image of unity: *e moromor digh di hepahor asure ekotar gamosa buaba*. Here, he attempts to bring forth the values and emotions associated with *Gamosa* for the Assamese people. *Gamosa* is a piece of cloth used by Assamese people as a symbol of honour and love. Hazarika explains the weaving process behind the making of this object. In addition to its symbolic representation of unity, the song identifies the object as an identity marker of the Assamese society.

From the study of Dr. Hazarika's songs, we can infer that music textualizes material culture. For, it is the material culture that initiates and endows specificity to our thought process and, thereby, dovetails things with ideas, archives with identity, traditional practices with collective memory etc. By representing certain objects/ things in his songs that he considers valued at a particular time and space, Dr. Hazarika endeavours to salvage the truth concealed in the maze of history. However, while attempting to interpret the intricate web of things and ideas, he locates himself in the *Bor Axomiya* culture

and tradition. It does not mean that he ever strives to be a chauvinist/ nationalist, rather he considers himself to be a humanist with history and root.

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POETIC JUSTICE VIS-A-VIS POWER: A READING OF *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

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Abstract:

How far can a man go to avenge humiliation he has suffered; can he go to the extent of selling his daughter to that end? Vijay Tendulkar in his play Ghashiram Kotwal deals with very pertinent questions and issues: who is responsible for creation of Ghashiram(s) in the society? How power corrupts and how it is always the weak, the poor and the women, who have to suffer humiliations and injustice in the hands of the powerful. A reading of the play will make one realize that Ghashiram is symbolic of- cruelty, callousness and indiscriminate use of power to commit atrocities on people. Humiliations and atrocities meted out to Ghashiram Savaldas, a Brahman from Banaras who came to Poona to make his fortune, change the course of his life. Ghashiram Savaldas is transformed into Ghashiram Kotwal and that transformation was ominous for the Brahmans of Poona. The madness for revenge makes Ghashiram almost inhuman. This paper is an attempt to examine the factors that are responsible for the creation and flourishing of Ghashirams in the society. It would make an attempt to understand the politics of power and the dynamics of power relations in the society. The issue of poetic justice would be viewed from various lenses. The paper would argue that the fall of a Ghashiram or eliminating one Ghashiram is not the solution for ending the

misuse of power in the society; one must find out the root cause of the problem and find solutions accordingly.

Keywords: *Power, politics, atrocity, madness, revenge, inhuman, power-corrupts, poetic justice, injustice.*

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“Use a thorn to take out a thorn...Anyway, he was no use any more.” (*Ghashiram Kotwal* 59)

How far can a man go to avenge humiliation he has suffered; can he go to the extent of selling his daughter to that end? Vijay Tendulkar in his play *Ghashiram Kotwal* deals with very pertinent questions and issues: who is responsible for creation of Ghashiram(s) in the society? How power corrupts and how it is always the weak, the poor and the women, who have to suffer humiliations and injustice in the hands of the powerful. A reading of the play will make one realize that Ghashiram is symbolic of- cruelty, callousness and indiscriminate use of power to commit atrocities on people. Humiliations and atrocities meted out to Ghashiram Savaldas, a Brahman from Banaras who came to Poona to make his fortune, change the course of his life. Ghashiram Savaldas is transformed into Ghashiram Kotwal and that transformation was

ominous for the Brahmans of Poona. The madness for revenge makes Ghashiram almost inhuman. This paper is an attempt to examine the factors that are responsible for the creation and flourishing of Ghashirams in the society. It would make an attempt to understand the politics of power and the dynamics of power relations in the society. The issue of poetic justice would be viewed from various lenses. The paper would argue that the fall of a Ghashiram or eliminating one Ghashiram is not the solution for ending the misuse of power in the society; one must find out the root cause of the problem and find solutions accordingly.

Many a times it is noticed that economic reasons are responsible for the movement or displacement of people from one place to another; Ghashiram Kotwal, the protagonist of Tendulkar's play, is not an exception to that rule. He is a Brahman from Kanauj and has come to Poona to make his fortune. But there in Poona he was mistaken for a thief and was mercilessly beaten, imprisoned and humiliated. Samik Bandyopadhyaya referring to Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* opines that the later in his social criticism is more concerned with the mechanism of power within the society and perhaps is not much concerned with the economic and political implication of power and the source of power (83-84)¹. One can perhaps contradict this argument of Bandyopadhyaya with ample evidence from the text. A close reading of the text would reveal that there exists an intricate relationship between the source of power, economic and political implication of power and the mechanism of power within the society. One is dependent on the other and one affects/effects another. The humiliation and atrocities meted out to Ghashiram Savaldas, an innocent Brahman, makes him revengeful. It has led to the transformation of an innocent Ghashiram Savaldas into the cruel and merciless Ghashiram Kotwal. This transformation was

ominous for the Brahmans of Poona. Ghashiram in great anger has pledged to make Poona the "kingdom of pigs". (*Ghashiram Kotwal* 21) His course of action from that time onwards was determined by his revenge motive. He is in search of ways to avenge his humiliation. Perhaps he has realised that if he could manage to acquire power than that power would enable him to materialize his desire for revenge. Ghashiram's desire to avenge his humiliation by any means or manner is going to effect and change the whole societal set up of Poona and its people.

Ghashiram has pledged to make Poona a kingdom of pigs. In order to avenge his humiliation he would need power. He was constantly pondering how he would derive power so that he could take revenge from the people of Poona. Ghashiram soon discovers that Nana Phadnavis, the chief minister of the Peshwa has a notorious weakness for woman. Ghashiram becomes so power thirsty and is mad for revenge that he decides to use his young beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri as bait to entrap Nana Phadnavis, so that he could get some powerful position for himself in return. The desire for revenge and thirst for power is such that Ghashiram did not hesitate to sacrifice his own daughter. He is so blind for revenge that he did not think once of the consequences. This excessive desire for power and the indiscriminate use of the same may be regarded as the tragic flaw of Ghashiram. It would not be exaggeration to say that the madness for power has made Ghashiram almost inhuman. Nana Phadnavis has power by virtue of his position but he has weakness for women. And this weakness for women makes him misuse his power. He uses Ghashiram as a tool to get his sex object Lalita Gauri. But there is every possibility that when his purpose is served he would discard and would conveniently get rid of both Gauri and Ghashiram and that is what

exactly happens at the end. Ghashiram might have thought that by becoming the 'kotwal'-chief of Police of Poona he was all powerful but he was greatly mistaken for he was only a tool in the hands of Nana. Nana used Ghashiram at/for his convenience. Ghashiram is too novice to have understood the politics of Nana's power.

Nana uses his political power as a minister to solicit women and satiate his sexual desire. This is utter misuse of power and position. Nana, a prominent and powerful minister, instead of protecting the honour of the womenfolk tries to prey upon them. The irony is that the protector has turned into a predator here. In fact he considers it dishonour if he cannot get the woman he desires and uses his power and authority to attain his objective. Referring to Gauri Nana says, "If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's is gone if she's not had". (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 24)

It seems that there exists an intriguing relationship between 'power' and 'helplessness'. In power relations the one who is in the receiving end experiences a state of helplessness. If one looks at the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* one would find that both Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal enjoys one kind of power or the other. The former has political power by virtue of his position as a minister and the latter has power by virtue of his daughter whom he had used as a sex object to control Nana Phadnavis. At one instance in the play Nana's helplessness is very clearly evident when Ghashiram refuses to send Gauri to him on the pretext of marrying off the latter. Nana is so desperate to have her for satisfying his sexual urge that he is willing to do anything to that end. Ghashiram takes full advantage of Nana's helplessness and weakness and urges him to make him the kotwal of Poona. Nana yields to his suggestion and makes him the kotwal of Poona. So, here one can see how Nana's helplessness or weakness for Gauri was

exploited by Ghashiram. Ghashiram perhaps feels that he has succeeded in his clever plans but like a tragic hero he does not foresee the future trap into which he was entering (Naikar 86-87). Nana had his own plans in appointing Ghashiram as the kotwal of Poona. Two purposes were served by this decision of Nana, one sexual and two political (Naikar 87). He would now get an easy and unrestricted access to Gauri and secondly he would be able to use Ghashiram as a tool to control or eliminate his enemies. In other words a thorn has been used to remove another one. Later in the play one can see that Ghashiram is entrapped in his own trap. The trap he made for Nana by using his daughter as the bait, he falls into that same trap or he meets the consequence for his actions. Ghashiram for his revengeful nature and for his indiscriminate actions has got himself into such a whirlpool from where he cannot come out. Now he is at the receiving end; he is helpless and weak in front of Nana.

Nana is a very shrewd and selfish politician. He is far sighted and very calculative in his actions unlike Ghashiram. Ghashiram is no comparison to him as far as politics of power is concerned. He might consider himself to be very smart but he fails to comprehend that Nana can be smarter than he (Naikar 87). Nana very well knew that the Brahmans from Poona will never trust Ghashiram as the latter is an outsider; so even if at some point of time Ghashiram happens to realise the plot of Nana he will not have supporters to raise a revolt against Nana. Nana compares Ghashiram to a dog, the dog that barks and works for his master. Nana's inner mind is manifested when he says that their misdeeds would be credited to Ghashiram's account. (*Ghashiram Kotwal* 29) So, the actual reins of power are in the hands of Nana; Ghashiram is merely a tool or puppet in his hands.

The objectives of the two- Nana and Ghashiram are to a large extent responsible for determining their modus operandi and their eventual success or failure in the overall structure of power politics/games. Ghashiram desired power and executed that power in order to avenge his humiliation of the people of Poona. He was successful in that objective of his. Nana executed his power in a more subtle and clever way. Three objectives were served by his shrewd execution of power. One, he could exploit Gauri and satiate his sexual desires. Second, he could use Ghashiram, the kotwal, as a tool to silence his critics and eliminate those who conspired against him. Third, he could eliminate Ghashiram when the latter was of no use to him. Nana has pitted Ghashiram against the Brahamans of Poona for he very well knew that this move of his will lead to the elimination of Ghashiram, for the people of Poona will avenge for the atrocities meted out to them by Ghashiram in his tenure as the kotwal of Poona. Nana being a shrewd politician could comprehend the complexity of things and had planned his actions accordingly. Ghashiram, unlike Nana, could not assess the complexity of things. He goaded with the desire for revenge takes his decisions emotionally without assessing situations critically and thus falls prey to the power politics of Nana. Ghashiram's focus was one-dimensional. He wanted to take revenge from the people of Poona for the humiliation he had to suffer in their hands. He used his power to that end and had achieved that end. But he, unlike Nana, had no plans to evade punishment for his actions. But Nana's focus was multi dimensional. He being far more adapted in power politics than Ghashiram, plans his actions cleverly and in spite of leading an amorous life and misusing his power as a minister he survives. This is in fact the irony and the saddest part of the play. It perhaps leads one to question, is there any Poetic justice in the play?

In the game of power between Nana and Ghashiram it is Gauri, a woman, who has to suffer. Tendulkar in his play is perhaps trying to highlight the fact that in the Indian society it is generally a woman who is oppressed and marginalized. It is very rightly said that it is always a goat that is sacrificed and never a lion. In other words, one who is weak always has to suffer. Gauri, a woman, is weak and voiceless. She could not resist or revolt against her father's decision to employ her as a sex tool to entrap Nana. She gets impregnated by Nana and has to die an untimely death for no fault of hers. Nana compels her to get aborted and in the process she dies. He does not want his name to be soiled. He employs Chandra, the mid wife to carry out the abortion of Gauri. This incident suggests how patriarchy employs a woman to exploit another woman and perhaps this is one of the reasons why patriarchy has been and is flourishing with much ease in the society. It is evident that Nana exploits a women's body but he does not have the courage or morality to own her; in order to hide his misdeeds he can go to the extent of killing that woman. But again the woman is helpless, she cannot do anything. In the dynamics of power relation in the play, the women seem to be the weakest.

Tendulkar in his play has vehemently criticized the misuse of power in the hands of the likes of Nana. Nana, the powerful chief minister of the Peshwa, instead of using his power and position for the protection of the honour of women uses it to exploit them. In an instance when Nana fails to catch Gauri and in blind lust grabs the servant, Ghashiram, at the door; he makes a deal with the latter to get the girl. He exclaims that his grandeur would go if she is not had. Tendulkar very aptly mocks at the irony inherent here. Morality and good sense demanded from the minister to have said that my grandeur would go if she is had but instead he says that his grandeur would go if she is not had. Samik

Bandyopadhyay in his "Introduction" to *Ghashiram Kotwal* has rightly pointed out that the "omnipotent" Nana cannot accept the humiliation of failing to achieve what he desires. Anything referring to his "impotency" as a ruler is not acceptable to Nana. (ix) He can and would go to any extent to execute his power and would have what he desires. When Nana was complying with the wishes of Ghashiram the latter might have thought that Nana was under his control. But he was gravely mistaken for this was a calculated move on the part of Nana, it was merely a temporary shifting or adjustment of power, Nana could turn the table at any moment when his purpose was served.

Nana is so intoxicated with power that he does not have any remorse for the death of Gauri. When Ghashiram enquires about Gauri to Nana, he tries to divert the matter by referring to Vedantic philosophy. He tells Ghashiram, "It is misapprehension to think that she was there. It was illusion... No one belongs to anyone. No one is anyone's daughter. No one is anyone's father". (*Ghashiram Kotwal* 51) Ghashiram is helpless in front Nana, he cannot do anything to Nana. So, the question arises in mind that how powerful is the kotwal, the police chief, in front of the minister?

Basavaraj Naikar in the essay "*Ghashiram Kotwal: A Tragedy of Power*" opines that Ghashiram was bound to meet his fate for he had violated the holy institution of marriage by surrendering his unmarried daughter to an old man. (*Literary Vision* 90) The pertinent question that arises in one's mind is had Ghashiram not surrendered his daughter to Nana could her honour be saved from the lascivious eyes of the powerful and promiscuous Nana? The answer perhaps is an emphatic 'no'. The kind of powerful position Nana was enjoying could have easily enabled him to exploit the honour of Gauri. Further, one should not forget that Ghashiram

was an outsider; any allegation made against him by Nana, an insider and a powerful minister would have been accepted by the masses of Poona.

Regarding the retribution meted out to Ghashiram, Naikar in his essay "*Ghashiram Kotwal: A Tragedy of Power*" argues that he who negates the moral order of the universe gets negated by it ultimately. (*Literary Vision* 91) If one goes by that logic than perhaps Nana deserves more punishment than Ghashiram. Nana, as evident in the play, was responsible for the dishonouring of and eventual death of many women for satiating his sexual appetite, Gauri being one example.

Hegel, the German aesthetician and philosopher² has vouchsafed that a lesser evil has to be defeated by a greater evil. If one goes by the above philosophy then perhaps one can argue that Ghashiram's end is justified. But if that is the case then it would be supporting the evil ways of Nana. It would be giving licence to the likes of Nana, the larger evils, to carry out their immoral and evil ways and eliminate ruthlessly the likes of Ghashiram, the lesser evils.

Tendulkar in an author's note has specifically mentioned that Ghashiram's are "creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place". (Introduction. *Ghashiram Kotwal* viii). This is a very serious issue; anyone may be a victim of such socio-political forces. This perhaps would make one more sympathetic towards Ghashiram and one would feel that the punishment meted out to him was more than what he deserved.

Samik Bandyopadhyay in "Introduction" to *Ghashiram Kotwal* has remarkably pointed out how 'deceptions of deputation' has been employed as a device of power in the play. He has rightly argued that "the real power uses the masks of deputation to mediate the exercise of

power, to hide from the victims the real face of power, so that all resistance is effectively deflected”. (x) If one tries to elaborate the idea inherent in the above lines then one would find that Nana, the representative of real power, uses masks of deputation, he deposes Ghashiram as the kotwal, and through him he exercises and executes his power over his subjects. The effectiveness of his plan is such and the irony of the matter is that the victim, in this case both Ghashiram and the Brahmans of Poona, would never be able to comprehend that it is Nana who has the real power and that it is he who is executing his power. The irony is that, Ghashiram the fool he is thinks that kotwali would mean power in his hands. On the other hand, the mass or the Brahmans of Poona, thinks that it is the kotwal who is tormenting them by misusing his power so they would try to punish Ghashiram for the tortures meted out to them. They would never be able to comprehend that the kotwal was simply a tool in the hands of Nana to silence and eliminate those who conspired against the latter. Nana saying that our misdeeds would be credited to the kotwal’s account reiterates the efficacy of his plans.

Thus, Foucault’s ideas on the mechanism of power as mentioned in *Power/Knowledge* would be pertinent here. Foucault has argued, “... power isn’t localized in the State apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed”. (60) Hence devices of power, as observed by Tendulkar in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, such as the operations of religiosity, sexuality, and deputationist politics³ are to be rectified and changed in order to bring in positive change in the society.

One would wonder why Tendulkar allowed Nana to go scot free at the end of the play and subjected only Ghashiram to retribution. Praising the critical acumen of Tendulkar as a playwright Sailaza B. Wadikar has said that the former is at once subjective and objective, individual and social and local and cosmopolitan. Considering the kind of dexterous playwright Tendulkar is it would not be exaggeration to say that he has intentionally left it upon the readers/audience to see and understand the real problem that is affecting the society and decide. He has not given the judgement but has allowed the reader/audience to be the judge. There is no denying the fact that Ghashiram(s) are created by the socio-political forces and the perhaps the punishment meted out to Ghashiram Kotwal is more than what he deserves. But perhaps by giving such an ending to the play the playwright has succeeded in depicting the irony and intensity of the matter. One might conclude by reiterating what Foucault opined in *Power/Knowledge* on the mechanism of power. He has very rightly opined that in order to bring positive changes in the society one must understand the intricacies of the functioning of the mechanisms of power in the society and act accordingly.

Notes:

1. The above observation made by Samik Bandyopadhyay appears in the essay “*Ghashiram Kotwal: A Tragedy of Power*” in *Literary Vision* by Basavaraj Naikar.
2. Refer to Basavaraj Naikar’s essay “*Ghashiram Kotwal: A Tragedy of Power*” page nos. 91-92.
3. Refer to the Introduction by Samik Bandyopadhyay in *Ghashiram Kotwal* page no. x.

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Kumar Bhai's Writings in Odia : Indecency in Human Culture and Culture of Decency

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Abstract:

21st century is an Age of experiment in literature and culture. Kumar Bhai born and brought up in the neglected corner of Odisha in 20th century saw the war-torn world. He observed the decadence of culture and split personalities in the society. What pained him most is the pain the fellow human beings used to experience owing to ignorance of the working of human psyche. He used his pen as a medium to reform society and uphold culture. He emerged as the messenger of peace and harmony. In his writings he displayed a flair for the virtues, the classics held; on the theatre he played the role of a reformed artist unlike that of moderns. He placed human values over the commercial. Goodness, selflessness, compassion; propriety and above all decency were valued highly by him. He usually spoke in the mother tongue that is Odia because it was natural to him. This article is written in the other tongue, that is English, because it being the global lingua franca, acts as the proper medium to reveal his message that is universal, holistic and proper for the modern youth whose heart, to borrow the language from T.S. Eliot, is like, 'taxi throbbing and waiting'. All the quotations from Odia have been translated, at a few places, transcreated by me the writer of this article. In a nutshell, this paper explores what Bhai stands for and how he is relevant for our times.

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Kumar Bhai the writer is the shining example of a social reformer who took to writing in order to inaugurate an era of decency in human culture, which deteriorated under the impact of colonization. Doubtless the Britishers in India exploited the common masses, imported and imposed their materialistic culture upon the subjugated people. The Indians under the impact of western culture belittled their importance attached to human values. Kumar Bhai sarcastically remarks on hybrid culture:

Sakhilo! high heel nai

Lipstick othare dei

Saibani besa ba saiba besa

Madam bolanti ama duhita

O, darling dear!

Putting on the high heeled shoes

And lipstick on the lips,

Flaunting as the foreigners

Our daughters relish the addresses like madams.

The young people turned vainglorious and imitative. Bhai looked upon it as the sign of deterioration of culture. Thus Bhai tries to decolonize the mind-set in order to preserve the essence of our own culture.

Kumar Bhai, as his name indicates, is the embodiment of indomitable zeal and enthusiasm and the exponent of universal brotherhood. Bhai born in Dhenkanal district of Odisha in the year of our independence ie; 8th April 1947 was gifted with various talents; he had a natural flair for dancing, singing, acting, writing and above all living a selfless life. Hence he emerged as a man of many parts: educationist, artist, musician, writer and social reformer. His pen is mightier than those who write for the sake of writing. He has a vision of a glorious future when the people will prefer goodness to shrewdness, transparency to crookedness, simplicity to complexity, morality to sensuality, creativity to mechanical doing and so on. In a word like Jayprakash Narayan he aims at revolutionizing the thoughts, more importantly, the life style of the people. To him the music of humble life style and high thinking was better than mechanical thinking and joyless living. During his life time he used to visit the educational institutions and instill the idea of goodness, dedication, selflessness, originality in the young impressionable minds of the school or college goers. Hence he is a model before all. Down the ages each reformer has his 'watch- word' just to reflect on his philosophy and activity. Gandhi's watch— word is 'non violence'; Buddha' s, 'righteousness' and Bhai's, 'decency'. Culture is broadly defined as 'way of life'; it refers to what man is. It is the core of civilization. Matthew Arnold rightly points out that culture is what has been thought and said best in a particular period. Arnold regrets the tendency of the philistines- the persons who hate intellectual and artistic pursuits. His *Scholar Gypsy* pictures that man suffers from ' sick hurry and divided aims'. Hence he is restless and does not enjoy the peace of mind. Kumar Bhai perceives the same feeling but expresses it in a different way. For him decency is the key word; but for it culture degenerates into vulgarity and barbarism.

The paper has been divided into four sections; the first section is the introduction to the theme; the second section dwells upon the indecency in human culture; the third section focuses on the culture of decency and the last one is the conclusion in which the originality in Kumar Bhai's thinking is brought to light. Deliberately the epithet 'human' has been chosen in place of 'contemporary'. The word contemporary has a reference to 'of the time', recent but the word human has a reference to universality. It has been noticed that degradation of human values has been a phenomenon since man attached more importance to pelf, power or position than to peace or bliss. The centre of Kumar Bhai's writings is decency which creates a circle of peace and bliss which man longs for in the core of his heart.

II

Indecency in human culture: source, magnitude and impact upon the consciousness, has been presented by many a literary artist in different ways. In the 20th century W.B. Yeats who won the Nobel prize for literature discovers the malady of modern civilization that the 'best' of people lack 'conviction' and 'worst' are full of passionate intensity to go on with their nefarious activities marked by self-aggrandizement. Hence he visualizes the coming of anti Christ- an image that has a link with the incarnation of Lord Bishnu in human form- the head of the lion with the body of a man in order to devour the devils- the personification of evil. All down the ages the sensitive literary artists have lamented the loss of human values. The mode of their presentations about the decadence of culture has varied but the theme has always been heart- rending. In this context Bhai's sustained efforts to denounce what is indecent has caught the imagination of the sensible readers. In the lyric *Bold Dance (Nachare Dhumuk Dhuma)* the poet says:

*Lobha paine jete sabu aniti
Lobha sari die sabu santi
Khadya re bisa mise, ghus re bepara hase
Lobha hi manisa kare bisa re (Palli Sangita-46)*

Greed is the root of corruption
That eliminates peace and bliss;
Adulteration of food is a temptation
That no business persons afford to miss
Bribe oils the wheel of transactions:
Greed spoils humans. (*Village Song-46*)

In the above lines Bhai spells out where indecency lies. Indeed corruption is another name for indecency. Greed, one of the inherent human vices is the mother of it.

In the lyric *Swartha paine Ei Dunia Lo (Self Interest is the go of the Day)* the poet says:

*Swartha paine ei dunia lo
Swatha paine hasa sneha
Swartha bina kaha kie kouthi lo
Kaha paine dhaluchi luha. (Palli Sangita-7)*

Self interest is the go of the day,
For it begets love and amity
But for it nobody sheds tears
And nothing moves. (*Village Song-7*)

Here Bhai holds that self-interest is at the root of all actions and moves. When a person gets blinded by self-interest or vested interests his activities appear indecent because they pose obstacles in the progress of the nation. Acute self interest begets complexity and makes the doer take to falsehood, bribery and crooked ways.

In the lyric *Hate Mapi Babu Chakhande Chala (Look Before You Leap)* Bhai throws light upon indecent shows in contemporary world. He writes:

*Bhela loka besi ehi jugare
Kanta ani pakanti se batare
Tume jadi bapa dekhiki najiba
Kanta phuti jiba gala gala. (Palli Sangita-1)*

This age is dominated by cheats many
They plant thorns on the way
If you do not see the way properly
The pricklers will prick suddenly. (*Village Song-1*)
Bhai states categorically that in our age cheats, rogues, scoundrels are many. Their dealings are detrimental for the experience of harmony and peace.

In the lyric *Sakhi lo Bada Bichitra Katha (O, Darling! How Funny is the Thing?)* the poet attacks the mixed culture. He writes:

*Sakhilo...
Pua mane saheb saji
Se bidesi madare bhiji
Garam dine bi tye ku bhidanti
Upar botam dei ta brutha. (Palli Sangita-55)*

O, darling dear!
The boys imitate the Britons
Drink foreign liquor,
Put on tie during summer
And display button upper
A mindless exercise!

Bhai criticizes the tendency of the Indian youths to imitate the superficial aspects of the lifestyles of the foreigners. The Indian youths do not put on the indigenous clothes; they develop fascination for western culture in their dresses as well as addresses. Such a blind imitation is indecent because it destroys originality.

Thus Bhai tries to bring to light the genesis of corruption: greed, lust, self-interest,

blind imitation and so on. His analysis reflects his penetrating insight into human nature. The lines are lyrical, often satirical and convey the readers a message that human culture needs to be modified and refined; the ways should be chalked out to prevent indecency and corruption.

III

The culture of decency centres round human values: goodness, selflessness, ceaseless striving, and above all aspiration for peace and bliss. Bhai himself was the embodiment of many human values. He exemplified certain qualities which are needed for a cultured man.

Mangalamayee (The Benefactress) is an interesting novel written on the consciousness of man. In one of the introductory pages of this novel Gangadhar Mishra the retired Superintendent of police writes a passage on '**words the from the core of the mind**' (*mana gahan ra bhasa*) which pictures Bhai as a man of culture:

Tumara sabu katha dhira o binamrata purna, kintu taha ispat pari tana. Tumara sangita ati madhura, kintu taha pratenkanku upara ku uthai nie abanraniya sakti ebong udipana re. Tumara abhinaya samastanku akarsirta kare, kintu taha manisa ku uthai nie achintaniya ucchha balaya ku. (Mangalamayee)

All your words are simple, indicator of humility but they are as strong as steel. Your songs are sweet but they elevate the consciousness to a great height; they infuse in the audience a kind of strength and enthusiasm that defies description. Your acting fascinates all but they revolutionize the thinking and feeling.

In the writings of Bhai there is an underlying feeling of selflessness, empathy and goodness. Here is a splendid passage in *Mangalamayee* (The Benefactress) which reads as follows:

Para upakare brukshya phalai

Para upakare nadi bahai

Para upakare surya jalai

Para upakara mo lakshya atai. (Mangalamayee-19)

The trees bear fruits for the benefit of others
The river flows for its use by others
The Sun shines to flood the world with light
I intend to work for others with might. (The Benefactress-19)

The secret for right living is to forget the self and work for others- a message that nature embodies. Here Bhai reminds the readers of William Wordsworth Who raises the slogan of 'Return to Nature' because nature is the true teacher, guardian and the guide.

In his book *A*, the collection of stories, Kumar Bhai pictures the faith in the divine. Here is a beautiful passage from his short story *Shesa* (The End):

Agneya, ananta, asima Bhagabanka tatwa "A" ashram hi bahu nastika mananku srestha manabikata paribeshan kari astika kariparuchhi. Biswa ku janaichhi eka nutan barta.

God is infinite, boundless and beyond knowledge. The concept of "A" has bound many atheists into the fold of humanity. It has made many atheists theists and has delivered a message to the world that God is omnipresent and saviour of all.

'A' is the first letter in Odia language. There are many words in such a classical language which reveal the potential infiniteness

in the finite. Such words picture a world which is infinite, eternal. These words inspire the humans to dream of the impossible. Bhai like Gandhi believes that means are as important as ends. He depreciates the designs of the shrewd politicians that the ends justify the means. He emerges as the apostle of goodness.

Prasanna Patsahani the Hon'ble MP quotes the oft-quoted words of Kumar Bhai:

*Au kehi bhala heuba na heu
Bhala mu nijaku karibai
Eha heu prati manara shapath
Jibane sidhhi labha pain.
(Palli Sangita-ja)*

I will be good in thought and deed
And won't mind if others don't heed;
Goodness is the rule golden
For every human to shine.
(Village Song-ja)

Kumar Bhai considers that goodness is the principal virtue to govern human conduct and activities. But for goodness no real success is possible. It is goodness that lends decency to every human deed; hence the goodness is the bedrock of a life that is glorious and sublime.

In India the burning issue of the day is communal riot; the conflict between the religious sects-specially between the Hindus and the Muslims. In this crucial situation the words of Kumar Bhai are relevant. Satyabhama Devi, the Controller and Director of International Indecency Prevention Movement, quotes the oft-quoted words of Kumar Bhai in context of religious harmony:

*Nuhe mu hindu, nuhe mu musalman
Nuhe mu boudha, nuhe mu kshirastan
Mu ate manaba santan
Sabu dharmara karmi muhare*

*Mu kare satya ra sandhan
Apanara mote manile sabhie
Hebi mu bhagyaban. (Palli Sangita-Jha)*

I am not a Hindu nor a Muslim
Nor a Buddhist;
I am a human
And work for universal religion.
I am a seeker of Truth Absolute
I will be fortunate
If I see myself in others
And others in me. (Village Song-Ja)

Bhai is dead against religious fanaticism and all kinds of differences on the basis of caste, religion and creed. He champions the cause of religious harmony and exploration of truth about life in the universe. He is eager to identify himself with fellow beings- in empathy lies the solution to many mundane problems.

To sum up, Bhai advocates the culture of decency; in such a culture there is no bickering nor biting whatever may be the cause. Universal brotherhood is the ideal; the idea is to integrate all human beings whatever may be the differences: temperamental or ideological or communal or religious. The way to preach and practise the culture of decency lies in resolution rather than aggravation of conflict and visualize a world beyond conflict.

IV

To conclude, Kumar Bhai, the proponent of International Indecency Prevention Movement is the upholder of human culture. He longs for better tomorrows when every human will live in peace. His songs are inspirational, writings, powerful in order to

mould human conduct and refine human manners. He attacks the human vices like self-interest, greed, anger, lust, attachment and so on in a dispassionate way. He is cool, calm, meditative and conscious of human frailties. His satire is mild not pungent. He is friendly with people who have vices and against the sin, not the sinner. In English literature the watchwords of the writers of the Age of Sensibility- Dryden, Pope or Dr. Johnson are propriety, decorum, decency and reason. Kumar Bhai uses one word frequently that is 'decency' because it is decency which is the mother of other virtues. At a very young age Bhai protested against a lady dancer who used to expose her body before the spectators in order to win appreciation in a public show in Bombay- the gate- way of India. Bhai's concern was that it was not the culture of Indian lady artists to expose the body- it was purely commercial devoid of essential human values. Doubtless true art lies in concealment not in exhibition; it uplifts the consciousness and provokes thinking. The dancer's role is to entertain and educate not degrade the culture that is prized for its inherent simplicity, humility and nobility. Bhai was advocating brotherliness or sisterliness; exposition of the body of an Indian lady in public was not the right gesture to instill such noble feelings. Thus, Bhai is a defender of Indian culture: he motivates the audience or the spectators or the readers for self-introspection and purification of desires: sensuous or sensual or material. In his writings

he instructs the humans to examine the emotions: positive or negative and harbour feelings like the Fatherhood of God, Motherhood of Nature, Brotherhood of Man, Sisterhood of Woman and above all Neighbourhood of Pain. He is a pragmatist not at all an escapist. Arnold views that anarchy is the antithesis of culture; so does Bhai. What is so original in Bhai is that he delves deep into the psyche of humans-both men and women and realizes imperfections, accepts them and suggests for perfections: profane and spiritual. Hence he didn't like to remain merely as a writer; he emerged as an activist to promote culture marked by decency that implies the deeper understanding of the psyche of the other. Writing is here a means not the end; the end is practice and propagation of culture of decency- a kind of culture that makes humans kind, sensitive and sensible.

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The Tempest : A Study through (Post)colonial Discourse

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to shed light on the triggering force of English Renaissance spirit that through the character of Prospero is best exemplified by the scientific temperament of venturing into the New Land. That to acquire the knowledge of the native land is to captivate the semi-demonic being Caliban, the original inhabitant, the ruler of the realm, is maneuvered by the Colonizer Duke of Milan. Because of the irrational disposition of the colonized, the racial apartheid is also to some extent galvanized in the treatment of the colonizer. The relationship maps an oppressor-oppressed hegemonic structure. This binary nexus, however, is gradually tapered, chiseled, and traversed by the 'spirit of questioning' as the playwright goes to finally bless the Island with freedom. Thus, the development of the story of the play paves a way for the reader/audience to look into the text through the lens of postcolonialism. There is the resistance ingrained in the psychic plane of the character, -something for which the discourse draws the multitude to perceive at the genesis of the 'New Dawn' of freedom. To say the least, such scopes of a modern discourse makes Shakespeare all the more relevant today.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Discourse, Colonizer-colonized relationship.

.....

The search for the other, maybe psychic or physical, is a natural inner drive , which is one

of the causes of the different European expeditions to the rest of the globe. Be it for educating the uncivilized masses, be it for spreading Christianity, be it for navigating the sea in search of new lands for self-gratification-supported by a scientific and adventurous temperament, be it for earning name and fame, be it to escape from the clutches the of pandemic diseases like Black Plague, or be it for trades in the far away Asian and African countries, the Europeans crossed the perilous seas and oceans.

British Colonization of America began in 1607, when the Virginia Company established a colony in the city of Jamestown, Virginia. A ship named after *Sea Venture* was commissioned to deliver supplies to the British Colony in Jamestown. The ship faced a storm on its way and was capsized on 24 July 1609. Consequently, all the passengers remain stranded safely on a coral reef in Bermunda for nine months. Thereafter, they went ahead with their journey with the aid of two new boats towards Virginia and landed there alive. These two incidents of colonization and huge storm did inspire Shakespeare to write his *The Tempest* (1611).

According to Harald Fischer-Tine, "Postcolonialism is an intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism." Hybridity creates an interstitial space of relations (between colonizer and colonized) wherein

colonial identity and native identity meet and often contest and mimicry and mockery also occur. Prospero's book (language) on magic emblemizes a sign of colonial authority or power to civilize the natives who are uneducated and savage in their demeanor. Ariel represents those colonized who are submissive and cooperative while Caliban stands for more assertive and stubborn primitives. Hence the verbal stuff of Caliban and Prospero is the well-steeped hunting ground to be critiqued for colonial/postcolonial discourse.

Caliban's mother Sycorax was a witch and his father was a demon and he is seen to lead the life leisurely and peacefully on the island, like other Americans. Because of the befriending nature of Prospero at the outset, Caliban gradually reveals all the secrets of the land to him and hands over the responsibility of legacy of the land to him and later is enslaved to the 'sly civility' of Prospero. The initial speech of Caliban may be deemed to be a clear case of his submission:

"I must eat my dinner.

This island's mine, Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou
can'st first

Thou strok'st me, and made much of me;
would'st give me

Water with berries in't; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved
thee

And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and
fertile:

Curs'd be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,

Which first was only mine own king: and
here you stay me

In this hard rock, while'st you keep from me
The rest o' th' island."

(Act I, ii, 18)

Prospero's attitude of subjugation vis-à-vis Caliban gets a candid expression in the following speech of the former :

Caliban: "For every trifle, they set upon me,
Sometimes like apes, that mow and chatter
at me,

And after bit me: then like hedgesogs, which
Lie tubling in my barefoot, and mount
Their pricks at my football: sometimes am I
All wound with adders, who with cloves
tongues

Do hiss me into madness."

(Act II, ii, 36)

Prospero subjugates Caliban as a slave. The moment Caliban eyes upon Miranda, Prospero severely punishes him. Prospero's kindness toward Caliban also depicts his superiority - complex sprung from his act of civilizing Caliban through:

"Thou most lying slave,

Whose stripes may move, not kindness! I
have used thee,

(Filth as thou art) with human care, and
lodg'd thee

In mine own cell, till thou did'st seek to
violate

The honour of my child."

(Act I, ii, 18)

As per the colonizer's point of view, the colonized are lazy, exotic, seductive, irrational, inhuman, and uncivilized. The same attitude is reflected when Miranda claims that Caliban's freedom is curtailed so that he could be educated and civilized:

“Abhorred slave,
 Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
 Being capable of al ill: I pitied thee,
 Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee
 each hour
 One thing or the other: when thou didst
 not (savage)
 Know thine own meaning; but wouldst
 gabble, like
 A thing most brutish, I endowed thy
 purposes
 With words that made them known: but
 thy vile race
 (though thou didst learn) had that in’t,
 which good
 Natures
 Could abide to be with; therefore wast thou
 Deservedly confin’d into this rock,
 Who hadst deserv’d more than a prison.”

(Act I, ii, 18-19)

Even though the colonial domination was often brutally repressive, recent scholarship has suggested that harsh coercion worked ‘in tandem with “consent” that was part voluntary, part contrived’ (Arnold 1994: 133). Prospero and Miranda’s relation with Caliban obliquely symbolizes the nature of European colonialism in the Island. As language is the epistemological means of cultural domination, Shakespeare through the character Prospero does the same:

Caliban: “You taught me language; And my profit on’t is, I know how to curse.”

(Act I, ii, 18)

It is evident from the above that Caliban is confident enough to use the language of the colonizer to his advantage and is capable of using it as a tool to assert himself. Here, Bhabha’s description of mimicry is pivotal to the colonial discourse in the following manner:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. (1994:86)

But Leela Gandhi explains the term ‘mimicry’ in her book, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* as:

But mimicry is also the sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. The native subject often appears to observe the political and semantic imperatives of colonial discourse. But at the same time, she systematically misrepresents the foundational assumptions of this discourse by articulating it. In effect, mimicry inheres in the necessary and multiple acts of translation which oversee the passage from colonial vocabulary to its anti-colonial usage. In other words, ‘mimicry’ inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation. (1998:149-50).

Colonial and postcolonial literature is often written in the Colonizer’s language. Prospero’s exploitation has been wittily traced in the following words:

“Hag-seed, hence:
 Fetch us in fuel, and be quick, thou’rt best
 To answer other business: shrug’st thou,
 malice
 If thou neglect’st, or dost unwillingly
 What I command, I’ll rack thee with old
 cramps,
 Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
 That beasts shall tremble at thy din.”

(Act I, ii, 19)

Shorn of power to retaliate, Caliban expresses here:

“No, pray thee,
I must obey, his Art is of such power,
It would control my dam’s god Setebos,
And make a vassal of him.”

(Act I, ii, 19)

Caliban’s attempt to rape Miranda and his annoyance upon the master is uncompromisingly ventilated and inadvertently manifested in the following words:

Caliban: “O ho, O ho! Would’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.”

(Act I, ii, 18)

The above dialogue of Caliban aptly fits into the texture of *The Tempest* for overcoming his being the *Other*. Homi Bhabha’s term ‘hybridity’ can be well explained by referring a quotation from Ania Loomba’s book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*:

It is Homi Bhabha’s usage of the concept of hybridity that has been the most influential and controversial within recent postcolonial studies. Bhabha goes back to Fanon to suggest that liminality and hybridity are necessary attributes of the colonial condition. For Fanon, you will recall, psychic trauma results when the colonial subject realizes that he can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, to shed the blackness that he has learnt to devalue. Bhabha amplifies this to suggest that colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony. It is always, writes Bhabha in an essay about Fanon’s importance of our time, in relation to the place of the other that colonial desire is articulated, correct. (1998:148)

The Bhabha’s concept of ‘hybridity’ bridges the gap between the colonizer and the colonized.

The colonizer Prospero discerns it as a threat to his own position and subsequently exploits him further incessantly. The dialogue of ill-treatment between Prospero and Miranda towards Caliban draws the attention of the postcolonial readers to build the platform of colonial discourse below:

Prospero: “... Come on,
We’ll visit Caliban, my slave, who never Yields us kind answer.”

Miranda: “ ‘Tis a villain sir,
I do not love to look on.”

Prospero: “But as ‘tis
We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices

That profit us: what hao: slave:
Caliban:

Thou earth, thou: speak...

Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself

Upon thy wicked dam; come forth.”

(Act I, ii, 17)

Caliban is treated as a non-human, almost demon-like creature. The value of freedom can only be known to a person who has long been under subjugation and exploitation. The saga of suffering of the colonized gets an appropriate reflection through the following song sung by Caliban (for his brutal master: Prospero) in his intoxicated state:

“No more dam’s I’ll make for fish,
Nor fetch in firing, at requiring,
Nor scrape trenching, nor wash dish,
Ban’ ban’ Caliban

Has a new master, get a new man.”
“Freedom, high-day, high-day freedom,
freedom high-day freedom.”

(Act II, ii, 41-42)

Caliban’s exasperation compels him to plot a conspiracy with Stephano and Trinculo against Prospero’s unnatural legacy upon the island:

“As I told thee, ‘tis a custom with him,
I’ th’ afternoon to sleep: there thou mayst
brain him,
Having first seiz’d his books: or with a log
Batter his skull, paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife.
Remember
First to possess his books; for without them
He’s but a sot, as I am; nor hath not
One spirit to command: They all do hate
him
As rootedly as I.”

(Act III, ii, 48-49)

That all the colonized always advocate for freedom is implicitly stated in the dialogue of the characters Stephano and Caliban:

Stephano: “This will prove a brave kingdom
to me,
Where I shall have my music for
nothing.”

Caliban: “When Prospero is destroy’d.”

(Act III, ii, 50)

In his article “Postcolonial Criticism” in Greenblatt and Gunn’s “Redrawing the Boundaries: the Transformation of English and American Literary Studies”, Homi Bhaba says:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether we are talking about the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War,

or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these areas as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of culture particularity, cannot be easily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition.

Shakespeare has altruistically and humbly penned down the magical spell of his final touch to the stage of dramatic delight through this work of art *The Tempest*. Caliban’s voice seems to have been purposefully mutilated. The nuanced communication style of Shakespeare’s characters had its root in the court of the English royalty. The relationship maps an oppressor-oppressed hegemonic structure. This binary nexus, however, is gradually tapered, chiseled, and traversed by the ‘spirit of questioning’ as the playwright goes to finally bless the Island with freedom. Thus, the development of the story of the play paves a way for the reader/audience to look into the text through the lens of

postcolonialism. There is the resistance ingrained in the psychic plane of the character, -something for which the discourse draws the multitude to perceive at the genesis of the 'New Dawn' of freedom. To say the least, such scopes of a modern discourse makes Shakespeare all the more relevant today.

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The Politics of the Spectacle and *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract:

*Salman Rushdie's novels, especially *Midnight's Children*, incorporate sundry elements from various sources such as films, epic, fable, national events, family saga, advertisements, popular songs, newspaper clippings, parody, pastiche and gossip et al to create a new kind of 'chutnified' language. While being intricately woven into the fabric of the novel at the structural level, films play a significant role in the novel at its thematic level as well. Rushdie, who wishes to restore the past to himself "in Cinemascope and glorious Technicolor" (Rushdie 1991,10), frequently employs elements from popular Hindi films, which is strategic: it does not qualify as 'high art', but postmodern thought challenges the foundations of such dichotomies like adult/infant and high culture/low culture. The value of the filmic narrative lies in its being a spectacle, its ultimate aim is entertainment; against traditional realist assumptions, it does not aim at the representation of 'truth', or what Derrida terms as the always already present 'transcendental signified'. The narrative of *Midnight's Children*, like popular Bollywood cinema is non-realist and non-mimetic. Both combine elements of the real and the improbable to produce a magic spectacle, conscious of the audience gaze and desire of the spectator, emphasizing upon enticing the audience rather than representing a presumed 'reality'. Thus the cinema in Rushdie is used to complement an alternative take on 'reality' and representation, which*

forms a major focus in the novel at its thematic as well as structural level. - This paper is an analysis of the spectacular effect of films, especially popular Hindi cinema which acts as metaphor in the novel's rejection of meaning or profundity, in favour of a spectacular superficiality, sometimes even within the narrative itself. Rushdie's novel asserts the illusory nature of reality, which is represented by popular Hindi cinema, by challenging the hegemonic realist assumptions of an absolute, monolithic 'Truth'. Realism no longer suffices to capture the deceptive and multifaceted nature of reality; as Rushdie's novel shows, one must be willing to make allowances for an amount of magic and mystery in one's perception of the world as well as in the course of a narrative.

Keywords: *Midnight's Children, cinema, spectacle, postmodern narrative*

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Ever since its appearance in 1981, the most widely held reception of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has been in terms of a 'national allegory'¹. Such an emphasis, however, does not reduce other narrative priorities of the text. It can also be read as a postmodern text, which questions the validity of such grand narratives like that of the Nation. It embodies a denial of the very possibility of meaning. Rushdie says in his 1982 essay, "Imaginary Homelands":

Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved..." (12)

This shaky nature of 'meaning' is conveyed in his novel by the motley narrative's conglomeration of these sundry elements, which include 'old films'. Rushdie further says that his novel *Midnight's Children* was born, "when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself" (*Imaginary Homelands* 9-10). This implies that the novel is a restructuring of his memories or perhaps of a collective memory. Memory is not an objective recalling of past events. It "eliminates, alters, exaggerates, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 253).

Calling himself "a cinema addicted Indian" and Bollywood "the world's number one movie city" (*Midnight's Children* 107), Rushdie wishes to restore his memories "in Cinemascope and glorious Technicolor" (*Midnight's Children* 10). In a way, then, his intention is to produce a cinematic reproduction of the India of his memories through words. At a metaphorical level, Lifafa Das - a character in his novel does the same thing through his 'peep-shows'. His bioscope show is a miniature form of the wider canvas of the Cinema that has an immanent presence throughout the narrative of the novel. The popularity of Bombay Cinema is based upon its recurrent use of improbable characters and situations - larger than life heroes and villains, impossible stunts, abrupt introduction of music and dance - all making up a magical spectacle which is similar to the spectacle of power which gives rise to the semblance of a nation. Rushdie's juxtaposition of filmic elements in his 'national allegory' is, thus, quite strategic.

In the popular Hindi film one can find everything - comedy, tragedy, dance etc; all aspects of human life in the same film. The highly unlikely is always possible in the Indian 'masala movie', miracles and sensational *deus ex machinas* are run-of-the-mill. Indian films create a universe parallel to reality but a little more attractive and gaudily dressed, with scenarios that eschew logic. Rushdie incorporates this filmy 'monstrous' diversity in *Midnight's Children* where "melodrama upon melodrama" (is produced) and "life acquires the coloring of a Bombay talkie" (203).

Against the convenient fictions of the pre-modernist periods, the condition of the post-modern, as explained by Lyotard, is one of language games, social meaning dissolved into a vast spectacular *combinatoire*, a dissociation of cause and effect, a concentration on the seductiveness of means and a concomitant disavowal of ends. The value of the filmic narrative lies in its being a spectacle, it embodies what Dana B. Polan calls the "will-to-spectacle", the assertion that "a world of foreground is the only world that matters or is the only world that is." (135). Its ultimate aim is entertainment; against traditional realist assumptions, it does not aim at the representation of a 'truth', or what Derrida terms as the always already present 'transcendental signified'. It epitomizes "a world of signs without fault, without truth and without origin, which is offered to our active interpretation" (Derrida 120). Even the Film as a medium of entertainment, does not always aim at coherence, in Polan's words, "what it offers is exactly that of a breakdown of coherence, a disordering of order for the sake of visual show" (133).

Midnight's Children challenges the conventions of classical realism. It is often episodic, fragmentary. The presence of the (seemingly) naïve narratee - Padma, with her "what-

happened-next” demands is symbolic of the traditional expectation of linearity or wholesomeness in meaning in a work of art. But Rushdie’s narrator challenges the expectations of reliability, “often undermining [his] own seeming omniscience” (Hutcheon 11); Salim Sinai’s body is, in fact, cracking apart gradually. His tale is not the manifestation of an organic vision, but something that Rushdie would term “a shaky edifice” (*Imaginary Homelands* 12). It is a departure from what Walter Benjamin has termed the ‘auratic’ nature of art. Rushdie says in his introduction to *Midnight’s Children*:

...I have treated my writing simply as a job to be done, refusing myself all (well, most luxuries of artistic temperament. (xi)

It is this skepticism towards the possibility of a perfect wholesomeness in art² (thereby, in life) generated by an epiphanic vision, that seems to be manifested in Rushdie’s “shaky edifice”. It is embodied in the a-Realist character of his narrative. Salim Sinai’s is not a telos-driven world, nor is his story. At one point, he tries to invoke the abstractions of destiny and purpose:

The thing is, we must be here for a *purpose*, don’t you think? I mean, there has to be a *reason*, you must agree? (305-06)

In immediate response, Shiva, Salim’s alter-ego, deflates this invocation of reason:

What *purpose*, man? What thing in the whole sister-sleeping world got *reason*, yara? For what reason you’re rich and I’m poor? Where’s the reason in starving, man? God knows how many millions of

damn fools living in this country, man, and you think there’s a purpose! Man, I’ll tell you - you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die. That’s reason, rich-boy. Everything else is only mother-sleeping *wind*. (306)

Shiva’s heated rebuttal of the tenability of reason or purpose is an expression of an underlying post-modern “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv), a rejection of the ‘grand narratives’ of progress and perfectibility in favor of the contingent or the provisional. The central character and narrator in *Midnight’s Children* - Salim Sinai’s own identity is fluid and ambiguous; he invokes destiny, but ironically, what he is reading as destiny is really only a matter of chance, for he is, after all, a changeling.

This is a refutation of the assumptions of liberal Humanism, which is centered upon an always already ‘present’ autonomous individual who has found “release from his self- incurred tutelage”, an “idealized natural human being: an unsleeping self-examining, ever-enlightened being, discovering and illuminating things and fighting secrets, ambiguities, darknesses, twilights” (Lal and Nandi 5). Postmodern thought challenges the foundations of such dichotomies like adult/infant and high culture/ low culture. In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem Sinai grows up to be thirty-one years old, but even in adulthood, he maintains a free commerce between fantasy and reality, which is considered ‘normal’ in children but ‘madness’ in adults. This provides him with an alternative reality, which is reflected in the juxtaposition of the magical and the realistic in his narrative technique. Besides, it also embodies, for Saleem as for Rushdie, a ‘third principle’ an alternative

to the anarchy or rigidity brought on by the 'adult' faculty of 'reason'. In his interesting study of the 1939 film 'The Wizard of Oz', Rushdie contends, "[it] is a film whose driving force is the inadequacy of adults, even of good adults, and how the weakness of grown ups forces children to take control of their own destinies, and so, ironically, grow up themselves" (*Out of Kansas*). His observation embodies a questioning of hierarchical systems in art as well as life. Nadir Khan, a character in *Midnight* says:

I do not believe in high art...Now art must be beyond categories; my poetry and-oh-the game of hit-the-spittoon are equals. (54)

Samir Dayal points out that the gross physicality in the novel is Rushdie's attempt to revalorize the body to reverse the hegemony of the mental, intellectual and the "high" over the physical, visceral and the "low" (435).

Søren Frank, in *Migration and Literature* points out that minor literature attempts to disturb the innocence and transparency of official language. "It follows the a-signifying, intensive lines outlined by sounds and smells, by light and tactility, by the free shapes of imagination, and by elements from dreams and nightmares" (155). He says that the intention is to escape the straightjacket of 'meaning'; the idiosyncratic use of language that escapes doxa manages to create exceptional conditions through the internal tensions of language and by way of exploiting the materiality of language. Rushdie, in his novel, dislocates the English language and opens it up so that other things, apart from conventional reality can leak into it - substances, intensities, affects, sensations and lines of flight.

Many of Rushdie's 'sundry elements' do not qualify as 'high art'. There is an interesting connection between the Bollywood ethos and

the novel's narrative which contests the hierarchical outlook on aesthetic sensibility and cultural consumption. One of the foremost criticisms against popular Indian Cinema is its 'lowbrow' quality manifested through "meaningless digressions from the core narrative, maudlin melodrama, an embarrassingly juvenile conception of the comic as well as the romantic, and ahistoric, inconsistent sequencing" (Lal and Nandi xiv). This is the outlook generated by the assumptions of the Western film world. Classic Western film theory insists on logical sequencing in films. Sergei Eisenstein, for example, has defined the "basic aim and function" of films as – "that role set itself by every work of art, *the need for connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action*, the movement within the film sequence and within the film drama as a whole" (3). Popular Indian cinema does not comply with the Naturalist expectations of western aesthetics, which is devoted to promoting a cinema of rational perception. However, instead of judging the Indian film ethos on the basis of homogenizing Western aesthetic principles, probing the social and cultural forces behind the production and consumption of this popular genre can lend an insight into understanding its nature and thereby of the subaltern voices within it.

Critics see popular cinema as playing "an anti-theoretical role, occasionally offering an explicit critique of the application of Enlightenment assumptions to the Indian context". (Lal and Nandy 14). The narrator in *Midnight's Children* says in the beginning of the chapter 'All-India Radio':

Reality is a question of perspective. (229)

Rushdie's use of magic realism itself offers an alternative take on the standard Realist perception of 'reality'. When Padma, the

narattee, expresses incredulity at Salim Sinai's claims to having a thousand gifted friends with magical abilities - the midnight's children, he argues for the plausibility of his experience by resorting to Islam, Christianity and Hinduism by turns¹

Even Muhammad ...at first believed himself insane: do you think the notion never crossed my mind? But the Prophet had his Khadija, his Abu-Bakr, to reassure him of the genuineness of his Calling; nobody betrayed him into the hands of asylum-doctors...What is truth?.. .What is sanity? Did Jesus rise up from the grave? Do Hindus not accept...that the world is a kind of dream; that Brahma dreamed, is dreaming the universe; that we only see dimly through the dream-web, which is Maya. Maya...may be defined as all that is illusory; as trickery, artifice and deceit. Apparitions, phantasms, mirages, sleight-of-hand, the seeming form of things: all these are parts of Maya. If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma's dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right? (293)

It is this paradox of the illusory nature of reality that Rushdie seems to be negotiating through his use of magic realism. At one point, Salim Sinai uses the metaphor of a schizophrenic moment in a movie hall to illustrate the ambivalent distinction between reality and illusion:

Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the

stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality... (229)

In one of the incidents in the novel, Rashid the rickshawboy, is found watching an 'eastern-western' called '*Gai-Wallah*'. It is a parody of the western popular genre of the western - which is itself a departure from Western codes of rationality and verisimilitude. The distinction between 'real life' and (filmic) 'illusion' is once again mocked when Rashid, "still full of the spirit of Gai-Wallah", on his way back from the theatre, 'rescues' Nadir Khan in 'cowboy style', only, like the lock that comes off, it's "Indian-made" (*Midnight's Children* 62).

In "Imaginary Homelands", Rushdie refers to the song "Mera joota hai Japani"³³

Mera joota hai Japani

Ye patloon Inqlistani

Sar pe laal topi Rusi-

Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani

- which translates roughly as *O, my shoes are Japanese from the film Mr. 420 and says it could almost be Saleem's theme song. An identifying feature of India's popular cinema is the extensive use of music and drama, which transforms it into a magic spectacle. The genre has affinities with the traditional oral and dramatic forms in which music and dance were essential components. This feature of popular films can be explained in terms of the *Rasa* theory in classical Indian aesthetics which bases the aesthetic experience upon the evocation of some specific (8) categories of moods called *rasas*. Here, the emphasis is not upon the representation of a 'reality' but in the production

of a certain effect/affect upon the audience. Traditional Indian art is, thereby, oriented more towards the 'desire' of the spectator, and so is popular Indian cinema. In other words, it is conscious of the presence of an audience gaze; the look of the camera presumes the look of the spectator in front of the screen. This is in keeping with Walter Benjamin's observation in his essay, "The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility":

For the film, what matters primarily is that the actor represents himself to the public before the camera, rather than representing someone else. (Benjamin 229)

Reception-theory distinguishes the two poles in a (literary) text - the artistic and the aesthetic:

the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader...the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two...The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence. (Iser 207)

Although Iser refers specifically to the literary text, his theory can be extended to the filmic text as well; it inhabits the virtual space created by the interaction and exchange between the film and its audience. The popular film's deviation from standards of rationality and linearity can be explained on the basis of this production-consumption dynamics⁴⁴It endorses Walter Benjamin's contention that with the advent of the New arts, esp. film and photography, the total function of art has shifted from the pole of ritual to that of politics.

. This has affinities in the novel too: the narrative makes no claims to an autonomous existence. Saleem Sinai's account is continually influenced

by the demands of the narratee, what he calls "Padma pressures":

As my decay accelerates...the risk of unreliability grows...in this condition, I am learning to use Padma's muscles as my guides. When she's bored, I can detect in her fibres the ripples of uninterest; when she's unconvinced, there is a tic which gets going in her cheek. The dance of her musculature helps to keep me the rails; because in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happens is less important than what the author can persuade his audience to believe. (376)

Thus, the narrative is non-mimetic in that its central concern is not the representation of a presumed 'reality' or 'origin', which according to Derrida is a philosophical fiction. It is shaped and modified by the expectations and reactions of its audience.⁵ Rushdie presents the character Hanif Aziz, "the arch disciple of naturalism" (*Midnight's Children* 339) as a failure; his adamant insistence on a strict Realism in his scripts doesn't work in the Bombay film industry. "In the temple of illusions, he had become the high priest of reality" (338). Rushdie highlights the precariousness of his ideological position by contrasting it with the miraculous nature of his nephew Salim Sinai "which involved [him] beyond all mitigation in the (Hanif-despised) myth-life of India" (338-339). Hanif's dream project "The Ordinary Life of a Pickle Factory" turns out a failure, he tries to do away with melodrama in favor of documentary realism, but as Saleem acknowledges, the representative Bombay movie is all about melodrama: "Melodrama piling upon melodrama; life acquiring the coloring of a Bombay talkie" (203). The realist mode no longer proves adequate for the post modern Indian experience and as with popular Bombay cinema, the Indian English novel cannot be

written by a simple realist, but by one who admits the improbable and the fantastic into his narrative.

Thus, cinema in *Midnight's Children* operates as a symbol of the novel's inherent critique of traditional Humanist principles of rationality. Popular cinema, by the standards of Realism, is 'irrational' and therefore 'non-serious'. However, Probal Dasgupta, in his essay "Popular Cinema, India and Fantasy" brings in the metaphor of *Dhyana*, "enchantment's victory over meditative attention, [as] iconic of the Indian aesthetics' solution to the level ordering problem of languages and meta languages" (Lal and Nandy 10), a problem which, according to him, cannot be solved in relation to the self of the Enlightenment subjectivity. He points out that the sage's meditation in *dhyana* would be completely focused and the very idea of a semi-divine temptress seducing him would be ungrammatical had not seriousness itself been a wish or a desire that shares the same perceptual matrix with wishful thinking. If popular cinema is 'non-serious', he positions it in relation to "the dialogic concept of the ludic as a mode of popular deflation of official visions" (Lal and Nandy 15).

Mikhail Bakhtin discerns an inherent carnivalesque spirit in the spectacle, which "belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (198). Bakhtin's association of the element of 'play' with the carnival, and thereby, the spectacle, once again points to a critique of 'reason' that the latter embodies. It inhabits the virtual space between reality and illusion, just like the narrative of *Midnight's Children* does. Popular cinema manifests the carnivalesque spirit by functioning as a spectacle⁶, for its function is not mimetic, but one of a free play of desire in a production-consumption dialectic, pointing to Bakhtin's association of the (medieval) spectacle with the culture of the marketplace. In the words of Dana

B. Polan, "In the phenomenological world of spectacle - a world of instant perceptions bracketing out the value of perception - an experience, especially in the way it becomes little more than a perceptual impulse, is seen to matter in and of itself" (136). Thus, a cultural analysis projects the cinema in *Midnight's Children* as a metaphor for an alternative take on 'reality' and 'artistic representation', which constitutes a central concern of Rushdie's novel at a thematic as well as technical level.⁷

Citation :

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Rushdie, S. "Out of Kansas". *The New Yorker*. May 11, 1992.

– Kane, Jean M. "The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History"

3. "...as is well known, Rushdie's novel is a national allegory"

– Hogan, Patrick Colm. "*Midnight's Children* : Kashmir and the Politics of Identity"

4. "Readings of *Midnight's Children* either insist on Rushdie's allegiance to nationalism

– Josna Rege, for example, suggests that "[d]espite its conceptual freshness and vitality, *Midnight's Children* remains very emotionally committed to the narrative of the nation" and that the novel "romanticizes the Congress party ideal of 'unity in diversity'

– or, alternatively insist that Rushdie is disillusioned not with the nation per se but with the corruption of the postcolonial nation, because those who acme to lead it were, as Timothy Brennan put it, "sell outs and power brokers"."

– Heffernan, Teresa. "Apocalyptic Narratives : The Nation in Salman Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*" "

² This idea of 'pure art' is closely related to the theory of *l'art pour l'art*, which denies any social function in art.

These trousers English, if you please On my head, red Russian hat- My heart's Indian for all that.

[This is also the song sung by Gibreel Farishta as he tumbles from heaven at the beginning of The Satanic Verses]

*Translation by Rushdie

⁵Just as the narrative or the art work is influenced by its receiver, so is the latter 'shaped' by the former; none of the two has an existence independent of or prior to each other. Both 'exist'

Notes:

¹1. "Salman Rushdie's brilliant novel *Midnight's Children*, from which I have crafted a title for this essay, is about the birth of a child and a nation"- Mohammed, Patricia. "*Midnight's Children* and the Legacy of Nationalism"

2. "In depicting the nation as a corpus, *Midnight's Children* belongs to a group of postcolonial novels

– among them, J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*(1986), Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986), and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991)

– that allegorize national history through the metaphor of the body politic"

in the virtual space created by the interaction between the two.

6The 'spectacle' assumes the character of what Baudrillard calls 'simulacra', "in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any lasting judgment to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance".

7Although the discussion presents Rushdie's narrative as a championing of the Carnavalesque spirit, an espousal of the 'non-serious', ironically, it is only a 'serious' return to the 'non-serious', for Rushdie's own work is often accused of intellectual elitism.

THE CROSSROAD OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION: SERAMPORE MISSIONARIES AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Abstract:

Education facilitates an individual's mind with an atmosphere of creative activity (The Centre 1, 2, 3). The Serampore Missionaries and Swami Vivekananda though belonging to different spaces of time voiced similar visionary messages towards the emancipation of women through education. They were able to trace the cause of the social degradation - the lack of education. Though education was available among the men, the women have been shunned from the portals of enlightenment through education, being subjected to patriarchal coercion which had stereotyped their existence. Education was the only remedy to this social problem which would enable women to discover and realise their identity in this world, their own selves and develop a voice of their own. Women play a very important role for the socio-cultural development; therefore it is a crime to prevent them from being educated. Besides their birth right as a human being to be at par with the men, they also actively contribute towards the development of the cultural identity of the society. This essay is a comparative discussion that explores the seeds sown by the Serampore Missionaries towards women's education which got vindicated vehemently by Swami Vivekananda who left no stone unturned to uplift the masses ideologically as well as through his own life and actions. Through their

philanthropic actions the Serampore Missionaries and Swamiji believed service to mankind is service to God, and through education the soul is liberated and true liberty is realised which facilitates an individual to move towards the 'truth' i.e. righteousness.

Keywords: Women's education, Women's emancipation, Social development, Serampore Missionaries, Swami Vivekananda

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Education facilitates an individual with an illumination of the world through the process of a living and growing knowledge which inspires an atmosphere of creative activity (*The Centre 1, 2, 3*). This creative participation should be equal and not subjected to gendered discriminations – it should enable an individual to 'realize him, transcend the limits of mortality – not in duration of time, but in perfection of truth' (*The Religion 55*) as education should be in

full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations [as] true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings (*The Centre 3*).

Patriarchy had often stereotyped women and gendered education preventing the equal dissemination of knowledge between the sexes. In spite of considering them as ‘an epitome of goodness’ (*Selected Essays on Aesthetics* 229) the women were often coerced by the social system to emerge as the hallowed ‘other’ – the eastern ‘Lakshmi’ (Dasgupta 11) and the Western ‘Angel of the House’ (Woolf 238) being subjected to patriarchal oppression and exploitations. Such an existence has prevented the women from education and enlightenment disapproving their necessity to have a room of their own, to study and thereby develop a voice and a literature of their own. Negating the concept of a comprehensive educational development of the society patriarchy feared that through education women would be empowered to be ‘the Renaissance seeker of wisdom’ (Fraser 65) - the liberator, zealous spokeswomen and emissaries of social metamorphosis accelerating a creative participation in this world. Though women possesses ‘the potentiality of life’ in the depths of their passive nature necessary for healing, nourishing and storing life (*Personality* 158, 159), yet she has been subjected to sexual politics which has coerced her to be the ‘second sex’.

The Serampore Missionaries and Swami Vivekananda though belonging to different spaces of time voiced similar visionary message through their ideas for the development of women’s education. The Serampore Missionaries headed by William Carey, Joshua Marshman, William Ward and Hannah Marshman believed in ecumenical pragmatism (Daniel 171), an openness of vision and introduced education among the native masses for the development of the society. Overcoming social obstacles, the Serampore Missionaries were able to open schools for the native girls in order to impart western education to them (Chatterjee 121). In 1809-10 they initiated the establishment of the Benevolent Institution in

Calcutta – the primary focus being to provide shelters to the destitute (boys and girls) and impart education to them (Ibid.). The school for these girls was the first of its kind in Calcutta and the joint efforts of the Serampore Trio and Hannah Marshman played an important role for its development. Hannah Marshman left no stone unturned to make the local women realise the necessity and advantages of being educated. Initially she was subjected to immense criticism but soon her arguments began to be accepted. As the missionaries lacked funds for the development of a separate school for the girls so they attained the boy’s school following a separate sitting arrangement.¹ The first report on the native schools stated,

In some instances girls have wished and have been permitted to partake of the instruction imparted by the Institution. Under the eye of a teacher in whom peculiar confidence has been reposed, some have been admitted and have gone through their exercises, separated from the boys by a mat partition. More female pupils could have obtained, had it appeared desirable (*Hints Relative* 11).

1818 – 1820 initiated several social reforms and one of the most important of them was the need to spread the education for the girl child. The Baptists in Bengal and England took an active step in organizing schools for the native girls and established the Female Juvenile Society in Bengal (Chatterjee 122). In 1817 The School Book Society at Calcutta was established with the object of compilation, printing and publication of school books, in Bengali and English. Though circumstances began to develop for initiating women’s education at Calcutta but the society was too conservative to accept the new ideals of education of the girl child fostered by the Serampore Triad, banning all the malicious social practices. William Ward, Joshua Marshman and Hannah Marshman

appealed the Home Government to help them with funds in order to establish schools for girls at Serampore as an extension of their evangelical activities (Ibid. 123). William Ward's appeal to the people at England for supporting the cause of women's education in India received an ample support from the English women. On receiving this news Hannah wrote to Joshua on February 21, 1821, 'I am determined to attempt a project for girls on return to India' (Ibid.) and in 1821, she along with Ward and Mack initiated the development of schools for females at Serampore (*Hannah Marshman* 87). They adopted the Serampore system of native education, where knowledge in elementary history, science, geography and mathematics was imparted apart from the general 3 R's i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic - a blend of the traditional and modern, giving special importance to orthography and grammar of Bengali and English languages (Ibid.). The Serampore Missionaries supported one another to spread education among the masses and developed schools for boys and girls. William Carey prepared books like, *A Grammar of the Bengalee Language*, *Iitihaasmala*, *Kathopokothon*, *A Dictionary of Bengali Language* and the translations of the *Bible* in Bengali and several other Indian vernaculars for the students to study at these schools apart from the general education on the regular subjects. Vocational education was also introduced in order to make the women self sufficient. The Serampore Missionaries played an important role in initiating a dynamic process in Bengal of educating the women and enabling them to have a voice and an identity of their own.

Though it was difficult at the initial stage but with the passage of time circumstances began to develop, schools for women began to rise and the measures undertaken by the Serampore Missionaries to spread the necessity for women's education saw the further affirmation in pan India with Swami

Vivekananda's ideals of reforms for the comprehensive development of human beings and the society based on the principle and philosophy of 'Neo-Vedantism'.

The germs of Neo-Vedantism as also the rationale and beginning of its practical application are to be found in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was left to Swami Vivekananda to develop them into the philosophy of neo-Vedantism and lay the foundation of practical Vedanta...The main outline of this new Vedanta was drawn by Sri Ramakrishna and it was Swami Vivekananda who filled it in with elaborate reasoning so as to work up a philosophy proper. It has been very aptly said that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But the commentator with his giant intellect and profound understanding made such distinctive contributions that his commentary becomes itself a philosophy, just as Sankara's commentary on the *Vedanta-Sutra* is by itself a philosophy ("Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism" 260, 265).

Swami Vivekananda's idea of 'Practical Vedanta' is based on the application of the philosophic ideals to the daily affairs of life. He was of the opinion that real salvation or *moksha* is obtained when we serve the society selflessly as service to man is service to God, as Swamiji had written in his letter to Mary Hale on July 9, 1897 (Nikhilananda 129, 130).

Swami Vivekananda played an important role in ushering series of dynamic reforms for the development of Indian culture in the twentieth century. His ideals² gave a limitless leap to all the socio-cultural and nationalistic reforms introduced by the Missionaries before his prominence on the Indian soil. He proved the necessity to bring

about an assimilation of the goodness of all cultures in the Indian heart for a better future sowing his ideals on nationalism and internationalism. S. C. Sengupta in his *Swami Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism* states

In course of a letter on 'What We Believe In', Vivekananda wrote in 1894, 'We preach neither social equality nor inequality but that everyday being has the same rights, and insist upon freedom of thought and action in every way.' This statement, clear and straightforward as it is, has to be understood in the light of Vivekananda's thought in general. The cardinal point of his philosophy is the Absolute as Spirit, which is manifested in everything in the universe, especially in man, whose spirituality finds expression in various ways, not the least in different forms of worship. Although Religion is one, religions may be different, depending on circumstances, and economic, political and even personal necessities (58).

When Vivekananda was actively uplifting the masses of the country, the country was rift apart by two ideals i.e. 'What the western nations do is surely good, otherwise how they became so great?' (Majumdar 112) and 'The flash of lightning is intensely bright, but only for a moment; look out, boys, it is dazzling your eyes. Beware!' (Ranade 58). The Hegelian dialectics validate 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis', Vivekananda ushered in 'synthesis' – Indians must learn science and technology from the West and the West must learn spirituality from India. Swamiji's ideas of synthesis validate the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum'. His suggestions on reforms in the various spheres of life establish his earnest desire to remove evils from the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural lives of Indians and uplift them physically, psychologically and culturally. Swami

Vivekananda believed that such evils acted as barriers in the proper development and blossoming of

the spiritual life according to the doctrine of Vedanta; for spirituality is the lodestar of Indian culture to which we must always look for direction (Majumdar 114).

Swami Vivekananda believed

India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love, the garb of the Sannyasin; not by the power of the wealth, but by the power of begging bowl. But one vision I see clear as life before me, that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne – rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction (Vivekananda IV: 352, 353).

He believed that his dream for India can only be attained if the evils of the society are eradicated and proper measures are undertaken for the development of the masses, especially the women and imparting education to all without any discrimination. 'In India', Swamiji believed

there are two great evils: trampling on the women, and grinding the poor through caste restrictions...the uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India (Chowdhury 400).

Swamiji Vivekananda's approach to India was sensible and practical. He believed that inequality among human beings, power of concentration, materialistic distinctions are the primary source of the country's downfall.³ He believed in the Vedantic doctrine of 'human divinity' which

postulates that 'religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man' (Lokeswarananda 41) and therefore upheld his ideas of equality between men and women. Roma Chowdhury states

When you will realise that all-illuminating truth of the *Atman*, then you will see that the idea of sex-discrimination has vanished altogether, then only will you look upon all women as the veritable manifestation of *Brahman* (402).

Like the Serampore Missionaries, Swami Vivekananda was apt to decipher the cause of the degradation of the majority of the masses. He realised that the lack of education has degraded the human condition; though education is available among the men, the women have been shunned from the portals of enlightenment through education. The high-handed patriarchy coerced women and stereotyped their existence. Education was the only remedy to this social problem which will enable women to discover and realise their identity in this world, their own selves and have a voice and subsequently a literature of their own.⁴ Women play a very important role towards the socio-cultural development of the society therefore it is a crime to prevent them from being educated. Besides their birth right as a human being to be at par with the men, they also actively contribute towards the development of the cultural identity of the society as Mary Wollstonecraft theoretically stated in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and Mary Shelley literally vindicated it through her *Frankenstein* (1823).

Swami Vivekananda's ardent desire to spread and uplift the women of the nation is evident through his writings where he embodies the 'nation' as the 'mother land'. His ideas on the power of women and the necessity of empowering women (through education) are

well manifested through his poem 'Kali the Mother', where the Mother, a woman is the creator and the destroyer,

... For Terror is Thy name,

Death is in Thy breath,

And every shaking step

Destroys a world for e'er.

Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!

Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,

And hug the form of Death,

Dance in Destruction's dance,

To him the Mother comes

(Vivekananda IV: 384).

Swami Vivekananda believed in the idea of the new, enlightened and educated women having a voice and identity of their own. His idea of education was based on the development of the soul, the personality i.e. character building, physical culture, cultivation of the arts, study of humanities with special reference to Indian culture, and scientific and technological training. Swamiji stressed upon the quality of 'chastity, fearlessness and personal contact of a good teacher for good education' (Majumdar 116, 117; Vivekananda V: 224) for both men and women.

Though Swami Vivekananda considered Sita as the ideal woman (Majumdar 115) but he was of the opinion not to put any signifier of perfection upon the women, rather wanted them to be educated⁵ and undertake the journey of life along with men enjoying equality and liberty in life at all levels, as with education women will be able to solve their own problems by acquiring the spirit of valour and heroism (Chowdhury 405). Therefore Swamiji believed that several problems of the society can be removed if they are properly addressed and one is women's

education. He strongly voiced for women's education, liberty and equal treatment in the society in order to ensure progress and development of life. Through education the 'perfection' in women will be 'manifested' as 'strength is life and weakness is death' (Vivekananda II: 3). The word 'manifestation' implies that something already exists and needs to be explored, nurtured and expressed enabling the hidden ability of the individual to be manifested as knowledge is inherent in man and not acquired from external sources - the stimulus of education causes the friction that ignites the fire of knowledge (Mondal 79, 80). Vivekananda said that with education a man 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge' (*My India: The India Eternal* 54) validating the inherent human potential, abilities and talents. Swami Vivekananda defined education as, 'life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas', and not a certain 'amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life' (Vivekananda III: 302). Education is not mere book-learning (Vivekananda V: 231), nor passing examinations, not even delivering impressive lectures, it is an ability to think originally, to stand on your own feet mentally as well as practically, interacting with people successfully (Vivekananda VII: 147). Education for him means that process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, as a result of which one can stand on one's own feet (Mondal 80). According to Swami Vivekananda, education is a development from within, it is the discovery of the inner self i.e. self revelation, not an imposition on the individual of certain borrowed ideas from the external sources, but a natural process of enfoldment of all the inherent powers which lie in dormant condition in an individual (Ibid.).

Swami Vivekananda however did not just emphasise on the need for education he also

laid emphasis on 'preserverence' and 'will power' as the epitomes of progress in the path towards the goal of success based on the nationalistic ideas of:

- The awakening of the masses who form the nation.
- Development of physical and moral strength.
- Unity based on common spiritual ideas.
- Consciousness of, and pride in, the ancient glory and greatness of India (Majumdar 108).

Besides, 'conviction of the powers of goodness, absence of jealousy and suspicion and helping all who are trying to be and do good' (Vivekananda VI: 218; VIII: 299) are necessary to make every individual as well as every nation great.

The Serampore Missionaries and Swami Vivekananda appear at different 'spaces' and 'contexts' of time in the history of human existence for executing their reformative ideals for the development of the general masses including the need of education among the women for the development of the society. The seeds which were sown by the Serampore Missionaries got propounded and vindicated vehemently by the Hindu monk who left no stone unturned to uplift the masses ideologically as well as through his own life and actions. They believed that through education the soul is liberated and through true liberty human beings move towards the 'truth' i.e. righteousness,

*Ya êkô varnô bahudhâ saktiyogât
varnâm anêkân nihitârthô dadhâti
vichaitti châte visvamâdau sa dêvah
sa nô budhyâ subhayâ samyunâktu*

He who is one, above all colours, and who with his manifold powers supplies the

inherent needs of men of all colours, who is in the beginning and in the end of the world, is divine, and may he unite us in a relationship of good will (*The Religion* 36).

Notes:

1. As an alternative sitting arrangement - a curtain was put in between the places where the girls and the boys sat in the classroom. Those girls who were eager to learn and be educated got themselves admitted to the boys' school.
2. Swami Vivekananda's ideals were all based on the scriptures especially the *Upanishads*. He said, 'If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upanishads, it is that one idea *strength*. The quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta and all lies in that one word' (Vivekananda VIII: 267).
3. Swami Vivekananda said, 'The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. All success in any line of work is the result of this...The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration' (Vivekananda VI: 37).
4. The words are taken from the title of Elaine Showalter's book, *A Literature of Their Own*. Here Showalter sets out to 'describe the female literary tradition in the English novel from the generation of the Brontës to the present day, and to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture. We are reminded of the term '—criture féminine' which refers to women's writing in French feminist theory. It describes how women's writing is a specific discourse

closer to the body, to emotions and to the unnamable, all of which are repressed by the social contract.

5. Swami Vivekananda said, 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's feet' (Vivekananda V: 342).

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(Dedication: This essay is for Mr Norman Aselmeyer for his unconditional love, unflinching inspiration and constant support.)

***Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

: Snigdha Rani Dutta

Half of a Yellow Sun is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's attempt to expose the impact of a political crisis in the condition of living during the Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafran war). Adichie, while exploring the personal conflicts among the characters, reveals the conflicts of the nation in a larger context.

The novel is an extremely engaging and engulfing narrative that encompasses the period before and during the Biafran war – the Early sixties and the Late sixties. The structure of the narrative is such that it cycles back and forth in these two time periods. The structure allows the reader to view the characters as real people. It is impossible for the reader not to get connected emotionally with the sufferings and hardships of the characters. The most important aspect of the novel is that even though the novel is loaded with historical elements – a great plethora of information, it never feels as if Adichie has pushed these information as an agenda.

Adichie has researched the Biafran war very closely – “I am working on a second novel,

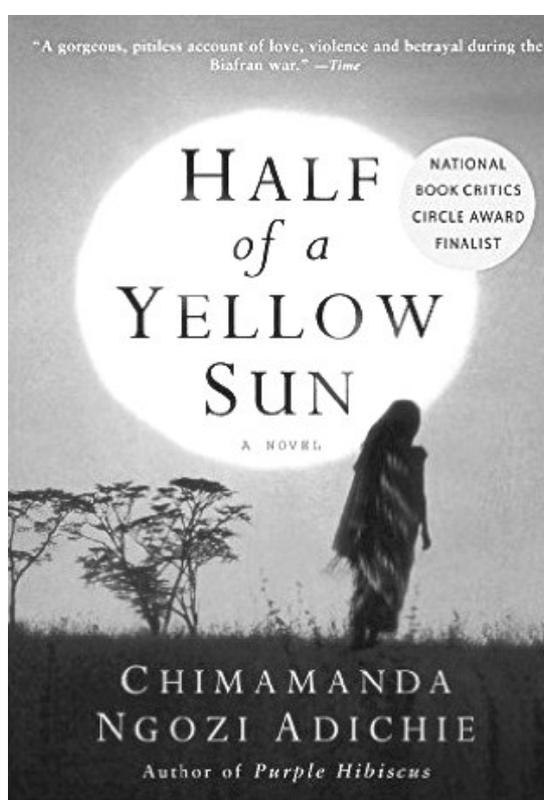
Half of a Yellow Sun, set before and during the Nigeria – Biafra war and told from the points of view of a university instructor, her houseboy and an Englishman. I have done a great deal of oral research because I find that many of the

books written about that period are more interested in the larger and grander narratives than in the small things that make up day-to-day life. I very much want the reader to feel what Biafra was like for ordinary middle-class men and women. Ultimately,

however, I hope it will be a book about that stubborn, unreasonable love that holds people together. It will be published in 2006.”

[“Author Profile: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”. *The Word Literature Today*, Vol. 80, No.2, Mar-Apr. 2006, pp. 5-6. JSTOR,

www.jstor.org/stable/



401588”].

Adichie is a brilliant writer and skilled at imparting information and context into her books. The title of the book indicates the flag for the country called Biafra that had wanted to exist out of Nigeria in the 60s. This book basically voices that process in a fictionalised way. This novel can be called as trauma fiction as well as

historical fiction. Adichie has intertwined the historical events with the domestic lives of the Nigerian people. She has voiced the traumatic events and their effects on people during the Biafran war which is also known as the Nigerian Civil War. The secession of the Igbo people from the Southern region after the Nigerian independence has caused the three years' Nigerian Civil War. The Igbo secession demanded and declared the Southern Nigeria as Biafra. The powerful blending of psychological elements and historical events makes the book more impactful. The book is very much informative. It is extremely praiseworthy for Adichie for her level of research and her dedication at attempting to create fictional characters living at the time of Biafran War, the period to which the author herself does not belong and for achieving huge success in portraying a realist picture. Adichie writes from the perspectives of the characters. She crafts incredible characters. Her characters are complex and yet, she has a control over characters in the sense that how they are presented in all their complexities. The complexity and authenticity of the characters are carried throughout the novel, which makes it more engaging and compelling.

There are five main characters, Olanna and Odenigbo, a couple living in Nsukka, both professors at the University. Odenigbo was very passionate, full of rhetoric and thought a lot about the country. Olanna had a non-identical twin sister, Kainene. She was blunt and it was implied that she was not as beautiful as Olanna, therefore, she used to make up for getting what she wants through hard works, without relying on others. Kainene's lover was the white British man Richard, who was interested in Igbo-Ukwu art. He was in Nsukka, for he was planning to write a book, a book that he had no idea what it would be about. Ugwu, the most important character, was the houseboy at Odenigbo's house. He developed an interest in literature and

tried to educate himself. The characters were viewed in new light from Ugwu's perspective.

The characters drifted apart not only because of the war, but also because of certain advances leading up to the war. They struggled, compromised and transformed from the quite privileged people because of huge political turn of events. The unfolding of the narrative shows how the things had started falling apart. The "ethnic cleansing"- a painful execution of Igbo people in the North of Nigeria had stirred the cause for the Biafran secession. We find Odenigbo declaring, "Secession is the only answer. If Gowon wanted to keep this country united, he would have done something long ago.... It is as if our people who were killed don't matter." (Adichie 157). The book inside the book, *The World was Silent When We Died* gives the insight to what was awaiting in the near future against the idyllic setting of the first part of the novel. Surprisingly, we find at the end that the author of this book within a book is not Richard but Ugwu. The boy had grown up emotionally within the three years' period of war. This book also gives an idea how the things broke apart. How the hatred amongst the tribes and religions worked rigorously to enhance the conflicts between the North and South of Nigeria after the Nigerian independence. Ugwu writes, "At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp". (Adichie. 195)

Adichie exposes the brutalities against the Igbo people and its impact on the characters. Kano was the place where the ethnic cleansing of the Igbo people had started first. Adichie had seamlessly described the scenes of horrors from the perspectives of characters. For instance, we find Olanna under huge trauma after she had experienced the violences done against the Igbo people in Kano. "Olanna's dark swoops began the day she came back from Kano." (Adichie. 156). She was haunted by the woman with the calabash that she had encountered in the train

and the nicely plaited head of a child inside the calabash. “That night, she had the first Dark Swoop: A thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe.” (Adichie. 156). Olanna was heavily traumatized by the events that took place in Kano. The experience had made a deep impact on her psychology.

Adichie narrates the military brutalities at the airport in Kano from Richard’s perspective, “He stared at himself and wondered if it really had happened, if he really had seen man die, if the lingering smells from shattered liquor bottles and bloodied human bodies were only in his imagination.” (Adichie. 153). Richard’s experience at the airport had left him bedraggled. Richard happened to witness the merciless killing of those who were Igbo at the airport. The customs officer, Nnaemeka, with whom Richard had chatted a while ago, was shot to death in front of his eyes. He could not believe his own eyes.

Adichie very carefully infuses into the text the personal conflicts in the lives of the characters along with the larger political conflicts. The novel shows the conflicts in marriage, relationships alongside political conflicts. The effects of the traumatic events on the domestic lives of civilians were immense. The novel voices the trauma of the massacre of the

Igbo, the civil war and the death and starvation of more than a million Nigerian people. Adichie has emphasised the unflinching hope among the Southerners throughout the novel. The novel ends with Kainene lost somewhere in the North and Biafra’s defeat. If we wish to see we will find in Olanna a hope for the return of Kainene that also may indicate the hope for the re-emergence of the Biafran state. However, Adichie implies it or not remains a question.

The things have started to fall apart and Adichie has very carefully and very satisfactorily given detailed exposition of what has happened, why it has happened and how it has changed a whole lot of things and led to the circumstances that give birth to the Biafran state; and at the same time, how it has affected both the political scenario and the domestic scenario. She has brilliantly exposed the horrors of persecution, massacre and starvation – the consequences of the Biafran war, She has exposed the political hypocrisies and how it has affected the lives of people. The people living through the war, were deprived of political and economic power to improve their condition. However, Adichie gives the implication that the horrors of the massacres, air-raids and destruction of all kinds had united the Igbo and made them Biafrans.

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Professional Prejudices and Bonding among Women in *Falling From Grace*

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Abstract:

*The plays of Hanne Rayson, a Melbourne based contemporary Australian playwright, depict current opportunities for women in terms of expanded educational and career choices, which have in turn led to complexities in women's relationship with men and a shift in family arrangements. Her plays also reveal that in spite of the women's relative emancipation, they continue to face many other problems including sexism, violence, difficulty in balancing work and family demands, preoccupation with child-rearing and domestic chores. Rayson claims to be a feminist and writes from a women's perspective. Her genuine concern for the welfare of women is reflected through their realistic, powerful and sensitive portrayal in her plays. Her plays frequently satirize upon the subject of the blind acceptance by women of the patriarchal system. This paper is an attempt to study Hanne Rayson's *Falling From Grace* (1994) as belonging to that theatre-genre which does not believe in producing merely feminist plays. The Play is dominated by the theme of female friendship and shows that in the absence of an oppressive patriarchy in the office, the women have the power to take critical decisions that affect their own and other women's lives.*

Key Words: *Feminism, Power, Decisions and Female friendship.*

.....
Ever since the professional theatre began in Sydney in 1830s women have been there as playwrights, actors, managers and directors.

“Despite social prejudice and the constraints of domestic life, they have written, danced, sung and acted with talent, versatility and resourcefulness and sheer hard work. They have initiated and administered theatrical ventures with flair and success (Parsons 650). Australian theatre has developed a tradition of feminist plays written by female playwrights since the beginning of twentieth century but the importance of feminist drama was never more obvious than in the 1980s and 1990s. A number of female playwrights started blossoming in the 1980s as a result of growing interest in the women's movement worldwide. The feminist drama by the eighties began to turn away from the political and methodological norms of the seventies. It favoured liberal feminism rather than focusing on socialist feminist projects. Leftist agit-prop drama went into decline but in the eighties the liberal feminists desired to achieve change from within. Women's theatre groups began to focus less on broad social change and more on working within the existing theatre system. Towards the 1990s women were in the forefront of experimentation in the Australian theatre and pushed the boundaries of theatrical convention simply by placing female characters at the centre of their plays. A new form of feminist theatre emerged in 1990s with feminist playwrights like Hanne Rayson, Tobsha Learner, Katherine Thomson, Joanna Murray-Smith and Patricia Cornelius¹, who not only go beyond producing merely feminist plays, but also committed to give women opportunities and work experience in all areas of theatrical

production which had heretofore been dominated by men.

Over the past thirty years the cultural expectations of what it means to be female have changed dramatically. Hannie Rayson, a Melbourne-based writer who is widely regarded as the most influential female playwright of the contemporary Australian Theatre, believes, “the emphasis on new and innovative Australian drama meant that women in the Australia theatre became not only the puppets but the puppeteers. And with women pulling the strings, women characters came to life. As Dorothy Hewitt said, until women became writers, the only strong female character in contemporary theatre was that of Coralie Lansdown, in Alex Buzo’s ‘Coralie Lansdown Says No’” (Cafarella 13). She agrees that there are plenty of roles for women in the plays. One of her aims is to bring female sensibility to the stage. She desires to “create wonderful, huge women who are bouncing off the walls” (Cafarella 13). Rayson points out in an interview, “As I look around the table of women from 25 to 67 years of age, I feel the spirit of shared womanhood. As the youngest I feel the distance between your youth and mine is too great for me to be “the girl you once were”, yet I look at you and see “the woman I might become” (1982, 16). Rayson wants to harness the energy and creativity of the women she sees around her – like the women, their children and mothers with whom she regularly holidays. She says, “I want to create witty women. If I’ve got a punchline, I never give it to a man” (Cafarella 13).

According to Rayson women are getting more power day by day and with full energy they want to utilize it. She likes to place women in positions of power. In her plays male characters are outnumbered by female ones, who dominate and take the leading role. While women are the energy centers of most of Rayson’s plays men take peripheral roles. As she says, “My plays

reflect a desire to focus on the arenas where women are power brokers – the domestic arena, (*Hotel Sorrento, Room to Move, Mary*) a women’s magazine (*Falling From Grace*), the arts Faculty of a University (*Life After George*), the local council (*Competitive Tenderness*)” (Murdoch 17). Rayson believes in fairness, equality and justice for all people. She believes that all people should be treated fairly: women, refugees, indigenous Australians, homosexuals, disabled people, the elderly, children and anyone who is vulnerable.

Rayson does not see man as the enemy and she also writes strong roles for men, as her *Two Brothers* (2005) is openly based on the lives of two brothers who are public figures. Her plays *Falling From Grace, Scenes From a Separation, Room to Move* and *Life After George* clearly show that although not explicitly defining themselves as feminists, young women have incorporated feminist principles into their gender and kinship practices. This approach Rayson believes, includes many recent gains: women’s work opportunities, combining work with family, sexual autonomy and freedom, and male participation in domestic work and child-rearing. Rayson is always interested in women’s experience as she says, “Gender has always been a key issue in my plays. I want to write plays about the experiences of women” (Ross 18).

The present paper focuses on the analysis of Rayson’s *Falling From Grace*, where she discusses current opportunities for women in terms of expanded educational and career choices, which have in turn led to women’s independence from men and to new family arrangements. The female characters in the play are powerful and complex. Power and responsibilities are in their hands. They are in high positions and take their own decisions. At the same time the play reveals that still women continue to face many problems, including sexism, violence against women, difficulty in

balancing work and family demands, greater responsibility than men for child-rearing and domestic work. *Falling From Grace* also examine how far women are able to find their space because women in power positions still face many problems.

Falling From Grace (1994), along with *Scenes From a Separation* and *Room To Move*, is among the most overtly feminist of Rayson's plays. The play directed by Aubrey Mellor and dedicated by Rayson to "my dearest women friends" was first performed by the Playbox Theatre Centre on Tuesday 9th August, 1994. "*Falling From Grace* is a humorous, yet often poignant, play which "presents the tangled friendship of three women all about 40 years old" (Romney 24). Suzannah Brompton, Maggie Campbell and Janet Brock are friends and colleagues, in a self-employed creative team that runs *Metro Magazine*, a magazine for the liberated woman.

Suzannah, the editor, is forty-one years old divorced mother of sixteen years old Tessa. Maggie, forty years old, is the sub-editor and a divorced mother of two primary school children. Brock is a writer who, at thirty seven, is happily married and pregnant with her first child. The women try to balance two goals: the 'emancipated' one they have inherited from their feminist mothers and the traditional one of marriage and children. Brock wants to publish Miriam Roth's research on a new drug, currently under trial for the treatment of premenstrual syndrome. But when it becomes evident that the drug may produce birth defects if women become pregnant while taking it, conflicts start emerging among the three women friends. As Helen Thomson elaborates:

The three friends, Suzannah, Maggie and Brock, are all mothers; they are also journalists with a fair share of the power of the fourth estate. When faced with the dilemma of whether or not to blow the

whistle on Miriam Roth, a brilliant medical researcher battling misogynist professional establishment on behalf of women, but just possibly ignoring birth defects as a side-effect of a new drug, the three are confused and torn apart by the tangle of issues and loyalties. (14)

The play ends with the reconciliation of the three friends.

Hannie Rayson's own bonding with Hilary Glow, her dramaturge, is probably a strong factor behind constructing the play around female friendship. Rayson herself enunciates:

These days women make friends with other women for life. Whereas their relationships with their men are perhaps more transient – and that's something that's borne out by the divorce statistics. We will still know our women friends when we are old. (Kizilos 20)

Hilary Glow and Hannie Rayson became friends in 1986 when Hilary asked Hannie to help her to teach a course at Victorian College of Arts. Hilary is now a project officer at the Australian Film Commission. Then they collaborated with each other for *Hotel Sorrento*. They had collaborated for *Falling From Grace* also. Hannie Rayson's *Hotel Sorrento* (1990) talks about the relationship among three sisters. Rayson, who has no sister but two brothers believes the bond between women friends is both more fragile and more tender than familiar sisterhood. In *Hotel Sorrento* the reconciliation or reunion of the three sisters could not happen because they could not resolve their conflicts and so they are separated at the end but in *Falling From Grace* the three friends reunite at the end after resolving their conflicts. So Rayson gives more importance to female friendship than familial sisterhood. "Sisters can slag each other mercilessly," Rayson exclaims, "It's a pattern

that has developed over years and years and years. Women friends are more concerned with bolstering one another... There is a sense in which they support and nurture each other in the world” (Kizilos 20).

For Rayson female friendship is, in a sense, a new subject for women. In *Hotel Sorrento* the mother of three sisters suffered a lot and died of cancer and she had no friends while her husband spent his time fishing and drinking with his mates. Rayson observes feminism has legitimised female friendship, and it can flourish despite husbands or men as *Falling From Grace* clearly shows. The play explores the meaning of friendship among three women; who work together and share their thoughts, fears and joys. In this context Rayson narrates:

I find the bonding women have is very rich. Friendships are precious. I know, for me, that the support and strength I have received from my women friends over the years has been both rewarding and, at times of crisis, the only thing that has pulled me through. I wanted *Grace* to be a celebration of friendship between women. But because I like to write about contradiction, I wanted to explore the kinds of situations that could threaten that bond and drive a wedge between them. (Ross 18)

Suzannah, Maggie and Brock have a close friendship, as the long first scene establishes and the play “presents a multi-layered relationship of three women” (Eggleton 144). The opening scene also sets the feminist tone of the play. The three friends offer a critique of the values of the white male norms. They consider their friendship as their foremost priority. The conflicts start erupting among the three friends because of the complexities of professional life. The first dilemma occurs as Suzannah tells the pregnant Brock that she cannot print the story about Roth and the new drug. Its publication may save an

unborn child, a matter close to Brock’s heart, but it could also lead to a costly defamation case if their information is wrong. Suzannah remains confused as to what kind of ethical framework should be adopted to take a decision in this case. Maggie leaks Hugh’s story to the press. Brock is pained to know that Roth’s reputation is in tatters. Despite these tensions, the play treads lightly to a comic resolution. The play ends happily with the women reunited in the maternity ward, designated as a place of reconciliation and forgiveness. In a final note of irony, Brock’s baby, a girl, will be called Grace.

So in the play it is friendship which becomes the ultimate value, and Miriam, fellow-feminist though she is, is sacrificed for it. So too are the men in these women’s lives. Above all, this is a play about the celebration of three warmly attached individuals with a shared sense of humour. Rayson suggests, “Her dilemma is exacerbated by her sex; by her sense of sisterhood – in the large sense of the feminist project to improve things for all women – coming into conflict with the love she feels for another woman’s husband” (Thomson 14). Thus *Falling From Grace* is not simply pitting the claims of women against those of men, but the big picture against the smaller, the greater good against merely selfish satisfactions. The main theme of the play is female friendship and how women value it, and how it provides valuable support. In the absence of an oppressive patriarchy in the office, the women have the power to make critical decisions that affected their own and other women’s lives. “Now (women) operate more in the public arena, more than we did in previous generations” (Kizilos 20), Rayson says.

In the play *Metro Magazine* is aimed at an educated female readership that expects to be served more than food and fashion. The magazine wants to make the feminist voices audible. Setting the action within a women’s publishing group brings the play into a vital

strain of feminist cultural enterprise. Perhaps the biggest change that has hit the publishing industry is the advent of a large number of women-run independent publishing houses. Earlier women had less visibility and the levers of powers were controlled by men. Over the last twenty years the face of publishing has been changing and what was considered a male job a few decades back is no longer so.

Many feminist activists in 1980s and 90s entered the publishing world. Magazines such as *Ms Magazine* founded by Gloria Steinam in 1970 and edited by Australian feminist Anne Summers, claimed to have made feminist voices audible, feminist journalism tenable and feminist world-view available to the public. Several more feminist magazines continue to keep feminist issues in circulation and drive a wedge through the masculine domination of media ownership and publishing. In India in 1984, Urvashi Butalia left Oxford University Press and co-founded "Kali for Women" with Ritu Menon. In 2003, she formed her own strongly feminist publishing house, "Zubaan". She narrated, "It was my involvement in the women's movement that made me realize how lacking publishing was in bringing to light the writings of women, and how much needed to be done (Daftuar 12).

By the 1990s women's magazines, many with women as editors, promoted a popular non-academic feminist discourse, with a focus on women's stories and issues like domestic violence, sexual harassment and homophobia. In the play *Metro Magazine* actively resists stories of home and family as Rachel Fensham and Denise Varney observe, "Drawing on the reputation of feminist publishing *Metro Magazine* signals that the play is about clever, articulate and enterprising women, professional dolls, whose work is connected to and a product of feminist politics" (290).

Falling From Grace revolves around a story about Brock, who is researching for the magazine's "Top Girls" series on prominent women. Her subject for the next edition is a brilliant research scientist, Miriam Roth, "a champion of women's health" (12) and a woman who has challenged the male medical establishment. A Community Health doctor, Dr. Hugh Storey, ex-husband of Suzannah, attacks Roth for misleading people and enunciates many problems related to the drug which Roth is not willing to acknowledge. Instead Hugh wants Brock and his ex-wife Suzannah to run his story in the magazine. The drug Roth was preparing may or may not be responsible for birth defects. Is she avoiding unpleasant truths to save her career or is it just scare-mongering by a paternalistic medical hierarchy and an ambitious male doctor who does not want to see her on the top? And that's why he conducted research especially on the defects of the drug. Is Dr. Hugh Storey, a "rabid careerist", intent on gaining publicity by any means necessary? Or is Dr. Roth a "ratbagzealot", for whom the medical profession is a prime site of institutionalized sexism? These questions are left unresolved in the play. The play also depicts the conflict between patriarchal medical establishment and an able female doctor. Men on Medical Board have suspended the drug trial and Miriam Roth is devastated.

In conclusion, *Falling From Grace* is about "women and power and what they do with it when they get it, is going to kick-start a few arguments both in and out of feministic circles" (Thomson 14). It asks some of the really hard questions about gender differences such as whether women are ethically superior to men, and whether all female friendships are stronger and more enduring than love relationships between men and women. The answers are 'yes' to the latter question and 'not yet but they are learning to be better than men' to the first. Other

issues central to the play are idealism, betrayal, friendship and women's health.

Notes:

1. Hannie Rayson, Tobsha Learner, Katherine Thomson, Joanna Murray-Smith and Patricia Cornelius are the feminist playwrights of Australia and their plays have gained worldwide attention. *Wolf* (1992), *Miracles* (1998), *The Gun in History* (1994) and many of Tobsha Learner's plays move the reader emotionally and tend to have epic plotlines – ordinary women placed in extraordinary circumstances. Katherine Thomson is a great observer and recorder of the lives and struggles of marginalized people in general and women in particular. *Barmaid* (1991), *Diving for Pearls* (1992), and *Wonderlands* (2003) are some of her famous plays. The plays of Joanna Murray-Smith reflect the confusions of individuals in the 1990s and social injustice of the period just as the plays of Katherine Thomson. Her plays *Honour* (1995), *Redemption* (1997), *Night fall* (1997) and *Rapture* (2002) gained popularity. In 2006 Murray Smith wrote *The Female of the Species*, a farcical comedy about second wave feminism. Patricia Cornelius, a founding member of Melbourne Workers' Theatre, has written over twenty plays, including *Last Drinks* (1992). Issues of particular concern to women have been the subject of her plays – including domestic violence, exploitation and discrimination in the work place, female ordination and racism.
2. *Coralie Lansdowne Says No* (1974) a play by Alex Buzo depicts a woman's struggle for independence and for her sense of self. Coralie is a strong, vibrant and articulate heroine of the play, who has retreated from the awful social world and lives alone in her eyrie on the cliffs above Sydney Palm Beach. In the play,

three males make advances to her. Her response to each of them is a firm 'no'. She is the one who thrives on transience, and is not about to throw away her independence on any male. The feminists attack the play because at the end Coralie says yes for marriage to Stuart.

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