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EDITORIAL

COSMOPOLITANISM IN LITERATURE

The communication revolution is a distinguishing feature of Globalization, which has a crucial role in the economic space of the world. It has reduced distances among the regions of the world. New technology aided by microchips has simultaneously been contributing to the mass production, finished goods and a massive promotion in marketing. Besides other things, this has also resulted in the growth of a new cosmopolitan air. International borders have become flexible, people are becoming more and more oriented with a spirit of mutual-existence-both socially and culturally; there is a growing trend of integration of economy of one country or region with another. There is a greater recognition of the talent and skills of any people by another and there is greater mobility and circulation of the talented and the skilled across the world.

The present time is a time of migration, mobility and an expansive transnational connectivity. America's expansive economy has led the leaders of the countries to take fresh overtures in shifting from their traditional economic policies. Even in a so called developing state like India, there are novel strategic visions in economic front due to the impact of the contemporary global capitalism. There is a spurt in merchandising and business activities, construction of more and more cross-national highways, newer airports, and newer connectivity in her desperate bid to catch up with the rest of the globe in terms of the fresh economic challenges. There is thus a cross-cultural impact upon the humanity and what has evolved is also a new paradigm of ideology: Cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is a concept having its growth upon transnationalism and internationalism. It is also a philosophy, which has its own creative influence on the cultures and the literatures of the world.

Globalization however also pushes the local cultural diversity and the local ethos to the brink of a disaster. It is putting obstacles to their growth and thus they are all into the mess of a contradictory situation. There is fresh yearning in the people for the roots, an urge to recover the past, - something, which at times also manifests into political movements. Communities are thus ironically in a global trap. The ethnically distinct people all over the globe have become vulnerable as they are 'made' to co-exist with the new order of things. There is thus an offshoot in literature called neo-cosmopolitanism which posits itself apart from the literary canons. A new genre of literature- the cosmopolitan literature imagines of a transnational or global community. It is a product of the migration and mobility of people with the marked emphasis on the binaries like home vs. abroad, immigrant vs. native, host vs. guest. It is revealing of the continuing blurring of the distinctive borderlines between man and man owing to the growing transcultural exchanges. Today, as it were, the dominant tendency of the culturalists is in a crisis of sort. In literature too there is a visible difference to the textuality in terms of this cosmopolitanism- where the text defines and determines itself in new ways.

THE DOUBLE-PROCESS: READING THE 'BODY' IN BEN JONSON'S *VOLPONE*

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Abstract:

*This paper will try to unearth the multiple possibilities of examining the 'body' as the agent of performance and the politics that seems to loom large over the concept when it comes to its representation in the theatre. Ben Jonson's comic masterpiece *Volpone* (1606) is a play that chiefly dwells in the proliferation of the "double-process"—that is, the confirmation and the deliberate rejection of the body. This aspect of rejection of the body on the stage (which is always in the mode of representation) can be seen as a ploy adopted by Jonson to cater to the whims and aspirations of the Renaissance theatre-going public given their increasing concern over human anatomy which has had almost become an obsession at that point of time. The coterie of characters which gain an upper hand in terms of 'body-rejection' are the minions of *Volpone*—Nano, Castrano, Andryogeno—who are accorded a significant interest in the consideration of the politics of the body. The paper will enter the discussion through a cursory estimate of the usage and perception of the body during the Renaissance much of which was governed by the ideals of Renaissance humanism fashioned by Giambattista Vico and Jakob Brukhardth. In the process of this discussion, the paper will try to suggest possibilities in order to authenticate the anthropocentric view which dominated*

much of the critical debates of the time. Lastly, the paper will try to analyse the characters according to their humours and in doing so, will place Jonson and his age in the present context to assess the viability and universality of the human subject with an Indian subject position.

Key Words: *Body Politic, Double-Process, Performativity, 'Verstehen'*

*For I refuse the title of artist to those who owe their reputation to a physical deformity. I regard them as buffoons. (Sarah Bernhardt, *The Art of Theatre*)*

Ben Jonson's highly acclaimed play *Volpone* (1606) is a brilliant dramatic achievement because although it is seen as a quintessential English Jacobean/Renaissance play, it has since then, invited many critical debates concerning the importance and function of the 'body' that seems to be one of the central concerns in the play. The reception history of the play itself indicates the sheer audacity with which Jonson tried to mock at the follies and foibles of the then English society by using the most potent weapon in his literary arsenal—comedy. Jonson strove to create an image of authorship by fashioning himself as a monolithic classicist, literary pedant and political reactionary as is evident in his

outright denunciation of the more sophisticated and elite class of audience of the seventeenth century English society. It is this same Jonson who had previously won accolades for introducing the English stage with the functional concept of “humours” through his celebrated duos *Everyman in His Humour* and *Everyman out of His Humour*. In both these plays, there is a constant anatomical reference to the discovery of the ‘fluids’ in the human body that goes in the making of individual disposition and temper. The idea of presence of the four fluids in the human body—bile, phlegm, cholera and melancholy—affirms the Renaissance buoyancy and the spirit of discovery that seem to govern the taste and attitude of the theatre-going public. It also serves to highlight yet another outstanding discovery—the discovery of the circulation of blood in the human body by William Harvey which had changed the contours of anatomical science. In *Volpone*, however, this ‘fluid’ concept does not get much preference but the ‘body’ as an agent of ‘discovery’ and as an ‘object of inquiry’ gains credence. The ‘double process’ highlighted in the title is therefore an examination of this dualistic significance of the body.

The ideology behind the politics of the body during the early seventeenth century Renaissance drama assumes tremendous significance due to its insistence on portraying social and political evils in terms of “sexual deviation and bodily excess” (Whigham, 33). Discourses on sexual transgression were not something uncommon at this age. Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and the major plays of Shakespeare, Chapman, Marston, Webster and Middleton are all instances in point. What becomes more intriguing is the manner in which these playwrights project the ‘body’ with due recognition of the alimentary focus on

Renaissance medicine. The shift from theocentric to anthropocentric world order during the Renaissance provided these playwrights ample space to concentrate on the variegated aspects of human anatomy. This eventually led to the issues of sexuality, sexual difference, gender consciousness in terms of role playing and the ‘desire’ of the ‘body’ as reflected in the appropriation of the human body in the theatre.

The “absolute centrality of the body to Renaissance culture” which Jonathan Sawday underlines in his study of anatomy and dissection as “master tropes for an early modern epistemology and for its ensuing forms of representation” (Sawday, 27) can be taken as a cue to study the Renaissance politics of “using” the body as an object of study. The human body became a prime model of anatomical investigation and study within the Renaissance culture. Sawday thus emphasises on how the body came to be textualised during the Renaissance:

The body was territory, an (as yet) undiscovered country, a location which demanded from its explorers skills which seemed analogous to those displayed by the heroic voyagers across the terrestrial globe (Sawday, 23).

It becomes imperative here to make explicit certain ideas regarding the very contestable notion of body politics in the theatre. The term ‘body politics’ normally refers to the political connotations of the material bodies, bodies on which major socio-political issues are contested and played out in time and space, and the political body of the nation. Body politics, when looked at from theatrical standpoint connotes a multi-layered perspective as to the politics of the body on stage, the gendered subjectivity, the politics of representation, the body of the Other,

the performing body, the actor/audience encounter, the body of the audience, the context-specific historical and cultural production and the politics of meaning, the real/post-real representation and so forth. The present study will seek to arrive at a negotiation of this multi-layered ideological position as the corporeal participation of the body in the theatre and its very 'presence' on stage leaves the spectator to either labour hard in making meaning out of it as participatory engagement, or to assume that theatre itself in all its variegated manifestations cannot work without the agency of the body. In other words, the paper seeks to arrive at the assumption that the acting body in the theatre not only invests meaning to the performance but also lends and imparts credibility to the entire project of spectatorship.

The Renaissance stage is seen as "a decoder for erotic experience, used both to reinforce and subvert expected sexual behaviour" (Zimmerman, i). The body serves to be the abode of both sexuality and eroticism because these two conditions are unimaginable without the conceptual presence of the body. The idea of 'desire' is intricately linked with the body having its origins in the mind. According to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, 'desire' is always a 'desire of' something; it arises due to the experience of a 'lack'. *Volpone* abounds in eroticism as it exposes not only the mentality of the characters through satire but also highlights the carnal desires of the body on stage. The perennial condition of 'lust' is presented as a fascination for the body of the other—here the "Other Body" can be seen through the lens of gender differentiation. The female body is always seen as a foreign element by the male body and is ever anxious to 'know' it in specific details. This can be argued from the various behavioural symptoms and psychological

obsessions of the male body such as voyeurism when it happens to encounter a female/foreign body. This condition is heavily couched in psychoanalysis by various conditional referents such as 'penis envy' and it would absorb an entire thesis altogether if we concentrate on it. Therefore, the irresistible urge of the body to 'know' can be seen as a cultural conditioning because sexuality is always at stake when the idea of 'difference' is taken into consideration.

In *Volpone*, the eponymous character is portrayed as a lustful individual who undergoes various disguises. The disguise as a mountebank perfectly suits the intention lurking within Volpone as he is successful in having a glimpse of the 'Other Body'—the body of Celia. This intensifies his lust all the more when we find him confiding to Mosca about his desire for Celia. However, it would be a very reductive approach if we reject Celia as a mere object of lust.

Celia, no doubt, is the source of male desire in the play but the desire of Volpone is replenished further by the machinations of Corvino who forces his wife to win Volpone's favours by deploying her physical charms. Nonetheless, we cannot just look at the act of Corvino's pressurising his wife as forced prostitution. This would be quite fallacious because Corvino hates to be designated as a city-cuckold. On the contrary, given the circumstances of Volpone's feigned physical recovery, Corvino's real intention is to generate 'pleasure' in Volpone by sacrificing his wife's chastity and thereby to become the chief begetter in the race for Volpone's prospective heirs. Volpone, on the other hand, successfully dupes the legacy-hunters by the sheer brilliance of his role-playing duly assisted by Mosca with whose connivance he succeeds in extracting huge fortunes from the legacy-hunters as gifts. The play however, proves once again, the debated contention that

“desire is an endless process of deferment” (Zimmerman, 2) as we find that Volpone’s desire for Celia is deferred by the new twist that pops up as an anabasis² in the form of Bonario’s timely entrance to save Celia from losing her chastity.

The ‘radical actuality’ of the body (appropriating the phrase from Stanton Garner) “introduces a *danse macabre* of theatrical looking that moves between absorption and repulsion, reversing the otherwise consumptive gaze of the onlooker” (Alvarez, 35). The anatomical theatre invited numerous viewing procedures to provide a theatrical space to view the body and to study it in terms of human anatomy. The idea of anatomy theatre can be ascribed to the near-invisible nature of the misshapen inmates of Volpone’s household projecting the ‘reprobate body’ in its natural deformities—the dwarf Nano suggests smallness, the eunuch Castrone suggests emasculation and the hermaphrodite Androgyno suggests traits of both the gender. No doubt, the character of Androgyno invites serious consideration of gender, but it also pose an essential question—why did Jonson portray such characters in a play satirizing the follies and foibles of the aristocratic class? The answer perhaps begets a due recourse to the then society’s preoccupation with the human body as an *object* of study. In the play, the ‘reprobate body’ challenges the ethics of spectatorship³ by confining itself within the limits of the theatrical space. In *Volpone*, however, one does not encounter any lurid experimentation *on* the body such as dissection which was much in vogue during the Renaissance.

The image of the bastards in *Volpone* becomes another significant area of interest. The body of the bastards are expressively linked with deformed persons and eunuchs. Francis Bacon

in his essay “Of Envy” states that the bastards are creatures whose ‘natural wants’ may render them vicious (Neill, 287). This is reiterated in *Volpone* in the deformity of the heteroclite brood—dwarf, eunuch and hermaphrodite—which Volpone has supposedly begotten through some clandestine affairs. In the like manner, Corbaccio disinherits his son Bonario. This act of disinheriting swells up as the play progresses and finally consummates in the bastardizing of Bonario. Now, the act of bastardizing in performance begets serious consideration of spectatorship as it ‘confirms’ as well as ‘rejects’ the ‘body on stage. Bonario’s body undergoes a transitional sweep as it fails to uphold the former glory and pristine nature of his body prior to his disinheritance. It serves to highlight the theatrical nuances of performance as the act of disinheritance or bastardization rests on the characteristic feature of performativity. The body is disowned and so devalued; it becomes, phenomenologically speaking, a ‘neglected presence’. Here, the deformity (in the case of Bonario) is brought to the fore by presenting the body as an embodiment of illegitimacy. This squares off the notion of performativity itself as the act immediately conveys the sense that the deed is done.

The exposition of the play kicks off with the projection of a body feigning sickness. The body in question is also suggestive of impotence which can be affirmed by the declaration of the body being ‘childless’. The bodily infirmities are immediately announced by the positioning of the body as ‘languishing’ on the stage. The politics of the body is affirmed by the staging of the “double process”—the simultaneous affirmation and deliberate rejection of the body on stage. The possibility of confirmation and rejection of the body by the spectator in the act of bastardization

of Bonario is an instance in point. The deviant or more specifically the ‘grotesque body’ (appropriating the term from Mikhail Bakhtin) is showcased through the projection of Volpone’s body while it is contested with another body that of Mosca’s which is again characterised by kleptoparasitism.

Role playing and disguises are the two characteristic features of performance and Volpone seems to excel in these traits. He is a master strategist who deploys his servant Mosca to do his biddings and to assist him in achieving his heartfelt desires. Mosca too becomes an interesting read because of his parasitic nature and this trait in turn endears him to Volpone quite unconditionally. The concept of role playing seems to take a completely different colour while considering Mosca’s performance because he not only plays the role of a parasite (one must note here the idea of a *performance-within-a-performance*) but engages the spectator’s attention to the performance of the body jostling with the double-process—while on the one hand, he is accepting the role of the parasite and on the other hand, he deliberately manipulates all other characters by gulling them with the physical infirmity of Volpone.

The play also becomes much more engaging because of the metamorphosis that takes place on the body of Androgyno. Metamorphosis on stage has to be quick and crafty because it renders substance not only to the performance but also to the body in action. There is however the risk of falling into the ‘distortive reception’⁴ which can be quite fatal in terms of assessing the gravity and seriousness of the dramatic purpose. In *Volpone*, the body of Androgyno takes the form of the body of Pythagore which is a brilliant testimony to the idea of the double-process. Here, we find a deliberate rejection of the body on stage for the sake of another. Again,

the metamorphosis of the body of Pythagore to that of a dull mule and subsequently to that of an ass suggests the possibility of accepting multiple roles in the process of acting. The very act of embodiment is challenged as we neither grant the privilege nor entertain the notion that animals can have a ‘body’ too. Thus, it calls forth a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience.

An alternative approach can be taken in the consideration of the body in *Volpone*. It can be argued that in *Volpone*, the ‘transgressive body’ is presented through the character of Celia. Granted that Celia (along with Bonario) is the only “virtuous” character in the play that escapes the banter and vituperation of Jonson in terms of exposing the hypocrisy and pretentiousness of the then society, the very idea of body politics immediately ushers forth a contradictory perspective to examine Celia’s character in the light of being a transgressive body. The paradox of portrayal becomes more intensified when the characteristic features of Celia is contrasted with her rather ‘infidel’ act of observing Volpone disguised as a mountebank through the window. This act reveals the desire of the so-called ‘disciplined body’ of Celia which arguably enough seems to harbour carnal desires for Volpone. It also casts light on the failure of Corvino to adequately address the required conjugal bliss with Celia. If this perspective is taken into consideration, then, the body of Corvino faces conceptual annihilation from the spectral presence of the play as it becomes a foil to the other male body in question. Celia’s act of dropping the handkerchief can be seen as a sign of confirmation and admiration regarding the qualitative superiority of Volpone’s body to that of Corvino’s. Therefore, from the semiotic point of view, the act of dropping the handkerchief

illustrates the latent desire of the female body which has been hitherto suppressed by the limits of societal decorum.

What becomes more intriguing in theatre is that the performing body 'acts' as a 'text', the authorship and authenticity of which is in the process of perpetual flux. The gap between the actor/role and performer/performance offers a particular form of spectatorial pleasure and the audience in trying to address this conflict potential recognise that the actors are not just copying behavioural patterns of the characters but are performing in a way that accommodates a formal and aesthetic relationship. Corvino in his anger associates Volpone with satyrs—half goat and half human—symbolising carnal desire. The sexual connotation of this image is bolstered furthermore when Corvino accuses his wife Celia for harbouring the thought to 'mount' on Volpone. One must note that the use of the word 'mount' and its theatrical register connotes multiple meanings especially when the context of such accusation is sexually charged up. Corvino snatches all possible freedom and liberty that Celia previously had access to by drawing a line as a sign of restriction. This immediately brings in the popular idea of a "laxman-rekha" to the Indian readers.

Corv. ...And till 't be done, some two or three yards off

I'll chalk a line:...

To set thy desp'rate foot more hell, more horror,
More wild remorseless rage shall seize on thee
(2.2, 54)

The semiotic significance of this abstract referent 'laxman-rakha' also invites the strategic significance of the Indian subject position. This reference immediately conveys the fact that as Indians, we cannot 'dis-locate' ourselves while engaging in extricating the dynamics of

performance of a foreign text. If we regard the notion that bodies are cultural texts as true, we then have an opportunity in theatre to re-read/re-interpret these texts according to our own cultural conditioning. In short, the subject position of the reader/interpreter announces an *informal cultural embeddedness* (italics and phrase mine) which is much needed to sort out congenial ways of perception.

The social life of the Renaissance women is brilliantly fabricated in the play through the projection of the two female characters who are almost polar opposites—Celia the virtuous women and Lady Politic Would-Be the sophisticated opportunist. The scaling of heights in the rush for social status and recognition has been deftly presented by Jonson in the portrayal of Lady Politic who craves to make her mark in the Venetian aristocratic lifestyle by flaunting her sophisticated nature. On the contrary, Celia has been presented in the traditional light of an "angel in the house" (appropriating the term from Coventry Patmore). It is Lady Politic who accuses Celia for tempting Sir Politic by designating her as a "chameleon harlot" in front of the advocatori (4.1, 106). The chameleon metaphor indicates the idea of role playing, masking, deception and doubling—all significant characteristic of the body politic. Celia's body, although couched and conceived along traditional lines, is much more complicated to analyse and interpret because gender is a "regulatory fiction" (Judith Butler) which enforces and censors certain behaviour.

Theatre is thus fundamentally concerned with the body and this fact has hitherto served as a vantage point. The conceptual notion of the 'body' in theatre is necessarily abstract but it is an abstraction based on the idea of a fleshy, palpable reality. Through *Volpone*, Ben Jonson

is able to hold multiple characterisation and contextual relevance simultaneously. Thus, theatre with all its cultural baggage and contestation offers significant ways and means in the understanding of the 'body'.

End Notes:

¹ The idea of 'selling' health is confirmed in Volpone's performance as a mountebank. He tries to prescribe and sell different sorts of medicines for different diseases like epilepsy, palpitation, kidney-stone, dysentery, paralysis, convulsions, cramps, vertigo and so on and so forth.

² Anabasis in drama means the rising of an action to a climax or denouement. For more specific details, see J.A.Cuddon's *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, London and New York: Penguin Books, (1992), 1999 rpt.

³ The ethics of spectatorship chiefly comprise of the audience's *willing suspension of disbelief*. The audience comes to the theatre with the preconceived notion that all that is enacted on stage is a mere *representation* of reality and not reality itself.

⁴ By the phrase 'distortive reception', I mean the kind of reception that is supposed to be nourished by the gaze of the spectator. If the metamorphosis enacted on the stage is not quick enough, it leaves the spectator baffled and puzzled regarding the very 'idea' of the act itself. This inability of the spectator in judging the viability of the performance gives rise to doubt which, if lingers more than usual, destroys the purposefulness of the act. In other words, the ethics of spectatorship is seriously threatened when the spectator fails to willfully suspend his disbelief.

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Plays of Ratan Thiyam and H. Kanhailal: Some Critical Insights

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The plays of H. Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam not only exhibit rich folk traditions but they also take the apparently discrete linguistic practices of small narratives to connect reflexively to the discourses of humanity.

As Louis Gates has shown, a playwright/speaker is a “cultural impersonator”— therefore, representational authenticity of any signifying practice is much more complicated than the singular, transparent, static categories assumed to give the writer a particular view. To make a semiotic analysis of these performance pieces we need to describe the various processes of signification and communication on the stage via stage props and other concrete elements; the theatre “scenography,” costumes, soundscapes, “stage design”, “scenic design” and “theatre-design”. Thus we talk about a three-dimensional construction of a visual, aural, material and spatial *mise en scene*, using a synthesis of different technologies, from the intangibles of lighting and sound to the actuality of wood and cloth.

A brief sketch of Manipur’s history acquaints us with the fact that there was indigenous culture of Manipur prior to the Vaishnavite movement of the eighteenth century, which was strongly propagated by ruling monarchs like Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) and Bhagyachandra (1763-1798). The traditional *lai* (gods) were destroyed; ancient scripts, the Meithei scripts were burnt and replaced by Bengali scripts; the Hindu calendar

and system of *gotras* were introduced; and the Hindu dietary laws were enforced. But even after that, the pre-Vedic Meithei deity Sanamahea continues to be worshipped in every household in ancestor-worshipping festivals like the *Lai Haraoba*. The main point is that the ethos of Meithei culture has been systematically subsumed within the value of an increasingly powerful Hindu hegemony. Historically, the people of Ningthonja class were called Meithei and they later on subdued the other six classes of the state around AD 33 to form a community. In the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century, pre-Hindu Meithei religious groups emerged to counter the dominance of the Hindu-Meithei Vaishnavites. There was a movement of resuscitating the past by re-affirming the worship of Sanamahea in opposition to the Radha-Krishna culture in Manipur. Moreover, there was a resistance to the imposition of Bengali scripts through a move to revive the Meithei scripts which involved a conscious rejection of Hindu values and artifacts, even the wearing of *tilak* and the act of performing *Ras leela* were shunned. Alongwith this overtly revolutionary activity there was cultural counterpoint provided by the Pan Manipur Youth League (PANMYL), founded on ethnic identity, Meithei-tribal ethnic oneness, whose political goal was the establishment of an “autonomous political state” and the liberation of the Manipuris from “Indian

occupation.” If read against the historical perspective of Manipur, the plays of Ratan Thiyam and Kanhailal are purely based on the physical culture of Manipur itself; thus, the appropriation of *Thabal Changba* dance (a dance throughout the night during the Holi celebrations linking the hands to form a large circle, building a communal energy and rhythm with strong, vigorous jumps), the martial art tradition *Thang-ta*; the narratives of *Phunga wari* (fireside stories) etc finally produces a flexible dramatic idiom to adapt to the changing contemporary situations of the state.

In April 1976, under the able guidance of Ratan Thiyam, the Chorus Repertory Theatre was established in the valley of the small hill state, Manipur, encircled by nine folds of hills in the easternmost part of India. This Repertory, located in the outskirts of Imphal, marked its anniversary season of twenty five years of existence through the auspicious act of inaugurating an architectural marvel called “The Shrine”—a 200-seated auditorium conceived and designed by Ratan Thiyam endowed with a separate space for set-construction and storage. Regarding Thiyam’s oeuvre, his 1984 production *Chakravayuha* (The Wheel of war) is performed more than hundred times around the globe, and this significant single play has catapulted the company to global spotlight in the late nineties. Plays like *Uttar-Priyadarshi* (*The Final Beatitude*, 1996), *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (*My Earth, My Love*, 2003) and *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (*Nine Hills One Valley*, 2005) are equally acclaimed as masterpieces. Equipped with most outstanding performances in many international festivals in India and abroad, this Repertory has been able to earn the prestigious Fringe First Award, 1987 in Edinburgh International Theater Festival, Indo-Greek

Friendship Award, 1984 in Greece, Diploma of Cervantino International Theater Festival, 1990 in Mexico and so on. Thiyam himself has won numerous awards and acclamations for his artistic achievements, such as, Padmashree (1989), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1987), John D. Rockefeller 3rd Award (2007) (endowed by Asian Cultural Council, New York) and so on.

Ratan Thiyam’s plays pose signification as a demystification of truth. In Thiyam’s case, the audience-spectator dynamics opens up a new space of testimony. He debunks the authoritative voice of verification, proof or demonstration. He topples the kinds of knowledge that we label as knowledges of demarcation and certitude. He employs signs on the stage as a sensibility to shake the assured distinctions of any ontology of the “real”; of presence and absence; and of life and death.

Technically, the concept of space—the ideologically loaded meanings produced by shape, décor, location, history, architecture and so on— is intrinsically connected to the politics of signification. Augusto Boal’s protest theatre, Peter brook’s “empty space,” Bertold Brecht’s dismantling of masking, Robert Lepage’s site-specific performances, and David Wiles’ idea of the “container” or supposedly “abstract” dedicated theatre spaces— enable us to highlight the importance of sightlines, acoustics, proximity, scale, furnishings, performance amenities etc. Similarly, Thiyam’s use of space gives birth to complicated networks of “models” or “maps”. Space here is a site of turbulence that encompasses scales of dimensions. It unleashes an array of contradictory messages. It composes relationships outside certain defined concepts and produces a grammar of signs beyond “fetishes, consciousness, essence, being, matter” (Serres: 137). This space draws on the vitality of deviations that elude taxonomies. Each space

alludes to a narrative, method, story or data in unconventional ways. We may take for example, the (visual) text of *Ashibagee Eshei* (2009) - performed by the Chorus Repertory Theatre in the Kalakshetra Museum, Guwahati, at 5.30 pm on 25th February, 2009. The performance text is designed and directed by Ratan Thiyam and the duration is of seventy minutes. Another example is: *Nine Hills, One Valley* (2005), which was staged in the annual international theatre festival organized by the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi (Jan-2-14), 2006. Thiyam's concept of space gives birth to a malleable responsibility to create, to invent, to produce some fluctuating tendencies. For example, in *Nine Hills, One Valley*, the woven reed mats that represent the nine hills surrounding Imphal (also the stage lighting) create a strong sense of geography; but at the same time, the mats signify the stubborn materiality of the Meitheis and a thrust of cultural narcissism. The mats also herald a will to risk loss or project a constraint of our interpretive "will to know." The fluctuation of colours produces a self-wounding laboratory for discovering, as Sarah Kofman puts it, a "storm of difficulties". In this context, as audience, we are forced to be wily in finding a path that does not exist. Also there is a threat to the romantic aspiration of giving voice to the voiceless in the invasive stretch of surveillance. Semantically, a steady rain of rolled-up newspapers flung on stage (*Nine Hills, One Valley*) herald the rhetorical positions of fragmented world-views. It is a litany of disaster and shows how there can be numerous approaches harboured by media to deal with fractured Manipuri lives dictated by violence and insurgency. The presence of the *Maichous*, the Seven Wise Men on the stage-space converges on the fluidity of the thought-processes of the worried mothers;

the elegant robes of the men and the brown poles signify the shattered dreams of the wailing sons of Manipur, a land stinking with degradation—the semi-dark lighting and fluctuating brightness intensify the dark emotions. Again, the while-clad dolls on the lap of the mothers conclude with the anxieties of death.

The Manipuri rendition: *Ashibagee Eshei* is based on Henrik Ibsen's last play *When We Dead Awaken* and it revolves round the non-reality of characters embedded in a symbolic and metaphysical dimension. The performance is designed to express the internal entanglement of four characters — Maja, Arnold Rubek, Irene and Ulfhejm (In Manipuri adaption Rubek becomes "Shaktam Lapka" or Sculptor; Irene becomes "Shaktam" on Image; Maja becomes "Shakhenbi" or Beautiful Woman and Ulfhejm becomes "Lamlanba" or Stranger). Story apart, the way these characters fit into the Manipuri adaptation poses a great challenge since culture, tradition and style of the Norwegians or the Europeans that form the background of the play are so different from that of the Manipuris. The semiotic model assumes the autonomy of different life worlds which are based on conversations amongst co-subjects and this pursuit of constituted meaning unfolds certain set-ups of formative and transformative human action and historically shifting values.

For Thiyam, very integral to the act of theatre signification is the representation of the performer's body on the stage. In the theatre space of *Ashibagee Eshei*, the long-lost dream woman of Shaktam- Lapka's past is stratified with the ethos of the bygone days and in a way, it pines for an identification with the non-Western 'other'. Her body is 'multi-sited'—her body articulates the power of expression that informs representation and invokes the problem of circumscribing a hybrid re-constructed

identity. Thiyam used innovative theatre techniques to represent Shaktam as the fallen woman as she is the other woman of a married man's fantasy. Hence, by roping in the words of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu we can say that her body in a space is well-equipped to inhabit and demonstrate its status, class position and 'cultivated disposition' through the range of activities that it exhibits in interacting with the world around it. As Bourdieu puts it, the "sense of honour" is inscribed in the "body schema" and in the patterns of thought and this in turn, "enables each agent to engender all the practices consistent with the logic of challenge and riposte" (1998: 15). Thus, within a configured theatre space, Shaktam's body not only represents the increasing diversity and changing cultural landscape of a Manipuri society but it also provokes a sense of "bodily insecurity" as manifested by her baggy, "amorphous" and Oriental outfits. Certain points of resistance totally reshape her body in new dynamics because at every moment the experiential self is lived differently culturally and historically. Through Shaktam's body (her pale white-painted face and flowing white hair), the protagonist Shaktam-Lapka, who was living at the margins of the "familiar", is transported to a distant or "exotic" space which gives her a possibility to flout rules, dictates, protocols and to counter certain disciplinary practices as elaborated by Foucault (1979). The body hence becomes a locus of embodied, but transformable experiences depending on contexts and conditions. This is in contrast to the inanimate but life-like puppets made by Shakhnbi, Shaktam-Lapka's wife. Shaktam is not successful in her urge to go back to the past or to step out of the culture entirely, nor is she able to find the resources to save her from the destructive tendencies of the society. Moreover,

there is a gigantic tomb of Shaktam-Lapka's dream-woman (*Ashibagee Eshei*). It can be said that in *Ashibagee Eshei*, the tomb is re-situated and re-made across cultures and contexts—here, the Ibsenian play (*When We Dead Awaken*) is told from an indigenous perspective.

The establishment of Heisnam Kanhailal's theatre group: Kalakshetra Manipur dates back to 1969. The Kalakshetra Manipur is not just a production company, it is also seriously engaged to the research theatre. For thirty five years, the group has been working to create a theatre-idiom based on physical rather than psychological language, driven by instinct and intuition, and exploring the specific powers of theatre in the context of native culture. With his wife and leading actress, Sabitri Debi, Kanhailal creates theories of theatre and life. Both performers are highly acclaimed in India and their creative partnership produced a number of plays including: *Tamnalai* (*Haunting Spirits*, 1972), *Kabui Keioiba* (*Half Man Half Tiger*, 1975), *Imphal '73* (1974), *Memoirs of Africa* (1975), *Pebet* (1975), *Rashomon* (1987), *Migi Sarang* (1991), *Karna* (1997), *Draupadi* (2000), *Nupi* (2002), *Dakghar* (2006). Kanhailal's projects include the "Nature-Lore"—a move away from the conditioning of the city towards a "home – return", exploring the rural landscape with an open heart. This is a way of his engagement with art to overcome the racial biases and attitudes that exist in Manipur.

The verbatim and documentary style performances exhibit the potential of cultural reification. However, quite interestingly, this process evokes an ethnodrama, a conversely loaded phenomenon in which a text/ multiple texts are created by readers/informants/actors/critics—this ethnographic semiotics renders the performance in a continual process of validation

and cuts across culturally specific signs, symbols, aesthetics, behaviours, and languages. The same is true for Heisnam Kanhailal's *Pebet* (1975) and *Draupadi* (2000), so much so that these plays transgressively blur boundaries of practices, methods, and techniques to advocate a "public voice" that has been emancipatory and educational. Inspired by Denzin's work on Triangle Theatre Company (Coventry, U.K), the idea of auto-ethnography can be converged with Kanhailal's critical reflections in performance-pieces like *Pebet* and *Draupadi*. Here he explores the personal responses (the loss of a child in *Pebet*, the marginalization of Manipuris in other nation-states etc.) through ethnographic narratives in production. At times, scripts are made available to audiences prior to or at performances so that a Bakhtinian polyphonic interaction takes place as the spectators can participate and get engaged; can seek clarification or can revisit the issues represented in the performance.

The "public voice" of ethnodrama is intricately related to Bernstein's theories of giving the power of authorship back to those who are being taught and described; being put under surveillance; being regarded as "audience." Significantly, Kanhailal's performances and their inherent elements of ethnodrama return the ownership, and therefore, the act of representation to its informants/audience (the theatre academy or company backs out here) (Mienckakowski: 1996). The audience is given a chance to access a clearer public explanation and produce a cultural critique.

For Kanhailal, representation of the body on stage is an important act. In his thought-provoking essay: "In Ritual Theatre (Theatre of Transition)" (2004), Kanhailal says that the body being a site of multiple signs enchants him

as it can be regarded as a repository of "the biological evolution of organism-in-life." It is a crystallization of subsequent oppression and resistance and a locus of transition— "an intra-cultural exercise." The body can also be a significant element in the "Ritual of Suffering" as it "is imprisoned by the forces of increasing urban sophistication and the "speed" of the time." In the context of performance, the body is charged with the complexity of energy, biological, social, and creative. However, Kanhailal is an ardent follower of Eugenio Barba's "Body-in-life—the polyphony of tensions" in decoding the performer's physicality on the stage. Barba's act of roping in diverse aspects like Balinese dance, Indian Theatre (Kathakali), some techniques from Grotowski and Brecht helped him in challenging the compartmentalization of the actor in Western culture; and these multifarious engagements eventually gave birth to his International School of Theatre Anthropology in 1979 (in 1964 he began the Odin Teatret in Oslo). His key writings like *Beyond the Floating Islands* (1986), *The Paper Canoe— A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (1994) and *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (1991) evolved from texts to improvisations, attempting to create what Artaud sought: a theatre of physical gestures devoid of words. To a considerable extent, Barba's ideologies influenced Kanhailal's performances— Kanhailal appropriated Barba's concept of "pre-expressive behavior"; the amplification and dilation of the body, energetically and spatially; creation of an energized and "extended" performer; the use of extra-daily rather than daily techniques, pushing and enlarging the body's capabilities and balance beyond usage familiar to social situations; opposition as a guiding principle of movement,

as in a counterbalance or in moving downwards to prepare for a jump upwards; and ‘inconsistent consistency’, the internal logic of coded extra-daily modes of performances like Kabuki, mime, and Ballet. Barba’s absent presence can be traced in the performance-pieces like *Draupadi* and *Pebet* alike. Moreover, in “Ritual Theatre (Theatre of Transition)” (2004), he has himself acknowledged that he “swallowed up the text and absorbed it into our (performers) body instead of speaking out the lines through lip movement, facial and finger gestures” (2004: 550). He aims to shatter the whole network of illusion on the stage—as no one wants to be burdened with heavy light, set, costume and make-up. Kanhailal cleaned the stage where he begins to unfold the autonomy of theatre — the drama of biological evaluation accomplished by the bare body of the performer. The most controversial aspect of his play, Sabitri Debi’s nude scene in *Draupadi* which is cheaply labeled as a ploy to advocate sensationalism, is an act of exhibiting a necessarily “alert”, sensorial, and “informed” body that is extremely localized in a continuum of oppressive feelings. The nude body performs a community ritual here as the spectators are led into “the mythical world which infused into our body the unknown world of cosmic energy, and inspired us to enter the world of the collective unconscious” (2004:551). Again, in *Draupadi*, the naked female body on the stage (Sabitri Debi’s intense physical moves) aims to represent the reduction of women to mere commodities, especially the plight of the Manipuri women who become rape-victims in the hands of the Army. Moreover, the body’s strange language on the stage captures the transformational possibilities meant for the audience by entering the therapeutic realm. It modifies the purposes of entertainment as

aesthetic appeasement and provides a common interpretive framework to a group of audience (the Manipuris). It henceforth formulates some common parameters for a cohesively unified group in terms of relationships and interests. Like ethnographers, we can use his theatre language as a tool to elicit data. Also, the socio-linguistic behavior on the stage helps us to procure a slice of social relations, norms, roles, values, and mores. For Kanhailal, ethnography and performance share a common interest as both generate a space with a confluence of differences.

The plays by H. Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam disclose a mode of enquiry and they are the self-conscious critique of hegemony. They especially talk about the sense of exploitation of indigenous people, and find means to subvert foundations, universal criteria of truth, or knowledge generated through the medium of grand or metatheory, and the supremacy of historical processes. These plays indeed produce polyvalent sites that are evocative of multiple impressions and questions in the mind of the audiences. A few questions or speculations generally found to be raised in the mind of them, however, are about the critical realities of oppression and resistance in a predominantly non-verbal dramaturgy of rhythm, gestures, and moments, the varied articulations of a performer’s body vis-à-vis the dominant strategies of time and space, how may the West appreciate the cultural expressions that are the characteristics of Asian identity, the possibility of the body having been biologically trained to cope with the ecosystem and natural environment through various performance techniques— vocabulary, dance, martial art, yoga, mantra and understanding of myth.

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Family at the Cultural Crossroads

Hannie Rayson's *Mary*: glimpses of family dynamics in a migrant community

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The dynamics of family is one of the oldest themes known to the stage. In Australian theatre also plays concerning the family are frequent, and some of the greatest Australian dramatists are recognized for the plays that are centered on family life. Hannie Rayson, a Melbourne-based writer who is widely regarded as the most influential female playwright of the contemporary Australian Theatre, believes, "we're all connected in some way to family" (Marriner, Web. 2010). Her works express a profound concern for the role of family in the Australian society.

Family issues are interesting because everyone in some way or the other can relate to them. As Sam Shepard, an American dramatist puts it: "Everything can be traced back to the family: what doesn't have to do with family? There isn't anything, you know what I mean? Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other – everyone is born out of a mother and a father and you go on to be a father. It's an endless cycle" (Bigsby 21). Family issues are intensely personal yet powerfully universal. Hannie Rayson's plays *Mary* (1982), *Hotel Sorrento* (1990), *Scenes from a Separation* (1995), *Life After George* (2000), *Inheritance* (2003) and *Two Brothers* (2005) are dramas of individuals and social dramas at one and the same time. Her plays are motivated by the idea

that pressures from the exterior world enter the family realm and may even contribute to the disintegration of the Australian family unit. Her plays show how modernization has affected the family in the Australian society. According to Rayson family means different things to different people. It is difficult to talk about the typical Australian family, especially as society and families change. She accepts that families may span several generations, several households, and may change in response to events such as divorce, remarriage and children leaving the parental home. The dramatist believes caring, supporting, protecting and loving are what all families have in common.

In *Mary*, Hannie Rayson gives us glimpses of family dynamics in a migrant community. In Australia, migrants came from different countries around the world and hence from different political, economic and social environments. As a result Australia became a multicultural society. The term 'multiculturalism' is used in two ways. First, it acknowledges the everyday reality of the diversity of cultures within Australia and the second: it refers to official policies on migrant settlement and integration, which support cultural diversity and help different cultural groups to maintain distinct identities while living together within a single society. *Mary* is written in response to the question as to how to maintain

family ties in a different country and in a different cultural milieu.

Mary was first produced by the Theatre Works Eastern Suburbs Community Theatre Company at Melbourne in December 1982 (directed by Susie Fraser). Prior to this, Mary toured to secondary schools in the Melbourne metropolitan area. A product of community theatre, it is a play that has been composed by working closely with members of the community over a twelve month period. The play received a “Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Trust award in 1980” (Jevons 24).

The play’s tours to Australian schools in 1981 served a dual purpose. It was an opportunity for the students (Several students in the group came from migrant backgrounds) (i) to work with professional theatre workers and (ii) to familiarize themselves with the theatre workers with the milieu of adolescence with all their the concerns, hopes, values, and attitudes towards school, family, life, sexuality, work opportunities, social life, etc. From this experience emerged the idea that rather than focusing solely on the experiences of a Greek girl within her own family setting, it would be interesting to juxtapose a Greek family with an Australian one. For the basic structure of the play, Rayson spent two months meeting and interviewing many Greek women, collecting hours of tape recordings related to their personal experiences of being Greek and growing up and living in Melbourne. This was followed by weekly meetings with a group of young people. The result is a play based on the personal stories and anecdotes of over fifty different women of all ages.

Mary is set in Doncaster: an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne. The set represents two modern homes in a newly developed residential area, separated by a garden fence. On

the one side of the fence lives an Australian divorcee and her adolescent daughter. On the other side lives a Greek family. As Leonard Radic observes, “The fence between them is a potent dramatic symbol. For while the Greeks have done well for themselves – well enough to make the jump from Richmond to Doncaster – they have yet to win acceptance from their Australian neighbours” (14). The play juxtaposes a Greek-Australian family with an Anglo-Australian one. There are five female characters in the play. Mary Stephanides is a teenager of sixteen years. Evdokea Stephanides is her mother and Menny is the grandmother. Mary’s family came from Greece but now the family has made its own house in Doncaster. In the Anglo-Australian family there is Gail Selwyn, who is a teenager of sixteen who is Mary’s friend and classmate. Carole Selwyn is Gail’s mother. Mary’s family has just moved from Richmond, an inner suburb of Melbourne to Doncaster.

Mary has just changed her school from Richmond, where she had many Greek friends, to Doncaster where she is the only Greek in the class. Mary’s friend Gail teaches her Australian ideas and Mary revolts against her mother’s Greek conservative ideas of motherhood. Now she wants freedom. She would like to go to party with her friends and wishes to take her own decisions. All these things are unacceptable to her mother, Evdokea and she tries to restrain her daughter from adopting Australian culture. This leads to tension between the mother and the daughter.

There are many differences between the society, culture and life style of the Australians and that of the Greek society. The play juxtaposes the Greek-Australian family with an Anglo-Australian one “not to make qualitative comparisons, but to highlight points of similarity

and difference” (Foreword). The play presents a contrast between the Greek and the Australian family units. A Greek family is a joint family. All the members live together under one roof. Parents, children, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren are all tied by kinship bonds and are accommodated under the same roof. Evdokea, in the play thinks about her four sisters and their children, who live in Greece. She tells the audience, “My sister, she could not believe when she see the picture of this house. She writes to me and say ‘Evdokea, you must be so rich to have such a house’. Is no good to be so long away from your family. I like them all to be here with me” (5). Gail though an Anglo-Australian, likes this idea of a joint family and longs for it, as she says, “Sometimes I think it’d be good to have a really big family. Lot of brothers and sisters” (27).

Mary’s grandmother Menny lives happily with her son and daughter-in-law. Greeks love to keep their elders with them. Generally Greek families care for aged parents. On the other side, Australian society is highly individualistic. Old people are generally put in the old people’s home. Hence one can understand Gail’s reaction when she learns that her grandmother is coming to stay with them for a few days. She feels sick.

CAROLE. Your Grandmother. She’s thinking of coming down next month for a few days with Auntie Lorna.

GAIL. Aw, Shit.

CAROLE. She has to see the eye specialist. Her eyes are going now, apparently. Poor old lady.

GAIL. Has Auntie Lorna put her in the Old People’s Home yet?

CAROLE. Well, she’s on the waiting list, but Lorna says she won’t go. She refuses. It’s a terrible business. I feel very sorry for them really.

GAIL. Stupid old stick. (32)

The Greek is a highly community based culture, where the extended family plays a major role in an individual’s life, a more community-oriented way of living exists, and there are strong family networks. Evdokea is a typical representative of Greek culture, and she considers Greek culture and values much superior than “Silly Australian ideas” (32).

By contrast, the Australian life gives lot of freedom to the individuals (to be what one wants). Gail takes her own decisions even though she is a teenager. Her sister lives with her boyfriend. For her mother, “It’s her life. Whenever she’ll feel comfortable she will marry. It’s her own decision” (12). Later on Gail’s mother Carole narrates to Ted, a man with whom she is engaged, “The only thing is I’m just a bit worried about Gail, my daughter. Yes. She’s sixteen. No, it’ll be ok. She can stay at a friend’s place” (12). Privacy is of utmost importance in Australian society. One can dress the way one wants, travels anywhere, be passionate about things one appreciates. As a social being individuals are less dependent on others in daily lives (While in Greek culture, an individual’s choices may be influenced by friends, family and society).

Another dissimilarity that is evident between these two cultures is the attitude towards divorce. In Australian society there is easy acceptance of divorce, while in Greek society divorce is considered a stigma because the Greeks give more importance to keeping the family together. When Gail tells Evdokea that her parents are divorced and her sister lives in Fitzroy with her boyfriend and her mother approves it, Evdokea is surprised, “What you mean your mother has no say with the boy friend?” (26). Evdokea is not comfortable with this position of a mother allowing her daughter

to stay with her boy friend. She thinks that Gail's sister is living in sin. For Evdokea a bad girl is one "who doesn't respect her mother, smokes cigarettes and uses bad language" (Hutton 8) and for her these are the qualities of a typical Australian girl. Gail tells her mother, "No, I don't think Mrs. Stephanides approves of us very much... you being divorced, and Merryl 'living in sin' with Marc in Fitzroy. She reckons, "What's your mother think about the boyfriend. She no like this, ah?" (26). Gail's mother Carole is a divorcee and now she is engaged to a man, called Ted McMohan. She goes out with him on Saturday nights. Carole shares all these things with her teenage daughter, "I'm going out to dinner with him Gail. What's wrong with that?" (15).

Essentially, Mary too is a family play. It throws light on the relationship between mothers and daughters and their quest for identity. It shows that after sixteen how daughters want to define themselves as a person other than their mother's daughters. It also assesses the role of a good mother and her obligations towards her daughter.

As the play opens, Menny: Mary's grandmother, is struggling to learn English. Evdokea, Mary's mother also has difficulty in speaking English. As it is a migrant family they are more fluent in their mother tongue, i.e. Greek. In fact the main problem the migrants face in Australia is their lack of proficiency in English. Even if migrants speak English, their accent or lack of fluency hampers their employment opportunities. Evdokea faces humiliation in the play due to her bad English. As in an interview Rayson herself tells, "When I was writing Mary I'd be with these grandmothers who did not speak English, I'd have a feeling for these women" (Varney 153).

The Greeks' migration to Australia started with the first fleet in 1786. After World War II the civil war took its toll on the Greek economy and the government encouraged emigration as a way of solving problems of poverty and unemployment. Between 1947 and 1982 many Greek families migrated to Australia and in the play Mary's family was one of them. For many years, Melbourne was said to be the fifth-largest Greek-populated city in the world, and today it is the largest Greek-populated city outside Greece. Many of the Greeks who came to Australia are associated with the emergence of a café culture. Milk bars, cafes and fish and chip shops enabled generations of migrants from Greece to establish themselves in cities and towns all over Australia.

Life was not easy for the new arrivals. Women had to work also in order to keep the family afloat financially. In the play Mary's mother works in a restaurant and her father works in a factory during day and drives taxi at night. Like other Australians, migrants need a level of emotional stability and at the same time, the maintenance of their own culture is equally important as it provides a sense of belonging and identity.

Mary explicates the relationship between mothers and daughters. The mother-daughter relationship is one of the most long-lasting and emotionally intense social ties. Although often positive and supportive, this tie also includes feelings of irritation, tension and ambivalence. Evdokea is more emotionally invested in this relationship than her teenage daughter Mary. At Richmond, Mary was among Greek friends, but in her new school she has no Greeks in her class. Her Anglo-Australian friend Gail teaches her some Australian values which are different from Greek culture. Initially Mary misses

Richmond and her Greek friends. In a letter written to her friend Roula, she recalls her old house and her life she has just left behind:

That's something that bothers me about this house. It doesn't seem to have any memories. No Greek has ever lived here, I can tell. The walls seems shocked to hear our Greek music this afternoon. And when I went to the milkbar – I had to walk nearly a mile – I didn't see one Greek face ... Remember how we used to play 'Spot the Aussie'? Mum is worried that we might lose ourselves here. Of course, I reassured her, yet inside me I understood her fear. She is frightened that Stavros and I will forget our Greekness. It's silly of her, I know; how could one 'forget' such a thing. (6)

In the new school, since the rest of the students are all Australians in her class, she starts avoiding morning assembly in the school and spends more time in school toilet. Slowly she starts telling lies to her mother. Once Mary and Gail go to town for shopping after school and Mary does this without taking her mother's permission. When Evdokea gets worried and inquires, Mary replies, "she had a late class" (20). In Greek families after the school hours Greek children are expected to partake in family activities.

Although, Mary's mother Evdokea says that they have moved for the sake of the children, yet, she cannot help but to fear that it might not be a good thing for Mary and Stavros. Evdokea came to Australia with an arranged marriage, and has worked hard with her husband to give the family all the things they wouldn't have had in a Greek village. She is frightened that teenager Mary, who is just starting to find her own way will grow away from her, and lose her Greekness. She needs Mary to promise that she will stay close to family. Being a good mother,

Evdokea worries about her daughter's habits, life style, how she spends her time and money and other health-related concerns. Every now and then she tries to teach her right from wrong. She expects Mary to make a career and gain financial independence. When Mary and Evdokea return home after Sophia's party they have a talk about Nicholette, a girl in the party, over smoking a cigarette.

EVDOKEA. Did you notice Nicholette smoking the cigarette?

MARY. Sure.

EVDOKEA. Her poor mother. She was so ashamed. Ever since Nicholette been to the university, she doesn't respect her mother. She's turned against the family.

MARY. Mum just because she had a cigarette.

EVDOKEA. She wear Jeans, she use bad language, she go out at night with the boyfriend, she smoke cigarette. A good girl doesn't do these things.

MARY. She's only trying to live her own life.

EVDOKEA. Live her life and bring shame to everyone else. Con say she always criticizing the Greeks, that girl.

MARY. You will never understand, will you?

EVDOKEA. I understand all right. I understand that you work all your life so your kids can go to school and have the books and the toys and the nice clothes and plenty of food to eat. They go to school and to the university and they get silly Australian ideas. They think they know everything. Just because they read the books. They think their parents are stupid. But you don't learn about life from reading the books, Mary. That's where you're wrong. That's where you're wrong. You learn with age. Always respect age. Mary. (32)

Evdokea is always nice and polite to her daughter. She takes a promise from Mary not

to change herself as 'another' due to influences drawn from the Australian society. True to the cultural mores of the Greek society, she does not allow her daughter to grow up on her own and to take her own decisions. On the contrary, Mary fails to understand her mother's emotional map. She wants freedom. She feels the need to spend more time with her friends. Gail asks Mary to go for a party on Saturday night at her friend's house. Evdokea doesn't allow Mary to go to the party and Mary starts resenting that she's the only one not being allowed to go for a party at night.

Both Mary and Gail wrestle with their responsibility towards their mothers and their desire for independence. They want to live life other than their mothers' daughters. Mary does not attend the party and becomes more rebellious. Gail advises her, "You've got to stand up to her [Evdokea] more. You let her push you around. She treats you like you're ten years old. No offence or anything but she does and you let her" (34). Mary likes Gail's suggestion and starts answering back to her mother. When Evdokea asks Mary to join uncle Con's party, she straightaway rejects. Gail instigates her to remain firm on her decision. Mary replies to her mother "I can't. I can't do it" (35).

At the end of the play Mary wants to attend a concert at her school one night, but, her mother does not allow her. Mary openly revolts against her mother,

MARY. You won't let me do anything. It's not fair. Everyone else is allowed to go except me.

EVDOKEA. I don't care about everyone else, Mary.

MARY. Well how come other kids' parents let them go out at night? I'm sixteen, Mum. I'm not a baby.

EVDOKEA. You still my baby. (38-39)

Evdokea thinks Greek culture is the best culture. She does not want Mary to go out for the concert because she thinks that there will be

no Greeks. Moreover Evdokea does not approve of Mary's friendship with Gail as she believes that Australian culture would have a bad influence on her daughter. She is unable to understand the rebellious behavior of her daughter. She feels helpless.

Mary was a different girl at Richmond when she was among her Greek friends. When she changes her school in Doncaster she finds no Greek friend and under the influence of Australian culture she starts finding the shortcomings of her own culture. She feels suffocated as she is not allowed to out on her own. When she goes out, it must be with her family or with Greek friends. Her Australian friends, and their values, are suspected by Evdokea:

MARY. You see. You'll never change. You make life impossible for me.

EVDOKEA. A good girl doesn't talk to her mother like this.

MARY. I don't want to be a good girl.

EVDOKEA. Well, go, then go!

MARY. I am going.

EVDOKEA. Go. But forget you have a family. And don't come back to this house.

MARY. You make me hate Greek.

[She storms out]. (39)

Mary experiences psychological ambivalence. She experiences simultaneous feelings of love and irritation about her mother. At the end of the play Mary writes an essay on "The changing role of women from the village to the factory and how it has affected one family – my own' My mother, no... Evdokea Vardaki..." (40). In the essay Mary acknowledges her mother's sacrifices and accepts that her mother's life has been guided by Greek values and traditions. She considers her life different from her mother's. "And I

understand why she cannot see it any other way. Yet, because my life has been so different..." (41).

One of the advantages of exploring another culture is that it invariably provides clearer insights into one's own. For this reason Rayson has juxtaposed a Greek family with an (Anglo) Australian one. Her intention in no way was to make a qualitative comparison, i.e. one is better than the other, but to highlight points of similarities and differences of lifestyle, attitude and values.

The Greek mother, doing what is expected of her according to the time – honored traditions of her birth place, is drawn with sympathy and understanding. But so too is her daughter, trapped uneasily in a no-man's (or no woman's) land between her mother's unbending discipline and her Australian friend's more relaxed way of life. The title of the play is rightly chosen. It is Mary, the Greek teenaged school girl, who is the central figure, too old to accept her mother's hard line Greek disciplines which alienate her from her friends, too young to defy her parents and choose her own path. Her one explosion of frustration comes in a brief outburst to her mother: "You make me hate Greeks" (39). The mother's dilemma is also presented beautifully towards the end of the play when Evdokea says to Mary:

There are times when I look at you, little girl of mine.
When you seem like a stranger to me
Who have you become, little girl of mine
Someone so different to me. (41)

As a family play, Mary focuses on the mother-daughter relationship. Due to her mother, Mary is always in a state of doldrums about what she should do: to do as her mind directs her, or, adhering to the practices that her

mother approves of. As she grows up, she wants to be her own person by coming out of the shadow of her mother. The relationship becomes even more fraught with ambivalence when cultural conflict among the migrant communities also adds to the tension. The play with an open ending is, above and all, about the quest for identity. It is the quest of a mother to prove she is a good mother. It is a quest of a daughter also to define herself as a person other than her mother's daughter. The play throws light on the relationship between a mother and a daughter. The play does not take sides with any one of them; that, in a way, is one of its strengths.

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To a World Where Borders Wane
THE POETIC EXUBERANCE AND BASHABI FRASER'S
THE HOMING BIRD

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Abstract:

Through an expression of her/his own worldview and ideology, the poet is able to voice the 'universal, human experience' (Parthasarathy 11) interrogating the hypothesis of 'marginality' 'to discover or posit a literary cultural tradition to which the Indian English poetry could be said to belong' (Paniker 12, 13). The English language is 'a potent vehicle of progressive thought and passion' for writers to voice their creative aspirations (Bose 515) through a creative homogeneity involving a cultural comprehension between the East and the West towards a ubiquitous magnitude by exploring the secrets of existence and discovering "the principle of unity in nature not through the help of meditation or abstract logic, but by boldly crossing barriers of diversity and peeping behind the screen" ("The Meeting" 379). Rabindranath Tagore had emphasized that the true and perfect relationship in life and society is based on love which facilitates 'freedom through cultivating a mutual sympathy' as the principle 'to solve the problem of mutual relationship' and 'liberate ourselves from the fetters of self and from all those passions that tend to be exclusive' ("Freedom" 628). This essay reads Bashabi Fraser's *The Homing Bird* as 'a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which [Fraser's] generosity of conduct is expressed' ("Creative Unity" 495). This essay explores Fraser's 'dynamic character of the living truth'

which provided her the 'enormous strength' (Nehru xiii) through the canvas of her fourteen poems to judiciously address the necessity of adhering to the integrating spirit of human unity, mutual-understanding, love and respect in this world, interrogating at once the divisive forces of society as "truth...has no dimension; it is One. Wherever our heart touches the One, in the small or the big, it finds the touch of the infinite" ("Creative Unity" 495).

KEYWORDS: *Memories, Partition, Togetherness, Humanism, Internationalism*

Our attitude is determined by our surroundings or temperament which facilitate the development of an association through the cultivation of unity through understanding and association, if not by the use of conquest or power ('Creative Unity' 511). This exuberance inspires the poet to keep alight the lamp of the human mind as its part in the illumination of the world (*The Centre* 1). It is through this realm of freedom that the poet not only voices great human truths but also chronicles the verses of victory (*Angel* 20) as knowledge is freedom leading towards the creation of Art, 'for man's civilization is built upon his surplus' (*Personality* 8). This power 'confers unity and significance on all the joy and sorrow and circumstance of life' by threading into a single harmonious whole the various forms of the self through which an individual can experience the unity within the universe – the realisation of the 'Jibandebata'

(*Of Myself* 7) which enshrines that all Life and Being is a comprehensive whole and such a realisation of this basic unity ushers a state of ‘tatra ko mohah, kah sokah, ekatvam anupasyatah’ (Chatterji 20). For this realisation, Life and Society can reach to the highest realms of freedom if they actively endeavour ‘to solve the problem of mutual relationship’ (“Freedom” 628). Therefore the poet being the ‘world-worker’ is able to ‘transcend the limits of mortality’ (*The Religion* 55) towards an existence where all the people are coordinated by the ‘vision’ of the poet to be ‘receptive as well as creative’ towards an ‘inspiring atmosphere of creative activity’ (*The Centre* 2) through which ‘a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which [the poet’s] generosity of conduct is expressed’ (“Creative Unity” 495). Through an expression of her/his own worldview and ideology, the poet is able to voice ‘universal, human experience’ (Parthasarathy 11) interrogating the hypothesis of ‘marginality’ (Paniker 12) which has often been used to describe Indian poetry written in the English language as

English is no longer the language of colonial rulers; it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, attending to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling (King 3).

Therefore through their Indian poetry written in the English language the poets aim ‘to discover or posit a literary cultural tradition to which the Indian English poetry could be said to belong’ (Paniker 13). Macaulay’s *Minute On Education* (1835) aimed towards creating ‘good English scholars’ out of the natives, the English language proved to be ‘one of the most enduring legacies of colonialism’ enhancing its glow over the course of a long tutelage and political

independence actually refurbished linguistic dependence [revealing] the language of foreign mastery as the only real *lingua franca* amidst a babble of communal and regional isms (Patke 244, 245).

But employing this *lingua franca* the Indian English diasporic poets have successfully established the ‘Indian experience irrespective of the language in which they write’ – achieving Indianness (Paniker 15) for creative expression both at the home and the world - ‘capable of expressing the totality of Indian experience’ (Paranjape 6). The English language was not ‘a medium of merely utilitarian communication’ but ‘a potent vehicle of progressive thought and passion’ for writers to voice their creative aspirations (Bose 515) through a creative homogeneity involving a cultural comprehension between the East and the West towards a ubiquitous magnitude by exploring the secrets of existence and discovering the principle of unity in nature not through the help of meditation or abstract logic, but by boldly crossing barriers of diversity and peeping behind the screen (“The Meeting” 379).

As a result the English language cannot be dismissed as an alien language because the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own. He will not be content to get to know Rabelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe; he will bind them to his intelligence as close as possible (Fanon 176)

rather ‘the creative choice of language must be respected and one should judge by results rather than by dismal prophecies of what the results must fail to be’ (Rajan 93). Writing is an activism for a writer; it is the only possible way by which she/he can express her/his political standpoint, ideology, worldview, dreams and visions; leading towards a harmonious fusion of ideas

(“Surviving In My World”) in ‘a thinking, understanding world of creative participation’ (*Letters* 66). Through their creative writing the poets continue the art of discovering the mystical humanity. As communication of life can only be possible through a living agency therefore writers through their art of writing communicate and nurture the growth, development and progress of a culture which grows, moves and multiplies in life (*The Centre* 21) as *yat kincha yadidam sarvam prana ejati nihsritam* (*The Religion* 54). To ensure an efficient communication of life through a cultural evolution within ‘a social environment that blended the traditional with the modern, the Eastern with the Western’ (“Rabindranath Tagore’s” 26), women writers being enthralled by their ‘inspirational eleventh muse’ (*Lakshmi* 49) successfully continue the tradition of *écriture féminine through a room and a voice of their own. Through their art of writing, they have been able to walk through the imposed barriers of barbed wires towards ‘a wider field of their talents’, breaking at once ‘the relative segregation of the women as a sex, relaxes the restrictions that otherwise narrow women’s functions’* (*Guha* 267) *by interrogating the ‘servile submission to custom and practice without regard to their tendency for good or evil’* (*Banerjea* 118) *towards a world characterized by disenthralment, egalitarianism and erudition where the woman writer cannot be contained, smothered, confined or silenced from gyrating the world with her perception embodied through her writings* (*Letters* 61). *Being indoctrinated in the principle of*

No, no, don’t be afraid, you are bound to win, this door will surely open –

I know the chains that bind you will break again and again (*Swades* 35)

Professor Bashabi Fraser’s poetry is the source of ‘light where the sun sets’, ‘an offering of love and devotion’ (*Letters* 93, 101). The technique of writing poetry comes with ‘creation’ which is the primacy of knowledge (Fraser, “Introduction” 24) and Fraser’s poetry authenticates her formidable creativity and apt awareness as a ‘progressive writer’ (Hasan xiii) of the Indian diaspora exploring the ‘cultural roots and commitment to the enduring earth’ and unravel the fathomless depths pertinent within the ‘micropolitics of everyday living in an urban environment’ (*Dilemma* np). Her poetry is characterized by the ‘immediate joy of [her] own soul’ and ‘is saved from all doubts and fears’ to state vividly the affairs of day as ‘the consciousness of the real seeks the corroboration with the touch of the real’ outside the poet (*The Religion* 21). Professor Bashabi Fraser’s poetry makes you feel at India as well as at Scotland as if home is where the heart is, Bashabi Fraser is most definitely at home in both her worlds, peopled as they are by loved ones – both Scottish and India (Chatterjee 10). Her poetry contributes towards the creation of a space of togetherness, unity, association and understanding.

Rabindranath Tagore emphasized that the true and perfect relationship in life and society is based on love which facilitates ‘freedom through cultivating a mutual sympathy’ as the liberating principle actively endeavours ‘to solve the problem of mutual relationship’ and ‘liberate ourselves from the fetters of self and from all those passions that tend to be exclusive’ (“Freedom” 628). Like music, Bashabi Fraser’s *The Homing Bird* is ‘a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which [Fraser’s] generosity of conduct is expressed’ (“Creative Unity” 495). In her collection, Fraser has explored ‘the dynamic

character of the living truth' which provided her the 'enormous strength' (Nehru xiii) through the canvas of her fourteen poems to judiciously address the necessity of adhering to the integrating spirit of human unity, mutual-understanding, love and respect in this world, interrogating at once the divisive forces of society as truth...has no dimension; it is One. Wherever our heart touches the One, in the small or the big, it finds the touch of the infinite ("Creative Unity" 495).

With a deep insight into Partition and its miseries through the experiences of her scholar parents, *The Homing Bird* addresses the abysmal issues of a history charred by violence, pain, loss, '(un)-belonging' ("The Crossing" 16), memory and nostalgia of a 'displaced multitude' (Ibid. 17) due to the senseless imposition of the 'lines of interpretation' (*The Homing* 20). Fraser, like the Female Muse of Creativity, has emphasized love, togetherness, fellow-feeling and cosmopolitanism interrogating the existence of 'shadow lines' (*Tartan* 51) which partition nations, communities, lives and common histories. The reader here can easily decipher that as a transnational writer Fraser has been successful in weaving the cultures of the East and the West towards a creative ideal authenticating her formidable creativity and apt awareness as a 'progressive writer' (Hasan xiii) who connects and associates cultures. As writing is an activism for a writer to express her/his political standpoint, ideology, worldview, dreams, visions and ideas through a harmonious fusion with imagination ("Surviving"), *The Homing Bird* not only decodes and interrogates the act of the 'one-man commission, cutting / a nation with a knife-edged pen / In the privacy of his room' (*The Homing* 6), but also reverberates with the resonant spirit of liberty, multiculturalism and togetherness; as poetry is the other tongue that

casts the languages of humanity (Fraser, Introduction 24) beyond barriers. In the introductory poem, "The Homing Bird" the poet is in dialogue with Kolkata and Edinburgh, 'Kolkata do you miss me?', 'But have you accepted me, Edinburgh?' (*The Homing* 5, 12). Through a graphic description of 'the second city of Empire' and the 'City of Literature' (Ibid. 9, 13), Fraser has euphonically conjured a poignant narrative between the two cultures, two histories. Through memories of the Raj, partition and her childhood in Part I of this poem she creates a nostalgic aura for the 'city of contrasting histories' (Ibid. 10), while in Part II she as one of 'post-midnight children' (Ibid. 11) with a global spirit embraced Edinburgh, the 'intimate city' (Ibid. 12) with an 'urban inspiration' (Ibid. 13) as an 'embodiment of strength' (Ibid.) for voicing her

thoughts in celebratory confetti

Over this city, to merge with its cloud canopy

And dissolve with its rare sunlight,

Suffusing my lines with the skyline of Edinburgh (Ibid. 14).

In 'Anchoring Aesthetics' the poet recreates personal 'reminiscences of a distant life' through the 'warm friendship' of the Bengali Cultural Association, to whom the poem is dedicated, who interconnected 'through the dancing rhythms of time' a nostalgic quintessence that anchored and replenished the poet in her life (Ibid. 15).

In the poems 'This Border' and 'Walled-In: Walled-Out' we observe the poet firmly interrogating the segregating spirit (Ibid. 18) ushered in due to the implementation of 'strange lines' (Ibid. 16) which construct 'one shared past with two histories' (Ibid.) and spaces to cocoon oneself against 'the territory of his enemy' (Ibid. 18). The anger against such an 'irrational

division' (*Bengal Partition* 4) metamorphoses into a prophetic sermon when the poet urges humanity to 'remove walls from minds / Discovering bonds in human kind' (*The Homing* 19) for a life of 'friendship and families' (Ibid. 16). The poet's spirit of debriefing continues in 'This Difference' and 'In my India'. In the former she nostalgically champions amicable memories of association over differences which are 'carefully architecture[d]' (Ibid. 20) among humanity 'enflaming friction' (Ibid.), competition, neglecting nature's integral continuity; in the latter she recollects sublime times of her parents in India when education sharpened reason to prosper with 'the Spirit of Rabindranath / In tune with Gandhiji's tolerance' (Ibid. 25, 26), but laments on the total loss of all values of federation. The poet's exegesis of such a loss and artfully demands 'Give me back *my* India!' (Ibid. 26). Between these poems there is 'India Calls' lauding the 'multi-ethnic vast nation/An unparalleled diversity' (Ibid. 22) where the old and the new exist together echoing the spirit of *vasudaibha kutumbakum* towards a progressive future through 'a land reform movement / About better distribution, / About social service, about destroying / Corruption by dreaming idealists' (Ibid. 26).

'Fog on Hill Cart Road' and 'Fog on M8' are sequel poems as 'Cricket – Eastern Style' and 'Cricket in Sussex'. In the former pair we explore an uncanny, chilling sensation through the imagery of the fog – on one hand it is 'slurping round / The shadowy bends / Its black humour' (Ibid. 27) while on the other hand it is a 'cold smoke- / Slithering tongues / From a demonic / Cauldron' (Ibid. 28). In the latter pair of poems we explore a graphic depiction of an Indian roadside cricket which are played by 'the batsmen / Of the future' (Ibid. 31) and watch with much awe and vigour, along with an

English cricket signifying the game and its intercontinental importance beyond the English boundaries. 'The Midnight Calls' attests to memory and association being timeless, psychological and it can never be curbed, disconnected by imaginary walls. This poignant poem emphasizes the truth that people residing in 'one half of the reeling globe' (Ibid. 30) far away from home remain connected to their roots, fearing the 'midnight and small hour calls' (Ibid.) bringing in the sad message of a near associate who has departed.

The concluding poem of the monograph 'Home' bears a note of internationalism above and beyond barriers along with personal overtones. Irrespective of one's far residing space, 'home' remains a space of warmth and nostalgic memories. Artistically decorated with vibrant images from the world of flora and fauna, this poem not only enthralls the heart of the readers, but also provides solace to a mind away from home, as was the effect of the nightingale's song upon Keats. While most of the poems in this collection embark on the ideas and associated painful, nostalgic memories of Partition and implementation of borders leading to the creation of the 'other' through the formation of separate nation states, the concluding section of this concluding poem emphasizes the necessity among human beings to encompass the spirit of togetherness, which has been epitomized through the poet's mother when she 'welcomes other guests thorough/Her open door' (Ibid. 33). The poet's mother like Mother Nature warmly embraces every child nurturing her/him without any discordance and division for a progressive future of humanity. Besides recollecting a personal memory of her mother's life to which the poet was an eye witness, the concluding sentence of the poem designates the poet's despondency on the spirit of togetherness ceasing

to exist amongst humanity after her mother's earthly departure.

The Homing Bird is a concurrent study of two cultures, nostalgia, memories for a long desired 'home'/'space' bereft of dissension. Employing simple words bearing powerful expressions Bashabi Fraser, the cosmopolitan poet, has created an aura guided by her vision, ardent conviction and foresight. The poet has successfully created a Dantesque odyssey for the reader to explore a solace after experiencing Partition, and in the concluding section by unraveling her mother's gesture similar to Christ the Redeemer of Rio de Janeiro. Her mother becomes the Female Messiah whose was a life of inspiration on the principles of unity and fellowship. Bashabi Fraser's *The Homing Bird* becomes the signifier of the pervading spirit of nostalgia, memories and an odyssey as poetry is the dawn-of-grace of man's first expression...full of pure mystery...still the beauty of the mystery is by no means of dawn alone; even at the dusk of life's completion the radiant hints of the pure mystery of eternal life announce its deeper beauty (*Of Myself* 19).

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(Dedication: I dedicate this essay to Dr Nizara Hazarika, Associate Professor of English, Sonapur College, Assam for her enthusiastic inspiration.)

Role of Places in Determining Obi Okonkwo's Character in *No Longer at Ease*

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Abstract: Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1963) is a demonstration of a modern Nigerian life. This novel deals with the colonial setting of Nigeria. Each of the places the protagonist of the novel: Obi Okonkwo lives in portrays different set of values and beliefs and therefore holds individual significances for him. After being selected by the Umuofia Progressive Union for higher studies on merit, Obi becomes alienated from his own society, community and culture. Achebe, through Obi Okonkwo, describes the pathetic situation of those who being born at the cross-roads of culture due to their inevitable exposure to the western civilization are unable to follow their own native values. Obi tries to negotiate between his living at Nigeria and his new way of thinking adopted from England but never succeeds. The primary aim of this paper is to examine Obi Okonkwo, the central figure in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, with reference to different places or locations as Obi's life keeps on shifting to a number of places. This novel involves three places (Umuofia, the village; Lagos, the city in Nigeria and England) which connect the life of Obi Okonkwo and frames his personae in accordance to the impacts and impressions they leave upon his mind.

Keywords: Place, character, Obi, Umuofia, Nigeria, Lagos, England .

Introduction:

Chinua Achebe is one of the most significant postcolonial authors. His second novel *No Longer at Ease* is set in the 1950s, on the early days of Nigerian independence. The novel starts with a trial of the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, who has returned from England after receiving English Education in a university for four years. Throughout the novel, Obi suffers because of his inability to combine his indigenous values and European attitude. He finds himself alienated and uprooted. The formation and transformation of his character is dependent to a great extent upon his experiences in Umuofia, the village, Lagos, the city in Nigeria and England.

Discussion:

Obi Okonkwo, the scion of Umuofia and a typically Nigerian young man is shaped by the Igbo culture of Umuofia. He, with the hard-earned money of the Umuofia people is sent to England for further studies with their expectations that he will bring honour and prosperity to their village. This, very first incident shows how the people of village Umuofia, construct the identity of a native around a place:

The first scholarship under this scheme was awarded to Obi Okonkwo... They wanted him to read law so that when he

returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours. But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new. (Ch-1, p.6)

Obi is born in the society of Umuofia, where the age-old values are no longer practiced as the people have adopted the western civilization. Christianity and western education have their immediate and strong influences upon the Igbo people who now come to disregard their own cultural values. The title of the novel itself describes the psychic dislocation caused by the western colonialism on Obi and also the confusion that is found in Nigeria due to these new developments. Obi, for instance, as a resident and an ordinary individual of Umuofia has to make his way through many difficulties, who gets to be nurtured by the western education in England. As all typical Nigerians, he too wishes to cleanse Nigeria of all its evils. But, the tragedy is that his country is no longer the “Nigeria of his dreams”. Being sent to England, Obi is shaped by the idealism of English literature soon after he shifts from Law to English.

Obi’s life undergoes a shift. The Colonialism to which Nigeria becomes a victim, changes Nigeria’s old identity on the grounds of religion, culture and language. Achebe highlights how the richness of the communities and their traditional moorings come to be interrupted by the influences from English education. Nigeria’s national self is thus affected by the British Colonialism and Achebe by highlighting upon this shift, makes an attack upon the British Colonialism while upholding the glory about the past of Nigeria. However, he does not blindly assert the Nigerian culture and also describes the faults of the Igbo community. Though, the Umuofians were severely influenced by the Eurocentric notions,

superstition and education went hand-in-hand. Obi is caught into a web for he does not want to be superstitious while the community forces him to abide by the traditions of the community. Thus, the novel subtly deals with the intricacies of one’s identity in a changing Nigeria.

When Obi moves from his homeland Nigeria to England he is displaced both geographically and mentally. The narrative thus grows upon the ideas of diaspora and also “Imaginary Homeland”. Significantly, Obi’s sense of belongingness to his native place gets stronger after he comes to England. Though he becomes very much English in his thoughts through the impacts from the English education, he nonetheless realizes how much his native people are different from the Europeans. Achebe also shows how peculiar the Blacks are for, upon external influences, they are prone to transformations even when living within Nigeria - as a result of which, there arises a fast gap in the attitudes between the old and the younger generations.

Obi’s life proceeds through identifiable shifts in different places as they give him different experiences and transforms his personality differently. Obi, in his early years, has never been in a town, later he experiences the city of Lagos and then finally goes to England. Eventually, he again comes to Lagos for a job. Life in England has made Obi a rational man. This in turn has made people’s earlier attitude towards him changed and Obi also now realizes what others expect from him. His exposure to the culture of England for four years have changed and reformed his perspectives about Lagos. He is now feeling more and more of a stranger in his own Nigeria. Ironically, though in England, Obi terribly misses his village, his family, his language and overall, the Nigerian culture- his education has shaped his

rationality in a different way. To him England is a much superior place than his native place. To others it may be some sort of an amnesia to think like that, but, Obi does not feel any prick of conscience out of it because this is how he has been moulded by the environs of England. However, he is not at all free from being homesick at England. He even writes a poem with traces of nostalgia on 'his' Nigeria during his first winter in England:

He sometimes found it difficult to believe that it was as short as that. It seemed... It was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him. That was the first thing England did for him. (Ch-2, p.10)

But the irony is: despite Obi's longing to come back to Nigeria and his earnest desire to contribute something to his country through his services and education remains unfulfilled and stagnant since his country is no more the "Nigeria of his dreams" and is changed. As a child, he dreamt of the sparkling lights of Lagos and always "associated Lagos with electric lights and motor-cars." (Ch-2, p.11), but, now the picture of Lagos and Umuofia is completely altered. The village, Umuofia also no longer admires the traditional ways of life and is not self-sustained. The present society in Lagos in all its aspects is conspicuous by the overbearing influences from the west.

In the beginning of the novel, Obi is presented as a character which has shunned much of its modesty at the cost of being corrupt. The impact of the varied experiences drawn from different places has brought about this transformation:

I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this that a sudden and a marked change occurred. (Ch-1, p.2)

In England, Obi has an idealized vision of Nigeria. But, as he returns, he is disillusioned by the harsh reality of the present of Lagos. Lagos is now under the clasp of corruption. Obi tries to maintain his integrity as a rational man amidst all this. Yet his effort for a reintegration into Nigeria is a failure since he is unable to have his way between the two competing terrains of culture. He finds it somewhat difficult to abide by the conflicting duties of both England and Nigeria. England gives him the rational mind, while Nigeria threatens him to push him into an abyss of corruption. Thus, Obi is shown to be trying to follow the dictates of his own mind in his actions but Nigeria deters all his ventures and finally determines his actions and inactions and strikes off his individuality.

England as a foreign land, did not have much of an impact on the way of the style of living of Obi. Only, the education in England has left a deep and a grave impact on him changing his trajectory of his thought-process. It is evident from the fact that, since he has returned from England, he does not dress up in a European suit or 'agbada' (as expected by everyone) and instead prefers wearing a shirtsleeves. Besides, Obi does not follow the standard English accent in his conversations in the language just to show himself as equal to an English gentleman. His English is unimpressive and is not up to the standards in comparison to the secretary of the Umuofia Progressive Union.

The people in Nigeria have too much imbibed the way of living and the language spoken by the westerners who try to acquire English education thinking it to be a means for material prosperity. But, Obi, in a way, understood, that the object of education is to enable man to widen their attitudes about life

and society. He is not drawn by the exterior facet of a life-style, which is characteristic of the English society:

He told him about the value of education. 'Education for service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries... we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly' (Ch-4, p.26)

The concept of English education has been a channel of gaining prosperity in Umuofia. It is an ideological policy adopted by the Europeans to facilitate their dominance over the Blacks. Thus, England, as a centre of Colonialism exploits Nigeria but ironically, Obi's experiences in England have enabled him to look upon the world with a new broad outlook. He returns to his native place with an earnestness to serve his country but soon he has to come to a headlong collision with the forces that have made the others to hanker after material prosperity. The episode centering his interview, when he returns to the city of Lagos, marks his honesty (he is even infuriated on the question of taking bribe by one of the interviewers).

Education has brought a definite evolution to the personae of Obi. He has developed firm conviction upon what he believes to be right. He has developed and acquired some new ideas and notions and also tries to render his duties for the welfare of the country with a pristine conviction upon his mission, but soon his initiative gets a jolt due to circumstances beyond his power of resistance and the story in turn leads towards a tone of despair and withdrawal. He acquires a position in the Civil Service. He is facilitated with car, money and respect. But, nonetheless he fails to survive in this profession due to his own scrupulous self. Though Obi is known as a man with a conspicuous anathema to corruption (he is also

against the practice of bride-price in Nigerian marriages), ironically at the end of the novel, he is blamed of being corrupt.

In the novel, Obi represents the entire young generation of Nigeria, affected by the aspects of Colonialism. Obi is going through a conflict between his birth in Nigeria and his stay in England. Obi is disgusted to find most of the people in Nigeria corrupt and involved in bribery. He feels that the country has headlong plunged into some sort of a moral degradation through these corrupt people. Since Obi has had been to England, he could very objectively understand the nuances of the lives of these two societies.

Obi, as a Civil Servant, is accused of corruption and of taking bribes- something, which he despised earlier. This transformation has been an inevitable product of the impact of the Colonialism. Obi finally becomes one of the many Nigerians who are the victims of unhealthy political system.

At the outset of the narrative, Lagos is found to be a city without a streak of darkness. When Obi leaves for England he continues to have in his mind a very bright picture of Lagos. But, when he returns from England after four years, he finds the place quite changed. Lagos, to him, is no longer conspicuous by the 'light', which he then identified the place with. Instead of light, it is darkness, which came to envelop the place. This darkness is the result of corruption and the altered mind-set of the people – a product of the impact of Colonialism.

'There is no darkness there',... 'because at night the electric shines like the sun, and people are always walking about, that is, those who want to walk. If you don't want to walk you only have to wave your hand and a pleasure car stops for you ...'

For many years afterwards, Lagos was always associated with electric lights and motor-cars in Obi's mind. (Ch-2, p.10, 11)

In Lagos, the common man is ignorant and the brilliant and talented people like Obi are supposed to surrender. Obi, very soon becomes familiar with the corrupt ways of the government of Nigeria through an incident involving a girl: Elsie Mark. The girl is unable to get an educational scholarship despite her good grade. So, she visits Obi with the intention of influencing him by putting at stake her own chastity; Obi only denies it:

She will remember that there was one man at least who did not take advantage of his position. (Ch-12, p.97)

Obi defines bribery as “The use of improper influence.” Ironically though, later, he himself comes under this “improper influence” due to various reasons. Obi's decision of marrying an outcast girl, an ‘osu’ also creates great issues in his family, among the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union and in the mind of his friends. His mother threatens to commit suicide should he marries the girl. To the dismay of the readers, Obi, who wants to bring some change to Nigeria becomes himself unable to change the mindset of his family members! Personal grief, financial-crisis and the incidents of bribery –all these come to conspire against his own faith and moral dignity.

Obi's relationship with his friends, Joseph and Christopher is also another significant subtheme of the narrative. Joseph and Christopher are superstitious though they are well educated. They are unable to be rational vis-à-vis the belief system of the Igbo culture, while Obi shows rationality in all his ideas. Obi, even argues with the President of Umuofia Progressive Union, when he advises Obi not to

marry an ‘osu’. Besides, in the later part of the novel, Obi is found to be unable to maintain the desired standards of the city life as he is left with a minimal amount of salary after paying off his debts and sending money to his family. Lack of financial support traumatizes Obi. Obi suffers from a sense of guilt when he gets to know about his mother's death and also when Clara breaks-off her engagement with him and leaves him. He also feels guilty of having to remain indebted to Clara for the fifty pounds she has given to him. He also draws flaks from the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union for not attending his mother's funeral. Though his mother's death has been painful to him, he can overcome his grief very soon and this getting normal even days after his mother's death fills him with great shame:

Shame and guilt filled his heart. Yesterday his mother had been put into the ground and covered with red earth and he could not keep as one night's vigil for her. (Ch-18, p.128)

Obi, in the city of Lagos undergoes a trial under the forces of corruption. On the face of a number of bribes, he finds himself in a dilemma about whether he should accept them or not. Finally, in order to relieve himself from the burden of debt and financial-crisis, he decides to accept all those and this in course of time turns out to be a habit for him. The decline of his character in this respect is so complete that he now even does not recoil to accept a bribe even from the one, who as a candidate deserves to get a scholarship:

He was already on the short-list, 'why don't you pay for him? You have money. The scholarship is for poor people. (Ch-19, p.134)

Obi, thereafter, perennially suffers from a sense of guilt. He knows that whatever he is doing is not acceptable to his conscience.

He wants to serve his country but is now engaged in bribery. The expectations of the Umuofians from him are now destroyed. At the end of the novel, he decides to give up the habit of bribe-taking, but, to his sheer bad luck, he is caught red-handed:

He thrust the money into his pocket... Two people entered ... a complete stranger. (Ch-19, p.135)

Conclusion:

The character of a place has a profound impact on the deeds of the person living in it. In *No Longer at Ease*, the places play effective roles in shaping the character of Obi Okonkwo. This is how a dignified man gradually undergoes a break-down in his character. Corruption in his own country (Nigeria) seems to be more powerful than the education he gets in England. Education makes Obi rational (a self which is shaped mostly by the idealism of English Literature), but, he nonetheless imbibes the corrupt ingenuities of the denizens of Lagos. Obi's weakness is his ineptness in dealing with

his moral problems. As a consequence, he comes face to face with his fate. Obi's fall epitomizes the essential behind the failure of the educated youth of Nigeria and thus the novel is able to arouse a serious reflection in the minds of the readers about the future of the nation.

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Contextualizing Orality in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

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Abstract:

Nigerian postcolonial author Chinua Achebe deals with the issue of cultural 'othering' of Africa under British colonialism in his second novel *No Longer at Ease*. Achebe, in this novel, brings into focus how the cultural identity of the native African people was threatened by English hegemony. No doubt, being a postcolonial writer, Achebe does criticize and strongly disapproves the 'crimes' of colonial times; but Achebe holds a different stance. He emphasizes more on the glorification of humanity in diversity rather than pondering over the pros and cons of colonial rule. Achebe brings the African cultural practices into forefront in his novels and thereby reclaims a 'proper' African identity. In *No longer at Ease*, Achebe sprinkles folktales and weaves proverbs throughout the narrative and exhibits the rich oral culture of Africa. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate Achebe's presentation of the plight of the native people, their culture in a British colonized Nigeria and how Achebe reclaims an 'African identity' by bringing native cultural practices like African oral culture to the fore.

Keywords: Other, West, Africa, culture, Igbo, Nigeria, proverb, folktale etc.

Introduction:

The concept of the 'Other' has its root in German philosopher Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel's discussion of the Master-Slave dialect in his

Phenomenology of Spirit (1803). Edward Said aptly applies this theory and scrutinizes the tactful mechanism and ideology behind European Imperialism within the pages of *Orientalism*(1978). Othering Mechanism is based primarily on bias, stereotype and prejudice and can be defined as the action or attitude of perceiving the other as inferior and different. Said detects that the dominant group of colonizers shape the 'centre' and pushes the colonized onto the 'periphery'. Creating the binary the colonizers devalue the colonized culture and impose their 'superior' ideology and culture in order to harness the "Other" psychologically and culturally.

The pre-colonial African people used to live in small autonomous groups. They were separated from one another by the diversity of language and culture. But the European Imperialistic intervention compelled them to break away from their communities and form/accept national demarcations as directed by the colonizers. Imposition of British ideology, religion, politics and economy upon the African natives posited threat to the pre colonial African culture. In a way the colonizers generated an existential crisis and 'created' onto this earth a new race of African people.

In Colonial narratives too, Africans are often (mis)represented. It leads to consolidation of a negative image of the African: "a savage bereft of rationality and morality, fit only for

subjugation and charitable aid” (Ochiagha, 2012:99). This (mis)representation of African identity as lack or absence of value and worth corresponds to an important characteristic of the othering process, which demonstrates that “defining the other is the project of colonizing praxis”(MacQuarrie,2010:636). Achebe comments that Africa has been presented as a zoo (Achebe, 2011:62), a derogatory and even dehumanizing representation presented by many, be they writers or ordinary people. Achebe identifies the emergence of the colonial genre “ (...)beginning with Rudyard Kipling in the 1880s, proceeding through Joseph Conrad to its apogee in E.M. Forster and ending with Joyce, Cary and Graham Greene”(Achebe,2011:63). Achebe observes that there is a whole list of what the Africans were said “not to have or not to be” (Achebe,2011:114): “they did not have soul, history, reason and awareness of themselves, religion, culture, not even human speech, being merely capable of making sounds and babbling, no intelligence and no accountability”(Achebe, 2011:114) . The African writers in English also faces intriguing remarks from western authors and critics. As Achebe mentions in his essay “Colonialist Criticism”, even critics like Honor Tracy, “who is perhaps not so much a critic as literary journalist” dares to criticize Achebe for celebrating “Africa’s inglorious past to which Europe brings the blessing of civilization.” (Achebe, 1995:57). She, in a way, finds it ingratitude on Achebe’s part to write skeptical novels like *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Whatever might be the criticisms, it is universally acclaimed that Achebe’s works set the beginning of ‘nationalist’ African literature. No doubt, as a postcolonial writer Achebe speaks to a Metropolis, which is responsible for reshaping the African identity as ‘other’. He

criticizes colonial rule as “a gross crime for anyone to impose himself on other, to seize his land and history” (Achebe, 2011:07). But he takes a different stance and pays heed to the celebration of his African ancestry in his novels. He prefers the importance of shaping the present and future for the Nigerian people to lingering the past. He wants to pave the way for the proper restoration of its individuality in the world.

Discussion:

‘Othering’ of Africa in *No Longer at Ease* : *No Longer at Ease* dramatizes the cultural ‘othering’ of Africa under British colonization. Throughout the novel, Achebe shows the deep and drastic changes in Nigeria and how these changes warped social relations in the country. Society, under the colonial rule, is no longer something created and maintained by the native Africans, rather, it is an imitation of the society of the colonial power. As it is not traditional, it lies somewhere in-between. The native people were treated like second class citizen and their cultural identity has been threatened.

In this novel, the character of Mr. Green is a typical colonizer. He negatively stereotyped Africans by saying that: “The African is corrupt through and through”(Achebe,1987:03). Mr. Green takes his civilizing mission seriously and believes that they have brought light to the African people. He identifies Africa with a state of subordination and inferiority in relation to the West. He believes only in “the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy.” (Achebe,1987:96) In his view, the British mission is still incomplete and he could not accept Nigeria’s chance of achieving liberation, independence and growth.

The protagonist, Obi Okonkwo represents a lot of young men in Nigeria. He is born into a society where the traditional values are no longer in practice. He finds himself at the crossroads of

culture. Through his character, Achebe evokes the alienation and frustration among those Nigerians who are Western educated and urbanized, yet, not really allowed or able to participate in the actual decision making process in any meaningful way. At the same time mention can be made of the old corrupt Nigerian officers who do nothing for the native people despite having the opportunity to serve the country. Although, Obi desires for a corruption-free Nigeria and denies every opportunity of taking bribe; yet, finally, he understands that he must come to terms with the present reality and its change from the past. The acceptance of the new order of things awakens in him a “feeling like a brand new snake just emerged from his slough” (Achebe,1987:150) and which makes him a cultural hybrid. His name is suggestive of the restoration of harmony after starting to accept the new reality, his full name, Obiajulu, meaning that “the mind at last is at rest.”(Achebe1987:06)

Obi’s father, Isaac Okonkwo, represents the people who follow the colonial ideology showing disgust to the native culture. He is a converted Christian and considers the traditional Igbo practices as ‘heathens’. In this novel, people’s crave for Western education as the only way to upgrade their condition, knocks at the successful imposition of the Colonizing ideology upon natives. Even Umuofia Progressive Union which works for native culture represents this hybrid identity where the members accept the Colonizer’s ideology by offering scholarship to Obi in order to get Western education for the development of society.

-In this way , *No Longer at Ease* draws a very lively picture of the deteriorating native culture under the influence of colonial practice in Nigeria.

Celebration of African oral tradition in *No Longer at Ease*: It is mentioned earlier that Achebe emphasized more on the celebration of native culture in his writings. *No Longer at Ease* is a perfect example of this. This novel takes recourse to oral tradition, which is the basis of African culture during the pre-colonial era. Achebe uses proverbs to communicate the African oral tradition within the frame of the Western novel. On his use of proverbs Achebe says, “ When I use these forms in my novel, they both serve a utilitarian purpose which is to reenact the life of the people that I am describing and also delight from elegance and aptness of imagery. This is what the proverbs are supposed to do.”(Ogbaa, 1997 : 67).

The characters in the novel, *No Longer at Ease*, use proverbs which are like the guiding force of their lives. The members in the Umuofia Progressive Union frequently use proverbs in their conversation. In the very first chapter, the members prefer to help Obi in his critical time rather than pondering over his foolishness and self willingness, because they believe, as the president of Umuofia Progressive Union says, “a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone.”(Achebe,1987:04) Then, one of the members spells out a proverb, “the fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush.” (Achebe,1987:05).Another member compares Obi’s situation to other Europeans , “who eat more (bribe) than blackman now-a-days”(Achebe1987:30) and “told the proverb of the house rat who went with his friend lizard and died from cold , for while the lizard’s scales kept him dry the rat’s hairy body remained wet”(Achebe,1987:05) .

Mr. Okonkwo, Obi's father, also cannot do away with proverbs. Although "he should have rejected anything about his father except this one proverb"(Achebe,1987:09) : "a man who lived on the banks of Niger should not wash his hands in spittle"(Achebe,1987:09). Isaac Okonkwo uses it as a reply to his wife, who remonstrates against his thriftlessness. In chapter Six, Mr. Okonkwo uses another proverb to advise Obi not to build castles in the air. He says:

"A person who has not secured a place on the floor should not begin to look for a mat"(Achebe,1987:54).

The frequent use of proverbs provides us an understanding of very rootedness of the Igbo community or other Nigerian people. Tradition is still very strong in their lives. In this novel, it is not just the older generation who use proverbs but the younger generation like Obi, Clara, Christopher and Charles too uses proverbs in their conversation. Obi, in one of the meetings of the Umuofia Progressive Union, delivering a speech, says:

"Our fathers also have a saying about the danger of living apart. They say it the curse of the snake. If all snakes lived together in one place, who would approach them? But they live everyone unto themselves and so fall easy prey to man."(Achebe, 1987:73)

Clara, in chapter Eleven, asks Obi, "you know the proverb about digging a new pit to fill up a new one?"(Achebe,1987:98) in the context of Obi's applying for an overdraft to pay another debt. Christopher, though educated in Western education and 'modern' in his way of living, uses proverbs in his conversations. This, again reinforces the importance of tradition in African people. In this novel, he suggests Obi to give Clara time and assures him that she will come

round. "Then he quoted in Ibo the words of encouragement which the bedbug was said to have spoken to her children when hot water was poured on them all. She told them not to lose heart because whatever was hot in the end turn cold" (Achebe,1987:144). Charles, a messenger in Obi's office reminds the saying of his people while requesting a debt from Obi. He quotes,"Our people have a saying that when there is a big tree small ones climb on its back to reach the sun", "our people have a saying that a debt may become mouldy but never rots." (Achebe,1987:88)

In order to defend the African heritage, Achebe also weaves folktales into the fabric of his stories. Regarding folktales, Achebe says, "If you look at these stories carefully, you will find they support and reinforce the basic tenets of the culture. The storytellers worked out what is right or wrong, what is courageous and what is cowardly and they translate this into stories."(Ogbaa,1997:71) According to him, a folktale "does many things. It entertains, it informs, it instructs"(Ogbaa,1997:69)

Within the pages of *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe reinforces the worth of folktales in the lives of African people. The Igbo people's love for folktales is demonstrated by Obi and other villagers' liking for the stories told by soldiers. "They spoke of Abyssinia, Egypt, Palestine, Burma and so on ... and the villagers sat at their feet to listen to their stories"(Achebe,1987:11). Another instance would be the people, who come to Obi's home in Lagos to console him on the occasion of the death of his mother and listens to the story of a tortoise told by Nathaniel. No doubt, there are people like Mr. Okonkwo "who believed utterly and completely in the things of the white men. And the symbol of whiteman's power was the written word, or better still, printed word."(Achebe,1987:115) Mr.

Okonkwo might consider that “stories like that are not for the people of church”(Achebe, 1987: 52) but the importance of it in African life is proved in the fact that a period called ‘oral’ is dedicated to storytelling in Obi’s primary school. Obi learns story to tell in the oral period and his mother helps him though her husband, Mr. Okonkwo, forbade her earlier not to do so. It presents how the old practices are at stake due to the exposure to and impact of the colonial discourse. Obi, while telling the story in his school, adds something of his own. Thus, he brings to light the inherent competence in African people in case of telling stories.

- Thus, maneuvering proverbs and folktales throughout the narrative, Achebe exemplifies the values of the Igbo tradition in his novel, *No Longer at Ease*.

Conclusion :

It is interesting to note that Achebe seeks to exert the value African oral tradition not in any African language but in English, the language of the colonial empire. In an interview with BBC News on 31st Oct., 2005, Achebe calls himself ‘a victim of linguistic Colonialism’ because he was educated in English. Achebe insisted on writing in English because writing in Igbo would not enable him to go closer to the Nigerians as Igbo is not the common language for all Africans. The lack of a common African language is put into focus in *No Longer at Ease*. Obi recalls a situation where he had to speak to another Nigerian student in English:

“It was humiliating to have to speak to one’s countryman in a foreign language , specially in the presence of the proud owners of that language . They would naturally assume that one had no language of one’s own” (Achebe, 1987:45).

Achebe’s use of Igbo words in the novel and the protagonist’s love for Igbo dialect hints at Achebe’s liking for his native language. Igbo words like ‘akara’, ‘aso ebi’, ‘oga’, ‘kwenu’, ‘egusi’, ‘garri’, ‘chi’, ‘agbada’, ‘lifu’, ‘uli’, ‘olourn’, and phrases like ‘Che Sara` Sara`’, ‘nwa jelu Oyibo’, ‘Ife awolu Ogoli azna n’afia’, ‘Olulu ofu oge’ are used in the course of the novel. In this way, Achebe tries to ‘nativize’ the English language. At times, the power of Igbo language is exerted over English language. The perfect example of it would be the scene where Mr. Mark speaks to Obi in Igbo in order to discuss a matter of scholarship secretly in the presence of the British lady Miss Tomlinson:

“ ‘And what can I do for you?’

To his amazement Mr. Mark replied in Ibo:

‘If you don’t mind, shall we talk in Ibo. I did not know you had a European here.’”(Achebe, 1987:78)

Chinua Achebe claims that his writing is a part of “a process of re-storying people who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession” (Morrison, 2014:225). Critics like Simon Gikandi affirms that “Achebe’s seminal status in the history of African literatures lies precisely in his ability to have realized that the novel provided a new way of reorganizing the African cultures (...) and his fundamental belief that narrative can indeed propose an alternative world beyond the realities imprisoned in colonial and post-colonial relations of power.”(Gikandi, 2002:02) Likewise, Chinua Okechukwu hails Achebe for producing a new epistemological framework from which to understand African cultures. However, there are critics like Kwame Appiah, who claims that Achebe is a representative of “Comprador intelligentsia”(Appiah, 1991:348), that is, “a relatively small, ‘western’-style, ‘western’-trained

groups of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world Capitalism at the periphery” (Appiah 1991:348):”in the West they are known through the Africa they offer, their compatriots know them both through the ‘Africa’ they present to the West and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa” (Appiah,1991:348). Achebe is criticized for his attempt to ‘stereotype’ African identity. According to this view, foregrounding only Igbo community and its culture, Achebe does injustice to the multicultural and multilingual African identity. Whatever might be the criticisms, it is universally acclaimed that Achebe’s works paved the way for African writing in English. Achebe was writing at a very crucial point of time-towards the very ending of Colonial rule and the nascent stage of Nigeria’s independence in 1960. Therefore, it was of utmost importance for him to bring into focus the African heritage for the sake of a nationalist identity. Rather than criticizing Achebe for his attempt to celebrate Igbo tradition and community in his novels, he must be hailed for his endeavour to foreground native culture to the West. Achebe focuses more on the recognition of the native heritage rather than, in Thiongo’s words, ‘decolonizing the mind’; because, it was next to impossible to think for an instant change in people after suffering for a long period of time under British imperialistic practices. No doubt, Achebe appropriates the colonizing West’s language, but, it is only to present the colonial encounter from an African point of view. To conclude it can be said that Achebe is successful and deserves praise for his glorification of native culture. *No Longer at Ease* bears testimony to it.

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Engaging Life, Engendering Theory : Dalit Studies- A Theory after Life

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Critical Theory has gone through a phase of transition. We have entered into an era of Post-theory. Theory has changed its terrain. The euphoria surrounded around theory is no longer felt. Theory that had evolved in the West and took the whole world in its grasp is gradually losing its stronghold. Critical theory is going through a period of revision of the earlier epistemological foundations which are mostly Euro-centric or America-centred. Rethinking is not abandoning theory; it is a redefinition of theory. Theory in the post-theory era may be more life-oriented and praxis oriented. Western critical theory has been a textual and philosophical discourse having no material or social connect with the life experiences of people. It was devoid of the domains of the lived experiences and hence it was one step away from life. Over the years, theory has reached a level of maturity where it understands the metaphysics of real world view. There is a clear movement from metaphysical to physical realities. The very notion of theory has built a theory of resistance from within. Theory has been challenged, critiqued and it is anticipated that a critical resistance to theory of the West will empower the Non-west to trace their self. Here we need to reflect on the fact that theory has to negotiate the pragmatics of life. In the context of the Orient, there is a need to let theory emerge from the experiences of the people. Here in lies the lived experiences of the Dalits to

construct a theory from the margins, to make their voices heard. Real life experiences can disrupt the attempted totalising gaze of theory by opening more diverse, interactive and inconclusive landscapes. Theorisation in the West comes first and then life is explained as something philosophical or abstract; but in Dalit studies, hundreds of years of life experiences of Dalits have given rise to a theory or Dalit discourse. But the pertinent question here is who can theorise the Dalit experiences? The questions of authority and authenticity are always involved in theorising any experience. There can be always a lacuna between theory and praxis. Who will speak for whom? Whose experience will be counted? Gopal Guru in his article, "How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India" opines that lived experience of the Dalits are the only authentic sources for theorising Dalit experiences and the people outside the ambit of Dalit category cannot theorise these experiences. Ashish Nandi takes this debate further when he expresses the process of theorising the Dalit experiences. In his article "Theories of Oppression and Another Dialogue of Cultures", Nandy has brought the matter of theorising the experiences of the oppressed across the world to the fore. He is of the view that the marginalised and the dominated people across the globe have got a homogeneous look in scholarly discourses irrespective of their socio-cultural distinctiveness. He says that the oppressed people

have been given two identities: 'they are poor and they are oppressed'. He further says that, "The theories that speak for them and want to have a monopoly on their welfare are usually aggressively global. They have no time or patience for the lifestyles of individual communities, which in any case they – the theories – consider secondary." (2012: 41) This contradictory nature of authorship and theorisation of Dalit lived experiences has been addressed by various scholars. According to Sundar Sarukkai,

Authorship is an important criterion in distinguishing experience and theory. A person who experiences is not an author of that experience like a person who theorises about that experience. We are not authors of our experience in the sense that we do not create that experience within us. It is part of our nature to have such experiences and there is no extra agency needed to initiate such a feeling within us. The experiences that we have one arising from being in situations not of our making and the other arising from situations we consciously put ourselves in. (2007: 4046)

Sarukkai goes on to say that we can theorise about another person's experience because there is a space within that experience which is not related to the person who is experiencing it. The oppression which the Dalit goes through is legitimately his experience. But in that oppression, the oppressor, be it an individual or the system, too is involved and the Dalit has no control over that. Thus Sarukkai postulates, "how much of the experience of oppression can be owned by a Dalit who experiences oppression in a particular act? Moreover, does a person who

experiences oppression own that particular experience or larger categories that describe that experience? (Sarukkai, 2007: 4046) Hence, theorising the lived experiences of the Dalits may legitimately be in the hands of theoreticians who have the capability to speak about the conceptual world which describes that experience. Ashish Nandy, too has expressed his concern of marginalising the intellectual dignity of the oppressed, here Dalits. He postulates,

Dialogue of cultures can acquire new depth if it engages communities and cultures at the receiving end of the system and reaffirms their right to intellectual – yes, intellectual, not only social – dignity. The oppressed do have their own, often-implicit theories of oppression and have no obligation to be guided by our ideas of the scientific, the rational and the dignified. They have every right to be historically, economically and politically incorrect. (2012: 44).

But what is required is a theory that will reflect the lived experiences of the Dalits, which will be free of any hegemonic ideology. We need to accept theory not as a collection of doctrines or abstract ideologies, but as something real, as something that happened with a history, its memories and its own way of describing things. The lived experiences of the Dalits have to take into account all its history, its memories to construct the Dalit discourse. Theory, here, is engaged with the process of unlearning and relearning. It is through this unlearning and relearning process, that the Dalits as well as Non Dalits can delve into territories that have hitherto been neglected or marginalised and bring the Dalit lived experiences to the fore.

The term 'Dalit' refers to the most exploited and marginalised people who have always

experienced immense oppression resulting from caste power structure in India. The term 'Dalit' became really popular only after the emergence of the 'Dalit Panthers' movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s. Gangadhar Pantwane defines,

To me dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books, teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. (Quoted in Trivedi, 2007:2-3)

Thus, Dalit as a category is against all forms of socio-religious hierarchy. Dalit Studies emerged from the lived experiences of these marginalised people. The experiences of the Dalits provide enough evidence for a world of alternative values and practices, a kind of alternative history. While speaking from the margins, the Dalit writings herald a paradigmatic shift in disciplinary centres of gravity. Knowledge production in the margins creates new centres for the marginalised people. In both the academic and social spheres, study of new trends requires a critical theory to reflect upon existing realities. Hence Dalit writings portray a trajectory from practical experiences to the formation of theory which will reflect the realities of life.

Dalit as a category emerged following Ambedkar's ideologies by discarding the term 'Harijan' to bring together the different castes of the untouchable communities in India under its rubric. Though Dalits have always suffered

caste oppression, they remained silent for years. Following the Mandal Commission Recommendations in 1990, the OBCs were given 27% reservations, which sparked a mass protest from anti-reservationists. It resulted in a mass killing of the Dalits by the Upper caste people. This caste hegemony was rebuffed by the Dalits for the first time. In the words of Satyanarayana and Tharu,

The killings were viewed as a symptom of caste authority of the upper- caste groups; the dalit groups called upon their own caste attachments to assert themselves. For the first time in history, dalits challenged the stigmatisation of their caste identity as well as the meaning of caste and brought new complexity to the debate. (2011:6)

Dalits, since 1990s, have opened up diverse discourses regarding their representation, identity, assertion and also identification of forgotten leaders and thinkers. Revival of the studies of Ambedkar and Gandhi created an impetus to Dalit theory. As a category it has its distinct values, idea, culture and identification with human dignity. The very emergence of the Dalits predicts a culture of resistance and assertion of the oppressed lot. Confronting the existing socio-religious order, the Dalit studies propel the initiatives for the creation of an alternative paradigm as well as reconfiguring the shape of everyday materiality.

This representation of the everyday materiality and lived experiences require a critical theory to study the emerging trends. And herein lies the importance of Dalit Theory that reflects the lived experiences of the marginalised, voiceless people. These subaltern groups have to face the everyday materiality borne out of caste hegemony. The socio-cultural realities are

always acquired and taken forward in our subconscious mind. But over the years of Mainstream Hinduism and its dominance over the Dalits, a process of internalisation has taken place which has made the Dalit resistance a slow and long process. However, with the emergence of the various Dalit Organisation and most importantly Dalit Literature, the dalit discourse has gained a new direction towards a mode of self reflection. As Ashish Nandy postulates, “I propose that one of the first tasks of social knowledge in India today is to return agency to the communities at the receiving end of the system. We can do so only if we take seriously the various cultural modes of self-expression of these communities” (2012:43). Literature is a potent means of self expression. Through various literary endeavours, the dalits have attempted to gain agency and an identity by presenting their suffering and oppression before the world. These experiences of domination, suppression and repression open up new possibilities to unearth the harsh realities of life and thereby an assertion of their rightful place in the society. As Arjun Dangle posits, “Dalit Literature is not simply literature, it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of new society and new people” (1992:266) But whose life or who are the people whose hopes dalit literature represents?

Dalit as a category represents the experiences and perspectives of various groups of peoples who have been oppressed by dominant discourses. Untouchability is not a singular experience, but a plurality of experiences where the dalits across the country have been oppressed and marginalised. The Dalits are subjected to exclusions of different types. What is important is that the dalits are given an identity of ‘untouchables’ and they reject that identity.

Therefore, in the very formation of their identity, there is a resistance which has ascribed an anti-identity to them. Thus there is a constant shift of Dalit identity that is exhibited in dalit literature. In the words of Darshana Trivedi,

Dalit literature is a journey from mainstream literature to marginal literature, from Grand narrative to little narratives, from individual identity to group identities, from ideal to real, from vertical literature to spiral literature, from self justification to self assertion. This is a ‘celebration of life’. (2007:10)

Dalit literature is the very reality of life and not merely a textual representation. It is a means to make the unheard heard. Through their lived experiences, the dalits create a literary landscape through which they trace their ontological and epistemological space. This space is a weapon for disrupting the mainstream discourses. For Scott, the experience of the subalterns can provide ‘evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social world’ (1992:24). Dalit literature creates a worldview based on the life experiences of the marginalised dalit communities and in the process creates a counter narrative to dominant discourses. These counter narratives create a kind of radical dalit epistemology which reflects the lived experiences of the oppressed. In the words of Y. T. Vinayaraj, “From the perspective of the Dalit epistemology, Dalit is neither a caste category nor an essentialist identity, rather; it is a ‘radical discourse’ through which Dalits reject all the notions of caste and envisage a renewed subjectivity, social status, and social space.” (2013:28). Dalit Personal Narratives are often

imbued with shame, anger, sorrow and a temperament of resistance towards the mainstream ideologies that always suppress the dalits. Dalit personal narratives is a historic breakthrough because Dalits in India, till very recently, were 'voiceless'. (Rajkumar, 2010:259) Autobiography has been a much loved genre for the dalit writers. The dalits have conveniently used these personal narratives to assert their identities and develop a resistance against the age old caste oppression. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* presents caste discrimination in a vivid manner. This autobiography has been regarded as a part of social movement for equality and justice. In this epoch making narrative Valmiki describes the oppression, suffering, the hard toil that the Chuhra community has to go through. It is a document of frustration, rebellion and assertion of an identity that has been negated by the mainstream social science discourses. Reacting against the criticism raising against him for writing his experiences, Valmiki retorts in the preface of the book,

Why should one feel awkward in telling the truth? To those who say that these things do not happen here, to those who want to claim a superior status for Indian civilization, I say that only those who have suffered this anguish know its sting. (Joothan, 2003: XIV)

Therefore Valmiki makes it clear at the very beginning that he wants to make the world know what it means to be a Dalit as he says "Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel

and inhuman. And compassionless toward Dalits." (Joothan, 2003: XIII)

Joothan is a potent document where Valmiki narrates the discrimination of the Chuhra community by the neighbouring Tyagis in his village Barla. The very living condition of his community is amidst filth and stench which becomes their reality. His community faced all kinds of discrimination like doing unpaid labour to disposing the carcasses of dead animals. What is really pathetic is that his people are made to eat the leftover food from the plates of the Upper caste tyagis. Valmiki had been eye witness to many such incidents. He writes, "When I think about all those things today, thorns begin to prick my heart. What sort of a life was that? After working hard day and night, the price of our sweat was just *joothan*. And yet no one had any grudges. Or shame. Or repentance" (p-11). Valmiki goes on to narrate his school life where he faced discrimination from everybody around him. School became a location of discrimination where he was humiliated not only by his school fellows but also by his teachers. He experienced such pain in front of his friends where in spite of doing well in his studies, the headmaster would make him sweep the floor instead of going to his class and study. The confrontation of the headmaster with his father and the effort by his father to send him to school really brought a positive change to his personality. He remembers vividly how his mother had rebelled against the master of the house Sukhdev Singh where she worked hard and was not offered any food. When she asked some food for her children, Sukhdev told her that she had already collected the basketful of *Joothan*, so why should she want more food? She was humiliated to the core and she retorted and threw a tantrum and went away. Valmiki reflects on his mother's courageous behaviour,

That night the mother goddess Durga entered my mother's eyes. It was the first time that I saw my mother get so angry. She emptied the basket right there. She said to Sukhdev Singh, 'Pick it up and put it inside your house. Feed it to the bridegroom's guests tomorrow morning.' She gathered me and my sister and left like an arrow. Sukhdev Singh had pounced on her to hit her, but my mother had confronted him like a lioness. Without being afraid. (Joothan, P-12)

Her act of defiance and rebellion is an instance of rebellion to the child Valmiki. Occasions like these are rare where dalits raise their voice, resist the humiliating behaviour. During his educational journey, he was always ill-treated and this had a deep impact in his personality. Valmiki then went on to narrate all kinds of humiliation and suffering that he had gone through. He mentions how during the university days also he was treated for his dalit identity. He had to bear the discriminatory comments targeted on his caste. He vividly remembered how his friend Hemlal introduced him to the ideologies of Ambedkar which brought a huge change to him. Ambedkar's writings and ideologies brought a kind of change to his self image. He became aware of his identity and his role to do something for his community.

The progressive mindset of his father had an empowering effect on him. His father encouraged him to study hard as only through education he could improve the pitiable condition of his caste. Later, when Valmiki witnessed the ritual of doing *Salami* by his friend on the day of his wedding and the upper caste women had passed all sorts of derogatory,

humiliating remarks, Valmiki told his father that they should stop this practice. Valmiki proudly narrated how his father stopped this practice for his sons and also for his daughter. With Valmiki posted in Maharashtra, he came directly under the influence of the Dalit Movement and Ambedkar's ideology. Gradually he began to take part in meetings and functions in different states where they discussed the dalit issue. Finally he reflected on the use of *Valmiki*, his surname and the humiliation that he had to undergo as his surname reverberates his caste. He believed that caste based society will not permit the dalits to have an identity. He says,

When caste is the basis of respect and merit, important for social superiority, this battle cannot be won in a day. We need an ongoing struggle and a consciousness of struggle, a consciousness that brings revolutionary change both in the outside world and in our hearts, a consciousness that leads the process of social change. (Joothan, 2003: 152)

Thus he reflects on the mindset of his community and also on the existing social condition prevailed in India. But he opined that time had changed, but something had still plagued the existing social conditions. He believed that as a writer he needed to express the realities of life that his communities have been undergoing. Even though he has been facing a lot of criticism, he has made it a point to raise his voice against the discriminations meted out by his communities only because they were born as dalits.

Dalit writings thus present the oppression and discrimination that the dalit

communities face in the Indian society. Through the individual accounts the writers expand the horizon to the collective lived experiences. Hemendra Chndalia opines,

Dalit literature is experience – based. In this literature *anubhava* (experience) takes precedence over *anumana* (speculation). Thus to Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Hindu metaphysical theory may make one to believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature. These writers make use of the language of the out-castes and under-privileged in Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature. Because of the anger against the age-old oppression, the expression of the Dalit writers has become sharp. (<http://shramjeevi.wordpress.com>)

In *Joothan* too Valmiki has presented the discrimination, the humiliation and the suffering that his community goes through. These narratives present the dalits' inner world and how through these narratives they demand a change in the social structure. In the Introduction to *Joothan*, Arun Prabha Mukherjee writes, "Dalit is a political identity, as opposed to a caste name. It expresses Dalits' knowledge of themselves as oppressed people and signifies their resolve to demand liberation through a revolutionary transformation of the system that oppresses them." (*Joothan*, 2003: XIX) These experiential realities of the Dalits provide a direction to place theory in the line of praxis. But has there been any importance that is given to such lived experiences? Do these praxis figure in the theoretical arena? Gopal Guru brings forth the dichotomy between "theoretical brahmins and empirical shudras"

(2002: 5003) in the sphere of social sciences. This dichotomy has brought a marked hierarchy in the process of theorising dalit experiences. But the pertinent question is how to theorise these experiences? How the mainstream social science scholars have presented the experiences of the dalits? Do they have a theory that best describe the experiences of the dalits? Do the dalits need a theory? What has stopped them from having theory of their own?

It is in this context that Gopal Guru, in his article "How Egalitarian Social Sciences are" presents the ever contented mindset of the dalit writers regarding a theory of their own. Gopal Guru opines that many dalits argue that their lived experience is rich enough and can stand on its own authentic terms so that it does not require any theo-retical representation. Experience for them is a sufficient condition for organising their thoughts and action and for ignition of every-day experience into resistance (2002: 5007). Guru has serious objection to this as he feels that there must be some theory to put forward their cases before the world. Guru has further objected that some of the dalit writers argue that since they have privileged access to reality they can capture it with a full view without any theoretical representation. This claim is obviously based on ontological blindness (2002: 5007). Guru again rejects the genealogical attitude of the dalit scholars who in defence of empiricism still argue that doing theory is undesirable because it makes a person intellectually arrogant, egoistic and socially alienated if not irrelevant. (2002:5007) Guru, thus, postulates that moving away from the empirical mode to the theoretical mode has become a social necessity for the Dalits. Here in lies the social necessity of a theory. However Guru is sceptical about the Non-dalits theorising dalit experiences as he feels that there is always

a hierarchy attached to the upper caste scholar as superior and the dalit subject as inferior. Guru thus opines that it is in this sense that for dalits doing theory becomes a social necessity in order to become the subject of their own thinking. However, this kind of an attitude will narrow down the dalit experiences to an essentialist position. It cannot be denied that apart from dalit identity, the dalits are also citizens of India. They possess, in the words of Du Bois a *double consciousness*(2007:7) of being a dalit and a citizen of India. Yesudasan talks of a dalitness that springs from the effect of savarna domination devaluing everything that is dalit. (Satyanarayana & Susie, 2011:619) Yasudasan categorically speaks of Dalit studies as an important discipline in social sciences and as a discipline it must have some positive contribution to society. He goes on to state that

“Dalit studies will acquire the status and significance of a discipline when researchers engage themselves in enquiries concerning a thousand questions relating to the dalit experience of modern social life. Knowledge in itself is valuable. But its value increases when it contributes to people’s struggles for a better world.” (*ibid*:628)

It is here he departs from Guru’s contention that knowledge production of the dalits’ experiences is the prerogative of the dalits. He opens up a new discourse where he invites the academia to research on dalit epistemological discourses but with a subtle warning to get things pass through ‘the acid test of dalit experiences and one’s own empirical knowledge’. And to interpret the findings, the dalits need a theory. (*ibid*: 629) And I would like to conclude that Dalit Studies and

discourses are a theory that speaks about the dalit experiences. Unlike the high theoretical preoccupations with the abstract and the metaphysical concepts, Dalit theory is deeply rooted in the voices of the voiceless and the marginal. These voices reflect their ontological as well as epistemological stances and possibilities. Dalit theory is not a top down strategy; rather is based on a strategy of equality and justice. It undermines the elite strategy of one group theorising and imposing their hegemonic socio-political norms on the other. It advocates the possibility of democratising theory by incorporating the real, heterogeneous and multiple possibilities of being and existence within the domain of theory.

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The Ethics of Leadership and the Aesthetics of a Fictionalized
Biography:
Revisiting *Biju Patnaik: The Legendary Pilot and Live-Wire Politician*

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Abstract:

Biju Patnaik: The Legendary Pilot and Live-Wire Politician is a fictionalised biography by Hullasa Behera in which the author highlights the missions, misgivings, mercy, magic, mesmerism, manliness and madness of the protagonist. The ethics of leadership lie in the emergence and popular acceptance of an individual as a hero. True leadership is never thrust upon but acquired by toil, tears, blood and sweat. Behera depicts Patnaik as a model, be it, in politics or piloting. By borrowing the language from Andrew Jackson a reader exclaims that Patnaik is 'one man with courage' that 'makes a majority'. The aim of this paper is to analyse the aesthetic of the writing of an Indian English biographer, it focuses on structure as well as the texture of the book in which the ethics of leadership of Patnaik are clearly spelt out. Patnaik's leadership is about taking initiative and being accountable. Behera's aesthetic lies in exploring some truth about Patnaik and the use of stylistic devices: foregrounding, parallelism, suggestive metaphors, oblique expression that bring out the ethics of leadership in Patnaik.

Keywords: model, initiative, accountable, oblique, foregrounding, parallelism.

Broad area of study- *The Aesthetics of Indian English Literature.*

Focus- *Fictionalized Biography.*

I

Borrowing the language from Shakespeare and substituting the word leadership for 'greatness' it can be stated that some leaders are born; some acquire leadership and leadership has been thrust upon some. Biju Patnaik acquires leadership by virtue of his risk-taking attitude, passion for the motherland and inherent love for adventure. This book deals with adventurous life of Biju Babu, the legendary pilot and seasoned politician. In the first part of the book Hullasa Behera highlights the spectacular achievements of Biju Babu in saving the lives of Sukarno, Shaharier and Hatta whom Nehru views 'the torches of Indonesian Independent struggle' (Biju Patnaik:36). The way Biju Babu piloted the plane and saved these nationalists from the clutches of the Dutch forces is history. As Behera blends the fact with fiction he introduces some dialogic situations in which the heroism of Biju Babu is brought to light. The whole book reads like a thriller. The author introduces dramatic elements, arouses suspense and provokes curiosity to know the Darling of the Oriyas. Hence this book needs to be studied

in the light of aesthetics: the western or Indian in order to do justice to the author or the protagonist he pictures. Doubtless the hero worship is not there. As a political analyst he focuses on the achievement of Biju Babu and its impact upon socio-political life of the Oriyas. The aesthetic of a work of art refers to the principles by which the work of art is created. Here Behera presents the magnificent achievements of Biju Babu in a fictional mode because that will arouse curiosity in the readers to know more about the man about whom Nripen Chakraborty, the former C.M. of Tripura holds that 'people do not know how much he has done'(Patnaik:Backpage) . Rasa is the soul of Indian aesthetics. It is, the imaginative experience which is defined by S.N. Dasgupta as 'an emotion excited by artistic circumstances or situations'(Indian Aesthetics:192). Behera has presented the situations from the life of Biju Babu in such a way that they evoke heroic sentiments; at some places they evoke romantic sentiments and at some places they provoke laughter. In this article the incidents or the dialogues or the achievements that are highlighted focus on the ethics of leadership- a kind of leadership that is needed in crucial situations.

II

Biju Babu the young pilot was adventurous; Pandit Nehru, a charismatic leader of free India realized it. Here is a critical situation in which Nehru needs Biju Babu's assistance to save the lives of leaders of freedom fighters of Indonesia. When Pandit Nehru looks puzzled because the freedom fighters of Indonesia are encircled by the Dutch and their lives are at stake Biju Babu the young pilot infuses strength in him and says that they need to be air-lifted from the place in which they are under the constant watch of the Dutch forces .

Behera gives the picture of a dialogic situation in which the conversation between Nehru and Biju Babu takes place:

What?- Nehru interrupted bewildered.

We just have to airlift them.

What? - Nehru shouted overwhelmingly.

Yes, that's it, Sir; of course, only if you nod- added the pilot enthusiastically.

Are you or myself mad?- Nehru shot back with some anger,

You can say. How's it possible?

Where's Delhi and where is Djakarta? Who are the valiant Indians that can jump headlong to the certain inferno? he blurted the questions hurriedly and hysterically.

There's no need for many, Sir. And I'm the poor, bloody Indian that can cruise between Djakarta and Delhi in the face of all odds and can throw dust in the Dutch eyes to get Shahariar and Hatta safe in Delhi –the pilot said slowly but sincerely.

Nehru looked up at his face straight and enthusiastically.

-It's really so; it's really so young man; it's really so Patnaik- he repeated again and again and rose up to embrace the young pilot.(Patnaik.41)

: This passage highlights the faith of Nehru in the courageous young pilot Biju Babu; the language is surcharged with emotions bordering on anxiety. The author takes care to present dialogues in a dramatic mode. The inclement weather and the hostile rebel forces act as the barriers to the pilot's journey by flight but the morale of the pilot is very high – it is what that makes him darling of the freedom fighters of both India and Indonesia. The heroic sprit in Biju Babu gets depicted very well and this splendid passage is sure to evoke heroic sentiments. Behera takes care to picture the romantic relation between Biju Babu and his

wife which arouses erotic feelings. Biju Babu the protagonist murmurs about his adventure and the co-operation of his better-half in the following statement “The Indonesian expedition would not have been really memorable/ but for this jungle jasmine, he reasoned to himself” (P.51). Here jungle jasmine is none but his wife who accompanied him not out of anxiety but of an adventurous spirit. The image ‘jungle jasmine’ is quite striking. Jasmine blooms and fills the heart of the spectators with joy ; the naturalness of the flower is enchanting. Patnaik’s wife was so natural and pleasing that she was the source of inspiration to her spouse. Thus Behera’s pictorial description evokes two types of ‘rasas’: the heroic and the erotic.

III

Behera throws light upon Biju Babu’s role in Indian independence struggle which was of a different kind. He was pilot under British regime but he was secretly working for the freedom fighters of India. He was imprisoned for two years by the cruel and clever British during Indian freedom struggle. The charge against him was that he was disseminating highly seditious and inflammatory pamphlets, postures, play cards against the British Raj in secret. Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India liked Patnaik as a pet pilot; hence he vacillated for a long time to arrest him on the charges of sedition or treason but finally to boost the ‘tattering morale of the Britons’ (Patnaik.65) he did it. Thus Behera pictures the circumstances in which Patnaik was arrested; the picturesque description reflects Biju Babu’s patriotism and tactful handling of the Britons. No wonder he is branded as the ‘Kalinga bull’. The contrast between Mr Patnaik and his better-half is made in a dialogic situation: ‘the tall, tasteless, inarticulate Kalinga bull makes the perfect pair with a short, supple, artistic Kashmiri belle’

(Patnaik.67). In these expressions Behera shows a fine taste for epithets. The author has a fine taste for mythical figures and he romantically describes the adventurous piloting of Biju Babu in rescuing the nationalist heroes of Indonesia. The line reads as follows: “the modern day Krishna who is a veteran pilot and lives far/ away in Delhi will fly his Dakota to rescue us Rumkinies in utter distress” (P.70). Unless there is a principle and passion for fighting against subjugation nobody would risk life for saving the nationalist leaders. In this context Biju Babu is a glaring example of a revolutionary who upholds the cause of liberty. The way the author treats Biju Babu’s adventurous journey as a romantic episode lends beauty and glamour to the description.

IV

Biju Babu was eager to modernize Odisha. Hence he persuaded Nehru to construct Paradip port. He suggests this proposal when he was sailing in a mechanized boat with Nehru, Nilamani and other dignitaries on the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal. Nehru gets absorbed in the contemplation of the beauties of nature but Biju Babu distracts his attention for the construction of port. Nehru gets disturbed but Biju Babu wittily questions: If you would not kindly consider constructing a port here during your regime, can Orissa get one? Other Prime Ministers after you will be provincial Prime Ministers. They’ll look after their states and constituencies. Who’ll think of Orissa, a poor and under- privileged state of India.(P.132)

Biju Babu inflates the ego of Pandit Nehru and his proposal is accepted. Odisha today is proud of Paradip port but the background of it speaks eloquently the vision and design of Biju Babu, the architect of modern Odisha- the replica of Nehru the visionary and

the dreamer. Behera comments that Paradip generated 'a wave, a fever and a fervor' (135). Thus such a statement foregrounds the events in which Biju Babu emerges as a charismatic leader.

V

Biju Babu the politician was a fund raiser, fund giver and financier of Odisha Congress party in 1961 and 1967 election. Nilamani recalls that Biju financed the political leaders of India from Indira Gandhi to N.T. Rama Rao. Neglected by the leaders of the Congress party he set up his own outfit called Pragati Dal. Later on he founded and funded a party called Utkal Congress. If Biju Babu could succeed as a live-wire politician it is primarily due to his calibre of raising funds and financing the party. Biju knew that finance is the mainspring of administration and he was very much conscious about raising and utilising funds for the cause of the poor, the neglected and the down-trodden.

In his analytical book *After Nehru Who?* American journalist –writer, Wells Hangen predicts that Biju is a force to reckon with in the post Nehru wrangle for the Prime Minister's job. Mr Hangen views that Biju was in favour of Krishna Menon as the successor to Nehru. He also holds: "Patnaik is a man to watch" ... "at least three aspirants, namely V.K.Krishna Menon, Moraji Desai and Indira Gandhi banked on his support"(P153) but the lucky winner was Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Biju was instinctively aware of environmental pollution while he was the Chief Minister of Odisha for the second time he ordered the "maximum restraint and economy in the use of official vehicles" (Behera:164- 165). Patnaik was travelling in a rickshaw to reach office in no official vehicle day. There was a lot of news and jubilation among the common city

dwellers and slum dwellers. They thronged the road to have the glimpse of Biju Babu the Chief Minister. At the end of the journey, at the secretariat gate he pulled out a hundred rupee currency note from his shirt pocket and handed it to the rickshaw puller. Such an incident displayed his soft corner for the down-trodden of Odisha. Doubtless, if Biju won elections time and again it is due to his quality to identify himself with the poor Oriyas like rickshaw pullers.

Biju as a political leader was least afraid, of public criticism. In the election he fought against Chakradhara Behera in Patakura constituency. He faced the public in a bold manner. Behera writes:

They were hating Biju, heckling Biju, hounding Biju, grounding Biju, spitting on Biju, spewing on Biju, splitting Biju, slitting Biju, smiting Biju, biting Biju, dirtying Biju, routing Biju, rioting on Biju, kicking Biju, ditching Biju...Why should the Patakura public lag behind.(P.171)

The author uses progressive tense instead of simple tense just to make the situation lively. In those days the people in Patkura constiunecy were critical of Biju Babu's policies and programmes. Biju Babu faced them and asserted his presence. The principle with him was to fight rather than flight. A charismatic leader needs to be fearless least he should fail in the materialization of his dreams.

Biju was against corruption. During his tenure of Chief Ministership he noticed that some of the Secretariat employees flouted all attendant rules and office norms; to give vent to his displeasure and anger he ordered to lock the secretariat gates between 10:30 to 11:30 in the morning. As a result the punctuality of the Secretariat staff improved. Behera writes:

...he appealed to the public in general to beat government officers who sit and sleep over decisions and were sleepy and sluggish in the execution of development and welfare programmes. Several reported incidents of public heckling of government officers infuriated public workforce. On the fateful day the Secretariat staff heckled and manhandled the tall Biju on the corridor of his third floor office while he was returning from lunch. They also beat R.N. Das, state's Chief Secretary.(P.174)

In the evening some journalists met Biju Babu and put the question politely: Did they really beat you?

Behera writes about the reactions of Biju Babu:

How can they beat me-Biju beamed with a pleasant smile- these stupid chaps had never played cricket. They do not know how to hit others. The young and old journalists alike laughed at Biju's humour and dispersed good-humoured after having pepsi bottles with him.(P:174-175)

VI

In the Introduction to *Indian Aesthetics: An Introduction* edited by V.S.Seturaman the editor says:

In all the articulated utterances there are three distinctive elements: expression, suppression and impression. Comprehending consists in our getting the meaning not only from expression but also from what is suppressed.(Xi)

In this book Behera the journalist cum creative artist is poised between the unheard and the heard like Janus allowing the inspiration to choose the words and their order. He proceeds from the articulated word to the unheard melodies and he does so by his sensitive response

to the suggestive power of words. In the portrait of Biju Babu the charismatic leader he has been conscious about the source of heroic sentiments. Seturaman holds that the heroic sentiment arises from energy, perseverance, optimism, presence of mind and special conditions of spirit. Behera in his work applies the principles of aesthetics into the composition of fictionalized biography. He chooses the appropriate occasion from the lives of Biju Babu and presents them in a lively dramatic mode.

The ethics of leadership lie in the qualities a true leader has to possess. A true leader has a purpose and a definite goal; he is to achieve it through proper means. Biju Babu was an independent minded individual. He had a dream of independent India and modern Odisha. Hence in the pre-independence days he was trying to save the freedom fighters from the hands of the British in his own style. Doubtless he was a pilot in the colonial rule but he used his position not to support the colonial masters but the independent minded Indians. Hence on detection he was to court jail but he did not bother for it. As the builder of modern Odisha under his leadership Paradip port was constructed. At the time of Chinese aggression he was the advisor to Nehru. As the Chief minister of Odisha he inspired the Odias to fight against corruption and if necessary to beat the corrupt officials. Just to teach lesson to the late comers to the secretariat he ordered as the chief minister for the closure of the gate. He was beaten but he did not mind but rather retorted the journalists which was witty. At Patkura constituency he faced severe public criticism but he didn't lose heart.

The book is worth studying in the light of aesthetics –eastern and western. The essence of eastern aesthetics is intuitive perception of reality. The quintessence of western stylistics is

the rational understanding of the reality that is pictured in literature. If the Indians focus more on Rasa- *Dhvani* theory the westerners focus on analysis, interpretation of a piece of literature. Considered in either way this book satisfies all. It is replete with foregrounded structure; the author has taken care to create the suspenseful atmosphere and the language used throughout the book has been suggestive. Expressions in many contexts have been oblique. This book is more than a biography; here facts blend with fiction. The entire book projects the

image of Biju babu in such a manner that the Odias may be feeling proud of having such a charismatic leader. The book which is a fictionalized biography, is so designed that the progeny too may feel inspired to follow the 'footprints' of this leader in their own times.

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Indian Poetry as Mirror of Indian Culture: An Analysis of *Ganga Mata-a Prayer*

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Taking a cue from Matthew Arnold, a sensible reader can view poetry as not only the criticism of life but as a mirror of culture. Indian poetry reflects Indian culture. Culture as defined in *The Cambridge English Dictionary* is 'the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs a particular group of people at a particular time'. Culture indeed has a broader connotation than that of literature or poetry.

Ganga Mata-A Prayer written by Susheel Kumar Sharma, the professor-poet from Allahabad, depicts the dreams and hopes of a sensitive Indian who prays to the mother *Ganga* for moral and spiritual upliftment of his countrymen. The *Ganga* as a holy river and as one cultural mainstream of India acts as a catalyst to the poet's sensibility. In my paper an attempt has been made to explore how the poet identifies the river as a symbol of the very essence of the Indian culture as he prays to it for reestablishment of harmony in the midst diverse types of distractions being perceived on its bank.

The poem is written in the form of a prayer. *Ganga* is imagined in the form of a deity cum mother by the Hindus. The Indian civilization both sustains and blooms on the bank of the river, though, none the less, with the passage of time, there has also been scenes of fast degeneration of the human values on the same plank. This has made the poet full of angst

and entreats upon the river to make a bid to restore the old order-the values, which are so essential for a moral and cultured life of the people. The *Ganga Mata* holds the myth of being a saviour and so, the poet envisions a remake of the glory of the Indian civilization upon its bank. By borrowing certain words in Sanskrit from the scriptures to the texture of a poem, he rues: *Who has put you in chains, O Amarapaga! /Who has stopped your flow, O Purandara! /Who has dumped his waste in you, O Sursari!/Who has diverted your way, O Bhagirathi! /Why have you accepted it all, O Tridhara? /How have you tolerated it all, O Saritamvara?* (P.4). Next, he tries to lend confidence upon it by calling upon to: *Flow freely again/Overflow again/ Dance rhythmically again/Be not bound by embankments and dams* (P.4).

The *Ganga Mata* stands for freedom. The river hence flows freely and is dancing along rhythmically. Being part of the eternal flux of life, it should not be bound by anything. The poet grieves that its natural flow is being resisted by some new developments including the growing pollution of its water.

Ganga Mata-A Prayer is in the form of an ode. The poet is evidently well versed in the Indian scriptures and myths. The opening stanza itself is reflective of all his knowledge of the Indian myths. The poem's diction is transparent, simple and lucid and the vision

contained by it is splendid. An excerpt: *O Ganges!/The dweller in Lord Vishnu's feet/The resider in Lord Shiva's locks/The sojourner in the Himalayas /The daughter of sage Jahnū/The co-wife to Parvati and Lakshmi/The redeemer of Bhagiratha's race/The atoner of Sagar's progeny/The mother of brave Bhishma /O Ganga Maiya! /Homage to thee /Accept my obeisance /O Punyakirti!* (P.1)

The poet makes references to a few gods and goddesses and a sage and a warrior that the river Ganges is connected with. The Gods are: Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva; the goddesses are: Parvati, Lakshmi; the sage is: Bhagiratha and the brave warrior is: Bhishma. Thus the river Ganges has its source in the divinity. The poet regards her as the mother, while honouring 'her' with the epithet of *punyakirti*, meaning: *the holy doer*.

The poet also states that he visits the river Ganges neither for a boat ride nor for fishing and neither for a redemption from sins nor for any other purpose, but to see her through the inner eyes of his soul: *I have come to your shore/Not just to sharpen my nerves with your waves /Not just to play with the fishes in you/ Not just to have a boat ride in the wee hours / Not even to wash my sins/And to be pure again; /Nor am I satisfied/Just with a glimpse of yours.*(ibid.) Trying to explain further about the real purpose of his visit to the Ganges he soon adds: *Like a bird in a tree on your shore / I want to sing your praise/ Like a tortoise in your water/I want to play in your lap/Like a dolphin in your floods.* (ibid) The suggestion here is that the poet has a vision of harmony in the universe through the spectacle of the river. It leads his imagination to hover around a world of various creatures: living, playing and sportive. All these visual images add an extra liveliness and colour to the poem.

The poet has a mission in revisiting the Ganges which he has set with a humanistic perspective. He longs to ferry people to the banks and wants to live in a moorage. It is significant to see that the poet has more faith in the gods and goddesses than upon himself. The divine origin of the river makes him especially drawn to the river. He recounts the myth of the river as being the daughter of the mountains (*Girija*) and entreats upon her to allow him to continue having his own way: *Allow me to have my way, O Suranadi! / Grant me my wish, O Girija!*

Sharma feels his ego melts when he visualizes any of the goddesses. His poem gets some special grandeur from his use of Sanskrit words (in Italics), where necessary.

The poet is not a slave to pelf, power and position. The only thing he wants to live under the grace of the river and to die by the side of it:

I don't want a kingship
I don't want a key to the treasure
I don't want a visa to the moon
I just want to live and die by you
Allow me to have a haven
By your feet, O *Shailasuta!*
My ears are eager to listen to
Evamastu uttered by you.
Grant me my wish O *Samudra-*
Mahishi! (P.2)

The poet in the above lines hints at the remedy to the malady of the modern life. The modern man hankers after pelf, power and position, while he himself is not at all after all this. He would prefer to live a life which is as natural and as profound as the Ganges herself. Suggesting that he is unlike the present generation of people who are led solely by material objects, he states that he doesn't dream of landing on the moon. His conception of human life is that it ought to be very simple, natural yet meaningful and peaceful. Like William Wordsworth: the

romantic and the mystic, he seems to bewail: *The world is too much with us /Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.* Or, in the core of his heart he questions like T. S. Eliot: *Where is life we have lost in the process of living...*

For the poet, Ganga is more than a river; it is the symbol of Indian culture and its glorious heritage. He visits Ganga like Matthew Arnold visits the Dover Beach or Wordsworth visits the Tintern Abbey. Besides, the spectacle of the flow of the Ganges sensitizes him about the decline of the overall worth of human being: *I want the world /To be rid of corruption./I want the world/To be rid of pollution./I want the world/To be rid of degeneration.*(P.5)

The world in which the poet lives is a corrupt world; the environment is polluted. The human values have degenerated. The poet doesn't experience harmony in the world he lives and moves. Here he longs for another world-a world in which all the creatures: men, animals and birds will experience happiness. He grows lyrical and pictures his dreams of a new world in lucid, simple language. He says: *I want the world/To be a home for all /I want the world/To be a wonder for all.*(ibid)

In the above four lines the poet sums up the message of the Upanishads that says that all should live well. The poet is well-versed in the Indian scriptures and this poem echoes the views of the Indian seers and saints. The poet dreams of an ideal world because the real world in which he lives is full of sorrows, sufferings, agony and anguish. The poet doesn't picture the tension between the ideal and actual as John Keats does but his longing for the betterment of the existing world order is genuine. Reading the different passages from this long poem, one gets impressed by Sharma's deep conviction about the greatness of the Indian

culture, as it is rooted in a value system which could be fundamentally essential for a progressive society. The Indian religion is interlinked with the Indian culture. The Indian culture has two aspects: the Hindu's ideas of worship of Goddess and the phenomena of nature from which we get benefits. The river is associated with life throbbing with vitality. The image of the river haunts all the Hindus who are prepared to undertake penance for purification of all their selves. The Hindus believe that one can earn salvation for a dead person by throwing the ashes of his corporal body into the holy river.

Thus, *Ganga mata- A Prayer* is a magnificent ode with an elevated theme. An ode to the river Ganga, in this the poet reflects on the essential harmony and co-existence among humans, birds and animals by breathing an air of holiness.

A poet is a painter in words; he uses words to fashion powerful images. He thus indirectly tries to enable a reader for elevation of his moral world. *Ganga Mata-A Prayer* has an effective style that helps accordingly to enlighten the soul of the reader besides removing remorse from the hearts of the young readers. Though his poem, the poet ventures to instill ideas of sanctity, hopefulness and harmony in the minds of the readers. He has used Poetry as an instrument to propagate Indian culture that is rooted in a value system. The poem could be an illuminating experience for a reader to realise about one's communion with the spirit of the Universe.

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Eco-critical Perspectives in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Reading of Selected Poems

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Abstract:

Ecocriticism is about the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It focuses on the earth-centred approach to the literary studies. Nature is the best teacher of the humanity and environment remains an integral part of all living beings in this world. Jayanta Mahapatra is known for his representation of nature and natural world in his poems. Mahapatra's poetic exploration of the land to which he belongs reveals his search for the self identity. The landscape is in a way an extension of a person's physical self. Most of the images are realistic and vivid. They are drawn from nature and life. The images form pictures that are suggestive and symbolic. In his poems, the natural world forms a metaphor towards understanding of the human situations. In this paper, an attempt would be made at an ecocritical reading of some of the selected poems by him. They are part of the two poetry collections: A Rain of Rites (1976), and Random Descent (2005). It would be a way of exploring the ways by which the poet deals with the natural world around him in order to shed light on its relationship with the human actions and behaviours, besides, human predicaments.

Key Words: Ecology, environment, nature, landscape, identity, Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry

Eco-criticism as a literary discipline emerged in the U.S.A in the late 1980s and in the U.K in early 1990s. Eco-criticism as a literary discipline critically evaluates the relation of literary discourse /text to ideas of nature, wilderness,

natural setting etc. It is about the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It focuses on the earth-centred approach to the literary studies. Nature is the best teacher of the humanity and environment remains an integral part of all living beings in this world. Eco-criticism examines how the literary discourses represent the physical or the external world and how moral questions about human interaction with nature are evaluated. According to Glotfelty, eco-criticism is directed towards an earth centered-approach where ecological concerns are of primary issue.

In the twentieth century, two books played a very influential role in the ecological warnings. They are: Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (drawing attention to the ominous degradation of the environment) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (devoted to the devastation inflicted by newly developed chemical pesticides on wildlife, both on land and in water). Besides, a few other works too have made their own special contribution in sensitising the humanity in regards to the state of the environment. Donald Worster's *Nature's Ecology* (1977) became a textbook for the study of ecological thought. The historian Arnold Toynbee recorded the effects of human civilisation on land and nature in his monumental *Mankind and Mother Earth* (1976). Environmental issues and landscape use also became the concerns of the Annales School of historians.

The term 'ecocriticism' was brought into existence by William Rueckert's famous essay *Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978). It was widely accepted in the last decade of the 20th century with the publication of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, 1992) and ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, 1993). The term is derived from the Greek words- *eco-* *oikos* and *krites* which mean 'house judge'. As such ecocriticism deals with the expression of judgment upon the writings which delineates relation between nature and man. It is related to the very concept of ecology in scientific study that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats. Ernst Haeckel, a German zoologist coined this word ('Ecology') in 1869. It is derived from the Greek roots 'oikos' and 'logos': *Oikos* meaning 'household' and *logos* meaning 'logical discourse'.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the earth was undergoing an environmental crisis owing to the industrial and chemical pollution of water, soil and air. Under these circumstances, ecocriticism came into existence. Thus, it is quite natural that ecocritical writings seek to raise the readers' awareness about the environmental degradation and often prompt them to action. To quote Peter Barry:

Generally the preferred American term is 'ecocriticism', whereas 'green studies' is frequently used in the U.K., and there is perhaps a tendency for the American writing to be 'celebratory' in tone (occasionally degenerating into what harder left critics call 'tree hugging'), whereas the British variant tends to be more 'minatory', that is, it seeks to warn

us of environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial and neo-colonial forces (2008: 242).

Ecocriticism seeks to focus on the role played by nature in a literary text. Moreover, it explores the way in which man and nature interact with each other. Ian Buchanan interprets the relation between nature and environment 'as a practice of reading literature from an earth centred rather than human centred perspectives' (143). M. H Abrams and Harpham read it as the relation between man and nature and the devastation brought on that environment by the human activities (87). An overall definition of ecocriticism is given by P.K. Nayar in the following lines:

Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural text, paying particular attention to attitudes towards nature and the rhetoric applied when speaking about it. It aligns itself with the ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environments, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches (2010: 242).

A prominent feature of Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is his special focus on the natural landscape. The landscape of Odisha, its hills, rivers, sea coasts, bird sanctuaries, rocks, temples etc. resonate in his poems. Places like Puri, Konark, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar etc. are also mentioned in several of his poems. Legends, history and myths associated with these places are interwoven in his poems like 'Dawn at Puri'

and 'Main Temple Street, Puri'. Mahapatra's poetic exploration of his native land also reveals his quest for the self identity. The land of Odisha is so much rooted in his poetry that in the poem 'Somewhere My Man', he announces: 'it is land which means'. Such expressions by him reflect the very intimate relationship between him and his land.

A man does not mean anything
But the place
Sitting on the river bank
throwing pebbles into the muddy
current, a man becomes the place.
(‘Somewhere My Man’)

The soul of the Indian villages also gets depicted beautifully in his poetry. The following is an excerpt from his poem: 'Summer' (in *A Rain of Rites*) in this context:

Under the mango tree
The cold ash of a deserted fire. ('Summer')

There is a correspondence between the landscape of a region and the religious faith of the people living there. Many times, the landscape in his poetry is in a way an extension of an individual's physical self. Bijay Kumar Das in an article: *The Poetry of Jayanata Mahapatra* writes:

Thus, landscape has a great significance in Mahapatra's poetry so far as it enables the poet to search for his own self in order to understand the world in its proper perspective (1992: 15).

As a craftsman of poetry, Mahapatra makes fine use of imagery. Most of these images are realistic and vivid. They are drawn from the premises of the simple natural life. They draw the interest of the readers for being suggestive and symbolic. One of the noble features of his images is that most of them are closely fused to the themes expressed in the poem. As a result, the imagery

prevails on the readers' mind. In regards to his use of natural imagery Pradeep Kumar Patra says:

Reading Mahapatra is just as reading Wordsworth. Just as Wordsworth interprets his whole ideas into poetry, in relation to nature, Mahapatra also finds the events, situations and the lost glory of Orissa as the objective correlative for the expression of his ideas and thoughts (2006: 89).

Thus, there is extensive use of the local landscape as a source of imagery in his poetry. These symbolize his emotions and ideas in their own unique ways. His poetic craftsmanship is especially evident in the images drawn from the various landscapes of the local topography of Odisha and their use as symbols to his emotions and ideas.

Various things of nature come as metaphors in his poems. They are adopted to represent mostly the nuances of the human situations. In *A Rain of Rites*, the stone appears in the ruins of temples and shrines. The stone in this poem symbolically indicates the immensity and the oneness:

At the touch of stone
the immensity becomes your own :
gods, fathers, sons,
binding into earth, becoming one
and centre. ('A Rain of Rites')

But at the same time the stone wall of the yore (Asokan Edicts of 261 BC) bearing some inscribed letters are a reminder of violence and destruction:

These things can happen all the time.
Memory has drained us, and an ancient
stone wall inscribed with rules is not
what it appears Someone's rotten blood
has gone into the stone. ('Random
Descent')

Natural objects are rather perceived as touchstones to judge the predicament of human situations in most of his poems:

The faces of rice are stony
its fists seem clenched all the time. ('A Mask')

This stony quality of rice reflects the hunger of the people. Again in the poem 'The Stone' from *Random Descent* stone walls are being perceived as the symbol of violence and destruction:

Beneath the bloodied walls of history
nothing can happen more dreadful
than stones turned to gods through prayers
Stones, whose eyes have had no expression
in them
Stones, like governments who have no
honour at all
Stones, whose long arms easily batter and
kill a young woman accused of adultery.
(‘The Stone’)

'Rain' is a recurring metaphor in his *A Rain of Rites*. Rain stands for Orissa, - the land of temples, rivers and rites:

Sometimes a rain comes slowly across the
sky, that turns upon its grey cloud,
breaking away into light before it reaches
its objective. ('A Rain of Rites')

In this poem, rain as a symbol, facilitates the reader to apprehend reality in a very clear way. It symbolizes the primitive innocence of human being. Rain is also posited as a suggestive symbol of fertility, but at the same time it also evokes his past and reminds him of the suffering he had faced in life:

The rain I have known and traded all this
life is thrown like kelp on the beach. ('A Rain of Rites')

The rainy season itself becomes an image of his native state in his poem 'Rain in Orissa':

The sky's face expressionless
an oriole call echoes away in the sullen
greyness,

the book of earth throbs with the light of things.

A pond heron floats wearily in a rain pool.
Its face a mask, it pauses for another look
around.

Grass everywhere is huge and moves
forward to kill. ('Rain in Orissa')

However, the rain to him is also at times symbolic of the painful existence of the human life:

The pelting rain
of the past failures and successes
keeps on whipping up mud on the forest
path ('Light')

The degradation of the natural world too finds a prominent place in *Random Descent*. The degraded earth by technological intervention should be evaluated in terms of the human delusion of victory:

But those things that happen
have always beginnings that cannot be
seen.
It is the body I think I've carried all along,
forcing me to wander from secret
to secret, mirage to mirage,
pumping up half truths into a reality I
never lived. ('Things That Happen')

In his attempt at presenting the dim socio cultural reality of the present times, he touches upon poverty, violence, social injustice, and victimization of woman in the society. *Rice* is a moving poem about poverty. The poet says:

But at times
A worn out summer left behind
Stumbles against the falling skin
Of fallow rice fields
As I feel my way
Along my defeating distances of hunger.
(‘Rice’)

In his poem 'A Mask' also, he relates hunger and brutality metaphorically:

Hunger lends each one a mask

and it smells of trapped beasts. ('A Mask') In the poem entitled 'Dawn at Puri' he symbolizes hunger of the people through the images of crows and a skull – both drawn from a familiar landscape of his native place:

Endless crows noises
A skull on the holy sands
tilts its empty country towards
hunger. ('Dawn At Puri')

In 'The Portrait', he brings the imagery of nature to refer to darkness of a sixteen year old girl who has been raped.

a large owl burrows deep into its
steamy air ('The Portrait')

The poet identifies himself with the image of the mango tree in the poem 'One Evening'. The theme of the poem is the agony of the human beings as well as the natural world. The poem has an eco-feminist overtone:

One evening
I was a mango tree
with a clutch to troubled,
reluctant leaves
tremors and tears ('One
Evening')

In yet another poem: 'Blue of the Sky', through the images of sands, shores and ocean, he explains the barrenness of the lives and human predicament:

the sky's blue waiting simply
to be carried by a bird's beak of tears. ('Blue of
the Sky')

Conclusion: Thus, Jayanta Mahapatra's poems on nature reflect his deep concern for the degradation of the natural world. The Nature imagery forms an integral part of his poetic sensibility. The varied landscapes in Mahapatra's poems unfold the human conditions and predicaments with their typical regional colour and sensibility. The poet deals with the natural world around him in order to shed light on its

relationship with the human actions and behaviours, besides, human predicaments. The poems by him perceive the inner reality of life against the backdrop of certain landscapes. The landscapes themselves are not just to set some scenes, they lead the readers to certain illuminations. Natural objects are perceived as metaphors of human situations in his poetry.

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The Genesis of Modern Jewish American Literature: Some Issues and Challenges

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Abstract:

Of all the ethnic literatures in the United States, Jewish American literature assumes a special significance because of its strong socio political roots. Jewish American literature embodies the history and culture of the Jews beginning with the era of diaspora and finally culminating in the creation of the state of Israel. Modern Jewish writers have also contributed to the richness and variety of American literature. Literature, along with religious and cultural customs and community institutions, is a defining point in the sense of nationhood and in the identity of the Jewish American community as it is a narrative of the past experiences, the conflicts, and the customs of the Jews in relation to daily life in an American setting. In order to explore this idea we must first ask ourselves what embodies Jewish-American Literature. For example, who fits into the genre? Does it consist of only Jewish writers dealing with Jewish topics or does it include Jewish writers on non-Jewish topics and non-Jewish writers on Jewish topics? Next, we explore what part this diverse literary genre plays on the many facets of life in the United States including the use of writing as reflection on the past experiences such as immigration and acculturation, as a reflection on the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel and how their occurrence affected the Jewish life in America, as an observance of

present day life, and as a manifesto on how Jewish-American life should be in the future. The study of Jewish American literature also offers a new insight into the study of post colonial literature from an American perspective as the mainstream writers have a tendency of “othering” the Jewish American writers. The study of ethnic literatures in the American context adds to the vastness and magnitude of American literature in general. Keywords: Assimilation, immigrants, ethnicities, colonization, holocaust, diasporic

Jewish American literature has chronicled and paralleled the Jewish American experience. It depicts the struggles of immigrant life, the stable yet alienated middle-class existence that followed, and finally the unique challenges of cultural acceptance: assimilation and the reawakening of tradition. There are many works of literature that depict the life of the Jewish immigrants. The heroes of these works tend to be young men or boys who are trying to establish financial viability in the New World while fighting with the demons of traditional Jewish life and family. Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth are the masters of Jewish American fiction. All of them wrote about the Jews rooted in America, who nonetheless suffer from alienation. Like his predecessors, some of Malamud's main characters –like Morris Bober

in *The Assistant*(1957)- are immigrants. However, Bober is not trying to make it in America. He has already failed. At mid-century, writers like Malamud began to analyze the problems with the American experiment. Jewish-American Literature has played an important role in representing and passing on the history, thoughts, feelings, and experience of Jewish immigrants and Jewish-Americans over the past two hundred years. From the earliest Jewish arrivals in the 1600s to the growth of feminist and gay rights movements in the Jewish community, Literature has played the part of story telling, memorializing, and motivating.

Beginning with the colonial and civil war period of American history, literature has played an important part of Jewish identity in the United States. The writings of the first rabbis and congregation members allude to the feelings of joy about being in a nation where they could practise their religion freely. The letters of Rebecca Gratz to her family members that told of the daily occurrences and observations from her daily life tells that she and her family were able to exist with much less anti-Semitism in their lives, and the ability to live much like the other non-Jewish citizens of that time. Likewise, the written address of Jacob Henry to the North Carolina House of Commons was a reaction to the anti-Semitism of one of his fellow representatives. This speech, an important part of Jewish-American political literature, fought the restriction placed on Jews and other religious minorities in the United States when it came to political office (Reidhead 41). His strong words provided a political idea that sought to change the society as it was and it succeeded. After the spread of pogroms in Russia, massive Jewish immigration took place. This was followed by an increased production of Jewish-American

Literature dealing with the experience of these newly arrived immigrants and the issues with which they had to deal including anti-Semitism, poverty, urbanization, and especially the divide between the customs, rules, and traditions of the old traditional Jewish communities and the new individualistic American ideas.

This is an important segment of Jewish literature as it calls into question the ever-evolving Jewish community and how it relates to the rest of American ideals and traditions. Mary Antin's "The Lie" deals directly with the difference between the traditional customs and the new American ideals. The Jewish son in this story, David, has to deal directly with the issue that his people are new to the United States and when his teacher asked him to play the part of his forefathers he accepts, but he becomes so upset that he believed that he let his teacher believe they were really his forefathers that he becomes sick to attend school. Like David, who felt sick because he lied to his teacher, thereby breaking a law of his heritage, in order to be accepted into his American school class, Jews of that era were in constant struggles over which values they wished to follow.

The movement from shtetl and rural community to the large American city also brought about a new experience to the Jewish settlers. No longer did they have a traditional community on which they could depend, but rather they settled primarily in the immense New York City. This movement brought about new problem such as conflict with a diverse array of ethnicity, the creation of tenement housing, the closeness of neighbors and the poverty that could not always be alleviated since everyone was in search of limited number of jobs in the city. Michael Gold's novel, *Jew Without Money*, deals directly with these problems as he describes in a semi-autobiographical story about the life

of newly arrived immigrants and their children in New York City. Leaving few aspect of Jewish life in the city untouched, Gold explores the relationship between the Jewish neighborhood and the surrounding neighborhood with population of other ethnicities. He explores the prostitution and the harsh conditions of employment in the Lower East Side as he also tells of the relationship between parent and child in the new Jewish-American context. Gold's narrative is important to the genre of Jewish Literature as it includes all of the aspects of the Jewish experience of that time.

Though Bellow is arguably the most revered Jewish American writer, his characters and themes are not overtly Jewish .Bellow, who grew up speaking Yiddish in an orthodox Jewish home, never locates his characters in this culture. Roth is the great chronicler of second generation American Jewry. His characters, by and large, are the children of those Jews who worked their tails off to enter the middle class and do not intend on letting their children forget it. Roth writes about Jews who are financially comfortable yet culturally adrift. Because of their comfort, they can afford to be critical of both their Jewish and American worlds. So instead of feeling more at home in America, they feel even more alienated. Caught in a no man's land between the universalism of American culture and the particularism of Jewish culture, Jewish American writers have, in recent years, opted for the latter. Contemporary writers such as Rebecca Goldstein negotiate the friction between feminism and Judaism, while writers such as Thane Rosenbaum and Melvin Bukiet discuss the unique conflicts of children of Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust has always been a dominant force in American Jewish communal identity, but only recently have writers begun to make sense of this relationship.

Similarly, the relationship between American Jews and Israel- the other dominant factor in Jewish American identity- has recently been explored by writers such as Allegra Goodman and Tova Reich. Contemporary Jewish American fiction has become geographically diverse. The rise of nationalism during the nineteenth century was yet another stroke against Jews because it was often based on blood similarity of a people comprising a national population, and Jews, of course, had no "racial origins" in any European country. Despite lacking a territory of their own at that time, Jews can be characterized as a colonized people because they suffered psychological colonization, with all that the colonized suffer, including self hatred and powerlessness. Driven, in part, by a resurgence of Hellenist ideals, the image of the Aryan male in literature, science and popular culture became almost hyper-masculine, while the Jewish male became feminized. There was a long tradition in which Jewish men were perceived as cowardly. They did not work for the land, and were not in the military. As dictated by an often watered-down Judaic sensibility, Jewish men tended to be concerned about women; marriage and family. They were positioned as almost anti-male, undermining and threatening European hyper-masculinity. The central political shift associated with the change is, of course, the establishment of Israel and the post-1967 thrust of centrist Zionist politics, but also significant is the maturation of American Jewry, whose consciousness has been formed through breaking away from old-world constructions of Jewish weakness, piety, fearfulness, and by implication, effeminacy.

The shift in intellectual discourse surrounding "Jewishness" has taken different forms in the United States, where the re-

masculization of Jewishness has not rescued it from a sense of “Otherness” and Israel, where Jews are no longer the Other but the dominant power. Understanding the continuing, problematic representation of “the Jew” in literature is crucial to understanding the relationship between discourses of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and territory and the formation of western ideologies. Jews have played a pivotal role in defining ethnic themes and incorporating them into American literature. In the eighties it was questioned “whether Jews are still to be considered a socially oppressed minority in America, similar to blacks and other people of colour, or whether they should justly be considered part of a precisely delineated social and political as well as artistic and literary establishment and as fundamentally different from those who are still to some degree excluded from it” (Eisen 21). The situation and the position of the Jewish-American writers has always been different from that of other ethnicities in America and still remains so until today. One detail is highlighted by comparison with the African-American writers. The “marginal” position of black authors has disappeared on the book market in the United States, but the themes of alienation and anger will not vanish as readily from their works. Instead of integration into the literary and artistic mainstream, black writers and artists wanted, especially since the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, to arrive at their “own” forms of literary expression which would have direct relevance for their lives. They wished to answer the question of their relationship to white mainstream culture by implementing a multicultural strategy; their literature is not that of assimilation, but in many ways that of establishing difference separatism, and cultural resistance. While the African-American writers there is no sense of the success or even

desirability of social and cultural integration into the predominantly white mainstream of American society, many Jewish-American authors felt as necessary and desirable, and as a result even managed to acquire it. Indeed, a great number of contemporary Jewish-American writers such as Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, Bernard Malamud, Arthur Miller, Phillip Roth and others have had literary success. The language employed by these writers is standard American English; they are socially accepted; and their works are read by a wide Jewish and non-Jewish audience. For this reason it is widely considered that their texts form part of recognized literary canon, and belong to the American literary “center” or “mainstream”, as far this may be defined today. As much as we agree to this idea, we cannot ignore several facts which underline the necessity to view Jewish American literary productions as shaped by strong ethnic forces, and Jewish American landscape. There are two main reasons why American Jewish cannot be successfully identified with the culture of the establishment. First if all, it is a fact that, as much as they tried to ingratiate themselves with the white mainstream majority, Jewish Americans just like any other ethnic writers have an acute “sense of doubleness, a double consciousness” (Sollors 243) and they confront an actual or imagined double audience, composed of ‘insiders’ and of readers, listeners, or spectators who are not familiar with the writer’s ethnic group, from both of whom they must have felt alienated at times. This sense is widely pervasive in their work and differentiates them from other mainstream writers who have “single consciousness”. Secondly, just like in many other ethnic communities, there is strong tendency to resist assimilation into the mainstream. Werner Sollors points out to the fact that: “Americans

perceive themselves as undergoing cultural homogenization” (245), that is, Americans of different background share larger and larger areas of an overlapping culture to fight against this and they have made efforts to maintain symbolic distinctions, a process known as “ethnicization”. The Jewish American community is very active in this respect. One such effort belongs to Dean J. Franco. In his book published in 2006, *Ethnic American Literature: Comparing Chicano, Jewish, and African American writing*, he tried to provide a strong corrective to the tendency of other minority traditions to dismiss Jewish literature as being “of the centre”, drawing from border theory as well as diasporic and postcolonial theorist and pointing to the acute social vulnerability, painful histories, and cultural anxieties that inform much of the Jewish literature of past century. A third aspect, supporting distinction from both mainstream literature and other ethnic literatures, Jews have an entirely different notion of the country of origin from the European Americans. The parent-child and old country-new world conflicts reflect several of the differences that make Jewish-American culture, and therefore Jewish-American literature unique. The change of authority in the family, the change of religious customs, the relationship in Judaism between the Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative branches of Judaism, as well as the relationship to Christianity and other minority religions, the new American dream in a Jewish context all have importance in this new ethnicity and in the literature.

Jewish-American literature has also played an important part in representing the feelings and thoughts of the Jewish Community during the second half of the twentieth century. The Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel

have become focal point in the rebirth of a sense of Jewishness. The Holocaust, the tragic murder of millions of innocent Jewish lives has become a focus in Jewish-American literature, and though the horrific phenomenon did not take place on American soil, it did affect the families of the victims, the survivors who emigrated to this country after the war, and the Jews who had no connection except through their Judaism and the through the worldwide Jewish communities. Representations of the Holocaust period, in such writings as Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* present to the American and Jewish-American public the story which binds the Jewish community to never forget and to never let such a horrific occurrence happen again. The creation of the State of Israel and especially the Six Day War has brought about a new sense of unity behind the Israel and the Right to Zion. Literature, such as Chana Bloch’s translation of Yehuda Amichai’s poem “Israel” portray a growing loyalty to and love of the State of Israel, yet as American Jews, writers have written on which nations to which we should hold closest to our hearts.

Jewish-American Literature has also been used to motivate change within the Jewish Community. For example, Tova Reich uses her writing abilities to combat gender discrimination in the communities of the Orthodox branch of Judaism. In her short story “The Lost Girl,” she writes about a girl who was lost on a field trip with an Orthodox Jewish organization and the reaction (or lack thereof) of the leadership of that particular institution. She argues through her writing that the (in her eyes) sexist traditions and customs of Orthodox Judaism make the value of a woman’s life less than that of a man’s. This use of literature is not to recall past experiences of the community or to entertain, but rather it is used to educate

and to promote political and social change within the community. Another modern day concern among American Jewry that has been represented in Jewish-American Literature is the rate of intermarriage and the potential loss of strength in the Jewish Community. Much literature, though very little fiction has been written on this subject as the ever-changing face of American Jewry will depend on how Jews choose their mates and raise their children. This issue has been discussed through literature that wishes to serve as a guiding force in the determination of the yet to come existence of the Jewish community in the United States.

Thus, we can see that Jewish American fiction plays an important part in the community of American Jewry. Literature is used for a myriad of purposes including no less than historical review, discussion of the life in the new world as opposed to the old, discussion relating to the place of the Holocaust and the State of Israel and their places in the identity of Jews, and discourse about the course on which Judaism and Jewish culture is evolving. The reading of literature of Jewish on Jewish themes, of non-Jewish writers on Jewish themes, and of Jewish writer on non-Jewish themes gives not only a look into the many facets of Jewish life in the from the earliest times of Jewish American but also presents several answers as to what it means to be a Jew in the United States today, and what form that identity will take as time evolves.

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Locating Ecocritical Thoughts in the Poetry of Wordsworth : A Select Study

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Abstract:

Environmental studies today form an important branch of discourse that has risen in response to the growing awareness about the ill effects of the mindless development affecting the ecological balance. This critical approach is termed ecocriticism and it analyses the relation between literature and environment. Scholars, critics and writers from all parts of the world today underline the significance of literary discourses in moulding our social values and world vision and stress on the urgency of the application of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism functions as a tool that draws the attention of the world to crucial environmental issues in the form of literary discourses. It upholds the voice of the 'non-human other'. Ecocriticism as a concept first arose in the late 1970s at meetings of the WLA(the Western Literary Association).The term was first coined by William Reuckert in his essay, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'.

"Ecocriticism depends upon our willingness as readers to marginalize ,if not completely overlook, precisely those aspects and meanings of texts that are traditionally privileged or valorized....what ecocriticism calls for , then is a fundamental shift from one context of reading to another- more specifically , a movement from the human to the environment..... a

humanism informed by an awareness of the more than human".(Reuckert,)

Ecocriticism takes its literary bearings from three major 19th century writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force and the wilderness in America: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller(1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau(1817-1862). In the U.K. , the subject had its roots in the British Romanticism of the 1790s (Jonathan Bate's Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition and The Song of the Earth). This study is an attempt to focus on some selected poems of Wordsworth in the light of Ecocriticism. The purpose is to shed light on the poet's views about the interdependence of man and Nature. The methodology to be applied is analytical and secondary sources will be consulted in the pursuit.

Though ecocriticism as a literary theory is of recent origin, the elements of it can be found in the works of several writers of the earlier periods. In this regard, Romanticism itself can be regarded as an embodiment of the rudiments of this. The Romantic poets attempted to rediscover the mystery and wonder of the world, and tried to establish a meaningful relationship between literature and Nature. To them, Nature is the principal source of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. William Wordsworth, who

belongs to the first generation of the Romantic poets, is a Nature poet, who viewed Nature as a living entity, and who believed that Nature is endowed with feelings and purposes. Thus, Wordsworth is viewed as an important icon of the ecocritical studies.

Romanticism rose as a reaction against the philosophical and industrial rationality that separated humanity from nature in the period of the Enlightenment. The idea of nature underwent a significant transformation in the Romantic period. The British Romantic writers formulated an innovative and in many respect original way of understanding the natural world. Such an understanding may be termed 'ecological', since for the first time in the Western intellectual world their poetry evinced the essential elements of a modern ecological world-view'. This view is especially evident in the poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge even as the Romantic era found itself to be in the threshold of an ecological perception – which was part of an overall sensibility that all of nature is constituted as an assemblage of biotic communities characterized by diversity, complexity and symbiosis. It was in the wake of such an ecological understanding that the traditional literary symbols as the nightingale underwent some new significance. It no longer remained a mythic embodiment of melancholy but a real bird in a forest, singing its own glad song of springtime, love and joyfulness. It comes to embody the mysterious complexity of nature which has the power to give life, and also to destroy it.

The poems selected for this study are: 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'Lines Written in Early Spring', 'The Leech Gatherer', 'The Ruined Cottage', 'London 1802' and 'The World is too much with us'. In the poem: 'Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey',

Wordsworth describes his return to a place on the banks of the river Wye that he had visited five years before. The opening lines of the poem depict a human community dwelling in harmonious coexistence with nature; the local farmsteads are 'green to the very door' and the local farmers act to preserve a remnant of the primordial ecosystem of that region by allowing their hedgerows to run wild. In 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth's position as an eco-poet is very clear. In this context, one may compare the poem with William Gilpin's 'Observations on the River Wye'. In his poem, Gilpin presents his account of the place in a picturesque manner, while Wordsworth's observations of the same place in his 'Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey' dwell on the idea of an interconnection between the human mind and the ecosystem. Gilpin before setting out to the narrative of the tour to Wye states that man travels for various reasons- to explore the culture, curiosity about art, to survey the beauties of nature and to learn the manners of men along with their different polities and modes of life. The language of the poem is locked within a Cartesian dualism- wherein the traveller is the subject and the environment he visits is the object. The Wye valley, to him, becomes a place to be examined, though not a home to dwell in. Gilpin regards the 'mazy course' and 'lofty banks' of the river Wye as the key to its beauty. To him, the spot he singles out for his tour is the most picturesque among the products of human history. In his description about the northern tour features a range of picturesque natural objects including ruins of abbeys (being naturalised to the soil). He affirms that ruined abbeys are among the most picturesque beauties of the English landscape. Picturesquely secluded in a harmonious vale, the Tintern Abbey becomes the high point of the Wye- tour for him.

Gilpin wonders with delight to see within half a mile of the site of the abbey the great ironworks, while walking and meditating amongst the ruins. Published in 1797, Samuel Ireland also in his *Picturesque Views of the River Wye*, wrote how contemplation of Tintern evoked awe and religious feelings in him.

Tintern Abbey in 'Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey', is a spot several miles upstream. To him the place is a 'life of things'. In a footnote at the bottom of the page in which the poem begins in the 1978 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet informs the reader that 'The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern', besides emphasizing that this is not a poem located at the site of the abbey. The absence of the abbey from the poem is significant. By erasing the abbey, Wordsworth ensures that the 'culturescape' of the poem is free from nationalism. Secondly, the absence has the effect of elevating his mind from religious sentiment to the feelings about nature:

Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

Which on a wild secluded scene impress

Thoughts of more deep seclusion, and connect

The landscape with the quiet of the sky (p. 109, lines 5-8)

In Gilpin, the traveler is the subject and the landscape is the object, but Wordsworth's effect of a grammatical and phenomenological shift makes all the difference. Though the sentence begins with the perceiving eye as the subject (I behold), but in the subordinate clause the cliffs become the subject. Wordsworth states that the thoughts are impressed on the scene itself. The 'I' is written out, or rather absorbed into the scene. Religious retreat meant seclusion from worldliness and submission of oneself to the divine will, for, to Wordsworth, deep seclusion

means dissolution of the self from the perceiving eye and diversion to ecologically connected organism. For the picturesque gazer, the eye is all important, but, Wordsworth also makes us to hear more precisely the sound of silence. To begin with, there is a scene and a landscape but by the end of the sentence the cliffs are found to be making a connection with 'the quiet of the sky'. The connection is what the ecopoetic does, while the picturesque does merely look.

A healthy ecosystem is one which is held in balance. Less than a few miles below Tintern Abbey, ironwork is destroying the bioregional balance, thus polluting the Wye. To the contrary, a few miles ahead, Wordsworth points out, -there is a cottage -farming which does not disturb the ecosystem:

These plots of cottage – ground, these orchard-tufts

Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,

Among the woods and copses lose themselves,

Nor with their green and simple hue disturb

The wild green landscape (p. 109, lines 11-15)

The colour green is attached to both orchard and uncultivated land. The wreathes of smoke on the horizon too is of positive significance to the poet, as it leads him to suppose that it might not be coming from the ironwork observed by Gilpin, but from the fires of 'vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods'. ('vagrant dwellers' are gypsies who do not stay for long upon a single place for they do not want to exploit a resource to the point of damaging the earth.)

The central section of the poem is devoted to the idea of an inner vision that should illuminate all humans about the fact that all 'things' have a life or an animating spirit which enables one to 'see into the life of things'. The memory of the Wye valley has a lesson to render to the poet, which may be termed as the Gaia hypothesis

i.e. the idea that the earth is nothing but a single vast, living, breathing ecosystem:

And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean, and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,

And rolls through all things. (p. 114, III. Lines 45- 54)

Wordsworth's distinctive version of the Gaia principle refuses to carve the world into object and subject. He feels the same force animates both the consciousness of the mind of man and of all things. A river or a plant is both an object of thought and a thinking thing. The distinction one makes between subject and object is a murderous dissection. For the picturesque theorist the perceiving, dividing eye stands above and apart from nature but Wordsworth prefers to take the tourist's status as a gazer. He takes the singular position as a gazer to affirm that the mind of man is integral to nature. 'Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey' does not offer a view of a place in the manner of the picturesque, but it relates to an exploration of the inter-relatedness of perception and creation, a profound reflection on the networks that link the mental and the environmental space. A tourist is a mere traveler, an outsider, while, the ecopoet is one who feels with nature.

In the Cartesian model of Homo sapiens, the eye is master of the heart. As the eye is master of the heart and the judgement master of the feelings, so mankind is the master of nature. To Wordsworth, it is an erroneous concept and it

needs to be corrected. There is an obvious echo of Rousseau's call to return to nature in Wordsworth's attitude to nature, for Rousseau also suggested that since man is both economic and social, he has to come closer to nature and understand her with her inward eye.

Wordsworth's poem: 'Lines Written in Early Spring' also is an example of the poet's emphasis on the interconnectedness between man and Nature. Wordsworth places the speaker in the middle of Nature and shows that Nature is right and loyal to human being while man must blame himself/herself for the broken bond between him/her and Nature:

I heard a thousand blended notes,

While in a grove I sate reclined,

In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts

Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link

The human soul that through me ran;

And much it grieved my heart to think

What man has made of man.

(Wordsworth, 2006, p. 1333, lines 1-8,)

In another poem: 'The Ruined Cottage', there is a reference to Nature's bestowing of favours upon man despite man's disrespectful treatment of her [Nature] who shows his/her indiscretion by disturbing the ecosystem:

... Beside yon spring I stood

And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel

One sadness, they and I. For them a bond

Of brotherhood is broken: time has been

When every day the touch of human hand

Disturbed their stillness, and they ministered

To human comfort ... (Wordsworth, 2006, p. 1359, lines 82-88)

These lines also support Wordsworth's ecological position as a poet of Nature .

The subjects of the air pollution and the environmental changes have found an implicit expression in many of Wordsworth's nature poems. He is overjoyed to see the beauty of the morning spread over the city of London in a smokeless atmosphere:

*The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.*
(p. 150)

The "Smokeless air" reminds one of today's movements for pollution-free air. Certainly, the poet would not have enjoyed the serene morning splendour if pollution was in the air. The poems 'Resolution and Independence' (1807) and 'The Leech Gatherer' (1807) open on a note of uproar and noise in the atmosphere throughout the night. There is description of a fierce storm accompanied by a heavy downpour of rain in the opening lines:

*There was a roaring in the air all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;* (1-2)

The violent storm and the heavy rains in the opening lines, suggest Wordsworth's awareness of the violent aspects of nature. The old leech gatherer is the symbol of firmness of mind in adversity. The pathos of the old man is found both in "hazardous and wearisome" employment and the scarcity of the leeches that were once seen in plenty. The old man says:

*Once I could meet with them on every side;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet I still persevere, and find them where I may.*
(124-126)

Although there is no clear mention why the number of leeches have declined, the phrase "dwindled long by slow decay" offers a slim suggestion about the reason. The slow decay of

the leeches might be due to excessive catch or some environmental damage, either of these, of course, an ecological cause.

As a critic of industrial culture, Wordsworth expresses his anathema to utilitarianism – a product of man's economic progress at the expense of the weak and nature. In 'London, 1802' the poet calls upon the spirit of Milton to return to arouse the nineteenth Century England from its moral stagnation. In the poem: 'The World is too much with us', the poet expresses his dissatisfaction over what he feels 'sheer waste of life' as man runs after earthly desires and vanity:

*The World is too much with us,
Late and soon
Getting and spending, we lay waste
Our powers,
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away,
A sordid boon!* (144)

The joys and spiritual blessings found in close communion with nature have disappeared as man prefers to live a busy life, conspicuous by mundane worldly engagements. He/she is 'out of tune' with nature and has lost his/her ability to respond to nature.

It goes without saying that the world today stands on the brink of a major ecological disaster. The exploitation of nature, coupled with the devastation of biotic life continues unabated. The basic 'lesson' of ecology, to the contrary is that the man is simply one species among other forms of life, not superior to any of them. The Romantic poets argue in the same vein about the life and its sustainability. The Romantic ecology puts reverences to the green earth because it recognizes how much we take from nature. Wordsworth's poems provide the modern man, who lives in a world haunted by

fragmentations and illusory shadows of reality and technology, with a new perspective about the interconnectedness and interdependence between man and Nature in a vast ecosystem.

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নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰ আৰু অসমৰ নাট্য আন্দোলনত ইয়াৰ ভূমিকা

ড° দীক্ষিতা দেৱী

সহকাৰী অধ্যাপিকা, অসমীয়া বিভাগ, শ্বহীদ স্মৃতি মহাবিদ্যালয় (বেলশৰ), নলবাৰী

সংক্ষিপ্তসাৰ : ঊনবিংশ শতিকাৰ শেষ আৰু বিংশ শতিকাৰ আৰম্ভণি কালছোৱাত অসমত নাট্যমঞ্চ প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হৈছিল। প্ৰথম অৱস্থাত অস্থায়ী ৰূপত নাট্যমঞ্চ তৈয়াৰ কৰি অভিনয়ৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হৈছিল। কিন্তু পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত প্ৰায়বোৰ চহৰতে একোটাকৈ নাট্যমঞ্চ স্থাপন কৰা হৈছিল। অসমৰ চিৰস্মৰণীয় নাট্যমঞ্চ 'নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰ'ৰ ভেটি প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হৈছিল ১৯০২ চনত। স্থায়ী নাট্য মন্দিৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হোৱাৰ পিছৰে পৰা অভিনয়ৰ বাবে নাটকৰ অভাৱ ঘটিছিল। গতিকে এই অভাৱ পূৰণ কৰিবলৈ যোৱাৰ ফলতেই ভালেসংখ্যক নাটক আৰু নাট্যকাৰৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছিল। উল্লেখনী যে নাট্যকাৰসকল একে একোগৰাকী সফল অভিনেতাও আছিল। স্বৰচিত নাটক সমূহৰ লগতে অন্যান্য নাট্যকাৰৰ নাটকতো অভিনয় কৰি তেওঁলোকে সফলতা অৰ্জন কৰিছিল। আনহাতে মৌলিক নাটক ৰচনা হোৱাৰ আগতে নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ লগত জড়িত থকা অভিনেতাসকলে নাট্যমন্দিৰত পৌৰাণিক আৰু অনূদিত নাটকো অভিনয় কৰিছিল। ১৯৪৮ চনৰ পৰা নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰত সহ অভিনয় আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। সেই সময়ত মহিলাসকলে অভিনয় কৰিবলৈ সুযোগ পোৱা নাছিল। এনে ক্ষেত্ৰত পুৰুষসকলে মহিলাৰ ভাও কৰি মহিলা শিল্পীৰ অভাৱ পূৰণ কৰিছিল। মুঠতে নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তাৰ ফলত ভালেসংখ্যক নাটক, নাট্যকাৰ, অভিনেতা তথা নাট পৰিচালকৰ জন্ম হৈছিল। এওঁলোকৰ সামূহিক প্ৰচেষ্টাত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰে অসম তথা সৰ্বভাৰতীয় পৰ্যায়তো সফলতা অৰ্জন কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। মুঠতে অসমৰ নাট্য আন্দোলনৰ ইতিহাসত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ অৱদান অতুলনীয়। আমাৰ আলোচনাত এই সম্পৰ্কে বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰে আলোচনা কৰিবলৈ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হ'ব।

আৰম্ভণি : অসমৰ বংগমঞ্চৰ ইতিহাস অনুধাৱন কৰিলে জনা যায় যে মহাপুৰুষ শ্ৰীমন্ত শংকৰদেৱ আছিল অসমৰ মঞ্চৰ প্ৰাণ প্ৰতিষ্ঠাপক। তেওঁ মঞ্চৰ মূল ভেটি স্থাপন কৰি অসমীয়া জনসাধাৰণৰ মাজত অমৰ সৃষ্টি অংকীয়া ভাওনাৰ প্ৰচলন কৰিছিল। কিন্তু সময়ৰ পৰিৱৰ্তন, পৰিৱেশ আৰু বিভিন্ন প্ৰভাৱৰ ফলস্বৰূপে ওঠৰ শতিকাৰ শেষ ভাগৰ পৰা অংকীয়া ভাওনাৰ প্ৰচাৰ-প্ৰচলন তেনেই সীমিত হৈ আহিছিল। আনহাতে বংগদেশীয় যাত্ৰা অনুষ্ঠানৰ প্ৰভাৱে সমগ্ৰ অসমকো স্পৰ্শ কৰিছিল। বংগদেশত ১৭৯৫ খৃঃত ৰাছিয়াৰ ষ্টুপাৰ নোভিচ লেবেডেফে আধুনিক ৰীতিৰ মঞ্চ স্থাপন কৰি বঙালী ভাষাত নাটক অভিনয় কৰিছিল। বঙালী সকলৰ পৰা আৰ্হি গ্ৰহণ কৰি ঊনবিংশ শতিকাৰ শেষ আৰু বিংশ শতিকাৰ আৰম্ভণি কালছোৱাত অসমত নাট্যমঞ্চ প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হৈছিল। ইউৰোপীয় থিয়েটাৰৰ আৰ্হিত অসমৰ প্ৰধান চহৰ সমূহত একো একোটা ৰাজহুৱা নাট্যমঞ্চ সম্পৰ্কৰূপে ৰাইজৰ উদ্যোগত গঢ়ি উঠিছিল। প্ৰথম অৱস্থাত অস্থায়ী ৰূপত নাট্যমঞ্চ তৈয়াৰ কৰি অভিনয়ৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হৈছিল। পৰৱৰ্তী কালত প্ৰায়বোৰ চহৰতে একোটাকৈ স্থায়ী নাট্যমঞ্চ স্থাপন কৰা হৈছিল। অসমৰ ধুবুৰী, গুৱাহাটী, নলবাৰী, তেজপুৰ, নগাঁও, শিৱসাগৰ, যোৰহাট, ডিব্ৰুগড় আদি চহৰত যিবোৰ মঞ্চ প্ৰতিষ্ঠিত হৈছিল, সেইবোৰৰ প্ৰত্যেকৰে একো একোটা আদৰ্শনীয় ঐতিহ্য আছে। অসমৰ মঞ্চজগতৰ প্ৰখ্যাত লোকসকল এই ঐতিহ্যৰ সৈতে সম্পৃক্ত হৈ আছে। উল্লেখ্য, এই নাট্যমঞ্চবোৰৰ বেছিভাগৰে নাট্যমন্দিৰ নামকৰণ কৰা হৈছিল। যেনে - কুমাৰ ভাস্কৰ নাট্য মন্দিৰ, বীণাপাণি নাট্যমন্দিৰ, নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰ, ডিব্ৰুগড় আমোলাপতি নাট্যমন্দিৰ, বাপুজী নাট্যমন্দিৰ, পঞ্চানন নাট্যমন্দিৰ, বালিগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰ, বহাগী নাট্যমন্দিৰ ইত্যাদি।

অৱশ্যে তাৰ মাজতে বাণ থিয়েটাৰ, যোৰহাট থিয়েটাৰ, গোলাঘাট এমেচাৰ থিয়েটাৰ আদি নামতো নাট্যমন্দিৰ গঢ়ি উঠিছিল। সাধাৰণতে প্ৰায়বোৰ নাট্যমন্দিৰ দুৰ্গা পূজাৰ স্থলীতে অৰ্থাৎ পূজাৰ মন্দিৰৰ গাতে গা-লগাই নিৰ্মাণ কৰা হৈছিল। আনহাতে দুৰ্গাপূজাক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি নাট্যমন্দিৰ সমূহত বিভিন্ন ধৰণৰ নাট অভিনয় হৈছিল। এনে এক দৃষ্টিভংগীৰ ফালৰ পৰা এই নাট্যমঞ্চবোৰক নাট্যমন্দিৰ বুলি অভিহিত কৰা হৈছিল বুলি অনুমান কৰিব পাৰি।

নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ ইতিবৃত্তঃ অসমৰ জনগণৰ এক চিৰস্মৰণীয় নাট্যমঞ্চ হৈছে নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰ। ই অসমৰ এটা অতি পুৰণি অনুষ্ঠান। ১৯০২ চনত নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ ভেটি প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হৈছিল যদিও ইয়াৰ বহুদিন আগৰে পৰা নগাঁৱত নাট্যাভিনয়ৰ পৰিৱেশ এটা সৃষ্টি হৈছিল। সেয়েহে ১৮৯২ চনত বৰ্তমানৰ জুবিলী খেল পথাৰত অস্থায়ীভাৱে ঘৰ নিৰ্মাণ কৰি নাটকৰ অভিনয় আৰম্ভ কৰা হৈছিল। দেৱনাথ বৰদলৈ ৰচিত 'জৰাসন্ধ বধ' নাটক এই নাট্যমঞ্চত অভিনীত হৈছিল। এই অভিনয়ত প্ৰধান ভূমিকা জৰাসন্ধৰ ভাওত দেৱনাথ বৰদলৈ নিজে অৱতীৰ্ণ হৈছিল। এনেদৰে নগাঁও চহৰৰ মাজ-মজিয়াত অস্থায়ী নাট্য মন্দিৰ নিৰ্মাণ কৰি সভ্য সকলে অভিনয়ৰ প্ৰসাৰ বৃদ্ধি কৰিবলৈ সুযোগ পাইছিল। ১৮৯৪ চনত এখন সামান্য অস্থায়ী বংগমঞ্চ সাজি ৰত্নেশ্বৰ মহন্ত ৰচিত 'দ্রৌপদীৰ বেণীবন্ধন' নাটকখন অভিনীত হৈছিল। এনেদৰে নগাঁৱৰ ডেকা লোকসকলে অস্থায়ী নাট্যমঞ্চ নিৰ্মাণ কৰি পূজা-পাৰ্বণে নাটক অভিনয় কৰি জনসাধাৰণক আকৃষ্ট কৰাৰ লগতে অসমীয়া অভিনয় শিল্পক আগুৱাই নিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। ডেকাসকলৰ উৎসাহ-উদ্দীপনা দেখি নগাঁৱৰ নাট্যমোদী ব্যক্তিসকলে স্থায়ী নাট্যমঞ্চ নিৰ্মাণ কৰিবলৈ আগুৱাই আহিছিল। কৰ্মীসকলৰ এই সুচিন্তাৰ পৰিণতি স্বৰূপে সম্প্ৰতি নাটঘৰ থকা ঠাইতে আমোলাপট্টিত ১৯০২ চনত খেৰ-বাঁহেৰে এই নাট্য মন্দিৰটো নিৰ্মাণ কৰা হৈছিল।

অসমৰ নাট্য আন্দোলনত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ অৱদান : সদৌ অসম নাট্য আন্দোলনত এই নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ অৰিহণা যথেষ্ট। স্থায়ী মন্দিৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠা হোৱাৰ পিছৰেপৰা অভিনয়ৰ বাবে নাটকৰ অভাৱ ঘটিছিল। গতিকে এই অভাৱ পূৰণ কৰিবলৈ যোৱাৰ ফলতেই ভালেসংখ্যক নাটক আৰু নাট্যকাৰৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছিল। অসমীয়া নাট্য জগতত বিশিষ্ট আসন অধিকাৰ কৰা ৰুদ্ৰৰাম বৰদলৈ, দেৱনাথ বৰদলৈ, কবি কমলানন্দ ভট্টাচাৰ্য, কবি

বত্ৰাকান্ত বৰকাকতি, যুগল দাস, সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈ, চন্দ্ৰ ফুকন, বৃন্দাবন চন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামী, দ্বিজেন্দ্ৰ মোহন গোস্বামী, ৰামকুমাৰ ভট্টাচাৰ্যকে আদি কৰি আন ভালেমান নাট্যকাৰে একমাত্ৰ নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰক চকুৰ আগত ৰাখি নাটক ৰচনা কৰিবলৈ আগবাঢ়িছিল। ৰুদ্ৰৰাম বৰদলৈৰ 'বঙাল-বঙালী', দেৱনাথ বৰদলৈৰ 'বৈদেহী বিচ্ছেদ', 'জৰাসন্ধ বধ', 'ৰাৱণ বধ', কমলানন্দ ভট্টাচাৰ্যৰ 'নগাকোঁৱৰ', 'চিত্ৰাঙ্গতা', 'খৰিভাৰীৰ ৰাজ্য লাভ', বত্ৰাকান্ত বৰকাকতিৰ 'হৰিণ চুমা', সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈৰ 'পহিলা তাৰিখ', 'সেই বাটেদি', 'উপহাৰ', যুগল কুমাৰ দাসৰ '১৮৫৭ ছাল', বৃন্দাবন চন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামীৰ 'ঠানুৰাপু', 'বিসৰ্জন', 'প্ৰায়শ্চিত্ত', ৰামকুমাৰ ভট্টাচাৰ্যৰ 'ওপৰ মহলা' আদি উল্লেখযোগ্য নাটকসমূহ নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰত অভিনয় কৰাৰ কাৰণে ৰচিত হৈছিল। আনহাতে 'পিয়লি ফুকন' নাটকৰ সৃষ্টি নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তাৰ ফল। 'পিয়লি ফুকন' নাটকখনৰ লেখক চাৰিগৰাকী বুলি জনা যায়। তেওঁলোক হ'ল - চন্দ্ৰফুকন, যুগল দাস, সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈ আৰু দ্বিজেন্দ্ৰমোহন গোস্বামী। উল্লেখনীয় যে উক্ত নাট্যকাৰসকল একো একোগৰাকী সফল অভিনেতাও আছিল। ১৯৪৭ চনৰ ৩১ মে' তাৰিখে নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰত 'পিয়লি ফুকন' নাটকখন প্ৰথমবাৰৰ বাবে মঞ্চস্থ হয়। প্ৰথম অভিনয়ত 'নাৰায়ণ'ৰ ভূমিকাত সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈয়ে আৰু পিয়লিৰ ভূমিকাত চন্দ্ৰফুকনে অংশগ্ৰহণ কৰিছিল। "নগঞা নাট্যকাৰ সকলৰ উপৰিও অসমৰ আন ঠাইৰ নাট্যকাৰসকলে লিখা প্ৰায় সকলোবোৰ বিখ্যাত নাটকেই এই নাটঘৰত একাধিকবাৰ মঞ্চস্থ কৰা হৈছে। তাৰে খনচৰেক বিখ্যাত অভিনয়ৰ নাটক হৈছে - মেঘনাদ বধ, লিটিকাই, পাচনি, জয়মতী, মহৰী, শোণিতকুৰী কাৰেঙৰ লিগিৰী, ভাগ্য পৰীক্ষা, টেটোন তামুলী, পাৰ্থ-পৰাজয়, পাণ্ডৱ মিলন, বেউলা নন্দদুলাল, কুৰুক্ষেত্ৰ, শ্ৰীৰামচন্দ্ৰ, মাৰ্জ্জিয়ানা, প্ৰায়শ্চিত্ত, ঠানু বাপু, বিয়া-বিপৰ্যয়, কুকুৰীকণাৰ আঠমঙলা, উমা, চন্দ্ৰকান্ত সিংহ, কাল পৰিণয়, গুৰু ভৰত, যৱনিকাৰ আঁৰে আঁৰে, নীলাম্বৰ, ৰক্ষকুমাৰ, নৰকাসুৰ, দক্ষযজ্ঞ, ওপৰমহলা, নাট্যকাৰৰ সন্ধানত ছটি চৰিত্ৰ ইত্যাদি।" মৌলিক নাটক ৰচনা হোৱাৰ আগতে এই নাট্যকাৰ সকলৰ লগতে নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ আন অভিনেতাসকলে পৌৰাণিক আৰু অনুদিত নাটক অভিনয় কৰিছিল। অকল নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰতেই নহয় অসমৰ প্ৰায়বোৰ বংগমঞ্চতে এই নাটকৰ অভিনয়ৰ জোৱাৰ উঠিছিল। তেনে পৌৰাণিক, বুৰঞ্জীমূলক

আৰু অনূদিত নাটক সমূহৰ ভিতৰত - কালাপাহাৰ, চন্দ্ৰগুপ্ত, ছাজাহান, বাজিৰাও, দেৱলাদেৱী, কৰ্ণাজ্জুন, ভীষ্ম, পৃথ্বীৰাজ, অহল্যাবাসি, ৰাণাপ্ৰতাপ, নুৰজাহান, টিপু চুলতান, মিৰ কাছিম, ভ্ৰমৰঙ্গ, চন্দ্ৰবীৰ, চন্দ্ৰাৱলী, ৰণজিৎ সিংহ, মাৰ্চেন্ট অব্ ভেনিচ, জুলিয়াচ চিজাৰ আদি উল্লেখযোগ্য। চন্দ্ৰফুকন, সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈ, জগত চন্দ্ৰ বেজবৰুৱা, ৰায়বাহাদুৰ বৃন্দাবন চন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামী অসম তথা ভাৰতবৰ্ষৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠিত শিল্পী। প্ৰত্যেক গৰাকী একেধাৰে নাট্যকাৰ, অভিনেতা আৰু নাট পৰিচালক। সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈ ৰচিত, অভিনীত আৰু পৰিচালিত নাটকে অসম তথা সৰ্বভাৰতীয় পৰ্য্যায়তো বিশেষ সন্মান লাভ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছে। নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰত জগত চন্দ্ৰ বেজবৰুৱাৰ ভূমিকা অতি গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ। ভিন্ ভিন্ চৰিত্ৰ ৰূপায়ণত তেওঁৰ বিশেষ কৃতিত্ব আছে। বৃন্দাবন চন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামী আছিল নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ গুৰি ধৰোঁতা। এওঁলোকৰ লগতে এই নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ মঞ্চত প্ৰথম অভিনয় কৰি পৰৱৰ্তী কালত অসমৰ বিভিন্ন মঞ্চ তথা চলচিত্ৰ অভিনয় কৰি বিশেষ পাৰদৰ্শিতা লাভ কৰা ব্যক্তিসকলৰ ভিতৰত মাণিক চন্দ্ৰ বেজবৰুৱা, পীতাম্বৰ শৰ্মা, পূৰ্ণ কটকী, কবি ৰত্নকান্ত বৰকাকতি, যুগল দাস, দ্বিজেন্দ্ৰ মোহন শৰ্মা, সনৎ বৰদলৈ, পবিত্ৰ বৰকাকতি, আব্দুল মজিদ, জ্ঞানন্দা বৰা, চুণি ভট্টাচাৰ্য, কানু বেজবৰুৱা, গুণ মহন্ত, ইমদাদুল হাজৰিকা, উপকূল বৰদলৈ আদি উল্লেখযোগ্য। এওঁলোকৰ উপৰিও আন কেইগৰাকীমান শিল্পী মহিলাৰ ভাও লোৱাত সিদ্ধহস্ত আছিল। তেখেতসকলৰ ভিতৰত - কবি, নাট্যকাৰ কমলানন্দ ভট্টাচাৰ্য, চন্দ্ৰ ফুকন, বিশ্বেশ্বৰ ফুকন, প্ৰাণেশ্বৰ কটকী, অমল শৰ্মা, ৰাজেন শৰ্মা আদি। ১৯৪৮ চনৰ পৰা নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰত সহ অভিনয় আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। সেই সময়ত মহিলাসকলে অভিনয় কৰিবলৈ সুযোগ সুবিধা পোৱা নাছিল। এনে ক্ষেত্ৰত এই শিল্পীসকলে মহিলাৰ ভাও কৰি মহিলা শিল্পীৰ অভাৱ পূৰণ কৰিছিল। এই ক্ষেত্ৰত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ ভোটাতৰা সদৃশ চন্দ্ৰ ফুকন অন্যতম। “তেওঁৰ খোজ-কাটল, পূৰ্ণ বচন ভংগীমা, অংগ সঞ্চালন ইমান নিখুঁত আছিল যে প্ৰতিটো চৰিত্ৰকে ফুটাই তুলিব পাৰিছিল। ‘সীতা’ চৰিত্ৰ মঞ্চত উপস্থাপন কৰি সীতাৰ অন্তৰৰ বিষাদৰ ছবি তেওঁ যিদৰে প্ৰকাশ কৰিছিল, সেয়া অত্যন্ত প্ৰশংসনীয়। প্ৰতিগৰাকী দৰ্শকে চকুলো টুকি ৰংগস্থলীৰ পৰা ওলাই আহিব লগা হৈছিল। কেৱল নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ ৰূপায়ণতে ফুকন ডাঙৰীয়া সিদ্ধহস্ত নহয়, পুৰুষ চৰিত্ৰকো সমানে ফুটাই

তুলিব পাৰিছিল।”^২ সময়ৰ অগ্ৰগতিত লাহে লাহে নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ মঞ্চলৈ মহিলাৰ আগমন ঘটিল। সমাজৰ বাধা নেওচি তেওঁলোক ওলাই আহিছিল। এওঁলোকৰ ভিতৰত বকুল শইকীয়া দাস, ৰছিদা খাতুন, প্ৰভা হাজৰিকা, পুতুল শইকীয়া, ৰুণু দেৱী, মুণালিনী ভট্টাচাৰ্য আদি। বকুল শইকীয়া দাসৰ অভিনয় আছিল অতি উচ্চ খাপৰ। দিল্লীত অনুস্থিত হোৱা সৰ্বভাৰতীয় নাট মহোৎসৱত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ শিল্পীসকলে ‘শোণিত কুঁৱৰী’ নাটকখন অভিনয় কৰিছিল। নাটকখনৰ মূল চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰলেখাৰ ভাওত বকুল শইকীয়াই অভিনয় কৰি প্ৰশংসিত হৈছিল।

সংগীত নাটকৰ এটি প্ৰয়োজনীয় অংগ। সংগীতৰ শুদ্ধ ব্যৱহাৰে অভিনয়ক উচ্চস্তৰলৈ গতি কৰাত সহায় কৰে। নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ জৰিয়তে ৰচিত, অভিনীত আৰু পৰিচালিত নাটক সমূহত পোনপ্ৰথমে বাউলী কবি কমলানন্দ ভট্টাচাৰ্যই গীত প্ৰয়োগ কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত গুৰুত্ব প্ৰদান কৰিছিল বুলি জানিব পৰা যায়। ভট্টাচাৰ্যদেৱে তেখেতৰ ‘নগাৰ্কাঁৱৰ’ (১৯২৯) নাটকত প্ৰথম আবহ সংগীতৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰে। স্বকীয় গীত সমূহৰ উপৰিও আন গীতিকাৰৰ গীতত নাট্যোপযোগিত সুৰ সংযোগ কৰি, নিজৰ সুৱদী কণ্ঠেৰে গীত পৰিৱেশন কৰি দৰ্শকক মন্ত্ৰমুগ্ধ কৰি ৰাখিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। ভট্টাচাৰ্যদেৱৰ পাছত শ্ৰীযুত যজ্ঞ চন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামীদেৱে কেইবাখনো নাটকত সংগীত পৰিচালনাৰ দায়িত্বত আছিল। ইয়াৰ পিছত সনৎ কুমাৰ বৰদলৈ, বিবেকানন্দ ভট্টাচাৰ্য, মুকুট শৰ্মা, কৃষ্ণমূৰ্ত্তি হাজৰিকা, খগেন মহন্ত ইত্যাদি স্বনামধন্য শিল্পীসকলে নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰত নাটকৰ সংগীত পৰিচালনা কৰিছিল।

সামৰণি : দেখা গৈছে, অসমৰ নাট্য আন্দোলনৰ ইতিহাসত নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ অৱদান নিঃসন্দেহে অতুলনীয়। অসমীয়া জনগণৰ সপোনৰ স্থলী এই নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ কাৰণেই সৃষ্টি হৈছিল নাটক, নাটৰচক, অভিনয়, অভিনেতা-অভিনেত্ৰী আৰু গীত-বাদ্য-বিশাৰদৰ। “পূৰ্বৱৰ্তী সকলৰ বাহিৰেও যাঠিৰ দশকৰ পৰা নগাঁও নাট্য সমিতিয়ে বহু নাট্যকাৰ, পৰিচালক আৰু অভিনেতা-অভিনেত্ৰী সৃষ্টি কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত অভূতপূৰ্ব অৰিহণা যোগাই আহিছে। এনে কৃতিত্ব আন নাট্যমঞ্চ সমূহে একেলগে দাবী কৰিব নোৱাৰে।”^৩ শিল্পীসকলৰ একনিষ্ঠতা আৰু আশাশুধীয়া চেষ্টাৰ ফলতেই নাট্য মন্দিৰে ভিন্ ভিন্ সময়ত অসম তথা সৰ্বভাৰতীয় পৰ্য্যায়ত অভিনয়ৰ যোগেৰে প্ৰশংসা বুটলিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। ১৯৫২ চন নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ বাবে

এটা বিশেষ গৌৰৱৰ দিন আছিল। কিয়নো সেই বছৰত সংগীত-নাটক একাডেমীয়ে দিল্লীত আয়োজন কৰা সৰ্বভাৰতীয় নাট মহোৎসৱত নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰৰ শিল্পীসকলে মঞ্চস্থ কৰা জ্যোতিপ্ৰসাদ আগৰৱালাদেৱৰ শোণিতকুৱৰী নাটকে প্ৰথম স্থান লাভ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। এই সম্পৰ্কে সেই সমৰ বাতৰি কাগজত এনেদৰে মন্তব্য প্ৰকাশ কৰিছিল - *Sunday statesman, Delhi* : "Indeed the success of the production lay in the ability of the director to treat it as a 'Mid-summer Night's Dream', songs and dance are woven into the texture of the play to create an effect of beauty. Both the music and the dances were appealing. This is a play and drama which every lover of theatre should see."⁸ তেনেদৰে ১৯৭০ চনত জুলাই মাহত বাংগালোৰত অনুষ্ঠিত সৰ্বভাৰতীয় নাট মহোৎসৱত নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰৰ সৌজন্যত সাৰদাকান্ত বৰদলৈ ৰচিত আৰু পৰিচালিত উপহাৰ নাটকখন মঞ্চস্থ কৰা হৈছিল। উক্ত মহোৎসৱত এই নাটকখনে প্ৰথম স্থান লাভ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। এই সম্পৰ্কে বাংগালোৰৰ বাতৰি কাকত 'কানাড়া প্ৰভা'ত এটি প্ৰশংসাসূচক বাতৰি প্ৰকাশ পাইছিল। মুঠৰ ওপৰত সোণালী ইতিহাস বহনকাৰী "নগাঁও নাট্য মন্দিৰ"ক অসমৰ নাট্য আন্দোলনৰ এক বিশেষ অংগ বুলি অভিহিত কৰিব পাৰি। শিল্পীসকলৰ একাগ্ৰতা, কৰ্মনিষ্ঠতা আৰু আন্তৰিকতাৰ ফলশ্ৰুতিত জাকত জিলিকা হোৱা নগাঁও নাট্যমন্দিৰ অসমৰ সাংস্কৃতিক জগতৰ এক উজ্জ্বল নক্ষত্ৰ।

পাদটীকা :

- ১। মঞ্চলেখা পৃ. ৪৩০
- ২। নাটক আৰু ৰঙ্গমঞ্চ, পৃ. ৩
- ৩। শ্বহীদ ভৱন আৰু পাব্লিক লাইব্ৰেৰী (শতবাৰ্ষিকী স্মৃতি গ্ৰন্থ) পৃ. ১৭০
- ৪। শ্বহীদ ভৱন আৰু পাব্লিক লাইব্ৰেৰী (শতবাৰ্ষিকী স্মৃতি গ্ৰন্থ) পৃ. ১৬৭

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- গোস্বামী, ইন্দ্ৰেশ্বৰ (সম্পাদিত) : শ্বহীদ ভৱন আৰু পাব্লিক লাইব্ৰেৰী (শতবাৰ্ষিকী স্মৃতিগ্ৰন্থ) ১৮৯৪-১৯৯৪) নগাঁও, ১৯৯৯
- বৰকটকী, উপেন্দ্ৰ আৰু শৰ্মা ভূপেন (সম্পাদিত) : শিলঘাট নাট্য সমাজৰ প্ৰেক্ষাপটত আমাৰ নাটক আৰু মঞ্চ, শিলঘাট নাট্যসমাজ শতবৰ্ষ উৎসৱ উদযাপন সমিতি, শিলঘাট, নগাঁও ২০০০

(লেখনিটো যুগুত কৰোঁতে বিভিন্ন গ্ৰন্থৰ সহায় লোৱা হৈছে যদিও ই সম্পূৰ্ণ মৌলিক।

ইয়াৰ বাবে মই দীক্ষিতা দেৱী সম্পূৰ্ণৰূপে দায়ৱদ্ধ।)

* * * *

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