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Phenomenal Literature

A Global Journal devoted to

Language and Literature

Chief Editor:

Dr. VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr. RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

Interview Editor:

Mr. GOUTAM KARMAKAR

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PHENOMENAL LITERATURE

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The contents of all the articles included in this volume do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors. The authors of the articles are responsible for the opinions, criticisms and factual information presented. The contributors are also responsible for ensuring the proper adherence to the scientific rules of writing and copyright regulations. While the editors have tried their best to carefully review, format and make necessary corrections in the manuscripts, if there are still any lapses, the onus lies only with the authors of the articles.

EDITORIAL

We are happy to introduce Phenomenal Literature, Vol. 3, Issue 1 – the first issue of the year 2018. We would like to congratulate all the contributors on their works being selected in this issue and at the same time we thank them for their qualitative submissions.

The present issue features total 40 works of English Literature. Among them 13 poems, 11 short stories, 01 satire, 01 memoir, 01 essay, 01 play, 02 translations, 07 scholarly articles, 01 book review and 02 interviews.

The cumulative list of contributors in this issue are Alessio Zanelli, Alexandros Plasatis, Anum Sattar, Asha Viswas, Chaganti Nagaraja Rao, Holly Day, Colin T Gallagher, Chandra Shekhar Dubey, Dr. Preeti Oza, Dr. Radha Madhab Jha, Dr. V. K. Jha, Fernando Sorrentino, Gary Beck, Goutam Karmakar, Harshal Desai, Jack Donahue, Jade Wallace, James Croal Jackson, Jules A Riley, Kenneth Kesner, Mark Blickley, Michael Levy, Murali Kamma, Nidhi Singh, Pallavi Kiran, Parul Narda, Peter Bates, Priyanka Das, R. E. Hengsterman, Raja Nand Jha, Raymond Fenech, Rizvana Parveen, Robert Ronnow, Shaliny S, Shara Sinor, Shivangi Shankar, Soumya S. J., Thomas Lucky Richards, V. Ramsamooj Gosine & Vijay Lata Tyagi.

Your opinions are important to us in order to serve you in the best possible manner and to the best of our abilities. Therefore, we would like to invite all the contributors and the readers to leave a few line of comment what he/she feels

about the journal by clicking the 'Feedback' menu or alternatively visiting at the following link:-

<http://www.phenomenalliterature.com/comments.php>

We request contributions for our next issues and invite all writers to help us in pouring wonderful writings in all the genres that we deal in and dwell with. Kindly do spread a word about our both literary journals, 'Phenomenal Literature' & 'VerbalArt'.

Cheerful reading!

Editors

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POETRY

1

A Quiet Night

V. RAMSAMOOJ GOSINE

It is a quiet night
When the ocean's roar is asleep
And ships sail to mapped destinations
The sparkle of the new born waves
Laid to rest in exhaustion
Birds of today are happy in slumber
Hidden deeply on the mango branches
Serving nature multitude of plans
Away from the marauding hunters
Dogs sleep on narrow country roads
A passer-by nods and walks away
Unafraid of the day's skilful teeth

It is not a quiet night
When the peace is shattered at twelve
Infants harshly awakened by cries
Women scream as dark shadows leap out
Bags loaded with yesterday's purchase
Radios drilling dumb words into soft ears
Stifling the longed for peace of the working
Leaving a restless mind to roam with sheep
Outside rain-spears slice defenseless walls
Thunder crawls rolls and somersaults

As lightning emboldens a frightening sky
And the-longed-for-sleep races away
Never to come in a hurry



2

Umbrella

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

In the lips of thunder, we never feel full
as rain slips from our mouths – the brick
streets are slicked with histories we will
not yet slip. Sediment lodged in the curb
will displace in time. Our tongues slicken
in the dry we create so we thirst for the
wet we tried simply to shield from ourselves.



3

Disenchantment

SHIVANGI SHANKAR

Call it my fury, say, I punish
For your callous exploitation
That I cry in helpless anguish;
Halt your vivid imagination!

When I stretch, killing a few
Scared, you declare “Nemesis!
Karma! Mankind’s getting its due”
Tales of destruction, genesis.

Every drought, implies displeasure
Every flood, my rage
Self-absorbed beyond any measure
Man does, his own martyrdom stage.

What do I care for man or ape?
Did I not quake before?
Always evolving, changing shape
Ere signs of life I bore.

Attention-seeking human, you
interpret my existence at will
My resources become your due
For you the sea, the hill.

Delusional about your relevance
In denial of triviality
Baseless your arrogance
Hear nature's reality—

I've been better, I've been worse
I've been wilder, more serene too.
Not my blessing, neither curse
My cycles are not for you.



4

Let My Scars Heal

PARUL NARDA

Every time you come close to me,
you make sure you give me scars deep indeed.

Let my scars heal with your love.

Do I follow my extinct, or I let it follow me?
Where ever I go, you are intensely within me.

Heartfelt love,

please give me warmth of your soul.

Are you aware?? That boy I love you so much.

Taking every edge of my heart.

Let the mystery die, let your superficial love shine.

Be mine, for I love you.

I will forget all your sins, you hold my hands and let me win.

Let my scars be my pride, for once let me be your side.

For I love you with all my heart.



5

Twone

ALESSIO ZANELLI

I hope for some more time before we'll have to part,
more looks, more words, and more of all I've always spared.

At times I feel so distant that there seems to be
no tie, no common past, no sharing blood or soul.

Though close, we may appear as perfect strangers but
no silence could conceal the truth: sheer likeness speaks.

I fear there'll be too much untold, unshown, passed by,
till I perceive how I am him and he is me.

It has been so since when – black-haired, strong-armed – he
used
to lift and hold me up above, a tiny babe.

And now that spots and wrinkles grace his thinning face,
will I grow old in turn as brave to stand both weights?



6

Who Am I

MICHAEL LEVY

I am the taste in your dark silky chocolate,
the warmth in your smile
I am the music in your laughter,
the amazement in your eyes,
I am the star-light passion in your work,
the seasoning in your touch,
I am the perfume in your ambiance,
the banquet in your thoughts,
I am the wonder in your speech,
the awe in every stride,
I am the love in your heart
the energy in your soul,
I am in the answers to all your questions,
the truth attached to each cell,
I am the delights of your life,
eternally bound as your bundle of joy.



7

Busy Afternoon Couple Days Ago**KENNETH KESNER**

it was like one of those places
a few minutes before rain
where people wonder what's next
what to do for the time
it takes clouds of darkening water
to replace the gravity of wind
you know when you're straight across
from someone at the corner of your eyes
where everything's calm and alone
light things are tossed between us
to end up one side or another
so others remember they moved
believe in something then unseen
it's not that they notice this
those in and out of view
they're content to have someplace
to go spare themselves from the time
one could know it's not like forever
the world will fall into words
left for others to bear



8**The Glory and the Strife****RAYMOND FENECH**

Do not leave this world
Thinking you have conquered it,
This earthly voyage is deceiving
Every past joy turns to grieving.
You might reach out as high as the moon
But the white melts from its face
Like burning wax from a candle,
Drops on shards of glittering waves
Where the night feeds on our fears,
We survive on hopes that are unclear.

The days of innocence are gone
Wrestled away from our childish sphere
The old rusty swing is bleeding tears
Of the forgotten days with so much cheer.

Our lives are full of illusions
A story teller flicking through pages;
Takes you on a long tough test
Whether for real or in your fancy fest,
When your inner sight ceases to gleam
When your quest becomes extreme.

You stop, glance at the mirror,
You are not there, you're in a trance,
Like a furtive ghost, life passes
An electric storm, invisible gasses:
Are you really there as time bypasses

All that your memory compasses?
Are we really here, did we live this life,
Or is all forgotten, the glory and the strife?



9

Sunset

ROBERT RONNOW

Sunset, quiet, except
for happy birthday to neighbor's child,
virgo, and all that means, purity
of morality, inability to scheme,
whatever else the stars dictated.

Woodpecker climbs oak, Connecticut.
Not ten years ago this mountain was
completely forested, untouched
since early arrival of Europeans.
Now my parents' home and others stand
in new clearings.

The birds do not seem to mind.
Sing, and deer occasionally visit, from where?
Out of the pre-historic past.

That I must die
is my every third thought.
On my hands and knees, cold sweat,
my own body murdering me.
I meet death with the philosophy
I lived in life.
Acceptance of the loneliness,
the unregarding beauty.

There is that shoreline
along the straits to Puget Sound,
 in mist, the generations
of sea birds nesting on the water.



10

For New Constellations

HOLLY DAY

If you were to set me free, I would leave with only
a rolled-up animal skin tent strapped to my back
a pocketful of dried berries and reindeer meat
a chunk of ice in a bucket to later melt into water.

I would give you one backwards last glance,
one last chance to stop me before disappearing
into a landscape of glaciers and polar bears
a sky filled with so many stars.

It would only take moments for my retreating figure
to be swallowed up in an expanse of white snow,
only moments for the wind to erase my footprints,
the twin snaky signatures left by my sled.

Eventually, you'll discover that all of your letters
have been forwarded to a research station abandoned by
Russians years before, everything you forgot to say in person
has been shredded into bedding by arctic foxes and penguins
chewed into mulch by inquisitive polar bears.



11

Another Myth about the Garden

ANUM SATTAR

Her husband thought of her a sturdy oak
which would bear the mighty blow of his axe.
Though she, a mere sapling, a toothpick stuck
in his teeth, could not bear his reprimands.

Abusive, he tried to pluck her blossoms
to fill his empty vase with their fragrance.
Thorny, she bloomed for her own happiness
and struggled to avoid a flowerpot.

Then tired at last she showed her thorns to him
and teased him with rose hips beyond his reach.
But with one swing she collapsed at his feet
and then in his garden outstretched she lay.

He tilled her yellowing leaves into mulch
and prepared the soil for another bush.



12

My Father

ASHA VISWAS

There was no time for conversation
Or even to say a final goodbye
As you had already closed your eyes
And set out on that journey all alone.
I have lost your last letter
Full of blessings, between so many
Of my own journeys in life, all alone.
You do exist now by absence
And I am learning to be alone
In this house of absences that nudge me
To live in the proximity of loss.



13

Nidhi

RAJA NAND JHA

At two places Nidhi is found
Here n there in native ground
That is the place of her birth,
Here she sings from heaven to earth.

There she does, this and that
Hale and hearty, heel to hat
On harmonium as she sings
Here we fly on fancy's wings.

There she has gods to adore
Here a goddess at this door
There a damsel, fine and free
A cooing cuckoo here is she.

Up she grows there and learns
Here miss Music title earns
There a lotus lapped in a lake
Here a feast for ears' sake.

At two places Nidhi is found
Here n there in native ground
That is the place of her birth,
Here she sings from heaven to earth.



SHORT STORY

1

Tourist Attraction

MARK BLICKLEY

I'm tired and I hate the daylight. This strange sun reflecting off the white *djellabas* irritates me. It lights up a city of men tugging at their genitals, smiling toothless smiles. It shows dogs and children, bones pressing against skin, begging for relief. The sun releases the warm smell of urine and I hate its familiarity. Sunshine gives clear, ugly faces to the staccato voices echoing through the narrow, filthy streets. It is impossible to hide anything under that sweet, burning Moroccan sun. I feel exposed.

Each day I amuse myself with sketching until darkness frees me from an imaginary world that hides me from the sun. The thick, violent sunset is my signal-a multi-colored alarm that assures me it is safe to leave the expensive hotel room.

The evenings are cool by the sea, so I follow the salt scent for a quarter of a mile until I stand on the beach. The growing darkness makes the people handsome. Eyes dominate. They make me feel secure. As long as I don't have to squint at the sun, which impairs my reading of men's eyes, I feel safe. At night the only reflections are friendship or danger, not white *djellabas*.

I listen to the waves slapping the beach. Women in veiled burnooses file past me, clutching their small sons and staring at their feet. I smile at the women. Their silhouettes against the horizon turn them into phantoms, insuring them of a most respected position within the night.

The ocean sounds and phantoms become too familiar, so I walk up to the boulevard just as the night lamps snap on. I love the lamps because unlike the sunlight, they throw everything into shadow.

The boulevard is stretched with brightly-lit cafes housing lazy men and frightened tourists. I feel sick when I see a table of my tour companions. They're caressing their cameras and huddling around the candle burning on their café table, as if insisting that the flame and familiar bodies offer some sort of protection. I spit, quickly turn my head, and cross the street.

The winding street to the medina is steep, and though it's larger than any other road in Tangier, it's a slow walk because of the crowds. The odor of raw sewage is carried by the sea breeze, and I like the contradiction of the two smells. I bump into many men who curse me and flash their teeth. I pause, stare into their faces, and continue undisturbed.

Children spot me. The smaller ones fleece the crowd using mirrors. When they find a careless foreigner with a bulge in his back pocket, they signal to their comrades for help. Soon a half-dozen desperate children run around me, hoping to distract me long enough for one of them to lunge at my wallet.

I am amused by their ritual and pretend not to notice the small hand sliding across my buttock. I am ashamed of the boy's lack of skill. Like an annoyed jackass I swiftly snap my leg back, creating a thud as my shoe connects with the boy's

face. A scream, some swearing, and four more blocks until the medina.

The entrance to the medina has competing merchants in blue jeans squatting in stalls next to sleepy old men with henna beards. Violent bartering and the rapid-fire tongues of children, along with the shouts of taxi drivers and the hissing of horny young men, produce an uneven din that assaults the ears in waves.

At every step a craftsman pleads in broken English to “make good business, my friend.” I walk under the old stone passageway into the medina proper and turn to face the square.

Children running at breakneck speeds and the rich variety of colored *djellabas*, even more beautiful under the weak night lamps, fill me with an incredible sense of well being – until I notice the lack of women.

I spin around, pushed to the side by two male couples with their arms around each other’s waists, giggling. It angers me and I’m tempted to stomp on their bare feet.

Two veiled women approach me, but the crowds are so thick that as soon as I feel a tug on my sleeve I defensively cock my fist. When I see they are females it excites me, and I lower my arm. Both women hold out a delicate bracelet of ivory and silver. I shake my head, but the taller woman with dark circles under her eyes giggles, “Is present. Gift. Go. Gift.” They attach them to my wrists.

Flattered, I thank them and walk away. The women shriek, attracting the crowd’s attention. “Two dirham each!” they cry.

“You said it was a gift!” I yell back – an explanation more to the crowd than to the women. The women raise their

voices until I can feel the entire medina watching the transaction.

I take a five dirham bill out of my pocket that one of the women snatches out of my hand as the other pulls the gift off my wrists. They disappear into the crowd, but I can hear their squeakish voices detailing their triumph. I laugh and am not ashamed of their skill.

I push through the crowd. I'm frightened and it excites me. My pace quickens as I squeeze past a decaying movie house featuring Charlie Chaplin, and rows of dilapidated cafes catering to men playing cards and rolling dice. The stench of excrement mingles with the sweet aroma of mint tea as my fear directs me to a café table.

The waiter is offended by my request for wine, so I order a mint tea instead. The tea is hot; it burns my lip. Two card players from an adjoining table look over and laugh. I exaggerate my pain and soon the entire table joins in the laughter. A dark man in a frayed sweater signals me to join his table.

The other card players ignore me. I jump into the game after watching four rounds. They play a form of poker using a forty-card deck and I lose twenty-three dirham in six hands. I leave without any acknowledgement from the players.

I continue my walk up a dusty hill to the Casbah. The path is dark and I notice teenagers following me. I pick up a large stone as I draw closer to the ancient fort where the city's poorest live. I can hear the teenagers' strained whispers. Rats scurry from wall to wall as my footsteps crunch on the cobblestones.

I feel a strange absence of danger. No one approaches me. I'm watched in silence. Exhausted, I head back to my

hotel. I toss my rock into the shadows and listen to it scrape across the cobblestones. I feel defeated.

Leaning back on my hotel steps, I look up at the black sky turning blue. The head of a new sunrise presses against the emptiness inside my chest. Soon I will climb into bed and try to sleep. I'm tired and I hate the daylight.

2

Sixty-Six Minutes

R. E. HENGSTERMAN

In my head, a mental timer ticked – eleven hours fifty-two minutes
A dozen times over the past two weeks I begged my family,
“Nothing special, please.” Today was no different.

“Why so sad?” my wife asked as she danced across the kitchen floor, a light hum spilling from her lips. After sixteen years of marriage, she was still stunning. And the ploy of using the hum to drown out my pleas was a familiar tactic. Unbeknownst to her, I spotted the iconic yellow Post-it notes and dug them from the trash. Written in her familiar handwriting, were names, numbers, and a recurrent date. That date was today. She was up to something. Who could blame her? Today was a day for celebration.

“See you tonight,” she said, pushing me out the front door with a honey-do-list, a soft kiss on the cheek, and a pat on the ass. As I drove to work, regret over my lack of assertion gnawed away at my insides. The rational part of me knew how important this day was to my wife and my teenage daughter who had lived her entire life under the safeguards of the special day.

❖❖❖

Eight hours twelve minutes

After the twenty-minute commute, I arrived at the office, met by the well-wishing of several coworkers, who sprung from

their cubicles; an odd game of human whack-a-mole as each returned to their seat when tossed a soft-spoken thank you. I knew they weren't so much happy for me as for themselves. Though I couldn't blame them, I didn't get a single; I'm sorry to see you go. The falsity never sat well with me. How we have let the value of life become mundane and disposable. Other than arriving at the office, my morning was painless and slow, though I struggled to manage the swell of nervousness in my stomach with a strained, repetitive smile.

At noon, everyone gathered in the lunchroom. After a short speech from my boss Alice from human resources presented a cake. It was in the shape of an hourglass with gold fondant borders, and no sand in the upper chamber. Time had run out. The whole theme didn't sit well with me.

After lunch, the day was a blur. Before I could blink the clock read 4.45 p.m. My final work day ended. So, I tidied the items on my desk; loose papers found their place, mementos stacked in a cardboard box marked with scotch tape and my name written in Sharpie. Outstanding messages returned, and data mining information passed to another associate. I put my mandatory call into human resources; telling them today was my day and to thank Alice for the cake.

"Congratulations again," she said, "and on a Friday, what a fantastic end to your week." I thanked Alice, wincing as I spoke.

♦♦♦

Four hours seven minutes

On the drive home, I hammered through the to-do-list with half-hearted attention while examining my life. How had I arrived at this point? Am I alone in thinking this way? How people celebrates their day made me cringe. A good many

people surround themselves with family and friends; while others spent their day alone. I wanted nothing more than to be alone, to hide. If there was a wrong way, I knew I'd found it. Someone needed to know. After forty minutes of running around town, I made it home. Before going inside, I sat alone in the driveway and let the day settle.

I could see the house needed fresh paint. The grass, mowing. Cockeyed shutters straightened, and several broken spindles on the porch needed repair. I climbed the front steps, crossed the porch, and with an unsteady hand on the front door said, "Honey, I'm home." Something I had never done in sixteen years of marriage though felt compelled to give everyone inside the chance to exaggerate their welcoming. It worked. "Congratulations," erupted as I entered the house. A swarm of hugs and handshakes followed. I scanned the room for signs of discomfort. I found none.



Three hours

The party lasted less than an hour. I had a dozen or more mindless conversations with the hollow mannequins who called themselves my friends. I stood on the porch and waved goodbye as the pretenders and cowards emptied into the evening with fixed smiles. In three hours, I became a straw dog; a ceremonial sacrifice. Once the house emptied, I settled on the couch with a plate of food and no appetite. My daughter joined, with cheese dripping from her lips and a plate of nachos in hand.



Two hours nineteen minutes

"Tell me again Daddy. How was it when you were young?"

"The past is the past," I said. Despite my hesitation her excitement surged.

"Please Daddy, one last time." My wife rifled a glance across the table of leftovers as if she knew I'd never get off easy.

"Well, when I was your age people were sick and unhealthy. But genetic engineering changed everything. Once the common diseases were cured people grew old. The population exploded. Resources became scarce and people killed each other over food and water." Her eyes widened. "The water wars," She said.

"Yes."

"The Government fixed everything."

"I suppose," I said. There was a moment after the words passed my lips, a fracture in time, which my daughter stiffened. So, I continued.

Yes, "An end date, a genetic switch programmed into the DNA of random individuals over the age of eighteen, a lottery of sorts, to keep the population under control."

"And people are happier now," she said, punctuating her words with a fistful of nachos without a care in the world.

♦♦♦

Two hours four minutes

Fear, guilt, embarrassment, shame; a lifetime of feeling unsettled caused me to fold into myself. "I found a way out," I blurted, my hands tentative on her knees. She drew back, cocking an eyebrow, "What do you mean?"

No living soul knew my secret until that moment.



One hour thirty-nine minutes

"I have these pills," I said, producing a small glass vial from my pocket holding two fluorescent blue pills. My wife, outside fighting with the overstuffed trash, was out of earshot.

"It's your responsibility," my daughter sobbed. "It's the law."



Eighty minutes

In my mind, I worked through this scenario a million times and settled on eight words. I gambled my words were enough. I drew in a deep breath before I spoke. "Do you know how much I love you?" I said.



Seventy-two minutes

It was three weeks ago that I picked up the pills from a friend of a friend after transferring a copy of my DNA. I paid ten thousand blocks of Bitcoin.

"Designed to work," the stranger said.

I have been carrying them in my pocket ever since, along with their burden.



Sixty-eight minutes

As my daughter's face screwed itself into disbelief, my soul retched. She drew back from the touch of my hand. With the frankness of her mother, she said, "Daddy, it's your day. We've celebrated."

Her tone flattened with matter-of-fact words that torpedoed my courage. I sank in shame. In my moment of disgrace, distracted because love was the strongest thing I could offer her and it was not enough, she snatched the vial from my hand.

"No. I won't let you. I won't," my daughter said, opening the bottle and downing the pills in one swift motion, swallowing dry.

My daughter believed there was no other way to live. Sorrow filled my heart.

"I love you too much Daddy. This is your responsibility. I couldn't let you not do it," She said.

Her words rose past her vocal cords with a hard gurgle, softened, and died on her lips, as did she, in my arms.

*Sixty-six minutes*

3

On the Make

JACK DONAHUE

It is happening to me right at this very moment so I want to get it all down now so you don't miss a thing. Here I sit in the back seat of a big Lincoln Continental, trying to discreetly rub my leg against the leg of the woman sitting on my left. My wife sits directly in front of me in the front passenger seat. This woman's husband is on the other side of her, staring out the window. It's a tight squeeze which I didn't plan on. Does anyone in this car aside from me have any idea of what I am trying to do? What I hope to accomplish?

This is the first time in my life I ever met the other people in the car. The driver, Professor Bob, hired me through a classified ad to do research for him so he could get his doctorate. It did not occur to me at first that he should be doing this research himself and that is what getting a doctorate in education is all about. But I need the money and agreed to meet with him. He said let's get together for dinner and we'll talk about it. But he invites this other couple along. Professor Bob is married but he didn't explain why his wife wasn't joining us.

About half way out of the city, heading toward Yorktown Heights I realise how fundamentally unethical this whole situation is but am too embarrassed to reveal to my wife how naive I am. It's going to be a nice ride up I told her. It was. But now what do I do? Our thighs touch! Ever so

slightly. I keep my leg stiff. She moves hers a little bit away. Is she thinking what I am thinking? Is there any chance for us?

I don't like the looks of her husband. How could she be happy with him? Impossible! First of all, he is much older than she is. His skin is almost albino white. Freckles dot his skinny forearms, but they're not the cute kind of freckles, (they almost look like cancer spots or something) and an occasional reddish blond or wheat colored hair sticks up this way and that out of the ugly skin growths. I'm not sure of the exact color of these random hairs because I'm color blind. All I know is that everything about him is unattractive. His arms have no muscle tone. They just kind of dangle out of his shoulder sockets. And his hair! God, his hair is awful. It's a toupee for sure, and a bad one at that. I can see the gauze netting at the tip of his forehead. He must put some paste on that thing every day to hold it down, like that stuff they put on dentures. I can't think of the brand name right now. Polident! That's it. Polident for the head. Whatever color that rug is, he got it to match the ugly hairs on his arms. He must have some real hair, though, in the back of his head maybe, because there is dandruff all over the collar of his black shirt. And you can see the semi-circle of salty sweat under each armpit. He doesn't wear deodorant. What is this beautiful woman doing with him? She's a little older than me but can't possibly be happy with him. What is he, rich or something? I don't know if I respect her any more.

I move my leg closer. All the time streams of unfamiliar scenery float by; my eyes are fixed on the right side of the road. I can't risk making eye contact with her. Our bodies have to respond to each other silently or no deal. By the way, Professor Bob's wife has a broken arm. Maybe that's why she's not showing up for dinner. The lovely lady next to me is muttering something to my wife (they're both school

teachers) about her two kids Tommy and Peggy and how her parents demanded she use her right hand instead of her left when she was a child and that unnatural forced behavior made her stutter for a while. She would never do that to her own children, blah, blah, blah. Well, I hope her parents like their stuttering southpaw daughter. I'm not so crazy about her. Now I'm thinking that she's not an attractive woman at all. Professor Bob is very good looking and has a great personality, unlike the husband of the woman so thigh-close to me. Exactly what does she see in him? Aside from his skinny arms, he's way overweight and has a puffy face as if he's on medication or something. Oh, what a terrible youth he might have had. How cruel and ignorant his parents must have been.

What is this, confession time? Who gives a shit, really? All I want to know is if this beautiful woman sitting next to me is feeling what I am feeling right now. Is she on the make also? What is she doing with that creep? He's some kind of business partner with Professor Bob. What do they do, sell Amway together? I don't know. I'm not sure I even care.

Anyway, we arrive at the Chinese restaurant and damn, I don't even wind up sitting next to this woman. My wife seems pleased. Neither one of us is paying for this dinner and the food is pretty good. So what is this trip going to cost us? Gas money. That's it. My wife tells Professor Bob that he reminds her of her beloved Uncle Anthony. And he does in a way to me too, I have to admit that. But Professor Bob's a corrupt son of a bitch (my wife doesn't know that yet), but not Uncle Anthony. This Professor Bob is going to pay me a couple of grand to go to the Teacher's College library and write up something on whatever his dissertation is. I'm thinking right then and there that I'm doing no such thing but I'm not going to tell him in the restaurant because I don't

want to ruin anyone's meal, especially mine. I'll wait a few days and send him a note or leave a message on his voicemail. I'll try to call when I know he's not going to be home because I want to end this relationship before it even gets started. My only concern right now is that after this meal we take the same positions in the car.

I want to feel this beautiful bitch's leg rub up against mine. Suppose she feels the same way I do and gets excited when our legs touch? What am I going to do about it? Sure enough, we sit in the same spot on the way back to Professor Bob's house. This time I get to look out on the other side of the road but it's dark and I don't see a thing except Day-Glo mileposts. Man, would I like to take this woman somewhere alone for an hour or so. Every now and then I steal a glimpse of her lap. She folds her hands in such a way that her dress rides down against the inside of her legs. I see their shape and I see what every man wants to see above all else, the formation of that magic triangle between her thighs. Wow!

She didn't even talk to me or look at me during dinner. Not even a hint that she finds me attractive. This could be just a one-sided deal for all I know. I'm thinking she's gotta like me because of who and what she's married to. I'm younger, better looking. Maybe she doesn't find me interesting though. My conversation at dinner was a little stiff and conservative. I have to admit that. But who cares about that if we're just going to have a couple of hours of wall banging sex? Her husband didn't say a thing I found interesting either. Damn, what does she see in him? Professor Bob carried the whole conversation during dinner, in the car and at his house afterwards. He's a charmer, that's for sure. In that way, he is like my wife's Uncle Anthony. But I know I'll never see him again.

I could use the money but I'm not getting a doctorate for anyone but myself. And I'm not even going to get it for myself. Damn, I don't know what I want. All I want is for this woman to give me some sign, any sign, that she wants me. But I get nothing. Not a thing. She doesn't even talk to me once the whole evening. She doesn't even ask what my name is. It's as if she knows that this is the first and the last time we'll ever have to see each other, so why bother. She must be hyper intuitive. Of course, I could continue the relationship with Professor Bob and this way I would see her again and give it another try. Maybe I should be more direct the next time. Maybe she's the kind of woman who doesn't go for subtlety, expects the man to take the forceful lead in every situation. I don't know. But then I would have to do that bullshit research for him and I refuse to do it. It wasn't that bad an evening, all in all. The food was good. The scenery upstate is kind of nice. My wife fell asleep on the way home. She always does. I don't know what I want. But I'm still young. I'll figure it out. Some day, I'll have it all figured out.

4

As Evening Fell, they all Marched Home for Tea

JULES A. RILEY

Come autumn, the pebbled beach was deserted of sunbathers, or children splashing about at the water's edge. The imposing beach huts raised on stilts and set in an orderly line beneath the high sea wall, occupied all summer by well-to-do families, were now shuttered and padlocked. No more the occupants sat on their verandas and peering down with an air of superiority on city visitors. However, the shuttering of those huts until another summer did not include the verandas.

To the gang of young boys, regaining full rein of *their* beach, those verandas became Wild West forts where the cavalry defended the frontier, or a desert encampment for a troop of the French Foreign Legion, and sometimes, a pretend machine gun emplacement, strafing imaginary invaders.

The accoutrements of the ragtag army were fashioned from bits of flotsam, or if in luck, a cut down old broom handle, whilst a tear of bed sheet sufficed as a flag, for none of the gang could afford the real thing. The *real thing*, being the toy guns and accompanying apparel displayed in the town's toyshop, its windows smudged with the imprints of children's dirty hands.

As evening fell, they all marched home for tea, after an exhausting day saving the world. The only casualties of *their* wars sported grazed knees, or, for having fought on the losing side, a bruised ego.

5

Two Days in December

MURALI KAMMA

Looking through his window at the sea of blurry lights, as the plane banked and made a sharp descent, Gautam felt a surge of pleasurable anticipation. But there was also a shiver of apprehension – and not for the first time, he hoped his father was fine and had remembered they were arriving that morning. It was raining. Dimly, he could make out the jets of water zooming down, as if a giant sprinkler had been turned on, and as the wheels touched the runway, fleeting memories of the monsoon season flooded his senses. But this was December. In the cabin, Gautam missed the earthy damp smell – although that familiar scent, he knew, would be waiting for him outside the arrivals terminal, greeting him like a long-lost relative. Had it rained in December when he was living here? Maybe. It was also possible that the weather patterns, among many other things, were changing, making him a stranger in the land of his birth.

He glanced at his wife, who had her arm around their young daughter.

“She’s sleeping like a baby,” Monica said.

“Yes, that’s good. I’m glad we can finally get off. Hope my dad’s driver shows up.”

The immigration and customs formalities didn’t take long, and when they emerged from the terminal, it was still dark. The rain had stopped. Though it was a relief to breathe

the fresh, rain-scented air after being cooped up in the cabin, what struck him forcefully, more than any memory-jogging smell, was the mass of people milling about at this hour. Their daughter, now awake, seemed fascinated as she sat on her mother's hip and looked around. Pushing the baggage cart, he looked for the driver. No one approached him, surprisingly, or stood holding a sign with his name on it. Gautam's thoughts went back to his last conversation with his dad. He'd sounded okay, but when Gautam phoned again on the day of their departure, there was no response. That was unusual. His father hardly went out these days, especially late in the evening. Maybe he had gone to sleep early. Now Gautam was worried.

He was about to turn and walk the other way for another look before hiring a cab, when somebody tapped him on the shoulder. Like an apparition, a gaunt man clad in a faded-white kurta and sporting a croquet tope had emerged from the shadows.

"I'm the man you're looking for," he said, startling them.

"What do you mean? Who are you?" Gautam eyed him suspiciously, just as it began to rain again. Even in the pale wavering light of the lamp, the man looked vaguely – and strangely – familiar. His scraggly beard was generously flecked with gray. Had Gautam seen him before? Did his dad know this man?

Monica waited expectantly, saying nothing, but their daughter started crying.

"Come this way," the man said, ignoring Gautam's questions. "Your daughter is miserable. My cab is close by."

His manner was peremptory, not to mention odd, but Gautam resisted the temptation to walk away, knowing that this was no time for delays. They were *all* miserable. He

wanted to get them away from the rain and head to his dad's house as soon as possible. The man led them to a black, dented car. The timing was good, for as soon as the Ambassador pulled away, the rain began coming down harder, splattering the car noisily. As they inched forward in the caravan of vehicles leaving the airport, Gautam realised they hadn't mentioned the destination or discussed the fare. Glancing at the driver, he wondered if they were in a legitimate cab. Shouldn't the roof be yellow? And the Ambassador came as a surprise. How many of these old cars were still around in the city?

"Don't worry, babu, I'll take you home safely," the man said, as if he'd read Gautam's mind. "My cab is as good as any other at the airport. Tell me where you want to go."

Gautam gave him his dad's address and asked how much he wanted.

The driver quoted a fare that, while a little high, didn't seem unreasonable. Gautam relaxed.

Pulling out a towel, the driver opened the window and started cleaning the windshield with his right hand. There was only one wiper and it wasn't oscillating fast enough. A furious spray of water hit Gautam on his face. Gasping, he leaned back. The driver didn't seem to notice. Fortunately, the rain eased off once they got on the highway, and the traffic flowed smoothly.

The day broke, bathing the city in a soft milky light. Exiting the highway, the cab went down a commercial street that was still silent and free of traffic. The shutters of the stores were down. Gautam's visits to the city had become infrequent, but he realised they were taking a shortcut.

Thud!

They were turning at an intersection, when there was a collision. And while the impact wasn't severe, it was so unexpected that it startled everyone. Luckily, the car had functioning seatbelts.

"What happened?" Monica said, alarmed, just as their daughter woke up and began whimpering.

Gautam could see that they'd hit a cow, which was now lying still on the side of the street. With a loud curse, the cab driver opened the door. Gautam, too, stepped out.

"Not to worry," the driver said. "It's not serious. I didn't see the sleeping cow."

Already worn out, this incident came as a fresh jolt to Gautam. But before he could say anything, they heard a loud voice echoing Monica's question: "*Kya ho gaya?*" Gautam turned around to see two men walking towards them. He'd assumed there was nobody else around, but these men had apparently been sleeping in a delivery van parked on the other side of the street. The heavier one, shuffling along, looked as if he hadn't yet recovered from a night of heavy drinking. He was completely bald and, Gautam couldn't help thinking, looked like a stereotypical movie villain.

"Nothing," the cab driver said, losing his composure. "Nothing happened. It was a minor accident, that's all. I couldn't see in the darkness."

"What darkness?" the inebriated man shouted. "*Aray, it's daytime.* Are you blind? Hope you're not going around killing cows." He giggled, unexpectedly, but there was menace in his bloodshot eyes.

His companion, shorter and slightly built, put a restraining hand on him. "Come, let's go," he mumbled. "It's none of our business."

Watching them in a helpless daze, induced in part by the lack of sleep, Gautam felt nauseous. The cab driver didn't speak or move. What happened next was so swift that Gautam didn't have the time to react. Walking unsteadily, Bald Head inadvertently stepped on the cow's leg, and stumbled. The cow – motionless until now – stirred to life and, jerking her head, went *butt...butt...butt* in one rapid movement. And then she was gone within seconds, ambling down the street, while Bald Head lay flat on the ground, his face contorted in astonishment and rage.

The cab driver, still agitated, tugged Gautam's arm. "Come, let's go, babu. The cow is okay."

As the Ambassador began moving, Gautam saw that Bald Head had stood up with the help of his companion. Now they were walking back to the van.

Monica looked bewildered and exhausted.

"It won't be much longer," he said apologetically. "How is she doing?"

"She's calm now." Monica smiled wanly. "Wasn't the cow hurt?"

"No, I guess not. She was just stunned, I think. It was so strange to see her rise suddenly and butt the man. And then walk away."

"A good thing...for both the cow and us," the cab driver said, chuckling, and shook his head. "That fellow was drunk. I'm sure he wanted to cause problems."

♦♦♦

A memory, hovering indistinctly at the edges of Gautam's mind, came rushing back. Now he knew why the cab driver looked familiar. Years ago – on a December morning, in fact –

a man resembling him had made an impression on him. That date – December 6, 1992 – was historic, though in a tragic way. He was returning to his college hostel, about a three-hour bus journey from where his parents lived. He'd come home just for the weekend. That Sunday, the bus station, usually crowded and busy at this time, appeared subdued when he arrived there from his parent's home in an autorickshaw. His parents didn't have a car back then. Just as Gautam was approaching the ticket office, there was a hubbub and people in the station began scrambling for the few taxis and autorickshaws parked nearby. A man informed him that several buses, including the one Gautam was going to take, had been hastily canceled. Reports of a clash, over a mosque-temple dispute in distant Ayodhya, were coming in. Passions were running high, even locally. Fearing a riot, the transportation officials didn't want to take chances. It was a tense time – only later would Gautam learn the details of the horrific incident in Ayodhya, and understand its sobering, long-lasting consequences for the nation.

Along with a few other passengers, Gautam managed to squeeze into a van. Heading back to his parents' place was the only option. Though not happy about the exorbitant fare, there was little he could do. The opportunistic drivers were making the most of this unforeseen opportunity. As the van began moving, a bearded man wearing a crochet tope approached them. Gautam wondered if he was a cleric.

"No space, no space," the driver said, waving dismissively.

But the passengers sitting inside, already upset by the fare gouging, loudly berated the driver and asked him to make room for the man. Relenting, the driver opened the door and let him sit on the cramped front seat. Gautam

recalled how the man had turned and thanked the other passengers.

They'd gone but a mile on the highway, when the traffic slowed down considerably. And then ground to a halt.

"Road block," the driver announced tersely. "*Accident ho gaya.*"

It was hard to know what was going on from such a distance, but then Gautam spotted a jeep filled with rifle-toting policemen. Was it a riot rather an accident?

"Go this way, quickly," the bearded man said. "There is an opening here. We can take the side road. I know the way."

Without questioning him, the driver swerved and, after much honking and hollering, managed to get on the unpaved, bumpy side road that seemed to be going nowhere. In the distance, Gautam could see what looked like an old, crumbling mausoleum. Was there a cemetery here?

"Are you sure about this?" the driver asked. "I don't want to get lost."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure. It's a little roundabout, but we'll be able to get back on the highway."

Going past sparse vegetation and huge boulders, they came to an intersection. Then, abruptly, the van stopped. Three young men were standing in the way, holding long bamboo staves. There was a tense silence as they slowly walked towards the van. Gautam's stomach clenched in fear.

"Why are you going this way?" one of the men asked, his face grim. "Why are there so many people in the van?"

"We're just taking a detour, bhai," the bearded man said, even before the driver could respond. "There was an accident on the highway. I told him to come this way. I'd lived in this area years ago."

Apparently taken aback, the man looked at him closely. "We're being cautious, that's all," he finally mumbled. The men stepped aside.

There was palpable relief in the van. Resuming their circuitous journey on the rough road, they passed more boulders that had been shaped by nature over time into interesting sculptures. This appeared to be the scenic route, one person observed, drawing laughter. There was camaraderie now among the passengers and they even exchanged personal information. It didn't take too long to get back on the highway. The bearded man got off first. Gautam remembered it clearly because, in a striking gesture, the driver had refused his payment.

"You were an extra passenger, bhai, so don't worry about it," he said, waving it away.

"Isn't everybody paying?" the surprised man said, his hand outstretched. "I, too, should pay."

The van, though, was already moving away.

♦♦♦

Waking with a start, Gautam was momentarily disoriented. Then he realised it was not 1992. Instead of being in van with a bunch of strangers, he was in a car with his family – and it was standing in front of his dad's house. He must have dozed off. Gautam got out of the cab.

Opening the gate, he walked across the overgrown compound to the silent house, which seemed shabbier and more neglected than he recalled. The weather-beaten walls needed not just paint but also some patching up. His father's aging Indica wasn't parked there, and when Gautam saw a padlock on the front door, his heart sank. So something did happen, just as he'd feared. He should have phoned Paulraj,

the neighbor, and asked him about his father. Gautam had spoken to him many times.

As if on cue, Paulraj called out his name from the other side of the wall.

"Your father is in the hospital," he said, coming closer. "He had a cardiac arrest and his driver took him to the emergency room. I couldn't reach you on the phone. Gautam, I'm so sorry."

He'd gone to the hospital to assist the driver, who was still there, probably sleeping in the car. Gautam's father was in the intensive care unit, Paulraj said, and they were waiting for an update. He invited Gautam and his family to stay with him. Gautam, thanking him for his kindness, noted that he had one of his dad's keys. Unlocking the front door, he entered the empty house and took his wife and daughter to the guest bedroom. In the kitchen, he found milk, eggs, bread and cereal. Returning to the living room, he called the hospital. His dad's condition, he was told, remained unchanged – and yes, he could come now to see his father and the doctor.

Gautam's mother had died years ago, several months after his arrival in the U.S. to attend graduate school. He'd been preparing for his exams, when his father called to give him the news. Her death from an abdominal aneurysm had been so sudden that Gautam was in a daze throughout his short trip to India. Grieving, for him, began only after he returned to his studio apartment near the frozen, snow-covered campus. Sitting at his desk by the window, he could see students in heavy winter clothing hurrying about with a preoccupied air, seemingly eager to be done with their finals and head home to their families for the holidays.

And now, on this trip to India, Guatam wondered if it was time for a reprise.

His dad had come to the U.S. only once, when he was still in good physical shape. The visit turned out to be shorter than planned, and Gautam realised his father preferred to live in India on his own terms. In the last few years, he'd become increasingly withdrawn, relying only on his driver and housekeeper for his needs. Any offers of help were politely refused. Gautam had to get used to perfunctory conversations that were often punctuated by awkward pauses.

Before going to the hospital, Gautam wanted to call his dad's driver – but he put the phone down when, through the window, he saw the cab driver waiting near the gate. He'd already been paid, so why was he still here? Opening the front door, Gautam walked towards him.

"I can take you to the hospital," the cab driver said. "I know how to get there. That's why I'm waiting." He'd obviously overheard Gautam's conversation with Paulraj.

"Wonderful!" Gautam said. "I'll be right back. Just give me a few minutes."



6

Man, Muddled

NIDHI SINGH

Goa was hot and muggy at this time of the year. Luckily, the hotel, Ramada Caravela, where the company had booked the visiting project team, was a first-rate property with a pool in its midst, and its own private beach with shacks and outdoorsy barbecues: it was a relief to be in the hotel's cool environs.

"I'm so smashed," Kiara said, at the hotel desk. "Let's recoup and hit the sack until dinnertime. We still have the whole Sunday ahead to fine comb the presentation."

Rishaan, who seemed to have other ideas, simply stood by, and opened and shut his mouth without a sound. Kiara and Rishaan, already affianced, checked into one luxury suite with a balcony that jutted over the beach, while Diya was tucked into a small room in a corner.

Diya was already sitting at a table when Rishaan and Kiara walked that evening into the dining hall. Diya looked lovely in a low-cut black dress. A fat crooner belted away cover numbers, while the empty dance floor waited for the guests to down a few pegs and loosen their inhibitions.

"What should we order – fish curry and feni – or is there more to Goan cuisine," Kiara asked.

"I'll have a scotch," Rishaan said.

"I, a beer," said Diya.

"Ahem. I thought we were here on business," Kiara observed. She was the CEO's daughter, so she had a right to be didactic. "Okay, I'll try the house wine then."

The little group tried to make conversation but soon gave up trying to be heard over the blaring music. Rishaan kept knocking back shots after another – "dance with me," he leaned over the table and asked Kiara.

"I am in heels," she replied, tossing her mane of wavy hair in his flushed face.

"I'll dance with you," Diya said, quite gladsome. Tossing back the remaining beer, she grabbed Rishaan's arm and led him to the floor.

"Go ahead," Kiara said, but they were already out of earshot. She twirled Rishaan's engagement ring around her finger thoughtfully; they dance well, she mused, and look good together too.

"Enjoyed yourself," Kiara asked as he turned off the light later at bedtime.

"Yeah," Rishaan replied, yawning liberally. His hand brushed against her shoulder, but she pulled away.

"I am tired," she said, tightly pulling the sheets, which swooshed like the unfurling of sails on an angry sea.

"You've been sleeping all day," he whined.

"You noticed?"

♦♦♦

When Kiara woke up, her hand instinctively moved to Rishaan's side of the bed, but it was empty. She pressed her head contentedly against the soft, goose down pillows and smiled. She felt rested – the glass of wine had put her to deep, dreamless sleep. *I must try it more often.*

"Rishaan, come back to bed, it's Sunday," she said aloud, stretching lazily and patting down the sheets. She imagined his hard, muscled body, naked in the washroom, and suddenly felt desire sweep over her snug and roused body. She called out again, "Rishaan...baby..." but no reply came. Curious, and burning, she walked around the suite looking for him, but he wasn't there. Finally, she flung open the tall French windows and peered over the balcony rails. It was still early and nothing was out there on the grounds – except for the sloshing in the pool. She leaned over and peered closely – it was Rishaan and Diya playfully splashing water on each other, and gamboling around like kids.

She was about to call out to them but stopped. She leaned against the wall and quietly watched. Rishaan had pressed Diya against the pool wall in the shallow end – she could make out his broad shoulders covering her petite and svelte figure. As Diya tossed her wet hair happily, spraying Rishaan, her head turned in Kiara's direction, and suddenly she saw her. She pushed away Rishaan and floated away. She said something to Rishaan, for he too turned toward Kiara. The man stood agape for some moments in the pool, his arms ridiculously hanging limply by his sides. Kiara, without her specs, couldn't make out his expression exactly but figured he seemed surprised. Rishaan finally gathered his wits and waved. Kiara waved back too and went inside to fix coffee.

"Hi darling," Rishaan said, as he walked in a few minutes later, wearing a towel. He gripped her waist and smooched her. "Sorry – I thought you would be tired so I let you sleep," he said.

"Sorry about what? You know I don't swim."

"Yeah, that too. Might as well use the facilities, now that we're paying for them."

"Might as well."

"Lovely coffee – you have a magic touch."

"It's not mine silly – it's just pouches and boiled water... do you two know each other from before?"

"N-uh."

"Good. Team spirit then?"

"All for one, one for all," he said, making a 'V' sign.

"Which one; begs the question."

"I have eyes only for one – this one." Rishaan placed his cup on the mantle and loomed behind her. Before she knew what was happening, with a flick of his fingers he'd expertly slid the robe off her bare shoulders; it fell in a soft silky heap around her unshod feet. He opened his mouth and kneaded her shoulders with his lips, tongue, teeth; and his arms entwined around her, like the devil, touching her nakedness at all the penetralia, forcing soft moans and shivers from her. He raised his head briefly to whisper in her ears, "you are tense...let go."

"Don't talk..." she sighed, and grabbing his hair, yielded unto his hot passionate caresses.

♦♦♦

Early guests were still trickling into the buffet room. Rishaan and Kiara, sated after long lovemaking, read the morning papers and sipped masala chai in an herbal-garden facing alcove. A little later, Diya walked in, wearing self-cropped denim hot pants, and a white, low-cut tank top, setting a storm brewing in the large hall. Heads turned as she sashayed in her dazzling loveliness down the aisle toward them.

Knowing Kiara's bespectacled gaze was fixed firmly upon him, Rishaan studiously kept his eyes on the newspaper headlines, even as a glowy Diya cheerily piped a 'hi' to them, and took the chair across the table. A nearby auntie swatted her companion's wrist with a butter paper dosa, as the man just wouldn't stop staring. Kiara wrapped her arm around Rishaan's possessively.

"Are we forgetting something here," Kiara asked, the corner of her lips twitching slightly in a wry smile.

"What," asked Diya, reaching across and sipping from Rishaan's cup.

"That we aren't still in the pool?"

"Oh, this" – Diya giggled, gesturing at herself dismissively. "We are in a beach resort – remember? It's a fun place!"

"True – perhaps one might have overlooked throwing a sarong on then?" Turning to Rishaan, she asked, "What will you have, dear?"

"An omelet," he said, rising.

"You stay – with your paper – I'll get it," she said, restraining him. "Aren't you coming, Miss," she asked Diya, who'd tucked her chin on her bent wrist, and was rolling eyes at Rishaan, who seemed to be glued to the headlines on his paper. Kiara had never seen him so absorbed in politics before.

"Oh, of course," Diya said, and jumped to her feet, and bounded after Kiara as she weaved her way to the chef's counter.

"Good morning ladies, what can I get you this morning," asked the dapper chef, half bending at the waist.

"An omelet – what's the special," asked Kiara.

"Cheesy masala with mushrooms, ma'am," he said, rubbing his hands, his eyeballs darting willy-nilly to Diya's creamy white cleavage.

"Okay," Kiara said and moved away.

"Don't put mushrooms in it – he's allergic to mushrooms," she heard Diya whisper to the chef behind her back. She paused and turned. "How would you know he doesn't like mushrooms? Do you two know each other from before," she asked.

"Umm...no. I must have seen it in the office canteen," Diya replied, picking out quiches and bacon strips.

"We don't serve eggs in our canteen – ever. It's vegetarian."

"Then...I can't recall who must have told me..." Diya shrugged and walked away to the milkshake counter. Kiara filed away a mental note to ask Rita from HR to mail her Diya's CV. Diya, a civil engineer, had recently relocated from the Delhi office – there was little Kiara knew about her.

"Let's meet now with our computers," Kiara said, as they leaned back and stretched blissfully after the sumptuous meal.

"What! I thought we were hitting the pool," Diya said.

"Isn't that enough swimming for one day, dear? Now, we wouldn't want your peaches and cream complexion ruined in the sun, would we? See me in one hour," Kiara said, jerking a thumb in the direction of the conference room, and left, with Rishaan trailing in her wake. He soon returned, though. He saw Diya leafing through some travel fliers in the lobby and walked up to her.

"Hey, you are back," she said.

"Yeah. She's crunching some numbers, and then she doesn't like being bothered. A true businesswoman!"

"She has to be – managing a construction business empire. And you've come a long way since college, haven't you – finally getting hitched."

"Yeah, she's something, isn't she? But it's you I miss the most – you ditched me, and now you come back into my life and tease me thus."

"I didn't ditch you Mr. Italian Stallion – I caught you with a girl – and I don't know how many others there were. It's only after we split I came to know of your enviable reputation. And I haven't come back into your life – had I known you were here, I would have..."

And I'm already seeing someone – he's a fine guy – I really want it to work with him."

"Come on, give me a chance," he said, turning up her chin, and looking into her limpid eyes. He bent slowly, confidently, and crushed his mouth on hers. She gripped his shoulders briefly, lingering awhile, and then pushed him away.

"What's that? You're engaged – to the CEO's daughter. She's smart – she's already on to something – don't get yourself – and me – into trouble," she said, straightening her dress, trying to squirm back into it.

"Come on baby, let's give it a shot," he said, grabbing her arm roughly and dragging her into the corridor, and trying to kiss her again. "Just once..."

She grabbed his collar and held him off. "Okay, if you want me so badly, I will. Let us this very moment walk over to Kiara and you tell her you're breaking off the engagement.

And then you can have me all you want. I want your commitment – right now!"

"Not this, not now – come on, let's at least pick up from where we left," he wailed, thumping the wall with a fist. "Give it some time..."

"Why? See? You won't give her up, will you – she's quite a catch – it's the smartest thing you've done in your life! You just can't get over your old habits – all you want is meat – more girl meat! Yes, I did love you once, but then I've got over you, some maybe, and some not. But don't come near me again – I am saving your life – our life here, okay? Trust me!" She shrank away from him and darted off.

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On Monday morning, Diya set up the display systems, and arranged the charts and graphs, while Kiara and Rishaan went through the slides for the final time.

"Can you guys look at the charts here, and tell me if the sequence is right," Diya asked.

"Ahem," Kiara muttered.

"Hey, wait!" Rishaan stopped Diya at one point. "I'm hazy about these carbon credits."

"Don't sweat – I'll jump in if there's a question," she said.

Shortly, the Japanese investors trooped in. Kiara introduced her team and then handed over to Rishaan for the presentation of their LEED certified, green commercial project.

The presentation went fine till one investor asked, "how do you convince the buyer to cough up such a high initial premium for a green building?" As Rishaan fumbled, Kiara

nudged Diya, who was sitting by her side. Diya walked over to the podium and took on the query. As the discussion meandered, Kiara noticed Diya's laptop going into screensaver mode. She reached out to press a key to return the screen but paused when Diya's college photographs began to flip past. The rest of the meeting was a haze for her as she became transfixed at Diya's collage of personal photos.

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"The meeting went off well?" Rishaan plopped his backpack on the seat next to Kiara's at the airport, that same evening. "And what was this person you had to meet so urgently, that you came over alone to the airport?"

"A business contact," Kiara replied, coolly leafing through a copy of 'Sustainable Architecture and Building.'

"Where is Diya – is she..." he asked, looking around.

"She's not coming."

"What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Oh."

"I left an envelope at the Hotel Desk for you. Didn't you get it?"

"Yeah – I forgot to open it in the rush. Here, let me get it now – what's in it – a bonus?" he winked, and rummaged through his bag and found the envelope. He opened it, and found out a note and the ring that he'd given her on one knee. He turned to her in panic. "Who told you all this? Did that bitch – say anything to you?" He weaved his hand through her hair and began to stroke her nape.

"During the presentation," she said, jerking her head away, "I happened to see yours and Diya's photos on her

laptop by chance. Afterwards, when I confronted her, she told me everything.”

“It was something that just blew over from the past – it meant nothing.”

“To you, it didn’t but ask me. Ever since she’s come to the Mumbai Office, you’ve been trying to get into her pants – I’m told. A family is a trust, Mr. Rishaan, but I guess you have no clue what that word is. And – I believe you don’t have a ticket to fly out – it has been canceled.”

“Do I still have the job, or...not?” his voice trailed, as Kiara walked away, without saying anything, or looking back.

7

The Day He Walked Away

COLIN T. GALLAGHER

It is fifteen years ago today, August 3rd, I will always remember that day. I had an argument with my eighteen year old son, Newton; I don't even remember what it was about, though the rest of the incident I remember clearly.

He got up from the living room couch and said, "I don't want to deal with this!" He walked to the front door opened it and left. I recall it so clearly and painfully. That is the last time I saw my son. He never came back.

How I cried. So many times I have asked my Lord for forgiveness. How I would give anything to see him again to see his handsome face smiling at me. I want to feel that occasional slap on my back when he would say "I am so glad you are my dad."

What could have happened to him? Did he have intentions of coming back but something happened? Did he get caught up in street violence? He so loved to clear his mind in the forest. It is so refreshing for him. Had he hurt himself in a glen of tall pine trees?

I called the police about his being missing. Also, I put a lost ad in the Examiner including photo.

I don't know what else I could have done. We hadn't been angry with each other. I just wanted to talk to him, and we ended in an argument.

Was he trying to make me feel terrible by cutting off contact? If that was his goal: it worked.

These thoughts have plagued me for fifteen years.

So happy at his birth in the hospital. I picked him up just seconds after breathing on his own. I examined him carefully to make sure everything is okay. I hugged my son. His mother was there too, of course, but he is my son.

I remember when he started walking. He fell so many times to the soft clean carpet. After a while, he was able to get up by himself.

Next came potty training. He was good at that from the start.

Toddler play groups were next, getting together with other couples who had toddlers. They would walk and bump into each other or reach out for help.

They would drink orange juice from little square juice boxes with small straws. He never spilled it.

My wife said it is too soon, but we would roll a baseball to each other on the living room carpet. He would giggle and laugh. Oh, how I would love to hear that laugh again.

When he entered kindergarten, the teacher said he got along with everyone. She had never seen a child with that ability. It didn't come from me. I'm a rough guy sometimes, but it's not my fault it is the nature of the beast.

After getting good grades in elementary, middle and high school, he planned to go on to a four year university, but wasn't sure of his major.

I have thought that he might have been on drugs shortly before he left, but I don't want to falsify my memory, and give myself false satisfaction and say it is not my fault. It is. I should have run over to him as he headed for the front door

and hugged him. My ego would have been ruined, but I would still have my son.

When he was sixteen I let him drive the winding mountain roads from Bakersfield to Sequoia National Park where we camped for a week twice a year. We walked the trails between the giant Sequoia trees some thousands of years old.

Walking along the river at the Lodgepole camping area, we could see the fish. Watching them for a while I asked if he wanted to rent a fishing pole. "No," He said, "I don't want to hurt the fish."

At eight o'clock every night, the rangers had a bonfire for the campers. We found a couple of seats together in the midst of the crowd, and were amazed at the brilliance of the flames.

He was just wonderful. Today I find no relief from my misery.

After he left, his friends called, and many times I had to say, "I don't know when he will be back." I fell into deep depression.

A psychologist that I saw tried to make me see that it is not my fault, but I couldn't shake off the ghost. My memory of him is painful, yet at the same time glorious.

Taking out the photo album and looking for my favorite picture of him, I had it enlarged to an 11 by 14 inch framed picture of my son. If he came home, I could show it to him and tell him how much he is missed and welcome back. That hasn't happened yet, maybe tomorrow. Like so many tomorrows over the last fifteen years.

My wife, Mary, cried with me many times – no one but us to cook for, no hope of grandkids or of his marriage. She too was devastated.

I miss my son. Looking at his framed photo, I cry.

I know he hasn't done this purposely. Something must have happened. I will pray again. That is all I can do. I hope that my higher power is listening and gives me a sign. It has been so long, but I am inching along trying to be happier.

I want my son back. I feel so powerless.

I attended services for Bhagavan Krishna's birthday at the Hindu Temple where I am a member. The pain is just terrible. I appealed to Krishna. I felt a feeling of peace, new hope and understanding.

When the mail arrived the next day there was a hand addressed letter – from him – my son.

I screamed for my wife, "A letter from Newton!"

"A miracle!" She yelled back: "Open it! What does he say?"

I got a knife and slit the envelope open.

Hi Dad and Mom, I sat on a chair and started to cry: "Dad! He still remembered me."

Sorry, I haven't written in all these years.

I was sobbing like a baby.

Sorry too about the lost years. I did something that changed my life and my good thoughts of you came back.

I thought I should write and tell you of good news.

"He's happy! Newton is happy! He is talking about good news." I shouted at my wife who was now sitting next to me on the couch.

I was baptized into the Hindu religion at the Temple here in Seattle, Washington a few days ago. I felt such joy. All sadness, misunderstanding and pain came to the surface of my mind then vanished, and I knew that I had to write to you.

"He's been baptized."

"I'm right here!" my wife said putting her hand on my shoulder.

I meant to come home. I took the bus to Seattle. I thought I would become a lumber jack, but as it turned out I started working for a grocery warehouse facility in Olympia, Washington.

Then I met a girl. We dated for a while, and she straightened me out. No more drinking. Wine with dinner was okay or one occasional shot but not to get drunk.

We were good for each other. I thought of you and Mom. As time went on we got married, bought a house and had a baby boy, Stewart. This year he'll be fourteen.

We started our lives together and have done quite well. I got promoted at the warehouse and now am a member of the management team. We have a nice house and second home in the deep forest for weekends and fishing. I still remember how I never fished with you, but today I love it. You'll have to come here and we can fish.

I put the letter on my lap, bent my head into my hands and sobbed like a baby.

"It's all over, honey, he's back!"

I have enclosed my return address: please write me. I hope all is well, and you and mom are in good health. "I can't read anymore, I have to lie down. Too much too soon."

I lay down and started dreaming, I was blessed with a vision of the blue skinned Bhagavan Krishna: "I am happy for you my devotee."

I dreamed of what Newton looked like after fifteen years.

I woke-up when my wife slid into bed.

"No I must finish reading the letter." I said to her getting out of bed and returning to the couch in the living room.

When you visit, we can go to the Hindu Temple and pray. I miss you dad - write to me soon.

I leaned over and slid sideways on the couch falling asleep as I lay there crying.

I started a letter the next morning. It was a long letter. I apologised for why he left whatever the reason is. I sealed the envelope and put a return address sticker on the corner.

"Honey I need two stamps."

"We don't have any! I ran out with the phone bill."

"I'll walk this letter over to the post office and buy some then mail this dream come true letter to my son."

With that, I grabbed my wallet and started walking.

I arrived; bought stamps; put two on the envelope, mailed it then walked home.

Was Bhagavan Krishna involved in this homecoming? I knew he was. I chanted his name mentally as I walked home.

It was a new day. I had my son back.



8

Made by Sea and Wood, in Darkness

ALEXANDROS PLASATIS

The harbour-side café was empty when a man in a Hawaiian shirt appeared from the darkness. In his fifties, in Bermuda shorts and flip flops, ‘I knew your father,’ the man said. ‘Like you, he used to work night shifts here.’

The waiter looked at him. He was already looking at him, but now he had a proper look. And behind the man, beyond the seawall, he saw the lights of a caique returning to the harbour.

‘I just became a father,’ the man spoke again, and the waiter moved his gaze back to him. ‘Let’s have a drink, young man. On me.’

He wanted whisky, and the waiter opened an orange Fanta for himself. They sat by a table near the open bar, under a lemon tree, and the man talked.

The caique moored, the fishermen cleaned the nets and scattered into the night, except for one young, blond Egyptian who walked over to Café Papaya and asked for a Heineken. ‘Bad catch. Problems with the engine.’ He gave a nod to the man in the Hawaiian shirt, and sat a bit further away.

The man looked the immigrant up and down, and went on talking. He had been living in America for years now he said, and spent his summers on the opposite island, Thassos, where he owned a five star hotel. He earned so much money in America that he didn’t bother about the hotel. ‘I’ve got a

yacht and just sail around. You know what? I'll take you for a trip. Let's sail the Aegean.' But what do yachts and hotels matter, the man suddenly threw his hands in the air, what does anything matter now that his young wife had given birth? 'On my journey back from America I was so happy that I forgot to mention the cash inside my suitcase. Can you believe it?'

The waiter moved his eyes away from the man who knew his father, and his gaze fell onto the Egyptian fisherman: *What's his name? He told me, I'm sure he told me before.* '...so the security at the airport in America they ask me: "How much money are you carrying with you, sir?" "Whatever I've got in my pockets," I say, "twenty-five thousand dollars." "And the money in your suitcase? Did you declare that, sir?" I say: "Aman! I've forgotten about it." They kept the money, seventy thousand dollars. "Reh," I tell them, "take it, reh! Keep it." Of course. My wife was going to give birth and you think I give a fuck for the bloody money? "Sure," I tell them, "keep it as a tip for my baby's birth." Hahaha, what fuckers these Americans are...'

It seemed that the man had finished with his story, and the waiter mentioned that he had to sort out the bar and clean the coffee machine.

'Get me a whisky,' said the man. 'Ah...your father was such a good man.'

A whisky was poured and served.

'Come, sit down, young man. Yeah, that's it, sit down.'

The waiter did so, and the man didn't talk now, he fiddled with the glass, it seemed that something was playing on his mind, and the waiter looked away.

'Look here. Here,' the man yanked his Hawaiian shirt. 'Do you know how much this costs? Two hundred dollars. Now, now... Can you guess how much I bought it for? Can you? Go on, have a guess.'

The waiter only gave a faint smile.

'Tell me!' the man demanded. 'Have a guess.'

'I've no idea. How much?'

'Ten dollars. Yes, *ten*,' and he gulped down his whisky and threw the glass on to the marble table: 'Ten. Ten dollars. Do you take me for an idiot or what? Now, listen. The shirt is a top brand. I'm talking about high quality stuff. I can find this type of shirt very cheap in America and ship them over. All you need to do...'

He went on with the plan, while the waiter gazed towards the blond Egyptian. It felt good looking at someone drinking his beer after a hard night's work, someone who was tired and needed that cool bottle. He had grown to recognise those who respected him as a waiter by the way they held the glass or the bottle, the knife and fork; there was no nerve in their grip, only tenderness, and a little melancholy. Rarely the locals showed any respect towards him. It was the Egyptian fishermen who had the kindness of the heart in their manners, the prostitutes and the spat-upon homosexuals, those beggars with a few coins to spend and those whom the waiter loved and gave them for free the little they asked for. They were the troubled ones, quiet, polite, and sparse with words usually; for them drinking was a ritual and the waiter part of that ritual, the one who brought something that made sense: the bottle, a plate of food. That voice wouldn't stop though, that voice that came out of that man who wore that Hawaiian shirt wouldn't stop, no, it kept going on, restless, feverish, foreverish, knocking on the waiter's skull with *plans*.

He looked at the man's bright Hawaiian shirt and then he saw his own hand rising and hanging in mid-air. He didn't know why he had lifted his hand. The hand had lifted itself, and he felt like a schoolboy, an idiot. A finger pointed somewhere, and the glance of the man who knew his father fell upon the blond Egyptian, who smiled: 'Another beer, when you get a chance, Pavlo,' and Pavlo the waiter pushed his chair back and said, 'Excuse me.'

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'I think you told me your name before, I'm sure you told me, but I can't remember it. Is it Mohammed?'

No, it wasn't Mohammed. The Egyptian fisherman said his name, but Pavlo instantly forgot it. He asked again, was told, and, once again, Pavlo forgot. Never mind. The Blond Egyptian.

They talked about the easy stuff, the shift in the café and the catch of the day.

'I like this time of the night. After every fishing voyage, I come here and have a couple of beers and look at the sea. I look at it thinking that one day I'll go back to my country. Back, to make a home, to get married and have kids. And I know that years later, when I do all that, I will like to sit in a café in my fishing village and look at the big Nile and remember the nights in Café Papaya.'

'I love nights, but nights without the people of my town. I never liked those, and I can't show them how I feel about it, I'm a waiter, you know, I must always be polite. Every time I go to take their order there is tension, they look down on me, they try to ridicule me and I can't understand why. I feel like a cornered rat. I did try to like them. For a period I used to

work drunk to see if that helped with the situation and it didn't, I just got more wrecked by them.'

'After this beer I'll go and sleep in the caique. You want to come and sleep there with us?'

The waiter stiffened suddenly, his face distorted. These words, this simple invitation shook him, and he fell silent: he felt comfortable with the Egyptian fishermen, he knew them, he knew that with them there was understanding, when he served them they were themselves and he was himself, and although he had never slept in a caique before, he knew he'd have a beautiful sleep there. He wanted, he craved to go. Sea, wood and silence pulled him over, in the darkness of the harbour, into the hollow of the boat. And fear held him back. He didn't know why he felt like that, it was silly to be afraid, but the fear was there, raw and heavy, ordering him to stay put, guarding his words. He was so scared that he kept his mouth shut. He said nothing.

The Egyptian said nothing either, he didn't mention it again. They smoked, and again they talked about the easy stuff, life as a fisherman and life as a waiter, about Izbat Al-Borg and Kavala.

Throughout this time Pavlo was thinking of the sleep in the caique. He imagined the musty life below the deck, that smaller world under the hatchway. The gas lamp that would burn dimly, pouring its trembling light over bunk-beds, blankets and wooden pillars. Light and shadow would play on the faces of the fishermen from Izbat Al-Borg, revealing and hiding those deep hard lines on their cheeks and around their eyes, residues of their sorrows, carved by salt and wind on their sea voyages in the night. A hand would turn the wheel of the lamp and the sweet sounds of the darkness would take over, the slow creaking of wood in water, the

dangling of brass lamps up on the deck, the sea. They would probably talk in the darkness – what would they talk about? – they'd talk until they'd all be too tired and their eyes would grow heavy. And it was so close, so very close! No more than thirty steps away. Thirty steps, and he'd have a new sleep, the most beautiful sleep, not a single soul in the world that dawn would have slept better than him.

Pavlo didn't know where fears come from, how they take over men and bar them from crossing streets, but he could feel the fear, powerful in its filth, controlling, pulling his imagination away from the caique, dragging him back to dry, secure land. *Backbackbackback, get me a whisky and look at my shirt, I want my burger with cheese and without cheese, where's my coffee, get me my coffee.* He spoke without thinking, the words escaping from him, and they were simple words, made by sea and wood, in darkness. He said he wanted to go and sleep in the caique.

The fisherman smiled. 'You want to come? Really? But I forgotten, the mechanic will come soon to fix the engine. You won't be able to sleep. Better come another time.'

It was time to go now. Soon it would be dawn. The Blond Egyptian finished his beer and headed towards the caique. Pavlo the waiter got a brush and began sweeping the terrace so that it would be nice and clean for the morning shift.

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9

Pariah

HARSHAL DESAI

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

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

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

My first sin was to think I have a career.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is a vicious cycle.

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

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

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

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

10

The Arithmetic Islands

THOMAS LUCKY RICHARDS

A Rat In Tom's House Might Eat Tom's Ice Cream. That odd sentence of ten words is used to help children spell a single word – Arithmetic. That is how I learned to spell arithmetic in grade school. A Rat In Tom's House Might Eat Tom's Ice Cream. I saw it then, and until very recently, as a tool, each word an island symbol for its corresponding letter, linked by a nonsensical string, all in the name of education. Trickery in the name of inculcation. Suddenly an eight year old can spell a ten letter word. When he dies, when I die, lying in a bed I do not know, gradually forgetting most of what I had known – A Rat In Tom's House Might Eat Tom's Ice Cream.

Why is this phrase so sticky? Why is it that you will now never forget it? I know why. I am Tom, and so are you.

A short time ago I was infused with a clarity born of pestilence, and it has changed my vision. I see now that there are numerous ways to look at this arithmetic. There are many different ways to view each island's contribution. We can look at individual islands, or we can look at them in groups where several words together form a single archipelago. There are certain formations that may make these archipelagos of meaning stronger. For example what follows is a seven island grouping; the first island being, "A Rat," island two could be "in," a small dot of an island, but none-the-less an important one, next would come "Tom's," this island would encompass both "Tom's," "House" is the next island, "Might" would be

island number five, "Eat" would come next, and finally "Ice Cream," number seven the final island grouping.

Or, perhaps a four island outlook could work well, for example; the island of "A Rat," the island of "In Tom's House," the island of "Might Eat," and lastly the island of "Tom's Ice Cream." Yes, I think that is it. I think the four archipelago approach fits the best.

However, before I give any Icelandic explanations let me explain to you a little fact about us. We are Tom, you and I, and what belongs to us, or what we perceive belongs to us is "Tom's." And that is a fact.

If I say island I suspect that in your mind you will picture a small roundish land mass surrounded by beautiful and clear salt water. On your island are palm trees, beautiful sandy beaches and lush vegetation. However, there are a large number of island types; there are frozen islands of thick blue ice, there are new volcanic islands of the blackest glass-like basalt, there are islands in remote mountain lakes surrounded by transparent waters of intense greens or blues. These lonesome islands are stared down upon by a bored sun.

There is a short phrase, a parable of sorts that says, "No man is an island," which means, of course, that we are all islands but long not to be. To be an island is to be alone, with or without others.

Island one: "A Rat." A rat is most often seen as a pest. Almost anything we see that we do not understand we see as pests. But we can also see rodents as pets, just as we can see weeds as flowers, or fire as light. Sometimes we Toms are too kind, too gullible, too wo'd by wants and desires. We are often lulled into a state of blissful forgetfulness. After all, a rat is a rodent, a creature of the wild, the bearer of the great

plague. It is an animal as we are animals, and given the proper circumstances we Toms, us animals, we rats will act in a rat-like fashion.

Island two: "In Tom's House." House: a dwelling, a comfortable place to go each night, a base to go forth from. Often a house is a home; a place/the place where we let go of our exterior selves. A place of comfort. A place where we spread out our belongings. A place, ideally, where we are in control. Home is where "we" make the rules, or dissipate them. We often see it as our spiritual sanctuary. Sometimes our house travels with us like a turtle's shell. And like a tree's canopy it may shelter other members of our family.

Our house is our ground, our sacred ground. When others are there they know it is ours. We have marked it as with any animal. *In Tom's House!*

Island three: "Might Eat." Might, perhaps, maybe, a chance-there-of. Might, this particular might anyway, implies a chance, a possibility of occurrence. The occurrence of eating. To eat. To eat is to consume. Once consumed – gone!

Island four: "Tom's Ice Cream." Here again is the possession thing that we Toms all seem so fond of. Actually it is not possession at all, but the perception of possession. If we seem to possess things it is only temporal, always temporal. This temporal possessiveness takes the forms of storing, holding, communicating, embarrassing or demeaning, rather than owning. I realise that now. And from this new perspective my "possessions" are singularly beautiful, my islands more dimensional.

Ice Cream; what is the good of keeping it in your freezer forever? Possessing its diminishing flavor? Protecting it will be a thick and scaly coat of white frosty ice? I remember times well past dark when I'd put my shoes back on and walk down

to Brothers' Bodega on the corner for some gourmet ice cream. I'd sit in the corner of our apartment on East 14th holding the cold carton in one hand and spooning the cement-like nectar into my mouth. More likely than not I would wake up the next morning with a sugar hangover. I have learned about ice cream that slower is better. But one must not wait forever. The thought of ice cream is second only to the first bite melting, but not melted, in your mouth.

I have also learned more about arithmetic. I have learned that 1 and 1 and 1 could just as easily be 1 and 2, as 2 and 1, or 3, or just 2 or even 1, and that I could just as easily be a rat as a Tom, but I have little desire to be ice cream.

A Rat In Tom's House Ate Tom's Ice Cream.

11

The Inferior

CHAGANTI NAGARAJA RAO

Soon after I had taken over charge as municipal commissioner of my home town, the news spread fast far and wide in the town and people from all walks of life including my classmates began to throng my chamber and enquire about my welfare, past career etc. As I recollected my childhood memories they were happily surprised at my photographic memory and marvellous recollecting capacity. I, however, retained my inferiority complex even after having become a gazette officer and achieved a reputation as a perceptive and diligent officer since I still remembered my childhood events.

♦♦♦

The Life Insurance Corporation of India invited applications from graduates for the post of lower division clerks. And those with post-graduation qualification were given grace marks of ten per cent over the marks they secured in the graduation. Those with brilliant academic career could get selected to the posts. I could not get the post of lower division clerk in L.I.C. of India with my poor academic record. My teachers as well as my parents and others declared me unfit for any post for which selection was made on the basis of academic record. I went to the state capital where my maternal uncle resided and tried my luck for the post of laboratory attendant in a college; but I was disqualified for it

since I failed to get even second class in graduation. I had developed diffidence and began to feel myself as quite useless for public employment and came to the conclusion that I should seek some career like ledger keeper in a grocery shop or cloth store or a server in a hotel.

I spent three years in torturous unemployment, facing social humiliation but however entertaining a hope that I would achieve success one day or the other. I spent most part of the time in libraries studying books and preparing notes. A few days later the state public service commission notified certain gazetted officers' posts to be filled through competitive examination. I submitted my application to try my luck, of course, with a feeling in the corner of my mind that it was quite impossible for me to display the intellectual calibre required for a coveted career. I was happily surprised when my preparation could get me the post of municipal commissioner.

♦♦♦

Almost all my classmates residing in the town came to see me. But my attention was rather on Nagesh. During our school studies I was rather shy to face Nagesh and speak to him as we were diametrically opposed to each other in our academic brilliance throughout our educational career. While he always achieved top rank at the state and the University level examinations I passed every year with 5 marks given as moderation in one paper for having secured pass marks in all other papers. I not only suffered from inferiority complex but was really inferior to him. After graduation Nagesh received immediate response for his applications for jobs from any government or private establishment for which selection was made on the basis of the candidate's academic record. I was

sure that Nagesh would be holding a prominent place in the government or private sector commensurate with his merit.

'He must have been feeling that a man of his intellectual brilliance should not visit a man with a poor academic record like me, however important person I may be today,' I felt. But so strong was the impulse in me that I should meet him at any cost and recollect the nostalgic memories of our school days. I had decided to go to his residence to see him. I sent my clerk to enquire about his whereabouts. He returned with a word that Nagesh was quite reluctant to meet me and to divulge anything about him for reasons not revealed to him.

"Then I will go to his house and meet him. What is wrong in it? There is nothing wrong in paying a visit to such an intellectual and my superior in every aspect. Please tell me where he is working" I said.

Meantime my office manager entered my chamber.

"Sir! Please do not do such a thing. Though you are a native of this place and despite your utter simplicity and unassuming nature, you are the head of the urban local government and you are not supposed to pay such personal visits. You are expected to maintain the demeanour of a dignitary. Please forget your childhood at least as long as you are working in this town," pleaded my manager.

"So you mean to say that I should not meet my classmate?" I asked him after a little pause.

"That is not my intention, sir! But when a high level officer visits an office or someone's residence it should be either an official visit or on an invitation. You are still feeling as if you are a student. Senior level executives are expected to maintain some kind of decorum in the interest of administration. If you are very particular to see him I will

arrange a rendezvous at an appropriate time. Please excuse me for my frankness," my manager pacified me.

His advice seemed quite acceptable. I simply put a full stop to the matter for the time being.

I had become popular in the town with my services. I felt it a fortune that the people of the same town who once excoriated my prattling, silly motives, childish inanities and poor academic record began to lavish praise on me for my services. Two months ran away fast. The manager of the local branch of Life Insurance Corporation came to my office along with his regional manager and invited me to inaugurate the newly constructed office building and also to open new records. I accepted the invitation.

As I reached the LIC office the staff greeted me. The inauguration of the new building was over and all the invitees were seated on the dais. As per the programme I opened the books and new records. Chitchatting with the manager I looked around the building and all of a sudden I was thrilled to locate Nagesh standing at the corner of the big hall. As I could spot him I waved my hand and called him near. He slowly approached the dais and stood in obeisance before me and the branch manager. I felt very happy to see Nagesh after a long gap of a decade.

"Hullo Nagesh! How are you? I longed to see you for two months. What are you doing here?" I said and turned to the manager and continued about Nagesh: "He was my classmate, a very brilliant fellow. He always achieved first rank throughout his educational career. He achieved distinction in post-graduation. It is a rare achievement."

Nagesh silently kowtowed before me with his hands folded. I asked him to sit on the dais, ignoring the formalities. The branch manager sighed to Nagesh to go away and

advised him to meet me later. Nagesh silently went away without uttering a word. I was surprised at his uncalled for silence.

"Sir," the branch manager went on: "How could you expect a lower division clerk to sit on the dais although he was your classmate during your studies? In fact, we also hesitate to meet an officer of your stature without prior appointment."

I was shocked at the branch manager's words. I returned to my office and began to seriously ponder over the career of an intellectually brilliant fellow with exceptionally good academic record like Nagesh. Meantime my office manager entered my chamber breaking my pensive mood.

"Sir! Could you meet your classmate in the L.I.C. office?"

"Yes, but..."

"Sir! Do you remember that you failed to get selection for the post of lower division clerk in L.I.C. a decade ago because of your poor academic record?" asked my manager.

"Yes."

"Then he succeeded with the distinction he secured in post-graduation. He is still a clerk in L.I.C.," my manager went on much to my astonishment: "His early success prevented him from making efforts for further success and your early failures had become stepping stones for your later success. Events of our lives are not in our hands. Even as you felt inferior to him in studies, he now feels inferior to you in career. Inferiority or superiority of persons will not always remain the same throughout our lives. That is why he felt shy all these days to meet an officer of your stature."

"If I also secured distinction in post-graduation.... and if I had achieved success very early in life...?" I looked at my manager with a wild surmise.

"There is possibility for you also to remain a Lower Division Clerk still," said my manager at which I remained a stupor.

SATIRE

1

Richard Wagner, Chemist

PETER BATES

Assistant professor Jeffrey Sidethorne leaned against the mailbox and flipped through the magazine *Nineteenth Century Music*. At last, two responses to his article published last quarter in that prestigious journal. For years it had rejected his articles about lieder meter and symphony dissections. So he sent them Richard Wagner's fabled formula for polishing brass instruments. Apparently nothing bothered the master more than a tarnished tuba. So he invented – and documented – a splendid formula. Here's an extract:

"... grams of finely powdered pumice. After you have applied this emperor of solutions to the filthiest of trumpets, you will undoubtedly hear the scorning laughter of the philistines. These mealy-mouthed wise-acres of our modern State-and-Art-barbarianism will try to manipulate you with lies and ignorance. A heroic will is needed to eradicate the odium of tarnished instruments, which produce sounds less like music and more akin to a squeaking, buzzing snuffle!"

Accompanying the article was a glorious sidebar, Wagner's long lost "Das Lied des Waldhornpolierers" ("Song of the French Horn Polisher").

"French horn, French horn,
Trusted brass!

Why did you have to stain?
After I smeared
your shining visage,
in the solution I rub your blemished side.
Hoho! Hoho!
Hohi! Hohi!
Buff, lambskin!
Rub off this disgrace!
High in the wood
A volcano erupted.
I collected spewed lava.
I crushed to dust the pumice
that now lies heaped in the Tarnhelm.
Hoho! Hoho!
Shine brighter than the beloved's canine tooth!"

Jeffrey quickly turned to the Letters to the Editor page. "I must have done something wrong!" began the first. "I tried this formula on an antique trombone that once belonged to Mahler's manservant. Before my eyes it melted into a golden puddle!" Another commiserated: "Saxophone polishing solution? What tripe! Everyone knows the best cleaner is the tears of a spurned hero."

Jeffrey giggled like a schoolboy. Soon he was typing up a new creation – something about Brahms loathing the squeak of tuning pegs and devising a beeswax paste – but he couldn't banish the feeling he was being watched. Then there was that steady crescendo whistling of the Prelude to *Parsifal*. Moments later it stopped and the master's visage appeared. "You have greatly misquoted me," he said, tweaking his majestic sideburns. "No tenure for you!"

PLAY

1

Funeral Strains

(A One-act Play)

GARY BECK

SCENE 1

(Pre-show. Offstage. Blaring sounds of anti-gay, anti-military protest, by a radical church group, attempting to disrupt the burial service of a gay Marine, Tom Richardson, killed in combat in Afghanistan. 'God hates fags'. 'Thank God for dead soldiers'. 'America is doomed'. 'Thank God for IED's'. 'God hates you'. 'Mourn for your sins'. 'Fags doom nations'. 'God hates America'. 'God is your enemy'. The protest is heard distantly at different times during the play. Enter John Richardson, Tom's father, and Tom's younger brother, Cal. As they enter the sounds of protest fade.)

John: I never thought I'd be glad to see bikers. When they asked my permission to shield the ceremony from that hate group I was really embarrassed at the public attention of you know what. But when they chased those church fanatics further away I felt like getting a motorcycle jacket, catching up to them, (He mimes gripping the handlebars and makes

sounds revving the motor) and buying them a beer.

Cal: I don't know about them, Dad. Most bikers are violent criminals and some are drug dealers. I'm not sure what they did was legal.

John: The hell with legal. They helped us, didn't they? Those guys are vets, sticking up for their own. The sheriff wouldn't do anything. Said: (Mimicking) "Those church people have a constitutional right to protest." You'd think a church would respect the rights of a family burying their son. I shouldn't have to listen to them yelling all that filth, but it got to me. I was so mad I was going to get my rifle from the truck and run them off, if the vets hadn't shown up.

Cal: What if the protesters wouldn't go? Would you have shot them?

John: I don't know, Cal.... But we have a right to bury Tom without their blaring away like that. It's bad enough the town knew about our shame. With the media here, they're broadcasting it to the whole world.... Maybe if I popped a few of them, they'd find another way to spread their twisted message of god. At least they'd go away.

Cal: Then you'd go to jail. That wouldn't solve anything.

John: I'd feel a lot better.

Cal: Maybe.... But they're not much different than you, Dad.

- John: The hell they are.
- Cal: You were pretty violent when you found out Tom was gay. You said worse things about him then they did.
- John: Yeah. But I was never anti-military. I served my country proudly.
- Cal: Well, so did Tom. But you drove him to enlist when he needed your help.
- John: That was his choice.... I almost died of shame when they caught him making out with a guy, and him the captain of the football team. What else could I do? (Sounds of protest, 'God hates fags'. 'Thank God for dead soldiers'. They fade away).
- Cal: You could have stood by him.... He'd still be alive if you hadn't kicked him out of the house.
- John: The hell you say. So now you're blaming me for his death?
- Cal: He'd be alive and safe in college, if you supported him when he needed you.
- John: I wouldn't have a faggot for a son. There's no way I could live with that.
- Cal: That's an ugly word, especially now that he's dead.
- John: Does the truth hurt?
- Cal: That's not what Tom was.
- John: He was a dirty pervert.

Cal: Don't say that. He was my brother and I loved him.

John: That's your choice, but I can't go to that gravesite and face the Marine honor guard.

Cal: Why not?

John: Because they know what he was.

Cal: How do you know they're not gay?

John: Are you nuts? Whoever heard of gay Marines?

Cal: (Stares at John until reality sinks in.) As long as someone's willing to fight and die for his country, what do you care what his sexual preferences are?

John: (Looks at him strangely) It should matter. We never had gays when I was in the Corps.

Cal: I'm sure you would have noticed.

John: What do you mean by that?... Maybe you're a homo. Is that why you're defending him?

Cal: Say that again and I'll kick your teeth in.

John: (Laughs derisively.) That'll be the day. You better get your girlie-man friends to help you. (Cal starts towards John, but stops when his mother, Ellen Richardson, and his younger sister, Norma, enter.)

SCENE 2

Ellen: Are you two fighting about Tom again? This is my son's funeral, John. It's bad enough I have to listen to those hate mongers screaming those awful things about Tom, without hearing my own husband echoing them.

- John: Ellen. That's no way to talk to me.
- Ellen: It's true, isn't it? You call him nastier things than they do.
- Norma: Mom's right. My brother died a hero. You shouldn't insult his memory.
- John: So all of you are against me.... Well I'm used to that.... How do we know he was really a hero?
- Ellen: His captain wrote that letter telling us how he died saving his buddies during a Taliban attack. I know my Tom. That's what he would do.
- John: (To Norma) I seem to remember that you and your friends were teetering, or whatever you call it, not too long ago, saying the war was unjust. Now all of a sudden it's alright because your brother died?
- Norma: I don't care about the war right now. I miss my brother and I don't want you saying those things about him now that he's dead. I stuck up for him when everybody turned on him, and I don't want you insulting Cal for defending the brother he loved and admired.
- John: What's wrong with you people? Tom almost destroyed this family. They came close to firing me from my security job at the mall. Your Mom's good friends stopped talking to her. Cal's buddies ignore him and your girlfriends call you insulting names. (Sounds of protest. 'Thank God for IED's'. 'Mourn for

your sins'. 'Fags doom nations'. They fade away.)

- Ellen: None of that matters now. I don't care about anything else but saying goodbye to the son I loved and lost. (To John.) I know I didn't always speak up when I should have. Maybe if I did he'd still be alive. Now it's time to put your bad feelings behind you. I want you to behave like the man I thought you were when we first got married.
- John: (Sullenly) Doesn't it matter what I feel?
- Ellen: I should hope you feel the same loss as the rest of us. (John shrugs.) What's the problem now?
- Cal: (Cuts in before John can answer) Dad says he's not going to the grave.
- Ellen: Don't worry. He's going. (To John) And you'll behave respectfully. This is the time for our family to mourn Tom and set an example for those who condemned him. Now no more arguing. Come with me. (Exit Ellen and John. Cal and Norma remain.)

SCENE 3

- Norma: It's about time she spoke up.
- Cal: That's a shocker.
- Norma: At least she did it.... What were you and Dad fighting about?
- Cal: The usual. He still blames Tom for everything. Then he called him a faggot.

- Norma: (She looks around, then steps closer.) There is another side to it. I understand why he's so upset. He's not the kind of man who can deal with that kind of thing.
- Cal: (Angrily) Are you taking Dad's part?
- Norma: No, silly. I feel the same way you do about Tom. But just think how it affected our big, macho Dad. His golden boy son caught in the locker room doing whatever men do to each other. It ripped his world apart. It was beyond his ability to deal with it reasonably.
- Cal: I know that. Believe me. It shocked me too, when I found out. But I never forgot that he was my brother.
- Norma: If Tom only told Dad that he was gay before anything happened....
- Cal: Yeah. Right. You must be thinking of some other father. Dad would have reacted the same way and thrown him out of the house even sooner.
- Norma: It might have been different if Tom had confided in Dad privately. He might have stood by him.
- Cal: Don't make me laugh. Have you ever been able to confide in him? (She shakes her head no.) I sure haven't. He'd never accept that a son of his was gay. I've been waiting for him to call me a faggot, because I like books. Just before you and Mom got here he asked me if I was a homo.
- Norma: (Teasingly) Did you confess?

- Cal: Smart ass.... I told him I'd kick his teeth in.
- Norma: That's the kind of talk he understands. I tell you what. I'll buy you a set of weights for your birthday. You can work out and build some muscles. That should reassure him you're not gay. (He laughs despite himself and she joins in.) I'm glad you can still laugh.
- Cal: There's not much else I can do. It hurts too much to cry.... I miss Tom all the time.
- Norma: So do I.... I keep asking myself if I could have done anything to prevent him from leaving home like that.
- Cal: I didn't know what to do.... I didn't want him to go, but I knew he couldn't live here anymore.... Sometimes I feel like there's a curse on us.
- Norma: Don't talk like that.... We'll get through this somehow.... Let's go to the grave site and not let anyone stop us from saying goodbye to the brother we loved. (Exit Cal and Norma. The distant sounds of protest. 'God hates fags'. 'Thank God for dead soldiers'. 'America is doomed'. 'Fags destroy nations'. 'Thank God for IED's'. 'God hates you'.)



MEMOIR

1 Only the Dead

JADE WALLACE

12.35 pm, Monday

You did not ask why I slept on the couch, you asked whether it was comfortable.

If you had asked me why I would have said
I don't go where I'm not wanted;
I'm no Frank O'Hara.

And god I know I can be petty sometimes, but I hate the way you laugh when you think I've said something stupid.

I hate the way you said my hair was the minimum length required to be attractive.

I hate the fact that you think I'm an anorexic feigning lactose intolerance.

I hate the sound of your deep-sleep breathing when I'm crying.

I can't be Frank O'Hara, but you could make a modest Bukowski.

You're a good writer and all, but for someone whose relationship manual is the Dhammapada, you can still be kind of an asshole.

You won't tell me what you want because you're convinced I won't give it to you?

Fuck off.

1.20 pm, Monday

Hair drenched, dripping all over the plastic diner tablecloth, looking at the delicate veins of river under the skin of my wrist. Even the French toast is soggy this morning. I'm thinking:

Only the dead get everything they need, and I'm no Frank O'Hara.

ESSAY

1

Mute Among the Qashqai

SHARA SINOR

She crept toward us slowly and sat down some distance away with a kind of wariness. With a pile of sheep's wool in her lap, she concentrated on spinning it around a wooden hand spindle into thread. Soon she moved closer and sat again. This time she peered out from her blue head scarf and kept her eyes on us while she continued feeding the chaotic mass of wool through her fingers onto the turning spool. It was made clear to us that she didn't speak. Later Reza would explain that she had a severe illness in childhood and was a little "off" now. She would never marry and remained in her father's care.

When I asked the travel agency to include the advertised available add-on of "a night camping with Qashqai nomads" in our itinerary traveling through Iran, I had suspected that my husband, Erik, and I would be set up in special "tourist" tents furnished with cots, or even beds, and coddled with amenities. I imagined the nomads would be performing their traditional chores for us more as a presentation than as part of their normal daily lives. I was interested to learn about them anyway, in spite of a scripted experience.

History books can tell us about the great Persian empire, but it's not so easy to know much about the current lives of

Iranians, shuttered away from the Western world. As American tourists, we needed special visas and could only travel with a registered tour company. We chose to hire a private guide, Reza, who contracted for Mr. Qajar's travel agency.

This night was my birthday. Since reaching middle age, I've made a vow to always travel on my birthday, for it's the one activity that invigorates me like no other, interests me, fills me full enough with wonder and appreciation to push out the depression over the pages turning so rapidly in my life. I was particularly excited about this birthday in such an exotic location.

We presumed Reza would drive us to meet the nomads. Instead, we went to the travel agency office and met the very professional Mr. Qajar in a gray pinstriped suit, argyle socks and shiny shoes. Reza told us we would now wait for him. Mr. Qajar left the room and to my great surprise, pulled up outside the office in a dusty Land Rover, while still impeccably dressed in business attire.

Mr. Qajar had called ahead to confirm that the Qashqai family had moved to their summer grounds outside Shiraz. (Yes, even nomads have cell phones.) He asked the patriarch, Hasan, what he would like as gifts in return for hosting us for dinner, and so as he drove us out of town, we stopped first by a pharmacy to buy a neoprene knee brace and then picked up his assistant, Farshad.

We drove for several hours, over a high mountain pass, deep into the Zagros mountain range. When we pulled into the seasonal nomad settlement, I was surprised there were in fact no tents, for the Qashqai were known as the "black tent nomads." They are renowned for the exquisite wool Persian

carpets they weave. I wondered which of the thatch-roofed stone huts clustered loosely together we would stay in.

Surprised again – Farshad and Mr. Qajar began setting up a three-man North Face dome tent for me and Erik. We were literally camping with the nomads. Precisely as advertised. There were no camping pads for our sleeping bags, just a couple layers of blankets.

The summer home of Hasan and his extended family lay in a broad grassy valley encircled by golden vertical cliffs that turned purple as the sun got lower in the sky. Once our tent was set up, Erik and I set out to explore the valley. We could hear the loud buzzing of bee colonies in a nearby orchard, where the bees fed on orange blossoms to flavor the honey.

The ground was littered with gray stones mostly the sizes of softballs and soccer balls. It would not have taken much effort to gather stones for the building of the huts. Ancient cypress trees dotted the land. Their trunks commonly split into a "V" shape, and their branches provided broad patches of shade.

Small herds of very woolly sheep with floppy ears grazed together in tight packs, moving like a combine moves through a corn field, munching down the grass as they walked in formation. Goats wandered around by themselves as if they were trying to spy on us, eyeing us casually, then standing perfectly still behind a tree. Chickens traversed the fields randomly in all directions, pecking intently at the ground.

When Erik and I ambled back into our camp, it now included three more tents for our companions, and most unexpectedly, Mr. Qajar in fleece pants and tennis shoes sitting on the ground industriously mending a tear in his tent with needle and thread. Reza told us the family was waiting

to meet us and we should go over to them. We presumed he or Mr. Qajar would accompany us, but instead we found ourselves alone with Hasan and his two daughters for over an hour, sitting around their campfire. Alone with no common words to toss between us.

As his daughter the spinster eyed us with her unabashed curiosity, it was she with whom I soon felt the most comfortable... she who never had her own words to toss, so there was no expectation of conversation. She settled the atmosphere around the fire with her quiet engagement in her ancient task. How many women before her have sat spinning thread from wool? Perhaps she foremost in the family illustrated with her nimble fingers the continuity I hoped still existed in this land between the past and present.

Hasan's whitened hair contrasted handsomely against his richly sun-baked skin, He still walked many miles each day to graze his flock of sheep and goats, though he was 69 years old. His birth certificate shows he is only 59; it took his nomadic parents ten years to go to a city where certificates were issued.

A delinquent gang of baby goats romped around the courtyard – climbing, nibbling, bleating, they weren't old enough to keep up walking with the herd. The tiniest one, born the day before, slept peacefully underneath a basket. I was grateful for their presence, as watching and photographing them gave me and Erik something with which to occupy many of the wordless moments. Otherwise we drank tea. And more tea. We tried several sheep dairy products they offered us, various roasted seeds and candies, and Hasan pulled some tiny weeds with his thick fingers and showed us they were edible.

Erik asked me, "So what do you think we are supposed to do?" I didn't have any creative answers and I felt it would be rude to get up and go find our guides, so we sat. At last Reza showed up, and Mr. Qajar shortly thereafter, with no sign he'd spent the morning inside an office, now wearing a sweatshirt and fleece hat. Here was my opportunity to gush forth all the questions I had been posing quietly in my head to Reza for him to ask the family. But suddenly the guides and nomads were chatting excitedly and quickly in Farsi, and as other family members came in from the fields, I felt it was an imposition to thrust in my questions as non sequiturs. I kept waiting for a break in the conversation.

Hasan's daughter was making rice over the fire; squatting down in a chaos of color and patterns – stripes, polka dots and checkers of red, white, blue, black and orange on her long skirt and shirt; a brown hijab with bright aqua and orange paisleys; and neon orange rubber sandals over pastel blue socks. Hasan's wife was hit by a car walking along the roadside and died, so his daughter did the cooking now. She lined the bottom of the blackened pot first with oil, then with a thin piece of naan so the rice wouldn't stick to the bottom. This bread, though made for the benefit of the rice, was delicious – all caramelised and crispy after the rice had cooked.

As I sat in silent observance, I worried I should be getting more out of this, prodding the nomad family with questions about their lives. Erik and I ended up slipping into a kind of shyness, letting everyone else converse among themselves in their own language. We drank our tea as the nomads did – from a deep saucer, sucking it through a sugar cube held between our top and bottom front teeth.

While we ate our dinner of rice and stew by the light of a kerosene lantern, sitting on the floor inside a stone hut, Mr.

Qajar told jokes that made everyone roll on the carpeted floor with laughter. Reza translated some of these: "One guy bets another he can bite his own eyeball," Mr. Qajar began, and the family fell over in stitches. "It turns out he has a glass eye, so he takes it out, puts it in his mouth, and wins the bet. Then he says he can now bite his other eye. The other man thinks there's no way this guy can have two glass eyes, he can't possibly win the bet. But the one-eyed man removes a false tooth and pokes his other eye."

The moon had risen and the stars had sprouted in the sky when we left the family to go to bed. The mountains loomed above us in their ancient brooding silence. I lay awake on the hard, rocky ground feeling like a failure for not asking more questions, anxious that perhaps I had not taken proper advantage of this special opportunity to meet the practitioners of such a deeply-rooted lifestyle, predating civilisation itself in the very land where empires were first built.

As I stared up at the moonlit dome of our nylon tent, I became acutely aware of layers of sound filling the night air. I could hear sheep and goats baaing and bleating in their night pen, cow bells ringing on some of the livestock, a donkey braying, crickets chirping, a pack of dogs barking and howling, counterpointed by Reza snoring in the next tent beside the Land Rover and the distant ruckus of a wedding taking place across the valley: modern techno dance music blasting through massive speakers, punctuated by celebratory gunshots and fireworks. The chickens had roosted amid this soundscape while the family fell into a timeless sleep, and the flickering edges of the dying campfire etched into the darkness the lines upon which this polyphony was scored.

At dawn, we stood by as Hasan let his livestock out of their nighttime pen. I held a young sick goat for him while he

administered a shot of penicillin. I was fascinated with the feel of the little nubs where horns were starting to grow. These were the goats who had been bleating all night. Though I now had another opportunity to use Reza as a translator, I tucked away my pocketful of questions. I realised there was no veneer of a performance to tunnel through with words, perhaps they weren't so important as I once thought. I could simply sit, listen, taste, touch and observe.

This morning I was one year older. I knew somewhere nearby a bride and groom were waking up in each other's arms for the very first time. Soon Mr. Qajar would pull on his pinstriped pants to go back to the office, and Hasan would strike out in his neoprene knee brace to shepherd his livestock to the cliffs and back, across the grassy cradle of his forefathers.

TRANSLATIONS

1

There's a Man in the Habit of Hitting me on the Head with an Umbrella

FERNANDO SORRENTINO

Translated from the Spanish
by Clark M. Zlotchew

There's a man in the habit of hitting me on the head with an umbrella. It makes exactly five years today that he's been hitting me on the head with his umbrella. At first I couldn't stand it; now I'm used to it.

I don't know his name. I know he's average in appearance, wears a gray suit, is graying at the temples, and has a common face. I met him five years ago one sultry morning. I was sitting on a tree-shaded bench in Palermo Park, reading the paper. Suddenly I felt something touch my head. It was the very same man who now, as I'm writing, keeps whacking me, mechanically and impassively, with an umbrella.

On that occasion I turned around filled with indignation: he just kept on hitting me. I asked him if he was crazy: he didn't even seem to hear me. Then I threatened to call a policeman. Unperturbed, cool as a cucumber, he stuck with his task. After a few moments of indecision, and seeing

that he was not about to change his attitude, I stood up and punched him in the nose. The man fell down, and let out an almost inaudible moan. He immediately got back on his feet, apparently with great effort, and without a word again began hitting me on the head with the umbrella. His nose was bleeding and, at that moment, I felt sorry for him. I felt remorse for having hit him so hard. After all, the man wasn't exactly bludgeoning me; he was merely tapping me lightly with his umbrella, not causing any pain at all. Of course, those taps were extremely bothersome. As we all know, when a fly lands on your forehead, you don't feel any pain whatsoever; what you feel is annoyance. Well then, that umbrella was one humongous fly that kept landing on my head time after time, and at regular intervals.

Convinced that I was dealing with a madman, I tried to escape. But the man followed me, wordlessly continuing to hit me. So I began to run (at this juncture I should point out that not many people run as fast as I do). He took off after me, vainly trying to land a blow. The man was huffing and puffing and gasping so, that I thought if I continued to force him to run at that speed, my tormenter would drop dead right then and there.

That's why I slowed down to a walk. I looked at him. There was no trace of either gratitude or reproach on his face. He merely kept hitting me on the head with the umbrella. I thought of showing up at the police station and saying, "Officer, this man is hitting me on the head with an umbrella." It would have been an unprecedented case. The officer would have looked at me suspiciously, would have asked for my papers, and begun asking embarrassing questions. And he might even have ended up placing me under arrest.

I thought it best to return home. I took the 67 bus. He, all the while hitting me with his umbrella, got on behind me. I took the first seat. He stood right beside me, and held on to the railing with his left hand. With his right hand he unrelentingly kept whacking me with that umbrella. At first, the passengers exchanged timid smiles. The driver began to observe us in the rearview mirror. Little by little the bus trip turned into one great fit of laughter, an uproarious, interminable fit of laughter. I was burning with shame. My persecutor, impervious to the laughter, continued to strike me.

I got off – we got off – at Pacífico Bridge. We walked along Santa Fe Avenue. Everyone stupidly turned to stare at us. It occurred to me to say to them, "What are you looking at, you idiots? Haven't you ever seen a man hit another man on the head with an umbrella?" But it also occurred to me that they probably never had seen such a spectacle. Then five or six little boys began chasing after us, shouting like maniacs.

But I had a plan. Once I reached my house, I tried to slam the door in his face. That didn't happen. He must have read my mind, because he firmly seized the doorknob and pushed his way in with me.

From that time on, he has continued to hit me on the head with his umbrella. As far as I can tell, he has never either slept or eaten anything. His sole activity consists of hitting me. He is with me in everything I do, even in my most intimate activities. I remember that at first, the blows kept me awake all night. Now I think it would be impossible for me to sleep without them.

Still and all, our relations have not always been good. I've asked him, on many occasions, and in all possible tones,

to explain his behavior to me. To no avail: he has wordlessly continued to hit me on the head with his umbrella. Many times I have let him have it with punches, kicks, and even – God forgive me – umbrella blows. He would meekly accept the blows. He would accept them as though they were part of his job. And this is precisely the weirdest aspect of his personality: that unshakable faith in his work coupled with a complete lack of animosity. In short, that conviction that he was carrying out some secret mission that responded to a higher authority.

Despite his lack of physiological needs, I know that when I hit him, he feels pain. I know he is weak. I know he is mortal. I also know that I could be rid of him with a single bullet. What I don't know is if it would be better for that bullet to kill him or to kill me. Neither do I know if, when the two of us are dead, he might not continue to hit me on the head with his umbrella. In any event, this reasoning is pointless; I recognise that I would never dare to kill him or kill myself.

On the other hand, I have recently come to the realisation that I couldn't live without those blows. Now, more and more frequently, a certain foreboding overcomes me. A new anxiety is eating at my soul: the anxiety stemming from the thought that this man, perhaps when I need him most, will depart and I will no longer feel those umbrella taps that helped me sleep so soundly.

2

Nirvanshiya

VIJAY LATA TYAGI

Translated by Chandra Shekhar Dubey

Nandi, the name was given to him by Gitti Bua after much deliberations. Son of Nandalal and Anandi, hence Nandi. In her declining years, Anandi was blessed with a son after observation of much sorcery, rituals and fasts. Anandi's breast milk had dried up therefore, she decided to move to her mother's house when she got assurance from Gitti, to happily breast feed her nephew, to save his life in bargain of gift of a gold ring weighing half tola in place of quarter tola. Sister-in-law left for her in-law's house, loaded with eleven sarees, a suitcase and one and quarter tola of gold after the very first birth anniversary of Nandi. But before leaving, she planted a thorn in Anandi's heart.

Sitting in a corner of courtyard in the sun whenever Anandi gave massage or bath to her son with great pleasure, picking up some excuse or other Gitti chirped, "Sister-in-law, his complexion is dazzling white like that of yours. But he has no resemblance with my brother neither complexion, nor eyes nor nose." She crossed the limits of joke, saying "In his declining years, my brother was blessed with a son, but the boy has features of his friend. Look, he has brown hair like that of Kamal Bhaiyya". Anandi usually brushed aside the matter jokingly but an incident that occurred just two days before Gitti's departure filled her with rage. It was a squabble over gift of a suitcase between the brother and sister but mud

was slung over Anandi's character. Filled with anger, waving her hands Gitti said, "I stayed here neglecting my home to look after this ox. If I need an Aristocrat, I must get an Aristocrat (brand of a suitcase). I know, this queen might have poisoned her ears. She has expertise in fuelling the fire but this time it is so mammoth that God alone could save." Anandi had always exchanged the gifts beyond her capacity. If her own brother has withdrawn, how can she help? But she had to tolerate everything. However, today her last sentence had pierced Anandi's heart to the core. Nandalal with his head down and tongue tied got two more sarees for her but he didn't say to her "Anandi, don't take Gitti's words to your heart. I know, you are innocent." Time is a great healer and it heals up great sorrows, contempt and insult. In a week, sequels of Nandi dismantled the walls of misunderstanding between wife and husband. Anandi got rejuvenated but while playing with son, father's fingers often got tangled into his brown hair. Initially Anandi took the morbid and silent jungle in the eyes of her husband for his delusion but she tried to control the rising tides coming out of it. Her patience broke down and she burst out, "Has the magic of your sister's chants spelt you?" Nandalal suddenly got struck by the ebb and flow of the rising tides and somehow managed to control Nandi who was falling from his grip. He stammered in broken syllables "Aye, o', o'I mean ...KK K... what do you mean?". "I mean that do you also see something tricky in a son born out of my womb?" Anandi felt lumps in her throat but Nandalal maintaining his calm said imploringly "No, dear I can't think of such a sin even in my dream." I was blessed to have you as my wife. Now Anandi got delighted. He further added "Don't tell me, you have given me such a precious jewel which I am unable to preserve." Bemused by these words, she lifted her son into her lap and slipped into

the kitchen. Nandalal wiped out the pearl cast tears from his eyes and silently made an exit.

Nandi had approached four years and Anandi was planning to get his head tonsured at the shrine of the goddess. Anandi made two plaits of his hair and thus rejoiced at the idea of being mother of a daughter. And then, suddenly one day Kamal dropped in. These two intimate friends met after an interval of five years. Both of them had the same height and frame. They followed in each other's sleeve. Anandi cooked meals for them and served them with great delight. Standing by their side, Nandi stared at the stranger while Kamal lifting up him in his lap asked "Sonny, what's your name?" Delighted by the quick response of the son Anandi persuaded "Son, tell your full name". The son obeyed his mother in his stammering voice "Nandi Nandlam" and thus made Kamal laugh. The night had fallen and Anandi had gauged the bottle in Nandlam's bag. She understood that two friends were celebrating over drinks. Therefore, spreading the cot in the veranda, she went to her room. The nap of a tired person and consciousness of a dynamic person in tiredness get alive in the wink of eyes, Anandi too fell into this category. She awoke, startled by the sound of glass which slipped out of someone's hands. She listened to the words resonating outside. The voice became clear in the darkness. "Nandu, I have grown affection for your son when I saw him today, photograph of my childhood flashed through my eyes."

"Kamal, look, I am grateful to you. Don't lift the veil from my impotency. That night – that night in darkness, I had pushed the platter served to me towards you, the rewards of which I have reaped from the cradle. I stand as a culprit of Anandi. I couldn't save her from the jibes of Gitti. I committed this sin only because I wanted that someone

should carry forward my genealogy. If you keep coming time and again then this will be revealed to everyone." They continued their conversation while Anandi fell unconscious. The word platter though voiceless coming out of throat, hammered every shred of her mind and her body grew numb. The husband might not know the biological father of his offspring but it is irony that wife doesn't know about it. This happened with Anandi only. She sat perplexed. Every pore of her body rising like hood of a snake injected poison into her body. She got disgusted of such a marital bond on the two ends of which stood both of them and in the middle sat Kamal. She felt queer. Finally, when she couldn't control herself, she burst out "Before the first rays of sun both of you get lost from the luxury palace."

However, Kamal left but Nandlal pitching hope in his heart kept sitting under the banyan tree. In the noon, when he entered the courtyard silently he saw Anandi rubbing limbs of her body as if she is trying to clean the dust that had settled on her eternal fidelity. But the dust contained such invisible particles of glass which scratched and lacerated her body. With tears in her eyes incinerating with pain, Anandi cursed the orgasm that overpowered her that fateful night. When Nandlal turned back he saw Nandi stood there crying. After all what's this? His plaits were missing. Nandlal asked in embarrassment "Oh! Crazy, what have you done? Why did you get his hair cut? Don't you know, it was to be offered to the goddess. Anandi stood in her wet clothes trumpeting "I...am I less than a goddess? At least, I am a mother. You tell me, nirvanshiya". The word which Nandlal dreaded to listen and to escape which he hatched the plot of lineage, the same word revealed his reality with the sound of a trumpet and drove him out of the home. Picking up his son in his lap, he came out. It was evening by that time. People were sitting in

spiritual congregation in the temple. He got stuck by Tulsi-Ratnavali episode. He mused at Tulsi's words after being scolded by Ratnavali. He seemed to have arrived at some decision and then went to his bed. Weighing these incidents against the prevailing circumstances when Anandi returned to normalcy, she came back to her room and found Nandlal writing something in his diary. She stood silently watching at him. He had scribbled two lines with change of two to four words here and there: "One who plundered the bundles of my joys, Oh! God give more to him". What is meaning of 'Oh God!', Anandi tried to poke at her reticent husband. Nandlal only uttered "God" and walked away from the room with his diary. Anandi cooked meals and without waiting for her husband to come, she reached at the shop before noon. She saw her writing something there. Escaping his eyes she managed to read these four lines:

"Four paths flung open at the cross roads
And the sky fell beneath my feet
With my palms I have laved the tents to my friends
As I returned home, I was homeless".

Anandi couldn't make out anything except the words therein. Anandi had studied up to class fourth, and Nandlal was intermediate but his love for reading had sharpened his understanding. Anandi collected the utensils and without asking any question further she returned home. She sneaked into the diary in the night again. She got another four lines after editions and deletions were made:

"Don't ask me, why I have grown folds in my face,
I too, have returned from the company of my owns,
Out of tricks I have gleaned some innovative ways,
Out of my disgraced life".

This worried Anandi. Suddenly what went wrong with Nandlal. She sat close to him with Nandi in his lap. With all politeness in her words she asked "What intrigues you, dear?

What's all this? What's this trick which you are talking of?" With moist eyes Nandlal looked at Anandi and with his eyes cast down said: "Weaving the lesson of eyes into words, I stand crucified, as if I am an angel". And turning his face he lied down.

Anandi's patience was on the verge of breaking down. She had given everything to this man but with his closed eyes he offered her as morsel to other man without her consent. She braved this blow too, but she failed to understand his new pretensions. Anandi broke into tears. Two to three months passed in such swings of ups and downs and doldrums. Anandi grew more and more distressed as the number of lines multiplied in the diary. Tearful regrets of both wife and husband accumulated and reached its climax then one day recollecting himself Nandlal said, "Your place in my heart is like that of an idol in a temple. I worship you in the heart of my hearts. That word is reward of my worship, the word which I never wanted to listen and for which I killed my conscience. I could hardly tolerate it." Nirvanshiya-but today this proved to be a boon for me. I may not have the sperms for an offspring but I have these sperms of words which are mine and only mine. The labour pain which you underwent in the birth of Nandi, I too shall undergo it though not physically but mentally. I shall write something which will outlive me even after my death and that would be only mine.

Anandi was staring at her husband with her eyes open wide. Never before he had witnessed her in this form. She had not discerned such wisdom in the thoughts of even Mahantjee. She got surprised at this metamorphosis of her

husband. Looking into Anandi's dismayed and wide eyes, Nandlal took her face into his hands and thus spoke:

"Life which I plucked from these breaths,
Let me pluck out those moments from my life
And you too, from your life."

Tears welled up in Anandi's eyes. Locked in her husband's arms she broke out into tears. The waves of her sense of guilt were on high rise. With folded hands, she spoke "Excuse me, please, I shouldn't have done so".

Days rolled on and the sperms of Nandlal took shape of a book. He presented the first copy to his wife. The dedication page read – "To my wife Anandi without whom this genealogy was impossible. Below it was written – Nandlal – "Nirvanshiya".

GLOSSARY

Bua	- Aunty (Father's sister).
Nirvanshiya'	- Issues
Tola	- Traditional South-Asian unit of mass, now standardised as 180 troy grains (11.66 grams)

ARTICLES / RESEARCH PAPERS

1

Orwell's Works: A Study of 'Democratic Socialism' and 'Scientific Socialism'

DR. RADHA MADHAB JHA & DR. V. K. JHA

ABSTRACT

Literature is the soul of life. It is deeply and directly linked with all the aspects and realities of life. Literature mirrors the society. The vast majority of books, both fiction and non-fiction, very accurately portray the society constituted of people, and impel readers to contemplate on diverse social, personal, political, economic, religious, moral issues. The characters, themes and episodes of literature have the essence of the people, issues and events of the real world. The gist of man's life, its comforts and miseries, its joys and sorrows, its tragedies and comedies are all reflected through literature. 'Democratic Socialism' had been pushed to the centre stage as an antidote to fascism and totalitarian danger which combined made the post-World War man 'measure his life with a coffee spoon'. A significant number of Orwell's essays of this period are located with his broadsides against fascist propaganda which watered down the very concept of truth. The Nazi theory of state authority and ruler worship brought out a nightmarish world in which the leader of the ruling clique attempted to control the total man. George, their only son, was the middle child. He moved to England with his mother and sisters at the age of one. He displayed academic talent from a young age, so his mother took pains to ensure

his attendance at a well-known boarding school called St. Cyprian's. His family was neither poor nor wealthy, and Blair attended St. Cyprian's on a scholarship. All writings of Orwell is closely related to historical events and political issues of his time. Orwell was a great novelist of his time. He wrote many novels 1984 is great novel of George Orwell. Coming up for air, Orwell's central transitional work, telescopes the themes of all the four literary phases of Orwell's career. The sharply divided phases of Orwell's literary career are conterminous with the graduating curve of 'democratic socialism'. Orwell's slow but steady transition from a repentant capitalist to a dilly-dallying socialist of the urban poor, staying in the camp of 'little Englanders' and then moving over to the camp of confirmed socialists of the working class, enroot briefly holidaying in the 'ranch' of the revolutionary socialists and finally getting baptized as a democratic socialist, is traceable in his journey through hills and streams starting with down and out, terminating in 1984.

Keywords: Literature, linked, fascist propaganda, talent, political issues, democratic socialism, ranch, revolutionary.

INTRODUCTION

Eric Arthur Blair, turned George Orwell, was born at Motihari in the state of Bihar on 25 June 1903. At the time Bihar was still a part of undivided Bengal. His father Richard Arthur Blair was a sub-Deputy agent in the Opium Department of the Colonial Service. The trade routes of the yellow material in the present day Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent encompassing the South Asian countries were unknown in those days. They linked India, China and Britain. Orwell's, mother Ida Imelda Blair, had French connections which enabled the litterateur Orwell to go to France in search of genealogical and litterateur roots. He was born and brought up in the genteel middle class that had been categorised as lower upper middle class in his inimitable window-pane prose style. To use his own words: From 1934 on, Orwell

thrust himself fully into the writer's arena. He quit his teaching job and moved to Hempstead, a gathering place for young writers at the time, where he worked in a used-book store. He published his first fictional work, *Burmese Days*, in 1934, and followed with *A Clergyman's Daughter* in 1935. Orwell's presence in Hempstead and his interest in the lower class did not go unnoticed. In 1936, the Left Book Club commissioned him to write an account of the destitute state of Northern England. Orwell threw himself into the project, conducting first-hand research in his quest for authenticity. In his travels, he met and married Eileen O'Shaughnessy. The controversial account was published in 1936 under the name *The Road to Wigan Pier*. He published *Aspidistra Flying* in the same year.

OBJECTIVES

The objective and the purpose of research is to explore the power of words he used for framing himself. Orwell's writing helps us to understand how the self should hold itself to overcome the problem of those forces. Multiplicity of social forces and an individual's responses to those forces may reveal an abiding truth of the self and the society. In the present research paper; the researcher proposes to explore and analyse with other aspects, how George Orwell uses words and language as a medium to express himself.

Followings are the major objectives of the Study:

1. To study various literary facets of George Orwell's personality as a significant novelist.
2. To examine multi-dimensions of relationships existing in middle class families.
3. To assess George Orwell's contribution to British Literature.

4. To study the impact of George Orwell's select novels on society and vice-versa.
5. To explore the significance and impact of George Orwell's fiction in the contemporary period as well as the days to come.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology includes a close reading and analysis of the material written by and on the writer selected for the study. My focus has been on exploring various issues and problems as delineated in the works of George Orwell.

ORWELL'S WRITING

All writings of Orwell are closely related to historical events and political issues of his time. Orwell was a great novelist of his time. He wrote many novels *1984* is a great novel of George Orwell. *Coming up for Air*, Orwell's central transitional work, telescopes the themes of all the four literary phases of Orwell's career. The sharply divided phases of Orwell's literary career are conterminous with the graduating curve of 'democratic socialism'. Orwell's slow but steady transition from a repentant capitalist to a dilly-dallying socialist of the urban poor, staying in the camp of 'little Englanders' and then moving over to the camp of confirmed socialists of the working class, enroot briefly holidaying in the 'ranch' of the revolutionary socialists and finally getting baptized as a democratic socialist, is traceable in his journey through hills and streams starting with down and out, terminating in 1984.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

'Democratic Socialism' as a political concept is 'branded' and purified in the revolutionary ardour of moralism. According to Aristotle; the 'golden mean' is the point at which most of

the problems of man get settled. 'Democratic Socialism' by its very nomenclature resembles the 'golden mean'. In his essay on 'Catastrophic Gradualism' Orwell refers to Arthur Kesters prescription of a combination of the saint and revolutionary as the saviour of mankind. The Platonic concept of the 'Philosopher King' and the science fiction image of the extra-terrestrial' are secular examples of disparate elements fused into one entity. Orwell was not against socialism but against its morbid outgrowths as in Stalinism and against 'Gulag' which according to him was a logical and inevitable consequence of Marxism though some believed that it was only an incidental perversion. The comment of a perverse eccentric or a pure cynic that 'Socialism is for the bonds' could not have angered the phlegmatic Orwell who recommended the left wing ideology under right wing political institutions. In the socio-political milieu of different brands of socialism, viz revolutionary or reformist, Marxist or libertarian, believer in central planning or in self-managing co-operative social democratic or democratic socialist, or a believer in the full abolition of private property of allowing conditional exercise of individual self-interest to trigger off economics pursuit, Orwell's brand of socialism is neither an ideological absurdity nor a monstrous proposition. His variant is suitable is suitable even for the developed Western societies, but idea for small and instinctively orderly by ones Orwell's show cases of 'democratic Socialism' are the miner's family in Wigan pier where the external physical ruggedness is compensated for in the honey felicities and in the hierarchy free Spanish militias. The present-day equivalents in the forms of Israeli 'Kibbutzim' and Indian 'Sarvodaya' are chrysalises of 'democratic Socialism'. The South Korean automobile workers who work seventy-two hours a week to pay back the

borrowed multilateral capital at Hyundai Car Factory vindicating the lessons of truth honesty and hard work following their Taiwanese counterparts who in their turn followed the Buddhist disciplined Japanese in the aftermath of the second World war sending economic danger signals to the one-time destroyer, benefactor, the united states are the eligible members of the society of "democratic socialism'.

The creative explosion of the concept into an ideology, into an orientation of life, rather into philosophy of life was occasioned by the hard and bitter days of Second World War, later in the undeclared cold war era. It finally matured and bore fruit as a sweet-sour elixir of life in *Animal Farm* and 1984.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM

Scientific socialism presupposes as its essence the systematic knowledge of society based on observation and analysis of its processes over a period of ten years of his intellectual struggle in the Oxford Liberty before publishing his magnum opus. Utopian socialism which projects a milk and honey future without a close consideration of the past and present processes within which socialistic welfare is to be attained is equated with the golden millennium – a thousand – year period unit – which encases redemption, retribution and hope. The concept of 'democratic socialism' is related to the innate virtues of man, his simple rustic pleasures and simple moral actions not motivated by self-interest. The intellectual sustenance of the idea was drawn by Orwell from the helplessness of the imperial representative (Orwell himself). The idea got reinforced before the gleeful smile of the Italian militia boy who was falsely accused of robbery.

The concept beeps the signal of the 'message of arrival' in the post- Second World War cultural essays and later in

Animal Farm and 1984. Orwell, the Fabian socialist, the devil's advocate of a pacifist, the arch enemy of the 'parlour socialist' and the anathema of the of the commissar, conceptualised 'democratic socialism' which would have become the diagnosis against a future based on power politics, permanent war economy and authoritarianism.

'Democratic Socialism' had been pushed to the centre stage as an antidote to fascism and totalitarian danger which combined made the post-World War man 'measure his life with a coffee spoon'. A significant number of Orwell's essays of this period are located with his broadsides against fascist propaganda which watered down the very concept of truth. The Nazi theory of state authority and ruler worship brought out a nightmarish world in which the leader of the ruling clique attempted to control the total man.

1984

1984 (1949) which is said to be George Orwell's most important novel displays all manner of propaganda, with distinguishing features of several definitions sharply accented. The party takes propaganda to totalising limits in its project of political control over not just everything that people do or say but everything they think or believe. The persuasive power of every medium, technique and genre of communication is exploited to its maximum potential and single-mindedly put to work. Virtually every communication is calculated to propagate politically charged messages. No holds are barred, and there is no respite from the intrusive messaging. The novel is a rich source of examples for thinking about propaganda, which could be analysed with reference to any number of theoretical issues in the literature. However, propaganda in the novel divides revealingly and

essentially into two main forms, which I call the propaganda of fact and the propaganda of fiction.

Animal Farm

Animal Farm has been considered as the most successful novel of George Orwell. It brought Orwell both name and fame. His name and fame mainly rests on this novel. In order to present the background of the Russian Revolution, political ups and downs in Russia and many more things, he uses the literary device of allegory and animal fable. Animal fable is the best form of the presentation of political satire. The novel starts with the revolt of animals against man in a farm. Old Major becomes the prophet of a revolution launched by the pigs to overthrow man's tyranny. Animals take charge of this farm by driving out the farmer. The specialty of *Animal Farm* is, as Orwell observes: *Animal Farm* was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole. The political purpose was the demolition of the Soviet political myth. The Russian myth was the prevalent mistaken belief of Western intellectuals and workers that the Soviet Union was truly a socialist state and the Russian model socialism could be replicated everywhere. To quote Orwell again:

"Since 1930 I had seen little evidence that the USSR was progressing truly call Socialism. On the contrary, I was struck by clever signs of its society in which the rulers have no more reason to give up their power than any other ruling class". (2)

SUMMING UP

To conclude; we come to the conclusion that literature has always been used as an effective tool for inspiring great deeds. Literature does not only reflect but it also shapes socio-political relations, exposes injustice and ignites

revolutions. Accordingly, important literary works address the great issues of politics. Doubtless, literature is like a result of what is going on in politics, society or economics; people become angry, depressed and that makes them write about it. Orwell the moralist is fascinated by the pursuit not merely of truth, but of the most complicated and difficult truths. It starts already with the early essay shooting an Elephant, where he confidently asserts that the British Empire is dying but immediately adds that it is "a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it". At times, he seems to take an almost masochistic delight in confronting uncomfortable truths. Orwell was a very English writer, and we think of understatement as a very English quality. But his specialty is outrageous overstatement: "No real revolutionary has ever been an internationalist," "All leftwing parties in the highly industrialised countries are at bottom a sham," "A humanitarian is always a hypocrite." He opposed fighting Hitler until well into 1939, only to reverse his position. In his wartime tract *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, he proposes the nationalisation of "land, mines, railways, banks and major industries". Orwell was a man of equilibrium. The older order of farmer Jones had to go; the new order promised by the pigs also got corrupted. In the world war context, capitalism appeared as a spent force against socialism which had been on the ascendant.

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2

Aesthetics of Sublime V/S Subliminal: Comparison and Contrast in Dalit Writings

DR. PREETI OZA

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the aesthetic descends from the concept of taste. Rationalism about beauty is the view that judgments of beauty are judgments of reason, i.e., that we judge things to be beautiful by reasoning it out, where reasoning it out typically involves inferring from principles or applying concepts.

Aesthetics, (sometimes spelt esthetics) is the philosophical study of beauty and taste. It also refers to the philosophy of art concerned with the nature of art and the concepts which help interpret and evaluate individual works of art. As a philosophy, aesthetics refers to the study of sensory principles – in other words, judgment or evaluation by the senses. The Greek origin of the word ‘aisthesis’ means ‘sensation’ or a ‘reaction to external stimuli’. Semantically in modern English, it means something that can appeal to the senses. As the meaning is subjected to sensory perception, the definitions are often fluid, varied and subjective, differing between people and culture.

As in the concept of 'Politics of aesthetics', both Foucault¹ and Rancière² claim that there is an aesthetics at the core of any politics that operate as the system of determining what presents itself so sense experiences. But the conflict between two aesthetics Strategies; that is the aesthetics of the mainstream and the aesthetics of the margin rely mainly on the creation and the consumption of the content. Literature comes first and only after that we can talk about the structure of its aesthetics, as a secondary phenomenon. The evaluation of literature or any other writing across the world has always used the euro-centric or any other similar exogenous frames of reference.

In India also the main bulk of regional writings use literary devices derived from Sanskrit, such as rasa, dhvani, symbolism and imagery besides following a mainly western aesthetic and there is a persuasive bias in favour of works of fiction that use intensely poetic language. The poetic dimensions of fiction have become the standard of what currently is being perceived as good fiction.

A major debate which surrounds Dalit writings is about the artistic standards or the aesthetic yardsticks that must be employed to understand this literature. According to one thought, it is wrong of Dalit Literature to demand separate criterion for aesthetic evaluation as they feel that universal values cannot be refuted and if the universal aesthetic principles are not being adhered to, then Dalit Literature will lose a proper framework of evaluation. However, another thought advocates that every genre of Literature is different

¹ *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth; the Essential Works of Michael Foucault, 1954-1984.*

² *From Politics to Aesthetics?, J. Rancière – Paragraph, 2005 – eupublishing.com*

from other hence a mechanistic critical tradition cannot be applied to Literature across the world. This paper will attempt to make a typological display of various distinctive figures of Dalit subaltern consciousness.

Dalit literature being a revolutionary form of literature does not adhere to traditional principles of aesthetics. It is a challenging task when it comes to placing the subject of aesthetics in Dalit literature. The criticism of Dalit aesthetics creates a mixed feeling because it does not deliver aesthetics based on pleasure giving beauty. When it comes to Dalit literature the idea of beauty needs to be re-examined and re-analysed. Commonly the idea of beauty is associated with spiritualism but Dalit aesthetics is derived out of a sense of artistic reality.

Mass Literature, Literature of Action, Literature of Protest and Marginalised Literature are different names of this emerging genre of literature that blossomed the world over out of socio-political and cultural transformation. Besides a strong tendency towards self-representation has been rising among those discriminated against for centuries. Bill Ashcroft aptly writes, ‘Marginality becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy’³. The literature by the Burakumin of Japan, Backjeong of Korea, Midgan of Somalia, Dalits of India is living instances of this phenomenon. They explore the underbelly of the society in a diction that subverts the middle-class concepts of linguistic etiquette and standard.

Dalit writing has been described as one of the manifestations of postmodernism in Indian literature. However the acquisition of the postmodernist idiom, modes

³ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003.

and attitude has not been uniform in Dalit Literature. A general presentation of the social, literary phenomenon of the “Dalit literature” – the literature of the oppressed – is firstly required to realise the specificity of that significant trend in the recent literature (since the sixties) in India. The readers, scholarly as well as casual heard a new language, a new direct, accusatory, angry and analytical voice and a literary production which dared to challenge the century-old myths, traditions and practices. For example, Namdeo Dhasal’s iconic poem in Dilip Chitre’s translation:

Cruelty
 I am a venereal sore in the private part of language.
 The living spirit looking out
 of hundreds of thousands of sad, pitiful eyes
 Has shaken me.
 I am broken by the revolt exploding inside me.
 There's no moonlight anywhere;
 There's no water anywhere.
 A rabid fox is tearing off my flesh with its teeth;
 And a terrible venom-like cruelty
 Spreads out from my monkey-bone.⁴

Here the words are full of raw fire. One can see a fury of degradation, obscenity, filth, rage and horror. No attempt to disguise the raw and hurt emotions is ever made.

These characteristic features form a set of aesthetic norms that helps the marginal writings like African American and Dalit writers to construct their ‘psycho-social self’ in their writings. A close evaluation of African American and Dalit autobiographies shows that the psycho-social self of their authors was constantly in conflict with brutal social, political

⁴ Dhasal, Namdeo, and Dilip Chitre. “Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld, Poems 1972–2006.” *Trans, by Dilip Chitre. Chennai: Navayana Publishing* (2007).

and religious institutions of their times. It is so because this 'self' was a kind of threat to the smooth functioning of these institutions. Therefore, these institutions of established classes always tried to create as many obstacles as possible in the path of the 'self' of their victims and attempted to deviate them, away from positive growth.

The distinctiveness of Dalit literature lies in its authentic unity of language and content. In it, the disillusionment and disgust of young Dalits, often accompanied by a desire for revenge, come alive. It revives the memory of the pain and suffering of past generations. It confronts centuries of hypocrisy, deceit and violence sustained in the name of tradition". 'The writings of Dalit scholars also contain powerful denunciations of and fierce attacks on the caste system and on Brahmanical Hinduism. It has been pointed out that the Dalit Sahitya is considered to be a unique genre of modern Indian literature. For now, untouchables themselves using the traditionally-denied weapon of literacy, are exposing the conditions under which they have lived as well as directly rebelling 'vidroha' against the Hindu institution which has assured their perpetual subordination to the Vain order.'

SOME IMPORTANT AESTHETIC CONCEPTS

If one looks at most books on aesthetic theories of India, poetic theories dominate. True, many of these theorists discuss other art forms, either in the same text or elsewhere, but their primary focus is literature. Important aesthetic concepts do figure in treatises that deal with music, fine arts or dance, but they are not applied to literature. On the other hand, theories discussed in relation to literature are sometimes extended to these art forms.

One sees it as a challenging task when it comes to placing the subject of aesthetics in Dalit literature. The en route to Dalit aesthetics emits a bittersweet feeling because it does not deliver aesthetics based on pleasure giving beauty. When it comes to Dalit literature the idea of beauty needs to be re-examined and re-analysed. Commonly the idea of beauty is associated with spiritualism but Dalit aesthetics is derived out of a sense of artistic reality. Hence Dalit aesthetics bends more towards materialist rather than spiritualist.

There are four main standards of Dalit literature: Artists must be motivated by their experience, artists must socialise their experience, artist's experiences must cross provincial boundaries and an artist's experience must seem relevant to all time.

When it comes to Dalit aesthetics one cannot rely on pleasure giving beauty and taste. The Dalit literature calls for liberation and freedom. The fact that it shouts out loud for peace and equality makes it a revolutionary literature. The paradigm of measuring a work of art should not be only based on pleasure giving sensation but arousing a sense of social consciousness can have its own aesthetic value. Revolutionary writers such as Rousseau, Marx, Phule and Ambedkar sealed the deal when they dedicated their writing to bring about a social consciousness.

The Dalit writers are not very well received by the critics, the savarna Marathi critics have always passed their judgment on Dalit literature. Some call it plain flat but some pass their approval to give it the tag of literature. It is commendable that the Dalit writers never resorted to the traditional form of writing but they build their own platform to deliver their Dalit reality and experience.

It is a well-known fact that writers gain their share of popularity through readers. The relationship between a writer and reader decides the faith of a book. The same can be applied to Dalit literature. Most of the Dalit writers derive their inspiration from Dr B.R Ambedkar. He has become a cult figure in the field of Dalit literature but Dalit aesthetics can only be uprooted when a Dalit writer succeeds in plunging Dalit consciousness among the readers.

Savarna critics are of the opinion that Dalit Literature must be evaluated strictly as Literature as that is how the reader is going to perceive it. Criticism of Dalit texts must not give room to any extra-literary traditions and it should be performed on the basis of universal theories and literary criteria.

The most challenging dimension here is that Dalit literature is experience – based. Here ‘experience’ takes precedence over ‘speculation’. To Dalit writers, history is not illusionary but the firsthand experience. 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 expressions of the Dalit writers have become sharp and this edge sometimes is not captured in the translated text.

A major debate which surrounds Dalit criticism is about the artistic standards or the aesthetic yardsticks that must be employed to understand this literature. According to critics

such as P.S. Rege⁵ and Balkrishna Kawthekar, it is wrong of Dalit Literature to demand separate criterion for aesthetic evaluation as they feel that universal values cannot be refuted and if the universal aesthetic principles are not being adhered to, then Dalit Literature will lose a proper framework of evaluation. However, another school of thought advocates that every genre of Literature is different from other hence a mechanistic critical tradition cannot be applied to Literature across the world.

Since Dalit Literature is unique in its insistence of social upliftment and the realistic portrayal of Dalit experiences of pain and suffering along with voicing Dalit rebellion; as opposed to the emphasis on beauty and pleasure, one must develop different artistic standards for of evaluation for such literature. Artistic craft does not assume an important place in Dalit Literature and the message forwarded by the text is given a higher position, hence artlessness can be considered a virtue of Dalit Literature, thus necessitating the need of separate aesthetic criterion. If this demand of Dalit writers would be fulfilled then faulty criticism by Savarna critics that views Dalit Literature as whiny and aggressive will not exist.

It can be observed that Dalit literature is all that Dalit literature is not and vice versa. Characteristics of the two kinds of literature are in stark contrast to each other. It looks as if they are pitted against each other. As Dr Rupalee⁶ Burke puts it, some of the major differences are:

Non-Dalit (Lalit) Literature V/s. Dalit Literature- the one has a long history the other is a brief history. The one is for

⁵ Six Marathi Poets – R Parulekar, A Kolatkar, PS Rege, N Surve... – World Literature ..., 1994 – JSTOR.

⁶ Burke, Rupalee. "The Search for Promised Land." in *The Voice of the Last by Praveen Gadhvi*. New Delhi: Yash Publications, 2008.

the Art for art's sake and the other is for the Art for life's sake. The one is written to entertain, the other is written to mobilise awareness. The one is imaginative or contrived, the other is realistic or chronicled. The one is guided by pleasure principle, the other is driven by social concern. The one pro establishment or canonical, the other is anti-establishment or oppositional. The one supports or reinforces notions of caste, the other totally opposes notions of caste. The one is exclusivist, the other is inlusivist. The one is influenced by Hindu mythology, Sanskrit literature and Western literature the other is influenced by Ambedkarite ideology, Jyotiba Phule and Buddhism. The one is idealistic, the other is radical. The one is imitative or allusive, the other is original or distinct. The one is based on /or judged by aesthetic standards, the other is based on or judged by sociological standards. The one is the literature for the people, the other is the literature of the people. The one is grown out of devotional literature, the other is frown out of rebellion against upper caste. The one is written by extremely well-educated, the other is written by not always well educated, well placed Dalit writers. The one is Sanskritised or Brahminical in nature, the other is Dalits in nature. The one has highbrow attitude, the other one has an aggressive attitude. The one is written for the Pleasure of the self, the other is a Commitment – voice of the community. The one is written out of pleasure, the other is written in blood, sweat and tears. The one usually ignores common man, the other glorifies common man. The one expects sub-ordination, the other seeks autonomy.

AESTHETIC OF DALIT LITERATURE

The aesthetics of Dalit literature, as discussed by Limbale, suggests that Dalit literature being a revolutionary form of

literature does not adhere to traditional principles of aesthetics. In the Marathi literature, an emphasis is put on the beauty factor of literature due to which pleasure is cited as the foremost aesthetic value. Pleasure is said to be native to Marathi Savarna literature while pain is said to belong to Dalit literature. Due to belonging to the lower caste, Dalit literature is often accused of arousing feelings of pain, suffering and anger in the reader whereas non-revolutionary literature arouses feelings such as happiness and delight. Overall Dalit literature is painted a negative picture when it comes to aesthetic evaluation as it is accused of portraying only grief and sufferings. It is said to not provide happiness as the literature of the upper and middle class does. However, what needs to be considered is that the feelings of pain and suffering are the primary feelings that a piece of Dalit Literature can evoke as it is a social document of rebellion designed for social upliftment of Dalits and hence pleasure and beauty are not its chief considerations, unlike other literary works. Hence analysing a Dalit text on these pre-established universal aesthetic principles is a meaningless and futile endeavour.

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3

“Semisymbiosis”: An Analysis of the Maternal Bond in Sheri S. Tepper’s *Grass* and *The Fresco*

SHALINY S.

ABSTRACT

Sheri Stewart Tepper, one of the American feminist science fiction writers has taken different approaches to redefine gender roles. Motherhood is a valuable civil duty and a powerless responsibility where mother has to raise the children as per the expectations of the dominant culture. The various inconsistencies in mothering and motherhood form a major theme in Tepper’s novels *Grass* and *The Fresco*. Mothers normally identify more with daughters and experience them as less separate. This sort of semi-symbiotic relationship that exists between mothers and daughters provide the primary gender identification for the daughters. Women, as mothers produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother these capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. This paper presents an analysis of the different aspects and range of this relationship in the above novels.

ARTICLE

Sheri S. Tepper, one of the American feminist science fiction writers, has taken different approaches to redefine gender roles. She challenges the norms of the society to have a wider outlook with equal opportunities for men and women. She poses questions on the construction of society’s gender roles,

role of reproduction in defining gender, the biased political, economic and personal power of men over women. Her novels criticize these ideologies which prevail in the society.

Motherhood, a patriarchal institution is a form of social control exercised over women as they bear and rear children. Motherhood is a valuable civil duty and a powerless responsibility where mother has to raise the children as per the expectations of the dominant culture. It "has a history, it has an ideology" (Rich 33). Throughout human history, maternal experience has been defined and written by patriarchal culture. Motherhood under patriarchy is obligatory. Society exerts structural and ideological pressures upon women to become mothers. Motherhood is women's major social role and all women are socially defined as mothers and potential mothers. No woman achieves her full position in society until she gives birth to a child. In some cultures if "a woman is not a mother she is not really a woman" (Kirkley 463). Motherhood is equated with Mother Earth, as both should surrender, serve and remain tolerant forever. The various inconsistencies in mothering and motherhood form a major theme in Tepper's novels *Grass* and *The Fresco*.

Children of both genders go through a symbiotic phase of unity, primary identification and mutual empathy with their mother, and then go through a period of differentiation from her. But these issues remain more central for women. Signe Hammer notes:

Most of the daughters receive enough support from their mothers to emerge from the stage of complete symbiosis in early infancy. But for the vast majority of mothers and daughters, this emergence remains only partial. At some level mothers and daughters tend to remain emotionally bound up with each other in what we might be called a semisymbiotic

relationship, in which neither ever quite sees herself or the other as a separate person. (42)

Despite years of continuous efforts by feminists, daughters remain still disillusioned with motherhood and with mothers themselves. Mothering, according to Chodorow, "occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes" (7). Mothers normally identify more with daughters and experience them as less separate. This sort of semi-symbiotic relationship that exists between mothers and daughters provide the primary gender identification for the daughters. Women as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother these capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. Tepper has pictured the different aspects and range of this relationship in her novels. The estranged mother- daughter relationship is witnessed in Marjorie and Stella and Rowena and Dimity. A cordial relationship is seen in Benita and her mother, Benita and Angelica and a mother outside a family structure is observed in Eugenie and Janetta's relationship.

Stella, the self-centered teenage daughter of Marjorie in *Grass* is always passionate, "always in the depths or on the heights" (128). When Marjorie warns Stella not to do anything, she would purposely do it. It is her disobedience that makes her to be trapped by the Hippae. Antony, Marjorie's son resembles her and Stella resembles her father Rigo. Stella is the "stunningly feminine version" (127) of her father Rigo and obviously she becomes a threat to patriarchy.

Marjorie and Stella's relationship is already splintered with an inability to understand each other. She anticipates a sort of companionship from her daughter which is impossible. Instead Stella expects "that indefinable something... the thing called intimacy" (250) from her mother.

According to Marjorie, "Showing love to Stella was like showing meat to a half-wild dog. Stella would seize it and swallow it and gnaw its bones. Showing love to Stella was opening oneself up for attack" (128). As a mother, her instincts have greater hopes that they may be friends in future. Stella's withdrawal from her mother is suggestive of Rich's view as, "a desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage to become individual and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr" (194).

Marjorie forbids Stella not to attend the Hunt, but the latter in order to take part in the Hunt, she takes practice to ride the Hippae. Her interest in riding is motivated by her love for Sylvan Bon Damfels. Sylvan rides for the Hunt and by taking part in the Hunt, she assumes that she can win his love. Sylvan warns the Yrariars regarding the hunt, but Stella rejects his advice, as he himself participates in the Hunt. Stella merely falls in love with the image of Sylvan and ignores his advice, as "It did not fit her picture of him, so she struck it from his image as she built him anew, according to her own needs- the gospel of St Sylvan, according to Stella, his creator" (251).

Stella defies her parents to impress Sylvan. She breaks her traditional behaviour, and tries to stand equal to his masculine behaviour. The irony is that while Stella attempts to win Sylvan's love and he, in turn extends his love towards Marjorie, her mother. Stella and Sylvan profess their love at the same time, but not to each other. Stella claims that, "In that very moment, he loved me as he had never loved anyone before" and Sylvan says almost the same, "I loved her in that moment. ... As I have never loved before" not of Stella but of Marjorie (252). Stella, on seeing Sylvan with Marjorie, trembles between "fury and shock" (291). She then realises

that Sylvan has not attended the Hunt and has been spending time with her mother. Her aversion to her mother, hence, redoubles and creates a breach in their relationship. Rigo too is initially angry as “she had not told him she intended to ride, furious at her for having ridden at all without his permission” (301). Stella gains her father’s disapproval and the process of impressing Sylvan also ended in vain.

Stella continues her riding with her father’s permission for the second time. Stavenger Bon Damfels, the Master of the Hunt comments on Stella that, “she rode brilliantly” (311). These flattering words of Stavenger made Rigo to allow her for a ride for the second time. Marjorie dissuades Rigo and Stella from the hunt, but in vain. As a willful daughter, Stella goes against the wishes of her mother and deserves her punishment to be kidnapped by the Hippae. Her impertinence towards her mother exposes the rift between the mother and the daughter. Stella, instead favours her father, as he permits her for the ride.

When Stella disappears in the Hunt Marjorie experiences a pain, “with a spasm of intimate agony. Like backward childbirth” (401). Marjorie rushes in search of Stella and finds her, “Beside the water... in a nest of grass, curled up, barefooted, half unclothed, with her thumb in her mouth (403). As she is found next to water, it is considered to be source of life. She is like a child, and her identity is not fully erased. She tells her name and “could distinguish between those she knew and those she didn’t” (403).

After Stella is found, Marjorie and Stella’s relationship is not restored, but there arises a wider gap between them. When Marjorie tries to console her, Stella “went into frenzied spasms of screaming and weeping, her face contorted with guilt and pain and shame” (403). Her feeling of shame creates

a barrier between her and her mother, making their relationship more remote.

Towards the end of the novel, Stella is pregnant with the child of Rillibee Chime. For Marjorie, motherhood is a trap in a patriarchal society, whereas for Stella, it is a pleasant experience and not a trap. As far as Stella is concerned, motherhood is an empowerment for her. Marjorie creates a different way of life to Stella. She transforms into a matured lady and leads a life free from patriarchy. Both Marjorie and Stella have transformations. Marjorie liberates herself from the traditional norms and Stella into a perfect woman facing the new world. Therefore, Motherhood is not just a handicap. It's a strength, a trial and an error, an achievement and a prize.

Dimity, the daughter of Rowena Bon Damfels in *Grass* is just fifteen when she is compelled to participate in the hunt. She shares her experiences in the hunt to her mother and flushes as she could not share anything further. Rowena could sense the flush made by her daughter and "turned aside in order not to confront what she saw there. ... She had not known until now whether it was her guilty secret or a secret shared" (34). The unshared incident during the Hunt is a sort of rape experienced by the riders. The oppression is indicated by the silence between the mother and daughter. Their inability to share experiences indicates that Bon women have no voice in their society. As Irigaray states, patriarchy "destroy[s] the most precious site of love and fertility: the relationship between mother and daughter" (112).

Rowena on seeing Jannetta's appearance in Opal Hill, hopes for her daughter Dimity too and seeks the help of Marjorie to find Dimity. She has broken the norms of the Bons by seeking help from strangers in search of her daughter. Dimity is rescued later but is empty headed. Rowena as a

mother feels happy for her daughter Dimity. Rowena and Dimity's relationship is estranged due to the inability to share their experiences whereas Marjorie and Stella's relationship is estranged due to the inability to understand each other.

Benita's source of encouragement in the novel *The Fresco* comes from her mother who asks her to go out and work for herself. Once she starts working, she "had been so busy she had never had time to think" (16). Benita's mother goes voiceless in front of her husband, which the daughter witnesses and moulds herself by being independent. As Rich comments, "A mother's victimisation does not merely humiliates her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman" (243).

Benita's mother is the one who boosts Benita. It is she who suggest her daughter to start a "secret bank account" (16) for the sake of her children's education. Her mother reminds Benita of the mistake committed by abandoning education; so she does not want the same to happen for her next generation. Without her mother's encouragement, Benita might have stayed as a passive and abused wife till the end. Even after her mother's death, Benita is reminded of her mother's words, "Help yourself, Benita. You can if you will. Think for yourself, Benita. Make a life for yourself. Take a deep breath and figure out what needs to be done" (22). The influence of her mother is just echoed in her relationship with her own daughter Angelica.

Angelica, the daughter of Benita resembles the stronger side of her mother Benita. The siblings Angelica and Carlos always stand contradicting each other. Angelica is depicted as a hardworking girl and she is good at studies. On the other hand, Carlos is one who needs everything with doing nothing. Benita's mother has advised Benita not to reveal anything regarding the secret bank account to Carlos "until

he, himself, was committed to going on" (17). Angelica accidentally tells him about the account and immediately, he demands half the amount to start the gallery.

Angelica, the angelic and gracious child proudly presents, "her diploma ... also a letter from a California university granting her a scholarship" to her mother (18). Along with her studies, she works as a "classroom assistant" and also puts "supper shift in the kitchen at the union" (114). Both siblings share the same flat in California, Carlos tries to have a hold on her as his father has on his mother. Angelica throws Carlos out of her flat because of his rude behaviour. Benita could not break the hold of her husband, but Angelica stands up to evict her brother's hold. The young generation represented by Angelica is strong enough to break the patriarchal hold than her mother. Mothers are the "reproducers of culture" (Phoenix 17) as they are responsible for their children's upbringing; Benita transmits not only love but also values to her children, which is reflected especially in her daughter.

Eugenie in the novel *Grass* becomes increasingly bored in Grass mainly because Rigo is busy with his job as a representative of sanctity and there is thus nothing for her to do. So she takes Janetta as her pet "a girl-sized walking doll, something with pretty hair to arrange, something to clothe and play with" (151). She looks after Janetta and teaches her valuable things such as dancing and sewing. Eugenie thus unintentionally takes on the role of a mother which by the societal definition is an unacceptable behaviour for a mistress. According to the traditional society, a woman with a family can be a mother. Eugenie does not fit in a family, and so she cannot take the role of a mother. However, she remains a mother figure to Janetta. When she takes Janetta to the ball, Eugenie cannot understand the means of the chaos caused

and she weeps like a child. Rigo despises her and considers her to be an embarrassment. During the fight between the Commoners and the Hippae, she is killed by "the Hounds that had swept through the place ahead of the flames" (378). She is punished because she transgresses the societal tradition by moving into the space reserved for a mother. Eugenie's fate reflects the hypocrisy surrounding the patriarchal ideology of motherhood. Although motherhood is seen as the ultimate fate and occupation for women, only those women who are within the confines of the family are allowed to become mothers.

Mother-daughter relationship is usually characterised by the patterns of fusion, projection, narcissistic extension and denial of separateness. In the above mentioned relationships there is certainly understanding or empathy between mothers and daughters with a few possible exceptions, where the daughter have difficulty recognising themselves as a separate person. Rich is of the opinion:

"To accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in ourselves is no easy matter, because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarise, these images and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto the other woman, but any radical vision of sisterhood demands that we integrate them." (253)

A mother is likely to experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her children. However, primary identification and symbiosis with daughters tend to be stronger because they are of the same gender. In turn, daughters develop a personal identification with their mother, through affective process and role learning. Thus, the maternal bond that exists between a mother and a daughter remain inseparable.

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4

The Treatment of Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Works of Jamaica Kincaid and Shashi Deshpande

SOUMYA S. J.

ABSTRACT

Written in a deceptively simple and unadorned style, Kincaid's books are informed by her status of uprooted subject, born in the Caribbean island of Antigua, but living in North America. In Kincaid's fiction, the mother-daughter relationship often becomes a mirror image for the hegemonic relationship between the mother country (England) and the daughter island (Antigua). She is an eminent Indian woman novelist in English. Shashi Deshpande is a very renowned name in fiction writing in Indian English Literature. She is also one of the most popular short story writers in India. She has written special four books for little children. She reflects a realist picture of contemporary middle-class woman in her writing. Her novels are set in big towns like Mumbai, Bangalore. Sometimes the town is mentioned; sometimes it is left to our imagination. Her treatment on mother-daughter relationship in relation with female sexuality is also a special matter to discuss.

Keywords: mother-daughter relationship, female sexuality, sexual discrimination.

Mother-child relationship is the most passionate relation in the world, comparing to the other relations. Jamaica Kincaid and Shashi Deshpande in their works, the prose poem Girl and the novel Dark Holds No Terror, carry the other side of

mother-daughter relationship. In Kincaid's fiction, the mother-daughter relationship often becomes a mirror image for the hegemonic relationship between the mother country (England) and the daughter island (Antigua). The novel Annie John significantly ends with Annie John's departure from Antigua. This seems for the character the only way out from the self-destructive cycle that dominates her life because of her inability to come to terms with her coming of age and her relationship with her mother.

The characters in Kincaid's novels are constantly trying to emancipate themselves from their mothers and, by extension, from their motherland, an oppressive environment that hinders their cultural, psychological and sexual development.

The prose poem Girl consists of only two characters, the mother and the daughter. It deals the danger of female sexuality through the advices of mother, even though the daughter doesn't seem to have yet reached adolescence. The mother believes that a woman's reputation or respectability determines the quality of her life in the community. Sexuality must be carefully guarded and must be concealed. She scolds her daughter for the way she walks, the way she plays marbles, and how she relates to other people. The mother's constant emphasis on this theme shows how much she wants her daughter to realise that she is "not a boy".

The prose poem reads like prose, but it follows the rules of conventional poetry. The only characters in 'Girl' are a mother and a daughter. 'Girl' is a somewhat of a stream-of-consciousness narrative of a mother giving her young daughter advice on important life issues and concerns. The poem is one long sentence of various commands separated by semi-colons.

The advice consists of how to do certain domestic behaviours, including making Antiguan dishes, as well as the more assertive points of being a respectable woman and upholding sexual purity. There is a lot of discussion from the mother about how the daughter must interact with people as well as how to behave in a romantic relationship with a man.

The daughter only speaks twice in the story. First she stands up for her against one of her mother's questions that turned into an accusation, and again at the end where she asks her mother a clarifying question. It concludes abruptly with a rhetorical question from the mother wondering if her daughter didn't understand how to behave based on everything she was told. The pre-adolescent daughter, who listens to her mother's speech, says little, speaking only to defend herself against her mother's accusations that she will one day become a "slut." The girl's protestations suggest resentment, but Kincaid does not provide her true thoughts or feelings.

The mother sees herself as the only person who can save her daughter from living a life of disrespect and promiscuity. She believes the girl has already started down this path because of the way she walks, sits, and sings *benna* (Antiguan folksongs) during Sunday school, and she imparts her domestic knowledge to keep the girl respectable. In some ways, the mother is wise: not only does she know how to cook, clean, and keep a household, but she also has a keen sense of social etiquette and decorum, knowing how to act around different types of people. For her, domestic knowledge and knowing how to interact with people bring happiness along with respect from family and the larger community. Her instructions suggest that community plays a large role in Antiguans' lives and that social standing within the community bears a great deal of weight.

Yet at the same time, there is bitterness in the mother's voice, and she takes her anger and frustration out on her daughter. She seems to think that none of her wisdom will make any difference and that the girl is already destined for a life of ill repute. She even repeatedly hints that the girl wants to live promiscuously and be a "slut." Her fears for the girl actually belie deeper fears of the precarious state of womanhood in traditional Antiguan society. Despite the mother's caustic remarks and accusations, the fact that she knows how to make abortion-inducing elixirs implies that she has had some illicit relations with men or at least understands that such encounters sometimes occur.

Even though the daughter doesn't seem to have yet reached adolescence, the mother worries that her current behavior, if continued, will lead to a life of promiscuity. The mother believes that a woman's reputation or respectability determines the quality of her life in the community. Sexuality, therefore, must be carefully guarded and even concealed to maintain a respectable front. Consequently, the mother links many tangential objects and tasks to the taboo topic of sexuality, such as squeezing bread before buying it, and much of her advice centers on how to uphold respectability. She scolds her daughter for the way she walks, the way she plays marbles, and how she relates to other people. The mother's constant emphasis on this theme shows how much she wants her daughter to realise that she is "not a boy" and that she needs to act in a way that will win her respect from the community.

Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist, has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. She is born on 19th August 1938 in Dharwad in Karnataka State in India she is an eminent Indian woman novelist in English. She is also one of the most popular short story writers in

India. She has written special four books for little children. She reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class woman in her writing. Her novels are set in big towns like Mumbai, Bangalore. Sometimes the town is mentioned; sometimes it is left to our imagination. Shashi Deshpande is a very renowned name in fiction writing in Indian English Literature. She has written eleven novels in English such as - The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Roots and Shadows (1983), Come Up and Be Dead (1985), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993), A Matter of Time (1996), Small Remedies (2000), Moving On (2004), In the Country of Deceit (2008), and Ships That Pass (2012). Deshpande's novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors, portrays the psychological problems faced by the protagonist, Sarita. In this novel, Deshpande shifts the narrative from the first person to the third person.

The Dark Holds No Terror, one of the powerful novels of Shashi Deshpande, depicts the life of Dr Sarita and her bitter experiences. She happens to escape from the tortures of husband's sexual extremes to her father's home. But she brings back to the horrible memories about the cruel attitude of her mother. The sexist discrimination experienced by Sarita at her home leads her to certain feminist reactions. The novel focuses on woman's awareness of her predicament and her wanting to be recognised as a person than as a woman. The novel focuses on woman's awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognised as a person than as a woman and her wanting to have an independent social image.

The first half of the Dark Holds No Terror deals with the vicious, prejudiced and cruel attitude of a mother, a strong product of patriarchal society who considers her daughter responsible for the her son's death. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead? (p. 14) When Saru expresses her

wish to stay with her mother all her life, her mother says "You can't "But your brother Dhruva can stay" He is different. He is a boy" [40] this gender difference of her mother's treatment of her son and daughter enrages Saru. She rebels against her "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one" [55] She looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that it will give her relief from oppression of the mother and will give her freedom Saru breaks the umbilical cord and leaves home. This is her first public defiance of the patriarchal power system. Saru's defiance is further expressed, when she becomes economically independent and marries of her own choice. Saru is disappointed with her married life. The institution of home, which is supposed to foster the growth of a child, robs the women of her right and respectability she always kept two different measuring yards, one for the son and other for the daughter. Here is one example to lay emphasis on the point. Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker. Who cares? We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married. I don't want to get married. Will you live with us all your life? Why not? You can't And Dhruva? He's different. He's a boy. (p.45) In this way a traditional Hindu woman she considers it her duty to remind her daughter that she is grown up and she should behave accordingly. The first experience of menstruation is horrible for Sarita and the mother is there to frighten her with the fact that she would bleed for years and years. The mother does not let her enter the kitchen and Puja-room. She is forced to sleep on Strawmat. A separate plate is provided to her to make her exclusion complete. Still in remote villages and even among educated people a woman is considered Unholy during the menstruation period. Sarita thinks about it.

"Things fell, with a miraculous exact exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way that was the way

my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that."(p.63) the fact is that the poor daughter Sarita always bared the opposition of her mother, be it the question of choosing a husband or a profession. Sarita's married life with Manu does not run smoothly for a long time and it makes her think that even pleasure is unreal and like an illusion where as grief seems more real having weight and substance.

The fact is that there is difference of status. Saru being a lady doctor is always given more importance. People come to her, surround her, ask for her and respect her and it is something which her husband cannot digest. And this is what changes the attitude of a loving husband into a sadist. Chapter VIII of the novel informs us about Saru's sexual tortures by Manu. She cannot free herself from him and when the fit is over, he is the same smiling Manu again. This confounds her bitterly. "The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible familiar body. And above me a face I could not recognise." (p.112)

Saru tells her father about her husband who loves cruelty in sex but it is something beyond the understanding of poor. Father who always maintain a distance and reserve with his wife. The root of this problem also seems to lie in the social attitude. The problem is psychological and not aware of the dead. "God, Saru! Have you hurt yourself? Look at that" (p.203) in this way whole novel is full of incidents showing disparity towards a woman. Sarita's mother shows inveterate hatred and enmity towards her daughter after the death of her son when she remarks.

"– Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless." (p. 196) The disappearance of Madhav's brother and his father punishing the mother by not eating food cooked by her reminds Sarita a Sanskrit story

from her school-text where a woman did not disturb her husband's sleep even to save her child from fire. Then Agni had to come to save the child. It makes Sarita extremely angry and she thinks.

"Who wrote that story? A man, of course. Telling all women for all time your duty to me comes first. And women poor fools, believed him. So that even today Madhav's mother considers it a punishment to be deprived of a chance to serve her husband." (p. 207)

Towards the end of the novel we see that Abhi's letter informing Saru about Manu's arrival first of all disturbs her as she is totally upset about her relationship and does not want to face him but after a bit of pondering over the issue she is able to find out her way. The moment she realises the importance of life, she determines to live with full gusto. She has also been aware of the fact that her coming to parental house was an exercise in futility. She feels "- because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk." (p.220)

Now Saru feels it strongly that she is responsible for her own miserable, puppet like existence. Too much dependence on institutions like marriage is also sheer foolishness. Rather one should be ready to face all the challenges and troubles of life. Saru's decision to go with Manu shows her confidence and courage in this direction. Obviously, the problem faced by Saru is the problem of hundreds of such learned and professional women who become the victim of the double stand of society. If the husband is superior to her position wise, she has to serve him that way but unfortunately if the husband is inferior to her, she is bound to face the sadism and ego of her husband like Saru. Indian society is still tradition-bound superstitious. No one dares challenge the existing patriarchal order. Let people boast theoretically that husband

and wife are two wheels of a van, two aspects of the same coin but the practical truth is that man is always considered superior to a woman. He has first right on meal, fasts are kept for his welfare and domestic walls never limit his scope. Shashi Despande's novel explore the problems of women in terms of illiteracy, ideological brainwashing in patriarchal societal structures, the problem of dowry, the complexity of the issue of caste and economic status. Saru is a 'New Woman', who is educated intelligent and economically independent, she could not accept her destiny as fate written on her forehead.

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5

George Eliot's Realistic Representation of Life in *Adam Bede*

RIZVANA PARVEEN

Victorian describes the literature of a period which has a certain unity, discrete from Romantic literature on the one hand, and modern on the other. Moreover it was long and varied. Victorian period was an age of enigma and authority. The Catholicism of the Oxford movement, the Evangelical movement, the spread of the Broad Church, and the rise of Utilitarianism, Socialism, Darwinism, and scientific Agnosticism, were all Victorian. The writings of Carlyle and Ruskin, the criticism of Arnold, the fantasy of George MacDonald, the prose of Darwin and Huxley and the realism of George Eliot too were Victorian.

REALISM IN LITERATURE

In literature, realism is a method that tries to describe life without idealisation or subjectivity of Romantic period. Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. Realism in England was introduced by George Eliot, and in the United States, it was introduced by William Dean Howells. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the common places of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral

element in the dramatic complications in literature. It is an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces. Realism, a style of writing that gives the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life. It refers to a literary technique where detailed description of actual problems of life is portrayed and it discards idealisation, escapism, and other excessive skills of romance. The 18th century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are among the earliest examples of realism in English literature. The realist emphasis on detachment and objectivity, along with lucid but restrained social criticism, became integral to the novel in the late 19th century.

Realism in art and literature is an attempt to represent life as it is. It illustrates life with reality, without ignoring aspects or situations that are unpleasant or painful, and idealising nothing. To the realists, the writer's purpose is to describe as honestly as possible what is perceived through the senses. True realism depicts man and society as comprehensive groups instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. Realistic fiction has been predominantly a revolution against the sentimentality and melodrama of romantic idealism. Characters in realistic fiction tend to be more complex than those in romantic fiction. Settings are more ordinary, plots are less important, and themes are less obvious. This sordid quality is especially associated with 'Naturalism' which is but an outgrowth of realism. It also reflects the contemporary social, political, religious, traditional, cultural and economic issues of the writer's times.

Realist writers in fiction usually take some important burning issues of the community and their pathos as writers is always stimulated by those sufferings of the people. The

writer evokes sympathy with the sufferings of the people that can find adequate expression only in the being and fate of their characters which is the real attraction of realism.

Literature is mirror of life which can be vindicated through realism only. Only realism reflects the life of an individual and his relationships in society with humanistic outlook and eagerness of their betterment. In this way realism and humanism are merged into an organic unity. Depending on the times and prevalent issues of their time, a realist writer attempts to find a solution to those problems in a humanitarian way based on his artistic expressions. Over the years, literature has reflected the prevailing social issues in many eminent works of literature under the shadow of realism.

A slow moving plot, strong emphasis on morality, depicting too many details, foreshadowing everyday events, importance of character over plot, element of marriage and having an optimistic tone are some of the characteristics of realism.

The major concern of realism is the adequate presentation of the comprehensive human personality. Since human personality and relationships is complex there are a number of aspects and issues which a realist writer can deal with in his works to portray various social concerns or individual aspects within society.

GEORGE ELIOT AND REALISM

Mary Ann Evans, better known as "George Eliot," was born on November 22nd, 1819, at South Farm in Warwickshire. Most of her writings were her experiences of English rural and provincial life. A woman of strong passions, deeply affectionate by nature, of a clinging tenderness of

temperament, Marian Evans went through much inner struggle, through many agonising experiences before she reached the moral self-development. Having passed through an ardently evangelical period in her youth, Eliot rejected conventional Christianity in 1842 in a traumatic break with her faith and her father. Influenced by her own painstaking translations of Strauss and Feuerbach, as well as by the events of her life, she gradually replaced her faltering faith in divine love with a humanistic belief in the power of sympathy. It is the human side of religion which interests George Eliot, its influence morally, its sympathetic impulse, its power to comfort and console.

George Eliot (1819-1880) is one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian period. She was a realist dealing with real people with real problems, and still made them sympathetic. She was a pioneer in psychological analysis in fiction. Her superiority over other novelists lay in her humanitarian sympathies and her psychological insight. She is an exponent of the democratic movement in modern literature. Eliot's grip on psychological fundamentals enables her to draw complex characters much better than her predecessors. George Eliot not merely grabs the outward and accidental traits of her characters; she pierces with definite vision to the very core of their nature. By doing this she enables us to realise the peculiarly subtle relations between character and circumstance.

George Eliot believed that her aim as a novelist was to be achieved by understanding and representing the proportions and relations of different aspects of individual and social experience, and the material conditions of life. George Eliot wrote in a letter to Dr. Payne in 1876,

"My writing is simply a set of experiments in life – an endeavor to see what our thought and emotions may be

capable of – what stores of motive...give promise of a better after which we may strive to keep hold of as something more sure than shifting theory"(Paris, preface).

The general character of all her novels can be described in the author's own terms as 'psychologic realism'. She presents the inner struggles of a soul and reveals the motives, impulses and hereditary influences which govern human action. She minutely explained the motives of her characters and the moral lesson to be learned from them. The insistence on unity, harmony, duty and slow growth in George Eliot's broad social analyses and in her minute psychological investigations of egoism and division with a single human soul, has its roots in the moral bias. But the bias has its rational justification in determinism.

George Eliot demonstrates how a character under the influence of strong social pressures, reveals certain flaws in his character which when combined with the social pressure causes his moral failure. Eliot holds him responsible for his failure of character and makes him responsible for his motives and intentions.

George Eliot's realism extends from the external world to the world of individual consciousness – like James and the psychological novelists who followed, she threw the action inside; the question of consciousness, of who is perceiving the external fact and under what conditions, becomes for her an indispensable aspect of the realist project.

REALISM IN *ADAM BEDE*

The germ of *Adam Bede* lay in George Eliot's "My Aunt's story". Eliot's aunt Elizabeth Evans was one of the very significant group of women preachers in the early British Methodist churches. Her aunt told her a story of a young girl

from Nottinghamshire who murdered her baby and was hanged for child murder. Her aunt attended the woman in prison and made her confess the crime with repentance. Years later George Eliot wrote *Adam Bede* (1859) based on her aunt's story which had influenced her a lot. Her character Dinah was based on her aunt, though avoiding direct portraiture. The protagonist *Adam Bede* is loosely based on George Eliot's father, Robert Evans.

George Eliot, in *Adam Bede*, declares her desire to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in her mind. In her most famous manifesto of realism in fiction, the chapter of *Adam Bede* entitled "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," Eliot reminds us that the particular task of the novelist is to present to her readers true-to-life characters whose foibles and imperfections will train us to understand and forgive those of our actual neighbors:

"These fellow-mortals, everyone, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people – amongst whom your life is passed – that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire – for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields – on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice" (*Adam Bede*, 176).

Eliot's scheme in *Adam Bede* is the careful delineation of consequences and motives; the novel is envisioned by its

author as both a perfectly enclosed system of cause and effect and an accurate depiction of reality.

Hetty, a diary maid was seduced by a landlord, Arthur and she was caught for infant foeticide and was rescued by Dinah, a female preacher, who awakened her soul. Adam, a carpenter by profession loved Hetty and she rejected his advances since he was of her station while Arthur was a landlord. Adam impressed by her physical beauty did not recognise her shallow nature. He was self-obsessed and over confident man who did not understand the weaknesses of others. During the trial of Hetty, Adam felt the suffering and pain through Hetty. Later Adam married Dinah who adopted a traditional role of a wife and quit preaching.

Eliot portrays how a shallow character like Hetty conspires to enhance her attractiveness. The relationship between her beauty and its message for others is linked to Hetty's lack of interiority, her simplicity of mind, and her inability to be or feel like others, to feel as they do. As the narrator points out that, sensible men would fall in love with sensible women, see through their deceits of coquettish beauty, never imagine themselves loved when they are not loved and marry the woman most fitted for them in every respect. Adam was an exception to it. Though he was practical and sensible man he was carried away by Hetty's beauty,

"For the beauty of a lovely woman is like music. Beauty has an expression beyond far above the one woman's soul that it clothes...the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes"
(*Adam Bede* 354).

Similarly, Arthur wishes to justify his action of indulging in an affair with Hetty as a mere combination of circumstances, as a man who struggles against a temptation

but falls to the temptation. For Arthur, social class was another problem. Hetty belonged to the working class while he belonged to the feudal class. Hetty Sorrel was madly attracted to Arthur Donnithorne. So she had a dream to marry Arthur Donnithorne and be a wife of a respectable feudal man. But Arthur was well aware of his station and suggested Hetty to marry within her own station.

When Arthur landed in Liverpool, he came to know about Hetty from Mr. Irwine's letter. The moment Arthur read the letter he was shocked. Immediately he left to Stoniton. All the while he had been thinking that he had returned Adam's love to him and they were to be married. He was no longer in love with Hetty and wished that both Hetty and Adam lived with each other. He did not realise that his casual flirtations had resulted in Hetty's suffering and pain.

When they reached the guillotine, the cart stopped and the crowd yelled as they saw a horseman coming at full gallop. It was Arthur Donnithorne carrying a letter in his hand and waving it in air as a signal. He had brought Hetty's release from death.

Hetty's desire to marry Arthur ruined her own life. Her tragic end created a deep wound in the psyche of Hayslope people. This incident in the personal life of Hetty sorrel suggests the harsh reality of society which one faces when two different unequal classes try to meet at a point through emotion and not through reasons.

Adam Bede has a slowing moving plot. Eliot gives prominence to morality and depicts too many details. Importance of character is given over plot. Moreover there is an element of marriage which takes place between Adam and Dinah. Thus *Adam Bede* has satisfied the characteristics of realism.

Eliot successfully changes Adam and shows the turmoil and suffering he must endure to reach the pinnacle of moral growth. Adam's ignorance to others weakness is because of his hard and uncompassionate nature which he overcomes through the sufferings and pain of Hetty.

Hetty died a spiritually peaceful death after her soul was awakened by Dinah's prayers. Her death was a moral awakening to her community. Her sufferings were solely responsible for their awakening. The dark and hard soul of Hetty was sympathetic and apologetic before its death.

Sympathetic identification with individual characters – what Dinah possesses and Eliot hopes to instill in her readers. It is one aspect of realism and she traces actions and consequences of all her characters. She inculcates an awareness of the far-reaching repercussions on our fellow beings of any probable action, however superficially far-flung it can be. The greatest mistake of Arthur was his failure to imagine that the consequences of his own actions could affect anyone other than himself. It was the failure of imagination that causes his thoughtlessness to consequence. He is always rushing to act, both in the name of his own pleasure and in the name of his recompense, before the repercussions of his actions are clear.

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot tries to amalgamate realism, in its tactic to the psychological truth of character with religious determinism. Virtues of idealised characters like Adam and Dinah appear to be flawed in their psychological growth, but whose moral sincerity helped as an example for the feeble characters. Arthur's and Hetty's sin can be redeemed through a spiritual conversion.

George Eliot attempts to instill in this realistic world of Hayslope love and fellow feeling, however, only Adam,

Arthur and Dinah remain as significant parts of this realm. Eliot resolves her deeply felt sense of moral righteousness with her sympathy with Hetty as a rootless pariah because of her aesthetic principle of sympathy and love to understand other.

Charles Dickens wrote: "The whole country life that the story is set in, is so real, so droll and genuine, and yet so selected and so polished by art, that I cannot it praise it enough for you" (Hunter, 122). In a realistic novel we can relate ourselves to some of the characters while continuing to live our own life. But we share full to the experiences of the characters in the novel—thus enriching our own personality. In order to identify with the characters we need to have a certain sensibility. To Eliot, realism did not mean a naïve belief that writing can transparently represent the real world, but a conviction that writing should not falsify or romanticise it. Eliot regarded realism as a moral choice, as well as an aesthetic one.

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6

The World of Visual Culture: Interpreting the Lacanian Gaze

PRIYANKA DAS

ABSTRACT

Visual culture is often understood in connection to performance studies owing to the overlapping of the similar ways of representation which both the branches adopt thus allowing a radical inter-disciplinarity to the subjects. The constituency of 'visual culture' is a variegated terrain. It is not something that has undergone constancy in its interpretations. On the contrary, 'what is visual culture' is itself a question that has changed over time. It is a terrain that is continually shifting, rapidly altering and one should be able to lead the whole notion of mass consumption, therefore, to very interesting influences. Lacan's organisation of need, demand and desire into realms of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic order plays a crucial part in an attempt to study consumerist culture. The real and the imaginary order blend in to yield the symbolic order and constructs 'desire'. A fundamental understanding of the notion and the functions of visual culture through a Lacanian lens is cardinal to this paper.

THE WORLD OF VISUAL CULTURE: INTERPRETING THE LACANIAN GAZE

An influential epistemological positioning that grants the ocular perception of arts formation and reproduction and anything resting on the visual side of cultural forms is attributed as visual culture. The all-pervasive nature of visual

culture defines everything that we see or are made to see. Visual culture operates on the complex structuring of knowledge perception by its two focal components—representation and semiotics. The Saussurean theory of semiotics coalesced with the Lacanian Gaze yields a theory of perception in aesthetic terms proposed by Walter Benjamin which is dealt in excessive by Kant and also found in works of Hegel, Schiller, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

Coined by the German anthropologist Johannes Fabian, 'visualism'⁷ was meant to criticize the commanding influence of the vision in the realm of scientific discourse to emphasize on observation as the prime way of deducing inference and authenticating knowledge. The term was condemned for an eminent lack of theorisation which results in a partial knowledge of the subject. Visual culture is often understood in connection to performance studies owing to the overlapping of the similar ways of representation which both the branches adopt thus allowing a radical inter-disciplinarity to the subjects. A fundamental understanding of the notion and the functions of Visual culture is cardinal to this paper. Lacan's theory on gaze and Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' are two primordial studies in this context.

The contribution of Jacques Lacan on contemporary critical theory underscores the pivotal impact of contrasting attitudes concerning film theory and Marxism on later theorists. Lacan's post-structuralist stance to question the valid identity of visible objects stands in deviation to Freud's notion of achieving truth by retaining the stability of the self. Freud's modus operandi is empiricism. He believed in charting out empirical framework to experience truth of the

⁷ Johannes Fabian. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1983

objective reality where as Lacan, in contrast, questions the validity of truth itself and rather concentrates on the epistemological construction of knowledge by pursuing ideological structures. Lacan emphasizes on the linguistic composition of knowledge and maintains that language plays a pivotal role in determining our conscious as well as our unconscious beings.

In course of studying psychosexual development and factors exerting influence on it, Freud embraced a clinical and neurological method of analysis. Lacan, on the other hand, proposed a linguistic hypothesis for comprehending an individual's admission into the social order. The prominence of Lacan's criticism on psychosexual development rests less on the physical aspects of body and more on the ideological structuring of behavioral patterns designed by the linguistic framework. According to him, language constructs the reality shared between a subject and her or his perception of the self in relation to others. Lacan denies any attribution of materiality to the linguistic discourse by making use of language itself which is far removed from corporeal reality.

Lacan advocates a conscious realisation of the acute demarcation between reality and the real, one being the universe we live in with all things make-believe and imaginary visions surrounding us, and the other being the inconceivable world of temporal existence which retains inexpressibility by language⁸. This distinct realization, however, unsettled and open to question, leads to a constant misinterpretations by the human subjects in their desire to reconstruct the sense of reality through language. Our reliance on the linguistic construction and ideological

⁸ Jacques Lacan. *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co. 1978.

structures define the general consensus of the term 'reality' which distorts our ability to recognise the overwhelming influence of material possessions and corporeal existence in our lives. Nonetheless, the real inexpressible world of material dependency inundates over reality. This labyrinthine relationship between our real lives and the constructed ones with all its extensions of meanings, symbols, images, desire, decide and control our psychosexual existence.

Lacan's model of psychosexual development gives us the mirror stage⁹ in the developmental order of a human subject, which, he states, is the imaginary level and traces the transformation of our primary instincts of necessity to 'demands'. Lacan indicates that this imaginary order is narcissistic in nature. One can gratify the primal needs of one's self where as demand intrinsically is insatiable. Lacan's conviction of the 'ideal ego' is the sense of lack realised by the subject and extends to an urge of imitating or emulating the choice of the person in one's life who the subject necessarily wants to be. Lacan's organisation of need, demand and desire into realms of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic order plays a crucial part in an attempt to study consumerist culture. The real and the imaginary order blend in to yield the symbolic order and constructs 'desire'. Lacanian desire takes immense interest in being produced rather than putting an end by ensuring its gratification. This could be called the Lacanian description of love.

Lacan's theoretical stand on the Gaze is problematised in connection to the mirror stage where the subject perceives a mirror image and accomplishes a fulfillment of the self as an

⁹ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1977) pp. 1-7

'ideal ego'. The mirror reflection takes the subject into the cultural realm constructed by linguistic frameworks. The subject decides her or his own subjectivity by recreating an imaginary self-projection which resides in the fanciful world of ecstasy devoid of problems and pains inherent in the real world. It gives a procreation of the self which does not succumb to the mayhem of the ordinary material existence of human lives. One enters into a narcissistic relationship with her or his reconstructed self-image or with the love objects of one's lives or people whom one aspires to. This projection is retained throughout in the subject's life in the more matured forms of psychosexual development.

Lacanian gaze is compounded by the narcissistic aspect of looking at an object and the eerie sense of the object's act of looking back at the subject. Moving on from the mirror gaze, Lacan settles to explore the possibility of how visible objects apparently stare back at the viewer. This act dismisses the authority of the subject's feeling of being in full control of his own gaze, while in another reality, the narcissistic gaze is counteracted by the thrusting of the 'look-back-ness' reminding us of our lacks and the depravity behind our desires. The materiality of the Real order which looks back at us, intermingle with the Symbolic order.

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**Re-inhabiting Love, Life, Culture and
Re-inventing the Self: Vision as Reality in
Vivekanand Jha's Poetry Book,
*Falter & Fall***
(A Review Article)

DR. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

'The world plots on. /And poetry stumbles and falls. ' wrote the famous poet and writer Jayant Mahapatra. Vivekanand's book, 'Falter & Fall' is a collection of 51 poems which stumble around love, life, nature and culture in a world of lived experiences. Vivekanand is a poet of eminence with many volumes of published poems, anthologies and journals to his credit. He is a prolific writer, translator and critic. He has authored one critical book on the poetry of Jayant Mahapatra and edited nine critical anthologies on Indian English Writing. He edited poetry anthology, 'The Dance of Peacock', featuring 151 poets from different countries of the world which was published by Hidden Book Press, Canada. This anthology was widely reviewed and critiqued as this magnum opus presented the spectrum of contemporary world poetry enlivened with variety of themes, forms, poetic and linguistic experimentations.

The book, 'Falter & Fall' under the review presents the blossom of human thoughts, human passions and emotions transmuted into sensations of great poetry. Here poet's vision

meets the mundane reality of the world and explores the various aspects of human existence re-inhabiting love, life and re-inventing the self. All poems in this book, seek to establish the philosophic distinction between reason and passion. Here Vivekanand echoes Spinoza's thoughts that passion without reason is blind, reason without passion is dead. These poems expound on a variety of themes: people, love, innocence, terror, death, truth, widowhood, global warming, honour killing, nature and yoga. The range and style got here a new impetus from poetic touch of Vivekanand.

The poet strives to strike a balance between his poetic vision and social realism. The very first poem in this collection titled 'An Elegy to the Poem' beautifully explores the gaps between aesthetic sensibilities and harsh realities of the publishing business. The poem captures the various excuses forming the reason for rejection in a conversational style. Poet's disgust and agonies reach a climax in these words 'Poets are victims of numerous persecutions.'(p14). A thematic sequel to this poem is 'A Paragon of Perseverance' explores the human frailties against the worldly prescriptions. The apathetic sermons to the poet are merely 'chemistry of words' and not concrete help. This poem is a wonderful interplay of words through which the poet achieves the poetic effect. It also sketches the lonely dilemma of a young aspirant who struggles for achievement and success caught into 'Geometry of words'. As one appreciates the internalised conflicts of the aspirant bordering on social realism, the poem assumes a form of phraseology of many modern poets.

'Ashes of Al'ar' addresses the issues of generation gap. The poet questions the wisdom of his father though in subdued tone but a sense of rejection of traditional values,

runs through the threads of this poem. To his son father's wisdom is 'chaffs of avarice and husks of imitating materialism'. Strains of revolt and realism can be discerned here like that of Trugnev's 'Father and Son'. 'A Banyan Tree' is a powerful poem with vivid imagery and striking alliterations. These lines 'In every leaf-large, grisly, glossy, green, / inherits your benign wisdom, resplendent / like a beam of the rising sun' (p20) form cascade of ideas, wisdom and thoughts. 'A Vanished Tree' is a poem about the lost values in the wake of globalisation and it shows an urge to preserve the cultural values and environment too.

Philosophical strains could be discerned in poems titled 'By the Seashore', 'Calamitous Carnage', 'Connectivity' and 'Humanity Died' In 'Humanity Died' the poet laments the death of humanity. The poet is aggrieved at the apparent loss of empathy, compassion and love. The poet doesn't find any solution to it and seeks redemption in benevolent act of God. Here resurrection is sought through faith and not nihilism. These lines personify humanity and laments the grievous loss 'Expecting some interesting things to see/ I found humanity has met with an accident/ It bleeds and cries in pain /and seeks some solace from onlookers/ Calling themselves wonderful/ and beautiful creatures of the world' (p52). It is not bold denial of rational faith in humanity but reduction in faith and morality which the poet seeks to resurrect through God. He returns to the same theme of scepticism, doubts and re-invention of self in 'Disposal' but in the last lines of the poem he surrenders himself to God: 'I decided to leave all to the Lord;/ He bestowed on me what unknown to me, required.' (p32)

Through all these poems the poet maintains that virtue lies in one's efforts to sustain one's being, and man's happiness consists in doing so. We begin to feel the effects of

alienation, this may mean that the poet sees the world more deeply, but it also suggests that he sees it more painfully. 'By the Seashore' lends the readers a peep into synthetic mind of the poet which sees resemblances and forges a communion with the self. Thoughts, emotions, carefully chosen words form an alchemy, re-inventing the self 'Soon the two in the sense and essence/ began throbbing into sole soul-body-mind' (p24).

In a poem titled 'Cruelty' the poet presents the gruesome reality of our world ridden with terror, violence, molestation and insanity let loose against the innocent masses. The poet envisions a society which is humane, just, moral and free from evils. The poet's vision although it sounds utopian here, is fraught with sordid realities of our society. One can discern here the reformist zeal of Shelley coupled with his defeated optimism. These lines from this poem are remarkably significant like Yeats' 'The Second Coming' where 'ceremony of innocence' is 'drowned in blood-dimmed tides'. To quote the poet:

Intolerance on a rampage;
tolerance victims of stampede.
Now none trembles with fear;
all shudder with anger.
The strong with one
but the weak with all cylinders. (p28)

'Cut-Throat' presents direct counterpoint to the violence against the animals and underlines how the whole humanity is perverted. The poem is a stark warning against the cruelty with animals for gastronomical reasons. Through a set of vivid images, the poet reveals the magnitude and intensity of cruelty inflicted on innocent animals and birds for the joy of eating – 'palatable flesh and bone'. The poet addresses this poem to future satirising the gluttony of human folks and

deeply expresses his concerns for ecological balance and preservation of animal kingdom by promoting vegetarianism. This poem may be seen as an appeal to the masses who lack consciousness and compassion.

Vivekanand's vision as reality permeates through many poems in this collection. 'Dispossessed Motherland' paints sharp pictures of reality of the people in a land of flood and famine. The stark realism: vivid pictures of flood, misery, penury and undying spirit of the people of that land coupled with the unified sensibility of the poet, reminds me of, yet another poem on famine 'Aakal' by Nagarjun. It is a land of 'sand and mud' where people fight an incessant battle against flood and drought with renewed spirit and conviction. It is a land of unproductiveness, bad omens, a wasteland where one has 'No crop to reap, only blood to creep:.... No fuel to be lit, no milk in the mother's teat; / only beating the dust from the veil of bleak wit. /If moral to be taught; death to be bought ...' (p33).

The inhumane conditions created by flood and drought have been artistically portrayed through vivid images. To the poet there is no escape from these grinding circumstances and therefore he takes resort to God. The words in the above lines have been synchronised to create a poetic effect. The language is colloquial, simple and extremely suited to the feelings that it evokes. The devastating impact of floods in many parts of the country is well known. The poet has observed it very closely but he reinvents it from contemplation without admixture of personal will. To the readers this wasteland is a varied series of bewitching views, stirring the senses and imagination with suggestion of reality. He frees himself from personal concerns, transmuting his vision into objective reality. 'Global Warming' shows his concern for nature and the world, we live in, so powerfully

and expresses his apprehensive vision for a better world. However, in the same breath the poet is aware of its deadly consequences:

Global warming stretched its arms
to hug all the joy and bliss of the world.
It transforms achievement of years
into bereavement of eternity. (p43)

The subsequent lines contemplate the ills of global warming and its immediate dangers by showing us the eternal and the universal behind the transitory and individual: 'Climate has turned to furnace / Frost to ice/ River to ocean / Man to monster / Benevolence to gangster / Love to rape / Medicine to drug/ Water to blood /Flood to drought/And drought to flood/ Foul to fair, fair to foul'. (p 43-44). Vivekanand achieves the poetic effect through these binary opposites, weaving thoughts into the words.

'Honour Killing', 'Killing of Innocence', 'Smothering', 'Songs of Woes' and 'Trauma of Terror' present a world wrecked by violence and immorality, and the poet weeps to see the state of anarchy and restlessness. These poems depict turbulence and troubles into which entire humanity has been caught. The turmoil of life, sufferings, and infinite needs of the people, tumult and drudgery emanating from these wants; present an inferno like situation. What intrigues the poet, is the preservation of this tormented existence. Out of these realities, he envisions a society which is just and ordered and not violent and chaotic. A synthetic interpretation of all these experiences leads the readers to a world of renewed self, consciousness and desire for change. No wonders there is little humour in Vivekanand and no wonder he breaks out with some bitterness occasionally when he thinks of the keepers of the law and order.

Vivekanand presents the socio-political concerns like Jayant Mahapatra not only in philosophical postulates but with artistic sincerity. To quote K. S. Anish Kumar, 'Mahapatra visualises each and every incident that influenced him including physical violence. His description imprints the situation in the mind of the readers and makes them learn. He is also aware of the power-oriented structure and its tremendous impact on the society.' (Jaydeep Sarangi & Gauri Shankar Jha ed., 2006, p113). Jayant Mahapatra's influence on Vivekanand in this context seems to be remarkable.

Vivekanand lends vision to every lived experience and renders colours and thought to his descriptive imagery and enchanting words. Here value of thought is ideal and its efficacy lies in impulse and desire to reshape the dead and the diseased. In this theatre of pictured experiences the instrument is not action but lessons of life for future. 'Trauma of Terror' is such a theatre of pictured experiences. It presents the diabolic acts of terror which has not only impaired the society but creativity and life as well. This poem like other poems of Vivekanand, is remarkable for its aphorism and wit. The poem abounds in epigrammatic statements such as; 'Life is nothing but error/ Teeming with trauma of terror' (p83), 'Life's endless peril/In the hands of devil' and 'field...With red bloodshed filled' (p83).

It is this fear of violence and love for life and peace that resonates in 'Songs of Woes' (75). Here the poet achieves the artistic unity through contraries which run throughout the poem 'bleeds' and 'leads', 'sworn' and 'mourn', 'orator' and 'deaf', 'descendant' and 'ascendant', 'adorned' and 'scorned', 'blooms' and 'dooms', 'seeds' and 'weeds', 'cultivate' and 'annihilate'.

The poet is broken in his heart and filled with woes he sings 'What song should I sing?/ Where innocent bleeds,/

brutal leads' (75). He is melancholic, dejected and recreates the external world in the image of his internal self and mind. Like Coleridge here subject (self) becomes the object and object becomes the subject. Vivekanand diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends, and fuses with his imagination. He is an introspective intellect, seeing a thing within the thing, interrogating and forming a discourse through his symbols. Reading his poems is not a seminal experience, but he always leaves the readers grappling with a series of ideas. Here there is meeting of the private and public world, ordinary and the exotic and mundane and the sublime, and in each encounter Vivekanand creates a deep impact on the mind and soul of the readers. The poet doesn't give you a single view but multiple options with his variety and range of themes.

Vivekanand's poetry shows a lifelong search for such images, images that were not just reflection but illuminations. He sought them in visionary poetry like Blake and Shelley.

He depicts a real world of direst wants and sufferings, a world of violence and terror and never ending woes. However, this doesn't mean that his tone is gloomy but it is filled with the rhythm of hope and noble vision. The poet achieves this poetic effect through subtle irony and satire. He satirises the greed for money in 'Pay-Perk' and ridicules the narrowness of vision which is confined to a small room and materialistic status symbols. The undertone of this poem suggests artificialities and trivialities of modern life. These words from this poem crudely mock at the hedonistic urge of man:

We are now money monger monkey,
leaping from one perch to another
as if our tails on fire
frantically looking over to extinguish. (p67)

The power of money finds an expression in a poem titled 'Multicolour': 'Colour of money has a peculiar chemistry,/ Even a dead comes out of cemetery'. Exploring deep in human psyche the poet subverts the commonplace notion and presents a critique of hedonism and money mindedness. Not all these poems evoke some poignant theme but with grandeur of ease and felicity depict the lived experiences of the poet. In 'Transcendental Meditation', 'Truth' and 'Yoga' we move from callous world of love, crime, violence and restlessness to inner peace and joy. The external darkness is illuminated in the inner tranquility 'I celebrate subconscious mind to be/ on the centre of transcendental eye'. 'Transcendental Meditation' beautifully describes the technique of consciousness and the tranquility that evolves out of it. The last lines of the poem mark the supremacy of calmness over turbulent circumstances. 'Yoga' is sequel to the earlier poem celebrating the telling impact of yoga on the 'Mind, body and soul'.

Structurally this collection of poems can be divided into two parts and thematically into three parts. The first two parts celebrate the inchoate reality of this mundane world and the last part presents meditative moments of joy and peace. The sequence of poems, is so good that it forms a rhythm and pattern providing the readers a dramatic relief. The book consisting of 51 poems, reads from first to last page like a thriller, a romance and subsequently passes into the meditative trance of the last part.

The poet seems to reinvent his self in the last part from chaotic to tranquility, from disordered to ordered and from fragmented to composed state of consciousness. The setting of the poem varies from urban to rural and from a suburb to a metropolis. The life which the poet describes in his usual and uncompromising fashion is generally unlovely and often

hideous but the impulse behind it is love, longing, order and peace. And all these elements make this book a great book of verse. The first impression that this book creates is its cover illustration justifying the title. After all, what's this life? The answer is-falter and fall and rise. These stuffs have been neatly woven into the text of this book with an artistic impact.

I strongly recommend this book to all lovers of poetry who enjoy poetry for the ideal and the real, for the power of reason and thought, mundane and the sublime and as an aesthetic art for uplifting mind and soul without getting lost in the mazes of words and verbal explosions.

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BOOK REVIEW

1

Review of Sheojee Tiwary's Autobiography, *Life At a Glance*

DR. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

(*Life At A Glance, An Autobiography, Sheojee Tewary*, Thomson Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 340, Price: Rs. 595.)

Autobiographies are author's journey within, journey where some slices of life become objective and appealing to the readers. No autobiography is complete in itself as an author may be selective in choosing some instances of his or her life. Nor any autobiography could be completely pure or true as an author may conceal certain facts of life which readers may or may not know. To me an autobiography is a framed narrative, where either you trust the tale or the teller and vice versa. However, this doesn't mean that autobiographies may not be true at all. Mahatma Gandhi's autography, 'My Experiments with Truth', Rousseau's "Confessions" have been rated authentic narration of life's accounts. Life is made of many journeys and trajectories and therefore there is not a single answer to a life's question. Hence an autobiography is history of tentative accounts of one's life in aggregation and

never absolute. Reading Sheojee Tewary's book, '*Life At a Glance*' confirmed my assumptions as convictions.

I have read and reviewed his other books too and could discern the difference and resemblances with analytical mind and synthetic discourse. His works namely 'Anter-vedana', 'Niyati Ka Vidhan', 'Thought Culture', 'Journey Within' and 'Divine Gita' have autobiographical elements which present the spiritual quest, philosophical bent of mind and moral and epistemological concerns of the author. Here the gap between the real man, writer and philosopher narrows down, weaving his tales into autobiographical framework. The intense personal experiences of the author get transmuted into palpable autobiographical sketches. The picture that evolves of a man and the writer after simulating these images, is that of a loving father, an honest police officer, a philanthropist and a man of integrity wielding the charms of vigorous and sublime thoughts.

The book under review '*Life At a Glance, An Autobiography*' of Sheojee Tewary strikes a responsive chord in the hearts of the reader. Sheojee weaves into this book the tales of personal woes, gain or loss, love and relationships and his sense of duty and commitment with philosophical and spiritual perspective. As the blurb of this book reads, 'His memoir is full of vigorous energy based on sublime thoughts and it sheds light on the importance of high values in life.' The book running into 340 pages, is replete with instances and experiences where every experience has been given a thought and every thought has been lent colour of emotion and morality taking the readers in interaction with the man and the writer. It depicts the intense experiences of his life from childhood to matured phase of his life. The chapters titled 'My Birth', 'My Parents', 'My Village Life', 'My Mother', 'My Chachajee', 'My school', 'My Marriage' take the

readers to his intimate world of bizarre and familiar experiences, lived and felt sensations of life.

While narrating these piecemeal accounts, the writer never loses track with the immediacy of experience and honesty of the purpose. The book beginning on these personal notes, gives us a story of a middle class, rural boy who through a series of adverse and congenial conditions get transformed into a successful human being. In every episode we see a man in the making imbued with new sensibilities and strength which provide the author vision and vigour. The author doesn't claim to be a sage or monk but a human being who had his own shares of joy and sorrows, failures and successes and frustrations. He candidly confesses 'whatever incidents are recorded in my memory I would like to mention it as they occurred without hesitation. I have no reason to worry whether they were good or bad.' To him the intuitive power of mind has been his guiding impulse throughout his life which he loosely calls 'voice of soul'. To quote the author, 'What challenges I had to face in my life. How I have been able to overcome all the problems with the help of the voice of soul.' (p11)

This autography is replete with such instances which are rich in inspirational episodes. These episodes have been beautifully woven into tales of sacrifices, struggles and indomitable spirit of a man and his life wish to overcome the circumstances. The very first chapter of the book 'My Birth' besides giving the readers a brief genealogy of the author, describes the rural process of delivery and role of midwife devoid of modern medical facilities. He selects chronologically the dates and events without telling us the year of his birth. The story of his childhood narrated against the agrarian and rural setting is rich in details of his school and its ambience, items of stationery being used by students

and kinds of lessons being taught to them. Here he makes the readers work on two levels of consciousness that of author's time and their own time, and thus they could see the resemblances and differences. The description of his village; conditions of houses, roads, seasons, people, places poetically evoke the memories of villages lost into modern urban slums.

After finishing this book I was struck with a question as to what went into making such a wonderful person. Was it nurture or nature? To me it is both but I got the answer in the chapter titled 'My Mother' which tells us about the deep impact of mother on the author. He learnt the first lessons of love, metaphysics, spiritualism and philanthropy from his mother. She was a pious lady with a large heart and a good singer. Fed on tales of Vikramaditya, Harishchandra and Rama and devotional songs, the author grew into a decent human being. Besides these glimpses of his personal life the author also gives the details of cultural life. Chapter 19 titled, 'Nautanki (Theatre)' takes the readers to a world of folk art and aesthetics.

In his straightforward narrative the author candidly tells the readers about the dance drama, musical instruments and cultural life of the rural folks. The narrative is amazingly rich in its power to create pictures of this colourful phase of his life.' 'Rumours and Fears', 'Elephant and Horse-Ride' and 'Visit to Bhaluni Dham Fair' provide an insight into the myths, culture and life of the people in free and natural atmosphere of rural space.

The subsequent parts of the book, lead the readers to the episodic corridors of his college life, duty as a police officer, marriage, parenting, responsibilities, death of his mother and his burgeoning as a writer. In every page of these episodes we find him in a renewed form but one element connects all these episode and that is his metaphysical musings and

spiritual quest. His life teaches us the art of perseverance, moral conviction, integrity of character and a tireless search for the truth amidst the challenges and worldly snares. Accounts his assignments as a police officer, efficient discharge of duties, interactions lead the readers through a series of challenges he met with positivity and dexterity. Here we encounter with a person endowed with new demeanour and vigour and get hold of his toughness, honesty, managerial skills and leadership qualities, perfect recipes for management graduates and civil service aspirants. In all these trying moments, turbulent phase of his life he listened to the music of his soul as his motivational impulse.

It is said when your head doesn't work, listen to your heart and it will never betray you. Sheojee always used this intuitive power to overcome temptation with caution. A mantra that runs through the threads of all episodes and stories in this autobiography. Various instances narrated in this book suggest that he is an avid learner and he learns from his senior officers, teachers, people and circumstances. His passion for learning drove him to many places. Working under various positions and in different capacities he had opportunity to interact with dignitaries and those in power politics, which further sharpened his understanding of the world.

He enjoyed the patronage of Jagjiwan Ram, the then Agriculture minister and had opportunity to serve Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India. Sheojee paints all these sketches candidly without glorification and propaganda. His post retirement life was full of adventures, travels and pilgrimage. To him retirement was initiation into a new phase of life. It marked the beginning of his creative phase which turned him to writing. If two basic elements were to define his writings, these would be namely fragments of lived

experiences and his spiritualism. His travel to USA, California has been a significant part of this book as it gives an insight into cultural differences but away from home he remained close to his system of faith and religion. Here we get descriptive notes of Stanford, Maryland, Virginia, Washington DC as if from a travelogue.

The last chapter of this book titled "Journey Within" named after his book, 'Journey Within', marks the culmination of this long journey. Here the readers can also see how meditation, yoga and spiritualism went into forming his consciousness as a writer. He is a great scholar of Vedanta philosophy and the same has been reflected in all his works. The book contains selective sketches of his life depicting different phases of life and reads like a good memoir. He uses the genre of autobiography but experiments with different devices to give to the readers an interesting story.

The book is episodic, full of anecdotes, memoirs and epiphanies artistically woven into a neat pattern characterised by continuity and rhythm. It thrills, it uplifts and inspires. Recommended to the readers of all age groups.

INTERVIEW

A Mizo Woman's Literary Journey: Goutam Karmakar in Conversation with Malsawmi Jacob

Goutam Karmakar (GK): Hello Ma'am. At first a big thanks to you for managing your time for this conversation.

How are you? Before going to ask you about your creative world, allow me to introduce you once again before the world. Will you share with us something about yourself, your schooling, college days and educational life? Do you still miss your childhood days?

Malsawmi Jacob (MJ): Hello Goutam! It's my pleasure to have this conversation.

Regarding my childhood, I grew up a rolling stone! My father was in the Army, so we moved around a lot. I was born in Jamshedpur, which was in Bihar then, and in Jharkhand now. After a couple of relocations, we happened to be in a Mizoram village on the outskirts of Aizawl when it was time for me to start schooling. From Nursery to Class 2, I studied in Mizo medium. This was really fortunate, as it gave me good grounding in the language, folklore and poetry of my people. After this, the family moved to Dharamsala, now in Himachal Pradesh, where my siblings and I were introduced to Hindi letters in the army camp school. Then we shifted to Shillong in Meghalaya, where our English medium education

started. After some more moves, I finished high school in Shillong and studied up to MA English in the same place. A couple of years later, after working as a lecturer in Aizawl College for a year, I did a PG Diploma in Teaching English (PGDTE) from CIEFL (Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages), Hyderabad. The Institute became English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) after those days.

Well, it's nice to reminisce about one's childhood days sometimes. But life is good now too.

GK: Since it is poetry by which we are known to each other, allow me to ask a few questions regarding your poems ahead of the novel. From which age did you feel the creative urge in you?

MJ: Right from Nursery school, I was fascinated by songs and rhymes. Soon after, I fell in love with Mizo poems that we had to study. Later, it was the same story with English poetry. And I started writing poems in high school, which were published in the school magazine. Then I went on writing, whenever the inspiration came.

GK: What are the books that you have read many times? And are you familiar with ongoing Indian English writings?

MJ: There are many books that I love, several of which I've read more than once. Some of the old English and Russian Classics still have a strong pull. Right now, I'm re-reading Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Though I first read it a few decades ago, I'm still enjoying and finding new nuggets of gem in it. I love Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the fiction works of CS Lewis, and several children books including the *Harry Potter* series. I'd like to re-read so many books if only time would permit.

Yes, I'm familiar with some of the works of present day Indian English writers.

GK: Which Indian poets and novelists writing in English do you want to read most? Are there any authors who have influenced your writing?

MJ: It's difficult to name particular poets though I like many works of many poets, including the contemporary ones. However, let me just mention Tagore's prose poetry *Gitanjali* as one of my top choices. Among the novelists, RK Narayan, Mulkraj Anand, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jerry Pinto... I'm happy you didn't mention short story writers, the list may get too long then!

I cannot claim to have been influenced in my writing by any author. On the other hand, I don't think any writer can claim to have never been influenced by other writers either. There may be unconscious influences from what we read.

GK: Ma'am what is your opinion regarding the emergence of North East Indian English poetry in recent years? And how would you like to place yourself there, whether as poet or as a novelist?

MJ: Let me begin by saying that the term 'Northeast Indian poetry/literature' is only a geographical convenience. The seven-plus-one states have totally different languages and cultures; so there's no homogeneity in their literature either. Of course, I am happy to see a large number of good poetry in English coming out of the region. Besides the heavyweights like Mona Zote, Mamang Dai, Robin S Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and others, a new and very promising generation is emerging. It's an exciting scenario there.

As I've written a novel, and also poems, I think I'd like to be called a 'poet and novelist.'

GK: What are the features in your poetry which sets you apart from other Indian Poets writing in English? How would you like to distinguish good poetry from poorly-written poetry in an era where people are writing poems out of fashion and not out of thought process?

MJ: Each poem is different from another, and each poet's works are different from another's. That's my case too. I feel that Indian English poets are generally very strong in creating images. In my poems, I work at sound and rhythm (this is not about meter, rhyme, or such things) to suit the content. I don't claim to have succeeded – I know I have a long way to go – but I do try.

Distinguishing good poetry from poor ones is essentially the work of literary critics. However, it's true that some poems impress you as worth reading and others put you off as shallow or shoddily written at first sight. And as there are so many varieties of poems, each kind needs a separate yardstick. However, since you asked, let me list some of the qualities I like in poetry: 1) Sincerity of thought and feeling if it is a serious poem. 2) Controlled emotion rather than a pouring out of feelings. 3) Tight, condensed writing as against long winding expressions. 4) Concrete pictures. 5) The sound of words and rhythm matching the sense.

GK: Now I guess you are expecting questions regarding your novel *Zoram* and I will not make you wait. The novel, first of its kind, presents the cultural ethos of Mizoram on a large scale. Do you agree with me? Do you think that writers from Mizoram should have come out much earlier

to present the political turbulence as you projected in *Zorami*?

MJ: You are right, *Zorami* is a very 'Mizo' novel, unique in several ways. However, regarding the second part of your question – many Mizo language novels based on the political turbulence came out much before mine. Even an English novel by Pramod Bhatnagar, a non-Mizo writer, came out way back in 1982. Mine only happens to be the first one in English by a Mizo writer. It stands out from the others in the treatment of the theme. It is written with a neutral view, focused on the social and psychological effects of the upheaval on the people of Mizoram.

GK: Allow me to quote a few lines before asking the question.
"Within a day, the buoyant, rather boisterous young girl had turned into a weepy, terrified wreck. ... As time passed, the wounds on her body healed, leaving scars. But her wounded psyche festered." These lines clearly show that pain, loss and resentment are part and parcel of Mizo women in the time of insurgency. How far does this insurgency leave an impact on Mizo women?

MJ: The protagonist Zorami is a figure of the people of Mizoram, not only of the women. Her violation represents the violation of the whole state. True, women suffer in more ways in conflict situations. But the novel portrays the suffering of all concerned. It traces the background and 'logic' of the armed struggle and its aftermath, showing the downside and futility of such movements.

GK: Your novel seems to attack the dogma attached to womanhood and wedlock. Your Zorami projects this when she says: "Damaged, Damaged, Damaged!... I'm damaged goods they want to get rid of! They want to dump me on an unsuspecting customer. But they will not fool him. I

shall tell him everything. He's likely to reject me once he knows. That's all right. Better than getting married with a dirty secret on your conscience." I want to know the novelist's opinion here. Since you are talking about women and their rights and freedom do you want to project yourself as a feminist novelist?

MJ: Yes, some of our traditional codes attached to womanhood and marriage are terribly unfair. The unfortunate victim of a sexual assault is considered damaged and impure, whereas such labels are not attached to the criminal. The female victim loses all her value in the marriage market. The whole idea is so lopsided!

Regarding the second part of your question, the word 'feminist' has so many shades of meaning, I hesitate to answer 'yes' or 'no.' I am all for justice and gender equality. But I also believe in certain forms of gender role and behaviour – though not in a hard and fast way. I hold the view that the Creator made man and woman equal but different, so both these factors have to be accepted.

GK: How far did the famine caused by 'Mautam' influence you? And how have you used this influence in writing *Zoram*?

MJ: The famine did not affect me at a personal level as our family was outside Mizoram, and I was too young to care or understand. But there were some vague snatches of talks and incidents I could recall. Then after growing up, through reading, research and other sources, I relived those times through imagination and depicted them in the novel.

GK: Death, despair, isolation and anxiety are related with your protagonist's life. So how far do you consider your

Zoramí as existentialist? And how do you want to see the life?

MJ: Yes, the situation of my protagonist is painful, and the psychological state she falls into is indeed abysmal. I have presented such a human condition because this is part of life, humans do undergo such experiences. Zoramí despairs of life and seeks escape through death, but she unexpectedly receives spiritual and emotional healing through the grace of God.

Though I have presented a stark and dark condition of life, I do not subscribe to existentialist philosophy; I believe life has meaning and purpose, and that problems can be overcome with divine help.

GK: The very title of your novel suggests that songs play a very important part in it. Can you define the role of the songs here? Along with it the term 'redemption' carries a special connotation throughout the novel. How far have you succeeded in giving redemption to Mizoram people in general?

MJ: Songs are part of the traditional Mizo story-telling, many of our folktales include songs. And my novel is about Mizo life. Since songs are a vital part of our existence, they are given an important role in the story. They are used to highlight a situation, to express a character's mind, or to create an atmosphere.

As for 'redemption,' the crying need for it is suggested from the opening of the novel, right from the prologue. A people who have been through what we did needs restoration both from inside and outside. My novel deals more with the inner restoration. As far as the redemption of the people is concerned, I can only suggest a way – which is to forgive and start afresh.

GK: *Zorami* speaks about the most traumatic period of Mizo history when Mizo National Front (MNF) was at its peak. You have shown this in your novel. Besides that, you have interviewed people who lived through that period. So it took almost a decade for you to pen this history. Kindly tell me how far have you studied the Mizo history for this project along with your experience while writing the book.? And do you want to categorise it as a historical novel?

MJ: Though I grew up outside Mizoram, Mizo history and social practices were very much part of my life. As a young child, I was introduced to the history, legends, folk lore, poetry and songs. And during the independence struggle, we got to hear about the happenings in our homeland through people's talks. So we were very much into it. However, nearly two decades after political peace returned, as a mature person, I did a deeper study by reading books and interviewing people in Mizoram.

When I started working on the novel, I vicariously relived the pain my people went through during the turbulent times. So it was very difficult to go on. This was the reason it took so long to finish. If it weren't for the big help from my publisher and editor, I may not have been able to come out with it.

How to categorise *Zorami* has to be left to the critics, I suppose. Being based on a historical incident, it could be termed a historical novel. On the other hand, the background is still rather recent to technically qualify for that.

GK: Zorami's life seems to be a quest, a quest to attain spiritual wisdom. So how will you show the maturity of Zorami in this context? Apart from spiritual bliss the novel

is a quest for inner healing also. The lines, "Color comes to her deathly pale face. Life comes back to her limp body. She opens her eyes. Her face beams as she looks around. She jumps into the pool and splashes about. She smiles broadly and swims back towards the man" amply show this. So can you elaborate this inner quest a bit?

MJ: Zorami is in dire need of inner healing, as shown right from the prologue of the book. She is also aware of her lack of a certain spiritual quality that her friend Kimi possesses. But immersed in her pain and bitterness, she is hardly on a conscious quest – in the sense that she is not doing anything about her needs. But spiritual bliss and inner healing come to her at the nadir of her life, purely through a miraculous divine act. The lines you have quoted above give a picture of the instantaneous healing Zorami experiences, as she 'observes' it happening to her past, younger self, in a dream-vision.

GK: You started the novel in 2004. But you wrote only a few chapters. And then it was 2013 when your editor and publisher (Morph Book) motivated you to complete the manuscript. So have you lost your motivation? And when you finished the book, it seems to be a novel where political and personal journey are merged and shown. So can it be taken as an autobiographical novel (not in a literary sense) where the journey of the novelist is also portrayed?

MJ: No Goutam, I did not really lose my motivation, but simply could not complete it due to some reasons. One, as I said earlier, was because of the pain I felt at the fate of my people.

You are right in saying that political and personal journey are merged in the book. After all, the character Zorami is a

sort of symbol for the state of Mizoram. But the novel is not autobiographical, the novelist is totally outside of it except in the imaginative identification with the characters.

GK: “We do not want Assamese language! We do not want goblin-scripts! Down with Vai rule! ... It is impossible for us to learn the script. Why should they impose such a difficult language on us?” This kind of imposing casts your novel as a postcolonial one. Do you agree with me? This context reminds me some other lines like “My dear brothers and sisters, let’s be very clear about one thing. We are not Indians. We are Mizo people...Mizo Kan ni! We are Mizos!” So tell me, don’t you want to label your people as Indians in general?

MJ: Postcolonialism, I think, is a process that goes on. And my novel does have postcolonial characteristics. In culture and language, my people are very different from the so called ‘mainland’ Indians. This difference is highlighted, with a strong statement that imposition of anything on a people only causes unnecessary friction and trouble.

Of course, we are Indians! We belong to India politically and geographically. The quoted lines are the words of characters who want to break away from India and become an independent country. Historically, it’s true that the insurgency movement arose from grievances against the government. At that time, Mizoram (known as Lushai Hills then), was only a district of Assam. When the mautam famine started, it is said, the Assam government did not help much, yet tried to impose Assamese language on the Mizo people.

GK: Two folktales ‘Chemtatrawta’ and ‘Chungleng leh Hnuaileng’ seem to play a vital role. So how have you

turned these folktales into history in your novel? Not only folktales but also many stories and side plots you have used along with the non-linear narrative style. So kindly tell us something about the stories and the narrative style and the purposes behind using these.

MJ: The tales of 'Chemtatrawta' and 'Chungleng leh Hnuaileng Indo' are first introduced to show part of Zoramí's childhood. They also aptly reflect the conflict situation of the insurgency period. In Chemtatrawta's story we see how a chain of violent actions and sufferings are triggered off by the misdeed of one creature. In the same way, in 'Chungleng leh Hnuaileng,' a terrible war between birds and animals is ignited by one irresponsible act. No justice could be carried out in either case. The stories can be seen as parables of the senseless violence and counter violence that was happening in real life.

The non-linear narration was a most suitable style for portraying a traumatised society that has fallen into utter chaos. All the side plots have their rightful place, as the novel is about Mizoram and its people, not about just some characters.

GK: What kind of future of North- East Indian English Literature can you see? As a novelist and a poet what will be your suggestions and advice for the betterment of the future of North East Indian English poetry, fiction and short story in India and in across the globe?

MJ: The future of Northeast Indian English Literature is bright. Easterine Kire of Nagaland winning the Hindu Literary Prize 2015 and the Tata Literature Live Book of the Year 2017 is a big boost. With more and more writers taking up writing in English, I think we can expect a big

contribution to Indian English literature from the Northeast.

My suggestion is to keep writing to the best of our abilities.

GK: In future can we expect any translations of native Mizo works?

MJ: A good number of Mizo writings have been translated into English. I too have translated a short story and a few poems, which were published in an e-journal and a print anthology. Yes, I think we can expect more and more translations to come out.

GK: Not so many young writers are coming from Mizoram. What will be your opinion regarding this?

MJ: Do you mean in English? All kinds of books – novels, short stories, essays, poetry collections, etc. are coming out thick and fast in Mizo language. These days, many young poets of Mizoram are writing in English too. A young poet published his collection way back in 2003. Two teenage girls brought out Young Adult Fiction books before my novel was out. A young man published a Mystery novel soon after mine. One young woman released her book of poems early this year. I think we can expect the trend of writing in English to pick up.

GK: Thank you very much ma'am for answering all my queries. It's a pleasure hearing from you.

MJ: Thank you.

A Scientist Turned Poet: Pallavi Kiran in Conversation with Kumarendra Mallick

Pallavi Kiran (PK): How poetry did happen to Kumarendra Mallick, an Emeritus Earth Scientist, who is a prominent name in the discipline of Earth Science?

Kumarendra Mallick (KM): I had a passion for poetry from my childhood. I loved reading poetry, both in Odia, English and later on, in Hindi. I started composing very late, especially after retirement

PK: Science and poetry has similarities of observing, studying and investigating the external world. How did the scientist within you help the poet to feel, express and grow?

KM: There is beauty, both internal and external, in science and poetry. Although, there is a saying that ‘where science ends, arts start.’ But I think, both goes hand in hand.

PK: Your book *Letter to an Imaginary Pen Friend and other poems* published in 2009 reflects your poetic vision. Where does this book fit into your career as a poet?

KM: I was not looking for a career in poetry; it was my love for poetry. This book has caught the attention of many. Many well-known poets have given good reviews.

PK: Your book features poems on varied themes. What is your poetic vision?

KM: Yes, I love to write on many themes, because in day-to-day life we observe everything. However, nature, life and love always attracted me.

PK: Poetry is said to have a heightened diction and language. Yet, yours is very simple and full of images. They also have a variation in structure. Is it because to make the readers accessible to the meaning and help them solve the poems? What is your own idea about what poetry, fundamentally, should be about?

KM: You are right. I did want to express my views in simple language. Perhaps, the nature is simple, too. I didn't find any need to bring in twists. Thoughts when expressed in simple can easily be related to the life of the readers. This is what I felt when reading lovely poems of many great poets. Imagine, how simple is Wordsworth's 'The Daffodil.' While reading the reader assumes to be on the bayside and watching he daffodils tossing in the wind.

PK: After writing long verses of poem, you have versed short haiku, haibun and tanka poems. How and why have these Japanese form of poetry appealed you?

KM: Yes. Brevity, it is said, is the wit of the soul. Haiku, senryu and other categories of Japanese genre opens a vast world through a small window. This attracted my attention and I started learning by reading books and journals on haiku, senryu and tanka. I attended lecture sessions too.

PK: You have worldwide audience for your haiku and you post everyday on your Facebook wall. What haiku culture do you see or tend to present through them?

KM: Now I can write these little poems and had the pleasure of publishing them in more than 10 international journals. Here, I must express my gratitude to Kala Ramesh, Goutam Nadkarni, Parvat Padhy, Ramesh Anand, Lorin Ford, Susan Constable and many others who helped me directly or indirectly to write haiku. Haiku in essence,

picturises nature whereas senryu deals with life. Both these genres leave the reader to imagine a lot and there lies the beauty. Haiku is a poem that can be painted that can be virtually seen and that can be expressed and interpreted in dance form. Very interesting.

PK: Kindly brief out all your print and online poetic publications till date as well as the awards and honour that you received for the same.

KM: Besides, in normal journals, some of the haiku are included in the anthologies. In bi-monthly Haiku Kykai, I had the pleasure of getting first position. In World Haiku Review, one haiku was published under 'Honourable Mention.' One Haiku was placed in 'Best of Basho.' Basho is one of the three Masters of Haiku.

PK: Have you taken up poetry as a hobby for your later life?

KM: I cannot say, for sure. But I enjoy reading and writing haiku. I interact with many poets every day. It is always a learning process. Your Space of Muse India, Boloji.com, Facebook and many well-known e-sites carry these poems. Some of the haiku are published in The Heron's Nest, The Frog Pond, A Hundred Gourds, the Mainichi Daily News, World Haiku Review, Presence, Chrysanthemum, Brass Bell, Gold Dust, Wild Plum Haiku Journal and Creatrix.

PK: What's about to appear next over the Mallick's poetic horizon?

KM: I have material for publication for both free verse and haiku. I am thinking of sending those to the publishers.

CONTRIBUTORS

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