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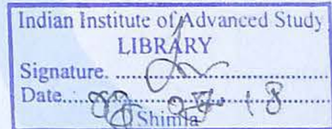

SUMMERHILL

IIAS REVIEW

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M. Hamid Ansari

What would Azad have said to the Angel now?
Peter Ronald deSouza

Modernity, Globalization and Nativism
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***Vedanta Ammanai*: An Advaitic Interpretation of Play**
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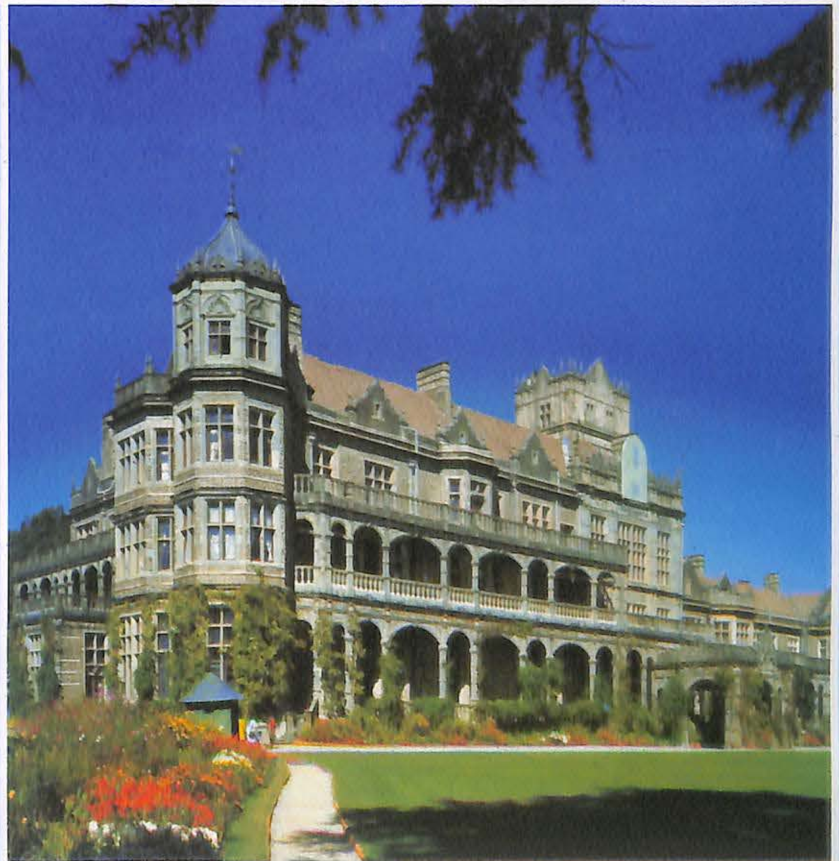

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The Intellectual and Society: Role and Responsibility

M. HAMID ANSARI

I do have happy memories of some years of schooling spent in this city and this is reason enough to relish the opportunity to return. This feeling is accentuated manifold by the honour bestowed by you today in inviting me to deliver the annual Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was unquestionably one of the great Indians of the twentieth century. As a philosopher he interpreted Indian thought to the world in what has been called the 'battle of consciousness.' The Republic bestowed on him the highest offices of the State and he in turn added lustre to them. A constitutional head of state in a modern democracy cannot, with justice, lay claim to Plato's ideal of a 'perfect guardian'; despite it, the philosopher in Radhakrishnan did inject a deeper perspective, draw attention to values and help the system, as he put it, 'do the right thing'. Inaugurating this very Institute in 1965, he cautioned against the deification of error and becoming 'prisoners of the status quo'.[1]

Three centuries earlier another man of philosophy, Baruch Spinoza, had prescribed for himself a rule of communication: 'to speak in a manner intelligible to the multitude, and to comply with every general custom that does not hinder the attainment of our purpose.'[2] Radhakrishnan would have readily endorsed this. Less reverential is Bertrand Russell's observation[3] that philosophers are for the most part constitutionally timid, dislike the unexpected and therefore invent systems which make the future calculable!

Given Radhakrishnan's intellectual stature, it would be beneficial to explore his views on the role of the intellectual in public life. These make interesting reading and retain a contemporary relevance.

He addressed the question in his 1942 lectures delivered at the University of Calcutta and at the BHU; these were published in 1947 as *Religion and Politics*. The imperative, spelt out in the first lecture, was the 'very rapid' pace of change:

> Everywhere round about us we hear the sound of things breaking, of changes in the social, in the political and economic institutions, in the dominant beliefs and ideas, in the fundamental categories of human thought. Men of intelligence, sensitiveness and enterprise are convinced that there is something radically wrong with the present arrangements and institution. . . .[4]

He traced the cause to 'the serious distemper' between social institutions and the world purpose of bringing about a cooperative commonwealth resulting in dignity, noble living and prosperity for all. The way out, he suggested, was 'the restoration of the lost relationship between the individual and the eternal'; hence the relevance of religion. Established religions, however, cannot meet the world's need for a soul.

Having sought to establish a balance between the ideal and the practical, Radhakrishnan spelt out a role for the intellectual in the final lecture. The relevant passages are noteworthy:

> The final ends of political action are to be considered by the thinker and the writer. In them society becomes conscious and critical of itself. They are the character of a society. Their business is to educate us to a consciousness of the real self of society, and to save guardians of the values of a society, the values which are the real life and us from spiritual callousness and mental vulgarity. . . .
>
> The intellectual need not take an active part in politics or in the actual affairs of administration. It is their primary function to serve society with intellectual integrity. They must create social consciousness and sense of responsibility which transcends the limits of the political community. Those who can serve society in this way have a duty not to engage in politics. For every society there will be a few for whom participation in political activity would be a perversion of genius, a disloyalty to themselves.
>
> If the intellectuals abandon the interests of culture, and repudiate the primacy of spiritual values, we cannot blame the politicians who are responsible for the safety of the state.[5]

M. Hamid Ansari is Vice President of India. This is the text of the 13th Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture delivered by him at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, on 16 April 2009.

Two and a half decades later, and while replying to a Farewell Address by the Members of Parliament, he put forth a more benign perception of men of politics:

> Politicians do not mean people of twisted tongues or cold hearts. They are men with warmth of feeling, who have compassion for the suffering of humanity. We should, as politicians, exert our utmost to alleviate the sufferings of humanity. Politics should not absorb all our life; it is indispensable, but not the whole life.[6]

Embedded here are perceptions of intellectual activity and the role of intellectuals, as also of politics and the purpose of political activity. Each has a bearing on life in society and on the meaning of citizenship. For this reason, it remains relevant.

II

The debate on the linkage between thought and action, and the moral imperative for action, is a perennial one. Neither exists in isolation. It has been argued that the notion of pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, in contrast with knowledge pursued explicitly for some particular end, is misleading. The intellectual's responsibility, admittedly, is to think; but thinking in itself is an activity and as such is linked to the activity which is the implementation of thinking; a refusal to see it so is to be morally culpable. The intellectual thus becomes a critical element in the value system of a society.

A definition of the intellectual and his role was provided by the sociologist Edward Shills:

> In every society there are some persons with an unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflective-ness about the nature of their universe, and the rules that govern their society. There is in every society a minority of persons who, more than the ordinary run of their fellow men, are enquiring, and desirous of being in frequent communion with the symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life, and remote in their reference in both time and space. In this minority, there is a need to externalize the quest.... This interior need to penetrate beyond the screen of immediate concrete experience marks the existence of the intellectual in every society.[7]

The intellectual is thus entrusted with a special responsibility. It necessitates corresponding action. Such an approach would lend credence to Marx's observation that 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.'[8] Nor was Marx alone in urging a linkage. 'The intellectual', wrote Vaclav Havel in 1986, 'should constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against all hidden and open pressure and manipulations, should be the chief doubter of systems of power and its incantations, should be a witness to their mendacity'.[9] By doing so the intelligentsia risks, in Toynbee's telling phrase, becoming an outcaste, born to be unhappy because its very existence is a reproach to the society concerned.[10]

In a celebrated essay in 1967, Chomsky had asserted that in considering the responsibility of intellectuals 'our basic concern must be their role in the creation and analysis of ideology' and to see events in their historical perspective.[11] The same point was made by Edward Said in his Reith Lectures in 1993 when he urged the contemporary intellectual 'to speak the truth to power', and do so by 'carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change'.[12]

At the other end of the spectrum, the intellectual is viewed as a dangerous creature capable of poisoning minds, destabilising order and creating chaos. Paul Johnson, in a selective survey, has questioned the 'moral and judgmental credentials of intellectuals' and cautioned about 'the heartless tyranny of ideas' emanating from them.[13] Such perceptions have been used to create or sustain closed societies, including some masquerading as open ones. We have enough examples in our own times of dictatorships of the right or the left, and of societies imposing a monopoly of control anchored on race, religion or atavistic claims.

The debate on what the intellectual can and should do, and in what manner, has taken place in most societies. The impulses and imperatives vary, so do the constraints. It is of particular relevance in a society like ours where, to echo Edward Said's caution, 'easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality. . . so often shield us from the reality of others'.[14]

On the basis of the role played by intellectuals in different societies, it is possible to develop a typology. They can be academics, writers, artists or activists. Creativity and courage are the two essential conditions for their public role. There is also a symbiotic relationship between the ideas generated within a society and its institutions of social sciences. Nor can external influences or linkages be overlooked; researchers have spoken of the impact on national perceptions of international 'epistemic communities' defined as network of professionals and experts who share normative beliefs, lay claim to policy-relevant knowledge and impact policy perceptions.[15]

III

Where then do we locate the role and responsibility of the intellectual in contemporary India?

India, it has been said, is a political and economic paradox: a rich-poor nation with a weak-strong state. Persistent centrism, and continuous realignment, is one of its striking features. This has accommodated a wide spectrum of interests, classes, status groups, regions and communities in the political process and development structures. This accommodation has not always been equitable. The Constitution provides the point of reference; its Preamble is the key to its social, political and economic philosophy and to its core value system. It has been described as a moral document embodying an ethical vision; this compels attention to Ambedkar's observation that constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment and has to be cultivated.

On Radhakrishnan's parameters, therefore, amongst the primary responsibilities of the intellectual would be to educate the society on these values and to assess the extent to which they are being adhered to. An unavoidable concomitant of this would be the necessity of 'speaking the truth to power'. The challenge before the intelligentsia, wrote Rajni Kothari six decades after Radhakrishnan's lectures, is 'to keep alive the flame of hope and resurgence, and to continue offering ideological alternatives to the struggling segments of the mass public.'[16] The role of the intellectual thus becomesintegral to the healthy functioning of a society.

The nature of the society in question, and the relationships secreted in its interstices, provides the starting point of analysis. Any critique of the Indian polity would thus involve scrutiny on multiple axes and require threefold examination of the relationship of the state and society, the state and democracy and the polity and the economy. Our quest would focus on the role of the intellectual in the furtherance of this critique.

Since time constraints come in the way of a comprehensive analysis, I shall endeavour to confine my remarks to five specific areas, namely institutions, economic amelioration, corruption, rights and environment.

Institutions

The structure of our polity took shape through intensive debates during the freedom struggle and in the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution bestowed centrality on the state and impacted on the relationship between it and the society. A good deal of social activity came to be focused on ways and means of impacting state perceptions and activity. Interest groups in society thus came to focus on elections as the first and logical step in this endeavour; the excellent work in this field done by Lokniti has been widely acknowledged. In the process, however, the democratic functioning of the society came to be considered by most as synonymous with the electoral process. Ashish Nandy has termed it 'psephocracy'. The study of the actual functioning of the institutions received inadequate attention and the wider implications of this for public debate and discussion were, exceptions apart, insufficiently scrutinised by the intellectuals. Its impression on public perceptions is all too evident today and raises questions about the health of our institutions and the state of governance. There are some exceptions to an otherwise pervasive neglect; Pratab Bhanu Mehta and Rajni Kothari, amongst others, are illustrative of these.

Mehta's critique is on the failure of the state in the removal of inequality. There is, he asserts in an eloquent passage, a deepening of democracy on the one side and its corruption on the other: 'It would be a rare citizen who has not felt the force of both narratives directly. The difficult question is how to bring the two together'. Democratic practice has in effect meant advancement of group interests through competitive negotiations rather than through the diffusion of democratic norms. This has led to 'a profound disenchantment with the state'.The Indian state, in its day to day transactions, is often 'neither feared nor loved: incapable of having the rule of law secured either through an effective set of institutions, or the eliciting of allegiance to its dictates by inspiring a sense of obligation'. One reason for this disenchantment with the state, he concludes, is the perceived failure of the instruments of accountability since democracy has become non-deliberative. The deliberative capacities and oversight functions of the Parliament are in decline and elections are rarely fought on policy issues. Political parties are in disarray. Mehta's solution lies in correctives to statism through a new politics of redistribution arising out of the policy of economic liberalisation: 'What Indian democracy needs is a new sense of the relationship between the public and the private'. He accepts that this will require an extraordinary effort. No blue print, however, is put forth except the suggestion that the proceeds of disinvestments should be earmarked for poverty alleviation and human resource development.[17]

To Rajni Kothari, democracy 'as a system has not been realised in practice' and remains an aspiration. The turbulence in India compels attention to the 'deeper psycho-spiritual dimensions of Indian reality', to societal perspectives rather than political ones. The Indian scene is characterised by a tradition of tolerance of pluralism, dissent and opposition. An unwelcome consequence of it is tolerance of 'ambiguity, deprivation and humiliation'. The consensual polity that emerged in the early decades of the Republic was supported by 'charismatic power and

pliable tradition'. The strength of the consensus was unavoidably contingent on the organisational skills of the elites and on the levels of discovery. When both faltered, new sets of actors emerged to redefine the contents of politics in terms of new agenda of aspirations. These new movements are 'no longer limited to economic or even political demands, but seek to cover women's issues and questions of public health as well as ecological and cultural issues. They include a sustained attack on sources of internal decay and degeneration'. They demand new instruments of political action, non-party and party-like. This necessitates a review of ideological positions on the nature and content of democracy.[18]

One aspect of the institutions of democracy pertains to Rule of Law. A few years back a senior law officer of the Government posed a candid question: have the three organs of the state discharged their constitutional obligations and functioned within the limits set forth by the constitution? His own answer was that the Rule of Law is 'under serious threat' arising out of 'cancerous developments eating into the fabric of each institution' and with 'each is destroying itself from within'.[19] Others too have spoken of the under-reach of some institutions and over-reach of others, both resulting in disturbing the balance visualised in the Constitution.[20]

There is little or no evidence to suggest that the requisite correctives are underway; nor has any concerted effort been made by public intellectuals to turn the grievance into a movement.

'Sixty years after Independence', writes the historian Ramachandra Guha, 'India remains a democracy. But the events of the last two decades call for a new qualifying adjective. India is no longer a constitutional democracy but a populist one'.[21] A Report published by the CSDS last year on the 'State of Democracy in South Asia' calls for a new political imagination to build democracy that would 'meaningfully accommodate minority and marginal groupings'. It calls for a reworking of political institutions to free democracy from the stranglehold of dominant caste and class elites.[22]

Economic Amelioration

These views on institutions, reflective on one plane of a widespread frustration over their demonstrated shortcomings, have not prevented civil society movements led or supported by intellectuals advocating correctives in some areas of social life, and putting some of them in place through changes in the institutional framework. I refer in particular to the processes leading to the enactment of the Right to Information Act and the National Rural Guarantee Act, both in 2005. The first has led to the empowerment of the citizen vis-ë-vis the state and is unquestionably the first major step towards transparency. We have, as Aruna Roy put it, 'an obligation to those who are denied access to shrinking public spaces' adding that 'campaigns have repeatedly demonstrated the power of collective participation to change the direction of governance'. The origins of NREGA go back to the Right to Food campaign initiated in 2001 with the writ petition in the Supreme Court and developed into a movement, thanks to what Jean Dreze has called 'skilful activism'. Despite uneven implementation by state governments, and some criticism by the World Bank lately, NREGA's uniqueness as an instrument of ameliorating the condition of the rural poor by helping them avoid hunger and distress migration by providing opportunity to earn a living wage in a dignified manner cannot be questioned. The process is assisted by the monitoring mechanism established by the Supreme Court; the Eighth Report by Commissioners N.C. Saxena and Harsh Mander in August 2008 is indicative of the scope of the initiative and the extent of intellectual-activist involvement in it.

Public opposition to specific instances of acquisition of agricultural land for SEZs, and the related discussions on approaches to industrialisation, continues to propel the debate about alternate models of development strategy. This has received an impetus in the wake of the global financial crisis. The need for financial stimulus and the re-emergence of the public sector as the engine of the economy has reinvigorated many intellectuals to question the premises of 'neo-liberalism' and the policies arising out of it. Prabhat Patnaik is a case in point.[23]

On a wider canvass, Amartya Sen has stressed the need for 'ideas about changing the organization of society in the long run'. Do we, he enquires, 'really need some kind of "new capitalism" rather than an economic system that is not monolithic, draws on a variety of institutions chosen pragmatically, and is based on social values that we can defend ethically? Should we search for a new capitalism or for a "new world" that would take a different form?'[24]

Corruption

In a paper written in 2004, Peter deSouza called corruption 'Democracy's inconvenient fact'. The Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan considered corruption 'endemic in all spheres'. Former Central Vigilance Commissioner Vittal characterised it as 'financial terrorism', as anti-national, anti-poor and anti-development, and as 'the root cause of very poor governance in India.' More disturbing is the perception that 'as crass individualism makes its way, the social

attitude towards corruption is more forgiving.'[25] Corrective movements like Parivartan have based their effort on effective use of the RTI and the mechanism of social audit and Jansunwai have received support of intellectuals and civil society groups; they have produced results in specific cases. This is acknowledged in the Report of the Administrative Reform Commission on 'Ethics in Governance.' ARC's specific recommendations would need for implementation political will and focused public support in much greater measure than is forthcoming at present.[26]

Rights

The doctrine of rights has evolved in recent years. A conscious effort, as yet uneven, has been made to give content to concepts of equality and justice. The role of the judiciary, and of the Public Interest Litigation, has contributed substantially to it. The ambit of rights has been amplified by the 1997 judgement of the Supreme Court in *Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan* ruling that 'provisions in the international covenants pertaining to human rights can be read into the domestic law in the absence of any inconsistency between the two, as a canon of construction'.[27]

The position taken by a wide cross section of intellectuals on communal, economic or regional issues like the Babri Masjid demolition, the 2002 Gujarat riots, or the more recent happenings in West Bengal on land acquisition, in Orissa and Karnataka on security of minorities and on regional chauvinism and communalism in Maharashtra, are indicative of an awareness that is to be welcomed.

In regard to actualisation of group rights, intellectual, public and governmental initiatives have been taken to ascertain the factual situation on deprivation and discrimination 'in production, distribution and social sectors.' The problem has been summed up by Amitabh Kundu: 'Unequal economic opportunities lead to unequal outcomes which in turn lead to unequal access to political power. This creates a vicious circle since unequal power structure determines the nature and functioning of the institutions and their policies. All these result in persistence of initial conditions'.[28] Exploratory efforts have been initiated by the Government to put in place a Diversity Index and create an Equal Opportunity Commission. Intellectuals have contributed to both in good measure. Both would need a wider degree of public support to allow these to pass the test of legislative approval.

Environment

Movements to protect and safeguard the environment have an older vintage and fall into two broad categories: micro movements based on result oriented efforts on specific issues and with wide public participation, and macro movements to influence policy. The most famous in the first category is the Chipko movement of the early 1970s. Other movements have related to opposition to the construction of major dams and hydel projects and to instances of environmental disasters; examples of these are the Silent Valley, Tehri Dam and Narmada River Valley projects and the Bhopal gas tragedy. Despite the involvement of eminent activists, large scale public support on a sustained basis was often lacking and only the movement to oppose the Silent Valley project was fully successful. On the other hand, grass roots level efforts in Maharashtra, like the Pani Panchayat and Ralegan Sidhi, associated with Anna Hazare, have been more successful.

At the level of activist intellectuals, and despite the good work done by environmentalists like Sunita Narain and Vandana Shiva, public awareness of environment issues is still in its infancy and there is merit in Vandana Shiva's observation that 'the environmental movement can only survive if it becomes a justice movement.'

The instances cited in this very brief survey present a varied picture ranging from frustration to success and to a mix of both. The latter may induce the optimist to advocate, as a hard-nosed realist put it in another context, patient accumulation of partial successes. The intellectual, admittedly, must speak truth to power; the manner of speech, however, cannot be that of the angry poet expressed so eloquently by the Majaz:

Barh ke is Inder sabha ka saaz o saaman phoonk doon
Is ka gulshan phoonk doon, uska shabistaan phoonk doon
Takht-e-sultan kya, main saara qasr-esultan phoonk doon.

IV

It is now time to revert to the role and responsibility question in regard to intellectuals. Most would accept the need to speak truth to power and do so by advocating the correct alternative. In doing so awareness and analysis of the major and minor premises of proposed approaches becomes unavoidable. T.K. Oommen has taken the argument a stage further and, in the context of our constitutional values, developed the 'perspective from below' that helps 'institutionalisation of equality and

justice' in contrast to the view from above that assists 'perpetuation of hegemony.' The response of the state to social movements, he adds, 'does not fall into unilinear patterns; (it) is dictated by the nature of the mobilisation attempted by a movement. Conversely, the character of the party in power is critical variable in determining state response.' This could range from facilitation to toleration and discreditation, even repression.[29]

Where then do we conclude? The answer is neither easy nor simple. A position nevertheless needs to be taken. The journey, of necessity, is a lonely one. I cannot help recalling a passage from that most indomitable of intellectuals, Edward Said:

> Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so remain within the responsible mainstream; some day you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship. For an intellectual these habits of mind are corrupting par excellence. If anything can denature, neutralize, and finally kill a passionate intellectual life it is the internalisation of such habits[30]

Gandhiji would have put the point across in his own way. 'I know the path', he said. 'It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip.'

I thank you for your patience. I consider your work of immense relevance to the intellectual health of the nation.

Notes

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17. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy* (New Delhi, 2003), passim.
18. Rajni Kothari, Op.cit. passim.
19. Goolam E. Vahanvati, 'Rule of Law: The Siege Within' in Mool Chand Sharma and Raju Ramachandran (Ed.). *Constitutionalism, Human Rights and the Rule of Law: Essays in Honour of Soli Sorabjee* (New Delhi, 2005), p. 168.
20. Pratap Bhanu Mehta is trenchant on this score: 'The Court's concern for its own authority has led it to read the political tea leaves with care. The judicialization of politics and the politicization of the judiciary turn out to be two sides of the same coin. . . . The Supreme Court, strikingly, has given up any formal pretense to the doctrine of the separation of powers' – 'The Rise of Judicial Sovereignty' in Sumit Ganguly, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *The State of India's Democracy* (Baltimore, 2007), pp. 113, 115.
21. Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (Picador India, 2007), p. 691.
22. *State of Democracy in South East Asia: A Report by the SDSA Team* (New Delhi 2008), pp. 140-141, 149-158.
23. Amit Bhaduri, Medha Patkar, 'Industrialisation for the People, by the People, of the People,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV no. 1, January 3-9, 2009, pp.10-13. Also Prabhat Patnaik in *Frontline*, vol. 26 no. 7, March 28-April 10, 2009, pp. 4-6 in the cover story 'Time for Change,' pp. 4-22.
24. Amartya Sen, 'Capitalism Beyond the Crisis,' *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 56 no. 5, March 26, 2009.
25. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV no. 5, January 31-February 6, 2009, p. 5.
26. *Administrative Reforms Commission*, Fourth Report, January 16, 2007, pp. 126-127, 172-194.
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What would Azad have said to the Angel now?

PETER RONALD deSOUZA

Stepping into the world of Abul Kalam Azad (or India's Maulana, as the Centenary volume brought out by ICCR so affectionately calls him) is like walking into a magical bazaar, for everywhere one looks one can see possibilities. No sooner does one follow a certain lead when one finds oneself distracted by another, and yet another, till one is hopelessly lost and looking for a path out, like Adela Quested in the caves in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. What I shall try to do therefore is offer some broad reflections on issues that have troubled, and continue to trouble, me. Time and again I return to questions such as how should a person, regarded great in his time, be placed in history especially in the light of subsequent events? Does a position which was on the wrong side of history at a certain time become one on the right side at a later date? Does the internal dynamic of contemporary politics determine what and when we shall learn from history? Has the age of political leaders, who transcended their social location to speak for the whole polity, passed into history as competitive democracy has become the only game in town? These are some questions that have engaged me and, therefore, with all the caveats that I can draw upon, I shall try to address some of them in this article by exploring some episodes in the Maulana's life.

In disturbed times nations and societies look for heroes in their past. We look for men and women who stood, often at considerable odds, for important principles and values so that the future world would be much better than the present, wracked as it is by conflict, violence, hatred and oppression. In such disturbed times we search for a person whose life represents the values that we would want our future to embody. According to Karl Jaspers, after World War II, Germany found in Max Weber the anguished soul that they so needed to heal the wounds of the holocaust. Today we in India keep returning to Gandhi. This year we are celebrating a 100 years of *Hind Swaraj*. That is why many of us in India are rediscovering the Bhakti saints and the Sufi pirs. We are willing to be selective in what we use from them so that we can enlist these lives in our own cause and have them speak on our behalf.

When I first began my recent engagement with Maulana Azad I too searched for the secular nationalist, the Islamic scholar who found no contradiction between nationalism and Islam, the leader who offered a vision of India in which plurality, and the co-existence of communities, would be its constitutive principles. The 'nationalist Muslim' came to be an inelegant phrase to describe India's Maulana.[1] As part of this search, at a recent seminar on 'Non-Violence' at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, I concluded my presentation by finding in Azad this gem of a quote from *Al-Hilal*, the magazine he founded, where he states, "If an angel was to descend from the high heavens and proclaim from the heights of the Qutab Minar, 'Discard Hindu-Muslim unity and within 24 hours *Swaraj* is yours,' I will refuse *Swaraj*, but will not budge an inch from my stand. The refusal of *Swaraj* will affect only India while the end of our unity will be the loss of the entire human world"[2]. For the Maulana to take an unambiguous stand when confronted with a choice between national independence and communal unity, and to choose the latter at a time when the movement for freedom had become an obsession, was not just bold but also indicative of a period in our recent history when leaders saw themselves as crafting a new imagination about the idea of India, as leading a people into a future whose contours had still to be delineated. For the Maulana the unity of all the communities of India was paramount. Forging and sustaining such unity was valuable not just for India but for the whole world. The world could learn from India. This is the Maulana Azad that the nationalist project wants us to remember.

In addition to recognizing this persona of Azad I would also want to find in his life some answers that speak to

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our difficult times. What would have Azad felt as he surveyed the India of 2008 when community politics has become the core of our democracy, when communal violence has become the significant, if not the dominant, element of community relationships, when the state is casual in the discharge of its responsibility to protect life and property, when national political leaders prefer to remain silent as 'the other' is demonised, and victimized, and the stereotypes become the basis for public truths, when 'teach them a lesson' is both an increasingly common slogan and also a practice wherever we go, be it Mumbai, or Kandhamal, or Guwahati, or Mangalore, or Jammu, or Ahmedabad, and when the community ghetto becomes the new social space of our urban geography? What would have Azad said to the angel now?

Investigating this takes me to the steps of the Viceregal lodge, now the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, to a photograph taken in 1946 that I feel I must describe. The Maulana is descending the steps, fez on his head, shawl across his shoulders, a bag in his right hand with his left folded across his chest. His face is somewhat indecisive and is turned slightly to his right. His eyes, hidden by dark glasses, cannot be seen and seem to conceal perhaps the agony in his soul. He is walking out of the Lodge after the failure of the two Simla conferences. Partition it appears has become inevitable. He looks sad and beaten. Is he thinking of Jinnah's insult when the latter refused to shake his hand at the start of the meeting?[3] Is he feeling burdened by the failure of the talks, by the fear of what it would mean for his Muslim community, by the anxiety of whether the idea of India that he had been carefully building is actually fundamentally flawed? There is a sense of defeat in the photograph. The Maulana seems like a man staring at the broken pieces of a dream. Not so Badshah Khan. He is also in the photograph and can be seen a step behind. He seems bemused but not burdened.

In the years since that conference much too much has happened and neither Jinnah's Pakistan nor Azad's India have lived up to the promise at their birth. Jinnah's Pakistan remains haunted by its two-nation theory for, hardly 24 years after its formation, a new nation Bangladesh was born from within it. It now faces a ferocious insurgency from the Pashtuns. Bangladesh too is still being destabilised by an identity struggle between the eclecticism of the Bengali identity, the orthodoxy of the Islamic identity, and the state centricity of the Bangladeshi identity.[4] India too is being wracked by the politics of identity.

In what follows I shall travel with Azad through some of the issues that trouble contemporary India, issues such as the communal problem particularly with reference to Muslim insecurity in India. I shall look at political outcomes, especially with respect to identity politics, of the expansion of democracy in India; at the complex issue of making political choices in fluid times or in other words the dialectical tension between the principled position and the pragmatic decision; and finally, deriving from all three, at the matter of leadership in politics. In many ways his personal biography mirrors the biography of the nation, and of the times. I want to journey with it but only as minimal exegesis. I may read too much into Azad but that I believe is permissible today particularly since our concerns were his concerns and juxtaposing the two may give us some illumination in these dark times.

Azad, as we all well know, was a fierce opponent of the two nation theory advocated by Jinnah and his Muslim League. There are at least three different arguments he offers for this opposition. The first is the cultural argument where he, in very moving prose, writes about the long and slow emergence of the composite culture that has been watered by different groups through India's history and that therefore belongs to all.

> It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil, and that many a caravan should find rest here. Even before the dawn of history, these caravans trekked into India and wave after wave of newcomers followed. This vast and fertile land gave welcome to all and took them to her bosom. One of the last of these caravans, following the footsteps of its predecessors, was that of the followers of Islam. This came here and settled here for good. This led to a meeting of the culture-currents of two different races. Like Ganga and Jumna, they flowed for a while through separate courses, but nature's immutable law brought them together and joined them in *Sangam*. This fusion was a notable event in history. Since then, destiny, in her own hidden way began to fashion a new India in place of the old. We brought our treasures with us, and India too was full of the riches of her own precious heritage. We gave our wealth to her and she unlocked the doors of her own treasures to us. ... Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour. There is indeed no aspect of our life which has escaped this stamp.... This joint wealth is the heritage of our common nationality and we do not want to leave it and go back to the times when this joint life had not begun.[5]

The passion behind these words is stirring and the fact that they were delivered from the podium as Congress President in 1940 underscores Azad's conviction that he must convince his larger audience, of both Hindus and Muslims, that the two nation theory is erroneous when seen from a cultural perspective.

The religious argument too is delivered with the stamp of authority. Coming from a man who was a forceful exponent of the Khilafat movement in India, who once considered offering himself for the doctrinal office (which was never created) of *Iman-l-Hind*,[6] who toured the world in a pan Islamic fervour and in his *Al-Hilal* days campaigned for it in his writings, and who wrote what is regarded as a major treatise on the Holy Quran in his *Tarjuman al-Quran*, his views must be seriously considered. In what can be extracted as the religious argument from his various writings, Azad put forward the principles for 'abolishing the distinctions of religion and community in order to consolidate the entire people into one nation.'[7] As Ali Ashraf observes in his discussion of Azad's achievement:

> Thus the *Tarjuman al-Quran* was certainly the great moment of triumph for Azad. It will be hard to find anything comparable in the vast literature of Quranic exegesis through the ages - comparable in its universal humanism, in the spiritual heights attained in its concept of God as The Merciful nourisher of all that exists, and finally, in projecting Islam - as indeed all religions – as essentially one great message of peace and human brotherhood, cutting across religious groupings and social identities based on religion.[8]

To understand the theological underpinnings of this argument, of the compatibility between being a good Muslim and a good Indian, one would need a certain training that I do not have. But I can empathize with him when he fervently states that 'the spirit of Islam ... guides and helps me forward. I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensible to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete... I can never surrender this claim.'[9] Being a leading scholar of both the theology and history of Islam these statements of Azad should be seen as flowing from a deep belief that one can live both identities, the religious and nationalist, without contradiction, that, in fact, they are dependent on each other, that Islam's home is as much in India as it is elsewhere and that India's identity is as much Islamic as it is Hindu. He acknowledges that the history of the spread of Islam has shown that the idea of a pan-Islamic identity, that transcends and supplants the nation, is unworkable and that in time the nation will assert itself necessarily fragmenting the one pan-Islamic community into several national communities. History will give to the Muslims several homes and India is one of them.

> It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically, and culturally different. It is true that Islam sought to establish a society which transcends racial, linguistic, economic and political frontiers. History has however proved that after the first decades or at most after the first century, Islam was not able to unite all Muslim countries on the basis of Islam alone.[10]

These are stirring words. One can see in their tone and tenor a deep belief in the idea of India being a home for Muslims and that the idea of two nations who cannot live together is based on both an error in theological argument and a wrong reading of Islamic history. Tragically, in the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent Bengalis, history proved him right when Bangladesh was born. Jinnah's obduracy, as is the case of all such obduracy in history, proved to be very costly in innocent lives.

The two arguments, the cultural and the religious, are well known and it is only in my desire to give a certain fullness that I have repeated them here. It is the third argument, however, that bears some telling because I believe it has received little attention. This is what I will call the demographic argument of a plural polity. There are three elements in this argument (i) the issue of numbers i.e., large numbers are a good guarantee of safety and a reduction of these numbers results in an increase in insecurity, (ii) institutional devices especially designed to protect minorities are important in a democratic polity, and (iii) the nature of these protections must be decided by the minorities themselves and not by the majority, i.e, it is not based on the sufferance of the majority but on the rights of the minority. These arguments show that Azad is not just acutely aware of the importance of countervailing processes in a polity, of the threat of insecurity that minorities face, of the centrality of institutions in the new plural political community,[11] but also of the need to go beyond policy and reassure the people of the soundness of the future on offer. In his message to Indian Muslims he wrote:

> The Muslims of India should not think for a moment that the Muslims in the Congress are blind to the genuine doubts and grievances of the Muslims. Indeed, perhaps they realize the situation better than anyone else. The point, however, is what should be the correct approach to remove these doubts and grievances? The difference between the Nationalist Muslims and the Muslim League is not one of ultimate aim which after all is the well-being and honourable existence of Indian Muslims in a free India, but of methods to be used to achieve the desired end. And if we so desire we can easily remove even this difference over our respective methods. What is needed is a broad vision, large heartedness and sincerity of purpose.[12]

His argument against the Muslim League is based on the firm belief (not strategic or idiosyncratic or competitive as is sometimes the case) that only in a united India of plural communities would minorities be safe and the 'communal suspicion' (his words) that so pervades the

air of his time becomes a thing of the past. The story of Independent India has, unfortunately, not borne this out as 'communal suspicion' seems to have grown and communal conflict seems to have become routine and widespread. Perhaps some of the explanations of why we continue to have this more intensified communal condition can be found in Azad's reasoning. Let me present, what I have labelled the demographic argument, by quoting from Azad's Presidential address:

> We have considered the problem of the minorities of India. But are the Muslims such a minority as to have the least doubt or fear about their future? A small minority may legitimately have fears and apprehensions, but can Muslims allow themselves to be disturbed by them?
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> . . . .The Muslims of India number between eighty and ninety millions. The same type of social or racial divisions which affect other communities, do not divide them. The powerful bonds of Islamic brotherhood and equality have protected them to a large extent from the weakness that flows from social divisions. It is true that they number only one-fourth of the total population; but behind the question is not one of population ratio, but of the large numbers and the strength behind them. Can such a vast mass of humanity have any legitimate reasons for apprehension that in a free and democratic India, it might be unable to protect its rights and interests?[13]

'Small minority', 'large numbers', 'vast mass of humanity', a language which shows that Azad has both a sense of realism, that small minorities can legitimately feel insecure and run the risk of experiencing majority tyranny, and a sense of confidence that this is not an anxiety that the Muslims of India need have since they are large enough to protect themselves and also since they do not have the weaknesses of social and racial divisions that other communities have. They have, in addition, the 'powerful bonds of Islamic brotherhood and equality'. With such assets they have no reason to fear being a minority (the Muslim League argument) because the demographic map of India, where they are in a majority in five provinces and a minority in seven, is a sufficient guarantee of security. This demographic argument was a powerful line of reasoning against the two nation theory but unfortunately Jinnah was able to not just persuade the Colonial regime to partition the country but also to instil a sense of insecurity in the Muslim masses. The partition of the country seems to have rendered this argument obsolete. Muslims are now insecure minorities everywhere and what Azad feared has come to pass. From 25 percent they have now become 12 percent of the population and are in a majority in only 1 state of the 28 states of the Indian union. When the demographics are unable to provide adequate protection (Gujarat being a grim confirmation) then the second and third line of defence needs to be given more attention. Azad stated that:

(i) 'Whatever constitution is adopted in India, there must be the fullest guarantee in it for the rights and interests of minorities.
(ii) The minorities should judge for themselves what safeguards are necessary for the protection of their rights and interests. The majority should not decide this. Therefore the decision in this respect must depend upon the consent of the minorities and not on a majority vote.'[14]

India's constitutional edifice has some protections for minorities. But are these enough? Has independent India self-consciously taken measures to assuage the anxieties of the minorities that make up its *Sangam*. I fear not. In the last two decades with the rise of a communal politics of aggressive Hindutva the tectonic plates of the Indian polity seem to have shifted to the right, seem to have unwittingly accepted, if not endorsed, the project of cultural nationalism. The recent violence against the Christian minority in Kandhamal in Orissa, the horrific communal carnage against the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, the insanity against the Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, makes one wonder why the lessons of history, as can be gleaned from the increasingly available partition testimonies, have taught us so little.[15] One wonders when will Azad's arguments, which were then on the wrong side of history, become arguments on the right side of history? Listen to his words.

> You remember that I called you and you cut off my tongue, that I took up my pen, and you lopped off my hand , that I wanted to walk and move, and you trimmed my feet, that I wanted to turn over, and you broke my back. Even at the height of the past seven years' misguided politics which has ended, leaving a bitter taste in the mouth, I alerted you at every sign of danger, and you not only ignored my call, but revived the old traditions of denial and neglect with which people used to face the call of truth.[16]

We did not listen to Azad then but are we listening to him now? Are we facing 'the call of truth' today? The occasion of this lecture will allow me to illustrate with broad brush strokes how I see the path of evolution that Azad's 'free and democratic India' has taken. Let me therefore now move the discussion from the exegesis of Azad's thought to an audit of Indian democracy.

I believe it is fair to say that, in the last sixty years, there has been an expansion and deepening of the democratic process in India. The party system has become more plural as it has changed from being a one-dominant

party system to becoming a coalition characterised multi-party system as a result of which more groups have acquired voice and begun to make claims on politics. This evolution of the party system has been driven by an electoral politics which has become more competitive. Different groups and individuals – also criminals and local fixers - have entered the fray since they see the electoral route as the main way to access the resources of the state. The institutional landscape has grown with an expansion of the developmental state and also an increase in the sites of representation particularly with the introduction of the third tier of government, the panchayats and nagarpalikas. Courts have become more interventionist with judicial activism often being resorted to to deliver justice. These details are well known and can be found in the extensive literature in political science.

What I just wish to examine here is what I will call Azad's article of faith which holds that in a free and democratic India the Muslim minority has no reason to be 'apprehensive'. This does not seem to have been borne out by sixty years of democracy. If anything the expansion of competitive politics only seems to have made the 'communal suspicion' worse, to have heightened the insecurity of the minorities, both Muslim and Christian. If we look across the country the number of cases of communal clashes and worse, communal riots, seems to have increased. The ability of the state to punish the guilty, a necessary condition of any democracy, is distressingly feeble. Several vetoes seem to be present in the process of punishing the guilty. Deconstructing the elements of these vetoes gives one cause for anxiety since they show not just interference by political leaders, (the triumph of pragmatic over principled politics), but also the unwillingness of the state to be impartial, as a result of a fading belief in the imperative of a constitutional order, (the triumph of prejudice over duty), and, most alarmingly, the concealed, perhaps subterranean, feeling that 'they, the victims, brought this upon themselves' (the action-reaction syndrome that seems to have been accepted as the natural order.) Perpetrators are hence not deterred from adopting a politics that gives them communal dividends. They in fact emerge as local leaders, consolidating vote banks through an identity politics that demonises the Muslim or Christian other, that pushes the minority into the ghetto – whether it be geographical, social, or economic. These local leaders, spurred on by hate filled rhetoric, acquire the social power to define the different dimensions of citizenship, the commonsense of what is permissible and what proscribed in the public sphere. The minority, increasingly traumatised by the experience of the many clashes, withdraws into a private sphere as the *Sangam* diminishes and the rivers begin to flow separately again.

To see the existence of these leaders as the result of the politics of vote banks is to see only half the story. There is also a cultural process that is underway. The anthropology of the violence of communal riots exposes the extent to which two, and more, cultural nations are emerging from the embers of hate. Azad's eloquent observation that '... our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour,' one fears is beginning to ring less true. And, disturbingly, the reasons for this lie in the processes of 'free and democratic India.' There are many factors, both at the micro and macro levels, that can be listed, from the ideology of aggressive Hindutva which wants to place all minorities on the sufferance of the majority, to the weakness of the state institutions in implementing their constitutional mandate a weakness made more debilitating by a changing mindset (how can the large para-military establishment stand mute witness to the atrocities committed – the most recent of a nun being raped), to the demographic decline of the Muslims from 25 to 12 percent of the population and hence a less effective countervailing force, to most upsettingly the failure of political leadership. God's workshop seems to have thrown away Azad's cast. They don't seem to make them like that anymore.

I know I run the risk of being criticised for what could be seen as an ahistorical romanticism, of supporting a simple minded heroes theory of history, but my response to that has to be through searching for counterfactuals. Show me a chief minister, or cabinet minister, or prime minister who has gone into the thick of the riots, to stop them. Show me a chief minister, or cabinet minister, or prime minister who has responded to such communal carnage with a firmness of purpose by which they recover the moral high ground that is so crucial for defining the shape of a political culture. There are none. What we see instead is a moral flabbiness, not just indecisiveness but an increasing disposition among the political leadership to see all political positions as the result of a strategic calculus and not sometimes ones which call for the taking of a principled position. Everything is strategy: how can I gain from this, how can I reduce my losses, how can I minimize the other's benefits, how can I prevent the other from getting an advantage? This has become the defining character of politics in India. All politics seems to have become a game of strategy.

While one can accept that much of politics is about winning positional advantage one must also accept that there are moments when one must go against the tide.

The evolution of the political culture requires such inputs from men and women, especially those in important positions of power, who will state firmly and publicly, that something is wrong and must not be done and who will use all the power at their disposal, especially the moral force, to make that statement. Lest I be seen as some naive romantic who, in spite of spending 30 years in the study of politics, doesn't understand politics, let me make my case by an illustration from the life of Azad.[17]

At the first Simla conference in June 1945 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not 'included among those who were originally invited, because it was thought that Gandhiji would agree to represent the Congress, and apparently also because of the risk (by including Azad) of offending Jinnah. But Gandhiji's reaction on receipt of the invitation was to point out that he represented no institution and that the function of representing the Congress belonged to the Congress President, or whomsoever the latter nominated. Accordingly an invitation was sent to Azad, who informed the Viceroy that the invitation would be placed before the Working Committee on 21 June and that a reply would be sent thereafter.'[18]

Did Gandhi worry about the 'risk of offending Jinnah', so vital a consideration in the crucial talks to avert partition? Was this a blunder, and would the outcome have been different if Azad had instead been compromised? Would the institution of the Congress have suffered if the office of the President had been disregarded and Gandhiji had instead accepted to represent the Congress? Would internal organization procedures have been diminished if Azad had not insisted on placing the invitation letter before the Congress Working Committee and accepted the invitation immediately on receipt?

In such a small episode lie so many interesting issues of principle and procedure, of political positioning, of strategic calculus and of the outcomes that follow from such strategic politics. I fear that many of the outcomes that we have to live with today are the result of a mindset and a political practice that has come to dominate out political life - especially in this era of coalition politics and in this era when the heroes of public life are in non-party political processes and not in party politics – where the 'risk of offending Jinnah' becomes predominant. Our institutions have become feeble because the representative process has been bypassed, with the politics of the street replacing the politics of the elected assembly, where a rowdy can hold the polity to ransom and where those holding constitutional office respond with a strategic calculus of gains and losses. At the 'risk of offending Jinnah' they do very little and allow the monster of 'communal suspicion' to grow. Our political leaders seem to have lost touch with their inner voice. As a Visiting Professor Suniti Kumar Pathak said, during a discussion on his lecture on Buddhism on 7th November 2008 at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 'with due apologies for my strong statement, the state of our politics in India today is because our politicians are not cleansed from within'.

Which brings me to the final concern of this lecture, the dialectical tension between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics. I have, in what has been stated so far, already offered some reflections on this issue. I want to add to them since I believe we are at a stage when exploring this relationship is important for restoring our trust in democracy in India. There are three aspects to this relationship. The first is the need to maintain a balance between the principled and the pragmatic in our political life. Conceding too much to one disturbs this balance and opens the door to political pathologies. If we navigate our political lives only by the beacon of unanchored principle then we run the risk of being out of step with the times, of being either unrealistic or naive. If we are guided by pragmatics alone - the winnability factor, or power at all costs, or the suspension of rules for temporary gain - then the charge of opportunism is a charge that sticks. While the pragmatic is, in a sense, the grease that runs the everyday world of politics there are moments in this world of politics when such pragmatism must be trumped by principle, by the invocation of a moral rule that disallows accommodation and adjustment. The trumping by principle of a political adjustment (remember Gandhji's last fast against the Nehru government) is important for the power play that currently defines politics to be reminded of its limits, of the boundaries beyond which it cannot go.

The second aspect is the importance of the principled position not just for the reason of trumping the pragmatic but also for its value in giving to political culture the framework that guides choices and regulates behaviour, that sets the terms by which the game shall be played. Political agents need to be socialised into this behaviour because this socialisation will ensure that they play by the rules, the operating norms of the polity. One incident in the recently concluded Presidential elections in the US brings out this respect for the rules very clearly, the speeches of Obama and McCain after the results came in. This may seem a small incident but if one analyses the tone and tenor of the speeches one sees that both candidates stressed their endorsement of the process, were gracious in their acceptance during their concession speeches, and most importantly rose above the partisanship that had characterised the electoral process.

By speaking differently from their pre-result speeches, by appreciating the achievements of the other ('the great significance of the win for the African-American community' says McCain, and 'a great patriot and leader' says Obama), the two contestants rose above party positions and strove to unite the country behind the result, after what had been a bruising campaign. In this small event, and I am sure the semiotics of the two speeches will bear out my argument that the two candidates had modified their political behaviour to accept the norms of conduct that kicked in after the results; of being gracious, of rising above partisanship, of statesmanship rather than one-upmanship, of uniting the whole country for the future. We see in this semiotics the robustness of the political culture of US democracy. Play hard ball, as they would say, but stay within bounds of decency. In India we are only partly there, fifty-fifty. If we had internalised the norms of a democratic politics then much of the excesses that mark our politics, such as the demonising of the other, would have been avoided. Why does one get the feeling that the Congress of the national movement had internalised these norms?

The third aspect of the dialectics between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics is the safety that principles bring to politics because in their absence the polity slips into a Darwanian nightmare. In a telling account of state formation in Africa *When Things Fell Apart*, Robert H.Bates paints a grim picture of how political elites take control of state institutions, of how they distribute important offices such as the Central Bank, the various heads of the security forces, the judiciary, etc., among family and cronies. He shows how clientelism and patronage have come to define the working of the state, of how the state has become predatory. This is what we fear and what we must avoid. A quick survey of state politics suggests that we are at the cusp. And that is why we have to think hard about the relationship between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics because it is only such a culture of reflexivity that would protect us from the excesses of partisanship, that would in the current context of rising 'communal suspicion', assure the minorities.

If the 'angel' were to come down from the high heavens and ask Azad to make his choice between *swaraj* and religious unity., I suspect he would make the same decision as he did more than 70 years ago and for the same reasons. *Swaraj* affects only India but religious unity would affect the whole world. And at a time when religious bigotry is rising in India, and in the world, the words of Azad appear ever so prophetic and redemptive.

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Notes

1. Mushirul Hasan (ed) 'Introduction,'*Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992). p7.
2. P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams* (Interprint, 1990), p.30.
3. V.N.Datta, *Maulana Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 224.
4. Riaz, Ali. '"God Willing": The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh', *Contemporary Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23 (1), 2003, pp 301-320; Murshid, Tazeem.M. 'State, Nation, Identity: The Quest for Legitimacy in Bangladesh', *South Asia*, vol XX, no 2, 1977, pp. 1-34.
5. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 'Presidential Address' 53rd session of the Congress, Ramgarh, March 19-20, 1940. Reprinted in P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams*, Appendix III, p149
6. Aijaz Ahmed, 'Azad's Careers: Roads Taken and Not Taken', in *Lineages of the Present: Political Essays* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1996), p. 144.
7. Ali Ashraf, 'Appraisal of Azad's Religio-Political Trajectory', in Mushirul Hasan (ed) *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad*, p.116.
8. Ibid., p.116.
9. Azad, 'Presidential Address', pp. 148-149.
10. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman), p.248.
11. Azad argued for a federal system with such a division of powers that the provinces would be quite powerful with respect to the centre.
12. *The Hindustan Times*, 4 July, 1945.
13. Azad, 'Presidential Address', pp.146-147.
14. Azad, 'Presidential Address', p145.
15. See the work of Urvashi Butalia.
16. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *Maulana's Speech at Jama Masjid after Independence in 1948*, in P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams*, Appendix VII, p.164.
17. I am grateful to Gangeya Mukherjee for bringing this episode to my notice.
18. V.P.Menon, *The Transfer of Power In India*, (London: Longmans Green and Company Ltd, 1957, rpt, Delhi Orient Longman Ltd, 1968), p. 186.

Modernity, Globalization and Nativism

BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

Modernity is to be understood as the living end of a tradition, not on appendage. However subversive it may prove itself, it has to grow in the womb of the tradition. Modernization does provide an occasion to shed the deadwood of age-old tradition in the process of renewal. There is a marked difference between modern Russia and modern Japan and modern Britain. Hence, it would not be totally absurd to visualize a distinctively Indian modernity.

Modernization of India, having been concomitant with colonization and westernization, a sort of modernity was abruptly imposed on us when most intellectual leaders of the nineteenth century were quite eager to have speedy changes in the country. India had to serve as a farmyard of the industrial revolution of England; hence followed numerous expedient colonial reforms, such as the railway for speedy transport of raw material, and the English education system to transform Indians into *desi sahibs* and to establish "the imperishable empire of English arts and morals, English literature and English laws" in India. The colonizers were so busy in replacing the India-centric economy by England-centered one, that they made Indian modernity literally eccentric, especially for literature.

In human history there are no answers to such naïve questions as: What are the justifications of such a plunder and such a cruel exploitation of an impoverished people? And what is the cost of such humiliation as to be ruled by a less civilized but militarily superior people? On our part the greatest price of all this was a kind of modernization that repudiated our traditions in several domains, including literature.

Talking about "modernism" in the Western sense of the term, has been a routine exercise in all the curricula of our educational institutions, and it has been carried out indefatigably until there is a strong reaction to it in most of our academic circles now. As the price of tolerating "modernism" is increasing rapidly, our writers, critics, environmentalists, town planners and generally all our intellectuals have started asking more boring questions: How do you define modernity? How long would the modernization process continue in our country? When would it end, or would it end at all? In the West the "Postmodern" phase had begun before they understood it. Should we also launch that kind of understanding in our country? The Western thinkers have made "modernism" an evaluative term; if it is so, aren't we doomed to catch up with their yesterdays for ever?

In short many years after we had made a tryst with "modernism", we seem to have fallen into a trap of questions and doubts. The crux of the problem is that we still perceive modernity as a universal commodity, and not a culture-specific phase of history.

Fifty years ago when my generation started modernizing themselves, we were deeply disturbed to realize the low-value status of the traditional patterns of living—the age-old kinship bonds, the joint family, rigidity of caste, irrational religious beliefs, degradation of women and untouchables, economically unprofitable agricultural methods and habits of growing a hundred traditional varieties of crop, low literacy, few roads and almost negligible communication with the outside world.

Today as we know, in Maharashtra, modernism has transformed the whole scene with a vengeance. The material quality of life has improved considerably. Yet I find myself more disturbed by what has been lost in the process. Now one observes nuclear families, selfish individualism, proliferating sugar factories, bankrupt farming, English medium education, scores of newspapers mostly supported by advertisements, overcrowded towns and nightmarish cities, film culture and deleterious television and pollution of all kind everywhere.

Yes, progress entails more problems, and their solutions produce more problems, which mean a new tunnel at the end of the existing tunnel. That we know. But the modern has become synonymous with the ugly,

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and there is nothing uglier than the ultra-modern today. The atmosphere of dignity is felt only where the modern has not made any impact. Truly, we have to reconcile with the two worlds—the old and the new, the beautiful and the ugly, the 'traditional native' and the 'Western modern.'

The truth is that the borrowed elements of "modernism" have not been thoughtfully chosen by us, and some of them have not been properly nativised. Now we all know that our forests are not denuded by the *adivasis* and religious illiterates but by print journalism—one acre forest per Sunday edition, paper industry, government agencies and other secular forces associated with "modernism". We realize now that having an old parent in the house is better than hiring baby-sitters, both psychologically and economically. After digging up the history of census reports, we understand that caste was not so abominable before the British ethnologists imposed their conceptual categories on the fluid endogamous groups. By giving them numerical weight, they created the majority-minority categories, which ultimately led to the partition of the country. And individualism, a typical Western concept associated with extremism and brinkmanship, could not be encouraged beyond a limit if we wanted to preserve our historically stable institution of family.

After all, many elements of Western "modernism" like secularism and tolerance were not unknown to us. The Indian civilization has a fair record of developing cities, rationality, freedom of expression and the sciences—most of these are blown up to a high pitch in Western "modernism" to be converted into urbanism, rationalism, journalism, scientific and industrial revolution and so on. Such historical phenomena could not be accelerated in our society in the past for obvious lack of stress generated in industrial mega cities. Now we have them with their delinquents and criminals in Mumbai, Delhi and in other cities.

Such a feeling of misjudgement about "modernism" is prevalent in most other colonized countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa and even in Europe where the native cultures were forced to abandon several beautiful elements of their respective traditions for which there was no justification. Apart from superficial gains, *Swaraj* does not seem to have improved the moral and aesthetic qualities of our society. On the other hand, the foremost concern of our intellectuals is how to salvage and preserve the vestigial values and native ways of life: tolerance, pluralism, spiritual point of view, beauty and grace of individual traditions from garment styles and food habits to customs, ritual observances, folklore, art and architecture, language and literature; for all such native elements were evolved naturally through generations of experimentation. It is a welcome sign therefore that "modernism" should become a *passÈ* in our thinking as it has failed to protect the best in our native traditions.

What kind of modernity would have evolved in India without the Western colonial intervention? The question has the danger of being labelled as purely hypothetical and futile. However, considering the different ways of modernization various countries in the world have adopted, the question becomes cogent. Russia, a free country, was speedily modernized. China, a partially colonized country took a longer time whereas Japan, not colonized, took a short span of time to modernize itself. India, the most completely colonized country, may require centuries to emerge as a modern society. However, history may not allow us to wait for so long!

But our contention is whether we are able to create our own modernity that suits our ancient heritage. Mahatma Gandhi, nearly a century ago, had set aside his characteristic humility to assert in *Hind Swaraj* that Indian civilization is far superior to the Western. For a civilization which is called "a wonder' by eminent historians, has a past of several millennia and has assimilated the best from other cultures cannot precipitate us into more of such modernity by sacrificing so much of its valuable heritage. Put simply, it is with this consciousness that the awareness of nativism begins, and a possibility of a distinct Indian modernity, different from its ugly Western face, can be visualized.

Originally the concept of *Dêsivad* (Nativism) was used in literary criticism after the realization of the perils of submitting the products of one literary culture to another culture's theories. It was observed that modern Indian literature had been basking in the glory of Western "modernism", always locating the centre of creativity outside the native tradition. Ignorance of one's own tradition is a sure sign of perpetuating colonization and intellectual slavery. The continuous dominance of English language in all our intellectual life has eroded our magnificent native system—aesthetic, cultural and social. The political system has been particularly dysfunctioning ever since it was adopted on the model of British parliamentary system (Mahatma Gandhi called it "a whore"), particularly because it has overlooked and suppressed our traditional structure of autonomy and decentralization. Judicature is another sad story. Being slaves, we were not in a position to decide for ourselves which native elements needed to be modernized or which Western elements needed to be borrowed and nativised for efficient functioning of traditional systems.

Notwithstanding the problematic role colonization has played in modernization of India, it has continuously

preoccupied our minds till today. Nearly all our intellectuals in some way or other were concerned with reconstructing the state of society before India became a colonial construct. Thus the parallel process of the "discovery" of India by Indians themselves has been on in the form of several movements—social, political, extremist, religious revivalist and so on. However, as bewildered victims, most of the intellectuals were obliged to take to the rulers' definition of modernity.

Gradually it was felt that reconstructing pre-colonial India meant how to decolonize Western knowledge of India. With little hope of political freedom and dumbfounded by industrial technological adventures from the West, a small number of leaders continued the great debate by reframing the same question: How to decolonize the native understanding of the West? And finally appeared Gandhian nativism with all its purity and force of our traditional spiritualism. This kind of nativism not only exposed the ugly face of Western "modernism", but also demolished the very foundation of colonial imperialism of the West once and for all. But the question remained: How to decolonize our own understanding of India?

Unfortunately after Independence the growing number of rootless half-baked modernists and secularist zealots, encouraged by Nehruvian cosmopolitanism created a situation by which nativism was clubbed with retrograde nationalism or chauvinism or even with separatism. As a consequence, today we have found ourselves in a real fix with the Hindu revivalists laying claim to all the glory of our tradition. That nativism should become tinder for fundamentalism is its worst distortion.

Let us return to the question of reconstructing a baseline of nativistic norms to structure a characteristically Indian modernity, a modernity of Indian growth. Here the problems of interpretation and evaluation of native material deserves serious attention, involving the choice of standards. The Indian academics, a true progeny of Lord Macaulay have forever sponged on English sources to discuss anything in English, thus making Indian knowledge an extension of British and American linguistic culture. How can we use the standards laid down by aliens for reconstructing our knowledge of India, if we could not decolonize it till today? Until we prove that the western intellectual standards do not have a significance that goes beyond their own particular tradition, we have no reason to adopt them.

Again, do we need native standards to interpret and evaluate native tradition or the so-called "universal" standards used for this purpose? It demands more serious attention. There can be no agreement on this issue unless we convince ourselves that in effect the so-called "universal standards" do not exist. Cultural similarities do exist, but differences which are more fecund and important, also exist. The term "culture" is an abstraction of several specific cultures of specific human groups. Certain areas of material culture and some areas of knowledge including the sciences do favour a universal approach because scientific outlook is neither Occidental nor Oriental, neither Western nor Indian. The disagreement on the question of standards is therefore of great importance.

Here we have to take into consideration the Whorfian thesis of how language decides the speakers' worldview. Cultural differences are also attributed to psychological differences between people, which in turn are attributed to geographical and environmental causes. Population groups have been geographically and genetically isolated for millions of years. Different ethnic groups thus acquired characteristics designated by our location and lifestyle. Both environment and choice are active in strengthening a variety of traditions which make a culture distinct from another. Each population group evolves out of such compulsions and acquires its own characteristic sets of gene frequencies. Thus psychologists and geneticists explain how environmental conditions, chance survival of neutral or hormonal mutation and reproductive isolation created distinct native styles of living.

How hollow is the basis of the concept of the so-called 'universal standards', can be understood by a little scrutiny. It takes into its ken only European knowledge and conveniently ignores others'. Having ruled over most peoples of the world for generations, they have imposed upon the subject cultures the rules based on their understanding of the universe. Now accepting such irrational standards as 'universal' would mean we ourselves lack the power of investigating truth. Nuruddin Faraha, Somalian author said in a seminar at Nimrana that unless all the customs, traditions and knowledge-systems of all the peoples of the world are taken into consideration, where is the basis of deciding what is universal? Standards differ from people to people whose lifestyles differ owing to various ecological and genetic factors. It is only the difference that is the same, but difference is there. Farah quoted an example of how his Yoruba and other African tribes celebrate the death of a member by dance and fanfare and rowdy shouting because it is understood as an occasion to express joy over the dead member joining the ancestor—a happy occasion. The spectacle of the European people, dressed in black, with long faces walking like in a military

discipline is not universal type of mourning. Even in India, different types of mourning exist. If those who defend 'universality' of standards try to understand Nuruddin Farah's point of view, enlightenment would follow.

In the modern cosmetic style, to take another example, looking 'white' under white face-creams is an insult to the black brown-almond Indian skin, so bewitchingly felt in the descriptions of our gods, heroines of old literature, epics, and in Ajanta frescos. Can there be a universal standard in the pigment and sense of beauty too is a question of cultural self-confidence.

Since all cultures are self-justifying, we should be prepared for an obvious antagonism between the others' standards and our own about the evaluation of culture. Moreover it can be safely asserted that it is the concern for native tradition which prevents the surrender of intellectual aims to alien interests. In any case no intellectual of worth should be allowed to enjoy the licence to ignore the knowledge of the native tradition while addressing himself to it. Such a test may look ridiculous elsewhere, but it is a litmus test for intellectually colonized Indians of which we have plenty.

Yet another source of ambiguity in our way is that we do not have a recorded history. However, we do have living traditions in all spheres of life and a considerable body of semi-historical records. Languages and dialects, legacies and customs, religious practices and rituals, beliefs, myths, conventions, code languages and folklore abound the cultural space of our people. Such a pluralistic expression cannot possibly be confined to a single theory.

At least we should be able to expose the dangers of monoculture by reasoned supposition that our pluralism is quite compatible with modernity. Thus, if we can establish the value of diversity and heterogeneity in our concept of modernity, it would be a unique achievement. Inspired by the western theories, we have started disdaining at our tradition for not being monolithic, consistent and for not showing signs of progressing in a single direction. We will have no regrets if we believed that it is only the fanatics who believe that their tradition has no dissent, that it is unified, and therefore, contains no antithesis within. A nativist on the other hand would take pride in our multiplicity, freedom of dissenting thought, contrariety of views and open-minded borrowings from alien traditions adjusted to the existing structures from time to time.

Several Vedic tenets were negated by the Upanishads which were repudiated in the early Brahmanical cults; these in turn were renounced by Jain and Buddhist systems. The classical Brahmanism made a comeback by absorbing major Buddhist and Jain values including *ahimsa* and vegetarianism with a vengeance, so that even the purely Kshatriya documents such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, obviously in their revised forms, began to flaunt *Ahimsa*. Rama, after killing Ravana, says, *Ahimsa paramo dharma*; and another warrior hero Yudhisthira at the end of mass destruction of life, deliberates with the *Rishis* in 'Shantiparva' on *shanti*. Then in the second millennium all over the subcontinent, numerous Bhakti cults in succeeding centuries rebelliously continue to reinforce Jain, Buddhist and several other *Nastika* ways of life suppressed by Brahmanism. Although the new middle-class view of history has been ungratefully hostile to Islam under European-Christian education system, many Hindu saints had Sufi gurus and radical social reformers like Jotirao Phule jubilantly praised Mohammed of Ghazni for destroying the Somnath Temple, a symbol of Brahmanical oppression of the masses, and now the Dalits have denounced Hinduism to embrace the almost extinct Buddhism in Maharashtra. The list will be unending. Tradition flourishes.

Indeed a nativistic base of modernity would provide alternate solutions to our problems of stagnation. New centres of creativity could always be discovered in the diverse antithetical material of our tradition. The western model of monocultural and monolingual nature in which all the "other" culture and languages are ruthlessly eliminated is antagonistic to our perception of modernity.

Most of us would be familiar with the long debate on India's modernity in which nearly all the thinkers of the world, great and small, have participated—from Nietzsche and Marx to Paz and Huntington - this debate may come to an end in a few decades from now, because the process of modernization is taking unprecedented momentum, and all languages and cultures of the world are dying or becoming marginalized. If we believe that modernity is a value system explicit in theory and practice of a people, we should individually and institutionally initiate a process of critical reconstruction of our existing material culture and practice it with confidence. Each new creative action requires reconstruction of a pre-acculturation base from the traditional elements to combat a new situation. Fortunately they are still there, waiting for resurrection. The real strength of Indian modernity will be tried on our indomitable nativistic values—pluralism, the numerous cultural elements still preserved in the multitudinous strands of our traditions—tribal, classical, borrowed and assimilated, on the strength of our rootedness in geography and history, and our diversity and heterogeneity. There is an abysmal want of these values in the postmodern world today, and nativist values are capable of filling that vacuum.

This question of reconstruction of the traditional material is the most challenging creative undertaking at present. It requires confidence in the primacy of the nativist values over all other luring considerations—transnational, cosmopolitan, universalist and so on. This is obviously swimming against the current of our "modernism".

Now it looks quite paradoxical that new knowledge should come from our study of the past. The modernist symbols like libraries and museums in monumental forms are in fact related to looking backward. The community's whole cultural capital is invested in some kind of habitus within a specific field. There is nothing of derogation in the artist's looking backward for sources in order to discover the collective wisdom stored in various forms of culture which evoke his mind. Perhaps the great lesson that future is implicit in looking backwards can be learnt from the sciences: by going back to Big Bang and beyond on the one hand and entering into the research of molecules and genes on the other, scientific research could build a new world.

A few Indian artists of vision tried to establish continuity with the unknown artists of the past: Rukminidevi Arundel's reconstruction of Bh (Bhava) Ra (Rasa) and Ta (Tala) in the magnificent Bharata Natyam, Kerucharan Mahopatra's Odisi dance, Balmukund Guru's revival of the folk farms *dharadhari* into a powerful new theatre—are some of the great examples of the Indian genius' going back to nativist consciousness. Similar experiments in other arts including painting are extremely encouraging. They have not only revived the past, deriving sustenance from it, but also relived it in practice. It will be the test of the new generation how they salvage and strengthen our numerous native styles, which modernization has assigned to the past and which globalization is now threatening extinction.

This is not taking place in language-based arts, because our languages have been marginalized ever since the noble vernacularists were outdone by the wily Anglicists in the 1850s and as G.R. Potter has commented on Macaulay's infamous Minute:

> The higher education of the Indian people ceased to be traditional and Oriental, and was made merely English, not even European. . . . It proved to be an irrevocable decision of tremendous import. The path to success lay through the mechanical repetition of text books written in English.

The suffocation under English is still on.

Now an example or rather a pathetic case of globalization of literature and how it has affected the very existence of gifted writer, Salman Rushdie. He is a Muslim expatriate of Indian origin and lives in hiding because of a prize of more than 30 lakh dollars on his head; still his presence is too frequently felt in the newspapers, sometimes for his ignorant statements on Indian literatures being too poor except what is written in English, or on Islamic values and so on. Writing entails choosing a language for literary production and implies most importantly affiliating oneself with a particular socio-cultural community in the world. This is a social act with specific political and geo-cultural determinants. Had he preferred to live in India as a Muslim Indian citizen, it would have been a different story altogether. He would have certainly become an eminent Urdu writer, anyway. But by his own choice he opted to become an English writer and eventually, like other expatriates, acquired British citizenship. His first major novel *Midnight's Children*, a masterpiece of great merit, with its Indian backdrop won the applause from the English-speaking, i.e. world-wide, i.e. 'international' readership—a pleasant suggestion to all colonized Indians who want to write in English, which is not their mother tongue. After all, what is the use of writing in Urdu with miserable royalties and faint applause? That apart, to sit in the rank of the great Indian English novelists like Kipling and G.V. Desani is indeed an outstanding achievement. However, here was the turn of the global screw.

A writer primarily writing for an English readership spread in different parts of the globe, earning billion of pounds/dollars by way of royalties (was it because the subject-matter was funny India? Perhaps because of its intrinsic merit) started receiving wrong signals—that a writer being a transnational, trans-civilizational angel, he should write mainly or only for his nebulous 'global' audience. So in a year's time Rushdie wrote *Shame*, his second allegorical novelette, repeating himself stylistically with the same gimmicks, presenting a comic picture of the Pakistani society. Let us say, it was his birthright again to make fun of his own cultural past. By literary standards, *Shame* lacks profundity, although it is an entertaining work. And then came his *Satanic Verses* by which he invited the ire of Islamic fundamentalists; so much so that it was immediately banned even in India, demographically the second largest Muslim country in the world. The furious Iranian religious head Ayatollah Khomeini announced a reward of millions of dollars for anyone killing him.

Now it would be a waste if we debate about the fanaticism of Islamic bigots. We are more concerned here about a literary fact—why should a genuine writer create such a situation of amateurish enthusiasm and lose his freedom of living like other citizens? To quote Ghalib, our first great modern poet:

Garmi sahi kalam mein lekin na is qadar,
Kee jisse bat usne shikayat zaroor kee.

Just as a clown is obliged to entertain his entire audience by consistently demonstrating more and more somersaults, the writers of Indian origin who have chosen to writing in English are badly given up to the habit of "Third World Masala" a successful trade strategy already initiated by R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and others and fully stretched, to suit the taste of English readers, by Nirad Chaudhuri and V.S. Naipaul (both dutifully honoured by the Imperialist masters). Most of the writings of these expatriate Indians of former colonies contain certain codes to please the 'First World' English speakers in particular. No African writer has done this, which needs to be noted. The point is Rushdie was so blindly addicted to cook for this global English taste that he thought he did not owe anything to any country or tradition and belonged only to an autonomous world of his own conception—rootless, internationalist of a sort, nevertheless he stuck to third-world teasing all through. Assuming that such a world of unrestrained freedom alone brings him success, fame, money and career, he floated in the air, kicking around (did he kick even English, Christian or western beliefs? That is his 'global' choice) and thus found himself inside the cage of his own making.

Perverse religious fanaticism has struck many like Mahatma Gandhi, but in the literary world such an issue has made history. A writer may not respect a country, a religion, a tradition or a language, the identities so sacred to millions, but by what right could he take the liberty to vulgarize the faith of so many people? May a poor man, who does not get even a mouthful to eat day-long, prays to Allah or God and gets to sleep, assured that tomorrow will bring some hope. In this hopeless world not everybody gets huge royalties, brand new assignments such as editing, without deserving, *Vintage Book of Indian Writing* and new citizenships of wealthy countries. Sweating blood, people endure. Most do not know how to make a living. To millions of such people of poor countries their age-old faith offers refuge and security and dignity. Therefore, their faith is dearer to them than their life. Even if somebody wanted to pull the poor folk out of this 'miry' faith, what has the globalization theory, which dominates the literary system, to offer to them? It talks of 'world economy' only, never of 'world community'.

A writer could bring some change in the life of such people if he lives among them, partakes of their suffering, shares their concerns, and above all, writes in *their* language, like Saadat Hasan Manto, for example. This is how civilizations have been raised. To live in one society and ridicule the faith of others in order to win recognition of that society is unethical for a writer. The value of such tricks does not go beyond amateurish entertainment. This stereotype is ubiquitous in nearly all the Indian writing in English. It therefore, does not add a bit to the seriousness of literature; leave alone its human commitment. Writers like Rushdie would not be regarded as martyrs in the history of the freedom of expression—a tradition of Dhnyaneshwar, Dante, Tukaram, Puskin and others.

In general, literature seems to have been averse to globalization in all its forms. It is only after colonization that a native work of literature or a native writer is artificially transferred to alien groups for non-literary reason. Literature was never produced for 'external' consumption. In the past, *Panchatantra* and Jataka Tales, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* spread all over Eurasia away from their places of origin, yet there was no 'internationalism' involved in that. Chaucer and Shakespeare freely borrowed Indian tales that migrated in a natural way from place to place, language to language in serial translation or adaptation on their intrinsic merit. In contrast to this natural dissemination of ideas, we suddenly came across school and college boys and girls in millions, all over the 'Third World', reciting the 'First World's' models: Shakespeare's *Othello* as a tragedy of colour discrimination or *The Tempest* as a comedy of half-civilized natives of colonies. Not only was this sufficient as a colonial language and literature undertaking, but John Milton was taught as an epic poet of grand style and his *Paradise Lost*, an average narrative poem, was studied as a great epic in the land of *Mahabharata*. Such second rate works became models of perfection. Just because somebody happens to be an English writer, he automatically became a part of world literature.

The English language was 'cultivated in this country as the classical languages of Greece and Rome were in the European universities'—the citizens of Bombay wrote to an English educationist. Thus the humiliation of the great Indian literary traditions was complete with the beginning of English education. Our generation is quite familiar with several British publishers' catalogues of 'world classics' in literature, which contained even Boswell and Dickens. None of our Eastern great works were mentioned and even to think of *Gatha Saptashati* or *Tukaram* or *Leelacharitra* as world classics was beyond imagination. Such crass courage is nothing but a sign of gross ignorance.

If the colonizers have realized that it is no longer possible to humiliate the 'natives', there comes now an immigrant generation of writers of Indian origin who

"spit on their ancestral land" in order to please their former masters. For a discriminating journalist like V.S. Naipaul touring in the 'Third World' of Hindus and Muslims, brings immense success. It took three books for him to understand even a fragment of what Indian civilization is. In 1964 it was all 'dark', there was no future for these damned people who come habitually late to office, they defecate everywhere, as if Naipaul came only to sniff at this all the time. Thus a 'successful' travelogue follows. Then the second turn of understanding the ancestral land in 1977 to find after thirteen years' interval, that it is a 'wounded civilization'. Again ten years after that, India is 'a million mutinies'.

What can be done to this kind of journalism that passes as literature? Compare it with just one visit by E.M. Forster and know the essential difference between journalism and literature, between an abrasive sensationalism and an artist's sensibility. What is disturbing is that a ranting kind of journalistic writing peripheral to genuine literary creation is becoming central to our literary culture. What Naipaul's or Rushdie's 'Third World' baiting is to Tory taste in England, is Taslima Nasreen's Bangladesh bashing to conservative Hindus in India—a post-cold war culture clash. Nothing of these gives the ennobling feeling of aesthetic fulfillment, let alone enrichment. They not only devalue their own self but also undervalue a whole culture. This is nothing but trivializing existence of literature.

The foregoing examples of the consequences of Faustian deal between the trans-nativist or non-nativist or anti-nativist writers and the global or transnational powers of our time, speak for themselves. I would like to conclude by repeating what I have said earlier: Any human being or literature can stand tall only in its own native linguistic group. It has really no need of international dimensions.

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Vedanta Ammanai: An Advaitic Interpretation of Play

KANCHANA NATARAJAN

Introduction

Avudai Akka is a little-known woman sage who lived in Tamil Nadu between the 17th and 18th centuries, and achieved self-realization, a sublime attainment that liberated her from all narrow and constrictive social categories. Akka belonged to Chengottai in the Tirunellveli district of Tranvancore principality. A child widow, during adolescence she received formal initiation into the practice of Advaita Vedanta from Shridhara Ayyaval, a great Advaitic master of her time. She composed a large number of songs that describe this metaphysical journey and the experience of final freedom, which involved the breaking down of/breaking away from all social constructions. Most of her songs are addressed to women, and were preserved by women in general and widows in particular. The songs thus circulated orally till the beginning of the 20th century, when some of them began to appear in printed form. Her song entitled *Vedanta Pallu* was published as early as 1896 by Sarada Vilasa Publication in Tamil Nadu. In 1910, some attempts were made to publish her work. In 1953, a major endeavour was made by A. Venkatarama Sastri to personally collect many songs from widows of Chengottai (Akka's birthplace) and print them. All of Akka's extant songs were printed in 2002 by Swami Nityananda Giri of Gnanananda Tapovanam, Tamil Nadu, in the text *Chengottai Shri Avudai Akkal Padal Tirattu*.[1] Anyone familiar with even colloquial Tamil can access these powerful utterances. Akka's poems are public songs, addressing the Tamil women community. Akka explains the terse metaphysical truths in a simple yet unique way, using familiar motifs available to women of those times.

Akka draws upon folk tradition for her imagery, and includes singularly feminine tropes/motifs/frame stories as a conduit for the transmission of Vedanta. She thus moves away from the prescribed 'high' tradition, in which conventionally, Vedanta texts may utilise examples, metaphors, parables, etc., in a particular way to describe the Reality which otherwise cannot be bound within the parameters of language. The normative mode of Vedanta scholars is to use erudite discourse that has a standard format (wherein they state and critique/counter their opponents' position prior to establishing their own argument). The great metaphysician and philosopher Samkaracharya is a classic example here. The audience for such debate is a select one, and the assumption is that it is already informed about all other schools of philosophy and the narrative strategies of the texts.

Akka's literary feat is that she brings the abstract philosophy of Vedanta into the existential realm through a unique mode of vernacular poetry, thus enabling it to be assimilated within the *desi* or 'little' tradition. The fact that she chooses to compose not formal written verses in chaste Tamil (*cenntamilz*) but instead render 'songs' that circulate orally (up to the present day), suggests her commitment to making the lofty principles of Vedanta accessible to all serious aspirants. This also orients her work toward the democratic tradition of Bhakti, where saint-poets completely rejected class paradigms and used dialect in their compositions, sung to the public in a spirit of ardent non-discrimination.

In her composition entitled *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka gives a compelling account that draws upon Samkhya and Advaita philosophies and its cardinal notion of Prakrti and Maya as an anology of the skilful player successfully realizing the Self. To the skilfull player, the three stones/the three gunas/maya are no longer an external impediment to be mastered but part of one's organic being, negotiated as effortlessly as a physical reflex.

I

Ammanai-*Ammanai* is an indoor game played by girls

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and adult women in Tamil Nadu. This game has inspired much poetry in Tamil literature through the centuries. The *ammanai* are round stones, finely crafted wooden balls or sometimes molucca beans, thrown up in threes, using both hands; the floor is patted before the hands catch the *ammanai* as they fall; the rhythm increases with the songs accompanying this action. The songs are also known as *ammanai*. If one player fails to catch the stones, her partner then initiates a round. In the literary manifestation of *ammanai*, one voice would set up a question, the second would counter this with another question, and the third would solve the riddle thus posed with a conclusive line.[2]

The earliest *ammanai* poetry was composed by the saint Manikkavacagar (tenth century). There also exist *ammanai* sung by legendary medieval poets such as Ottagakuttar and Pugazhendi. During the 17th century, *ammanai* assumed the form of historical ballads such as *Ramappaiyan Ammanai*,[3] composed to extol the war fought by Talavai Ramappaiyan, the general of Tirumalai Nayakkar of Madurai. *Ammanai* poetry became increasingly popular from the 17th century onwards – for instance, *Sivagangaiseemai ammanai* again narrates the final wars of the valiant Marudhu brothers of Sivagangai. There is also a solitary extant manuscript of unknown authorship titled *Jnana-ammanai* in Tanjore's Serfoji Sarasvati Mahal library, consisting of 32 verses describing a spiritual aspirant's experience of non-dualism.[4] In this text, each line of the verse ends with the refrain "*ammanai*", a Tamil word connoting the imaginary audience of girls, as well as the stones used to play the game, and the players of the game. Most *ammanai* songs are composed by male poets, and they are all addressed to the young female audience, also referred to as *ammanai*.

Avudai Akka, the author of the song *Vedanta Ammanai* uses the game/play of *ammanai* as a tool for constructing a critique of *maya/prakrti*, regarded as the cosmic creative power embodied in existential divisions and differences. In this lengthy song, Akka deploys the formal structure of *ammanai* game as a simile for understanding the energy of cosmic creation and subsequent dissolution. Akka's poems do not merely end with the refrain "*ammanai*". The *ammanai* game, the capricious *ammanai* stones and the exceptionally astute and judicious *ammanai* player, the excited spectators, the self-realized singer are all emblematic of the cosmic *leela* or play that engenders the world of division, desire, action, their results, the experience of pleasure and pain; and finally ends with an aspiration to achieve a dispassionate withdrawal from the game itself by penetrating the matrix of creation and multiplicity. Akka uses the structure of the game as both metaphor and methodology to conceptualize various metaphysical nuances in the system of advaita. This strategy is offered as an alternative to the hegemony of reason and textuality as means for arriving at advaitic knowledge and experience. This unusual device of communicating Vedanta philosophy through non-pedagogic, oral compositions centering on the theme of a common game played by preliterate women, is both intriguing and tantalizing, and radically challenges the high literary tradition adopted by upper-caste male claim to the privileges of authorship.

Though the frames and tropes that Akka uses for explicating Vedanta are unconventional and unorthodox, they effectively demonstrate her familiarity with the central questions and polemics of mainstream Advaita. In particular, what distinguishes her songs from the textual tradition is her audacious choice of frameworks within which she effortlessly drives home the central advaitic philosophy of non-duality. Though Akka draws largely from folk and vernacular traditions, her songs are completely informed by metaphysical considerations nourished by her transcendent intuitive experience of the Self, and an understanding of philosophical polemics that she probably gained through accessing the canonical texts in some manner, though we have few biographical details. The central motif of all her songs is non-dualism, the oneness of being, where all differences and divisions are rendered absurd, false and without ontic status.

II

The Philosophical Notion of Play[5]

The central theme of the song *Vedanta Ammanai* is play, the game of Ammanai played by young girls and adult women. It will be worthwhile for us to examine the nature of play here. The concept of play contains an inbuilt notion of leisure, carrying within it the sense of ease, effortlessness and freedom. A child, for instance, plays for the sake of play itself, and because it is in the child's very nature to play. Adults in non-competitive contexts too play for fun. The notion of play is singularly important in the context of Advaita Vedanta. This philosophical school uses *leela* or play in the context of creation. Badarayana, the author of the *Brahma Sutras*, and Samkara, the advaita master, in his subsequent commentary on this text, claim in the sutra *lokavattu leelakaivalyam*[6] that god/*isvara* manifests this world through *leela*, the energy manifested as mere play. The feminine term *leela* derives from the root *li+kkvip*, and signifies play, sport, child's play, a semblance, an appearance, pretence, a game, etc. Central to the lexical meaning are the two connected notions of effortlessness and pretence involved in such play.

Vedanta contends that the countless names and forms of this varied and complex universe forms are manifested by the supreme principle through a sportive *leela*. According to Samkara,

Just as in the ordinary world, in the case of a king who has attained all his desires or of his minister, their activities in sports and pastimes are merely of the nature of a sport and are indulged in without any particular aim in mind, or just as the inspiration or expiration etc. (of a man) takes place naturally, without any extraneous purpose, even so may the Lord also engage in such sportful activity without any purpose, and merely as the result of his nature. It is not possible to explain on the ground of reasoning or the scripture that there is any other purpose on the part of *Ishvara*/god.[7]

The notion of *leela* is crucial for creation in Advaita ontology. Play is best exemplified in a child playing and not so much in an adult game, even if all the desires of the adult are satisfied. The child plays a game for the sake of playing, it is her very nature to play, and she devotedly dives deep into it. The child plays with playthings, real or imaginary. If they are imaginary she projects them all, her toys and her playmates, through her imagination. She creates her play-world, engages with it, and with other players in it, and when tired she withdraws from them all. The world she imaginatively creates, or the themes around which she plays, clearly do not have any real status. Interestingly, the child perceives this fact, that the world that she projects has no external existence. Yet she willingly inhabits that world till she tires of it.

Similarly, according to Advaita the world with all complexity is projected by *Ishvara* through play. The world or *jagat* is defined by Samkara in the second *sutra* [*Janmadhyasyayatah*] thus:

the transient world which is distinguished by names and forms, and which is connected with diverse agents and enjoyers' which is the basis of the fruit of actions depending upon a particular environment, time and cause, and even in mere thinking about which, imagination boggles and is unable to comprehend, the arrangement ..[8]

Such a world is obviously not any individual's projection but that of the omnipresent and omniscient Being called Brahman/the Absolute. However, just as a child wills to play, Brahman the Absolute does not will this creation or its dissolution. Brahman is the ground for such projections to manifest, just as a rope is the ground for the (illusory) projection of a snake or a garland. The complex world is projected in *leela* by *Ishvara* who is associated with *maya*, his creative power. This process of creation and dissolution takes place in the substratum of non-dual consciousness called Brahman.

A dominant ontological claim of Advaita is that there is no transformative creation or *srsti*. The Samkhya school of thought, for example, holds the view that this world has evolved from a transformation within *prakrti*, the matrix evidenced through material plenitude. *Prakrti* undergoes change, initiating the evolution of intellect, ideation and ego. For *advaitins*, there can be no transformation in consciousness, since it is the originary and only non-dual principle. Nor is creation like a potter exercising effort, desire, will and a plan to shape a pot in a process wherein each of these distinct aspects asserts itself individually as well as collaboratively. Further when the pot comes into existence, the duality between the pot and the potter is maintained through a process of connection, production and created object. The cause and the effect are cemented through a relation. Thus the doctrine of creation as expounded by the theistic Naiyaikas leads us to a tripartite division of cause, effect and a cementing relation. According to Vedanta, there is no actual creation involving desire, will and an effort like a potter, in creating this world or *jagat*. The universe with all its characteristics is a mere appearance, a pretence, a manifestation of cosmic consciousness, just as a child's play-world is a manifestation of her imagination, summoned and dispatched at will. This world of multiplicity and transience conceals, veils and shrouds the underlying non-dual principle that is inviolate and inviolable.

The *advaitic* argument is that there can be no ontological transformation, because if the 'real' lends itself to change, it vitiates its immutable and indivisible nature. The world is therefore not a creation but a projective manifestation. This arises and falls back into its source, the non-dual Brahman. The metaphor of *leela* may be applied usefully here. This projective play has no specific aim, nor does it involve effort. Samkara cites the example of breathing in and breathing out to elucidate this effortlessness in manifesting the world.[9] A child while playing effortlessly projects a temporary world and imagines multiple episodes within that world, regarding them all to be true. Yet, simultaneously being a spectator of the game, the child is aware that her projected world is illusory. Regardless, the child plays on, untiringly creating and dissolving her projections, performing without the aim of achieving any special goal, simply involved in activity natural to her. The *jagat* too, manifested by the projective *leela* of the Absolute, has no substantial existence. The world in its entirety is dissolved when the player detaches from the ceaseless game.

Characteristic of the child's games is her devotion to the activity of playing, her total surrender and immersion of self in the dynamic process. Mesmerized, captivated

and driven by this engendered *leela*, temporarily committed to belief in the totality of this *jagat* (the world) all its components and truth-conditions, unable to resist its addictions, the child plays till fatigue claims her. If creation is an act of play, so too is dissolution: the suspension of play. The child now makes an effort to reclaim her lost subjectivity and exerts her agency in order to withdraw from the act of playing. Once this occurs, her playthings, playmates and constructed events disappear as effortlessly as they arose, leaving no trace. The child loses her status as a player–and thus, the play too loses its significance. Transposing the metaphor to *advaitic* terms, it might be said that when one withdraws from *leela*/the cosmic game, the termination of the manifest physical and psychical worlds is inevitable. All projections come to an end, and this state of being is called liberation. What remains is the equivalence of all significations within the matrix of the non-dual self, with nothing to lose and nothing to gain, nothing to achieve and nothing to perform.

In the song *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka uses the ammanai stones, implements of the game, to denote *prakrti/maya*. She uses two terms for the stones: *mulaprakrti* and *maya* (even though they belong to two different schools of Indian philosophy,namely Samkhya and Advaita). She characterizes *ammanai* stones as made up of three *gunas*, manifesting the five subtle elements followed by five gross elements. A retrogression or cosmic involution occurs during withdrawal: everything manifest is withdrawn into *prakrti*. According to Samkhya, *prakrti*, the creative power, is real and it contains the dynamism to manifest this world. The created world is not a projection but a result of true transformation in prakrti. With the first pulse of cosmic evolution begins the series of immaterial and material strata: *mahat*, *ahamkara*, the *tanmatras* and *mahabhutas*, the intelligence, ego, the five subtle elements and five gross elements and mind. The five gross elements and mind then expand to 96 principles[10]. In the song of *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka introduces us to *ammanai* stones, i.e., the *mulaprakrti* hidden from both player and spectator because it is safely kept under lock and key in an ornate treasure box called the *mahat tattva* (intelligence principle). This is clearly a Samkhyan idea. But as the game proceeds there is a change in terminology as well as in the song's underlying philosophical notions. *Mula prakrti* becomes *maya*, the delusive power whose exact nature defies categorical analysis. Akka apparently begins the song by invoking the normative and common-sense belief in matter/*prakrti* as the source of this world, but as the play advances, with the player able to penetrate the structure and logic of the game and the moves of the other players, she unravels the mystery, identifying the *ammanai* stones as *maya*, the magical and delusive power of manifestation. Thus there is a clear and deliberate shift from Samkhyan notion of *mulaprakrti* to the delusive *maya* which according to Advaita philosophy does not have an ontic or metaphysical status. Since it does not have an actual existence, its creative manifestations too are thereby 'unreal'.

The two feminine creative principles, *mulaprakrti* and *maya*, are also prominent in Tantra. These principles become central to the goddess cults in Tantra literature[11]. A prominent instance is the classic text *Tantraloka* (Light on Tantra) of Abhinavagupta, the famous ninth-century Shaiva Taantric philosopher. The metaphysics of Abhinavagupta's Shaiva Tantrism include elements of both Samkhya and Advaita. Teun Gourdiaan in his work *Hindu Tantrism* discussing the Samkhyan influences along three lines, asserts that:

1. The dual principle of Shiva and Shakti is reminiscent of the Samkhyan Prakrti and Purusha; the relation and functions of these dual principles are also similar to Samkhya. However, there is a crucial difference: the non-identity of the two in Samkhya as against the transcendental unity of Shiva and Shakti usually held by Shaakta and Shaiva philosophy.
2. The Samkhya evolutionary series of 25 categories: *purusha*, *prakrti*, *buddhi*, *ahamkara*, *manas*, the ten senses, ten subtle and gross elements, often recur in Tantra; the series is, for instance, still clearly recognizable in the *srichakra* system with a notable absence of Purusha.
3. The Samkhya doctrine of the relation between cause and effect as one of transformation (*parinama-vada*) is repeatedly offered by Shaakta authors to prove their doctrine of the reality of the objective world. The Advaita doctrine of identity of the self with the Absolute is central to Tantra. The self, none other than the supreme, appears to be limited, but when the limitation is removed the self discovers its unity with the supreme. However, Tantra diverges from Vedanta in one significant way. According to the former, the creative process is a transformation: the world emerges from Shakti and is also reabsorbed back into Shakti by Sakti. For Samkara and *advaitic* philosophers, there is only projective manifestation, a "pseudo-evolution."[12] From the point of view of the individual self, the chief cause of bondage and suffering in the world is *maya*, an aspect of the goddess or Shiva's eternal Shakti. The beguiling nature of *maya* in Tantra is two-fold, limiting, disruptive/dispersive. It is incomprehensible, like the agile deception of magic. But the fundamental paradox that an aspirant must

negotiate is that the illusory functions of *maya* are in fact as real as *maya* itself is from the metaphysical standpoint.

Thus Indian philosophy, with its three main strands, has *prakrti* or *maya* as a very important power that brings this world–real or illusory–into being. To some extent, it is evident that Akka uses all three perspectives, Samkhya, Tantra and Vedanta, in the song *Vedanta Ammanai.* The female player involved in the game, creating the world and also withdrawing/dissolving it through the power of *mulaprakrti,* is both Samkhyan and Tantric. Seeking metaphysical unity and oneness through ultimately penetrating the false entity of the existent world/rejecting its delusive power is Advaitic. Because Shakti worship is said to exist in all Advaita Maths[13] and Akka had direct access to the Sringeri Sharada Matha, it is likely that she was exposed to the Srividya[14] tradition of Shakti worship. This become obvious in her other long song titled *Srividyashobhanam.*

Vedanta Ammanai articulates a definite metaphysical doctrine woven through the metaphor of play in general and the game of *ammanai* in particular. Just as in play the child "pretends" to be someone other than herself, Akka the singer plays the metaphysical game, personifying herself as the protagonist who is a skilful player of the game–one who uses the *ammanai* stones (symbolic of *gunas*) to achieve the metaphysical goal of triumphing over *maya,* to attain emancipatory plenitude, the experience of non-duality. This is the player's final and permanent victory, the player's prize, the player's attainment, which cannot be bettered. Akka introduces the player as "one lady" (*orutti*) possessing equanimity. This *orutti* is Akka herself, who having transcended all categories of name and form, is without self-referential parameters. This is not unusual in the context of the knower of the self. In his Sanskrit work *Atmavidyavilasa,*[15] the well-known *advaitic* sage and Akka's contemporary Sadashiva Brahmendra describes the state of the realized seer. The subjectivity of the knower of the self is obliterated; the sage in full abandon refers to the joyous experience of the knower of the self, here none other than himself, as *kopi,* "someone". Akka chooses a similar mode of articulation in *Vedanta Ammanai .* This song's *orutti* is depicted as longing for liberation: she now desires and decides to play the game with the single motive of seeking *moksha* (release) from the endless cycles of grinding turbulence that characterize *samsara.* To win such a game, her strategy is based on the perfected deployment of a skill she fortunately possesses–equanimity–that enables her to catch and throw and catch the three stones in the required order and with the required speed, as they fall. This entails exquisite control the levels of intellect, emotions and body.

Before commencing the game, the player is gripped by anxiety and fear of losing the game and thus becoming an object of ridicule. Additionally, she hopes she will win the game, despite the doubt and astonishment of the spectators. Such terror is inevitable when one enters the field of the arduous spiritual quest, elsewhere compared to walking on the edge of a razor.[16] According to Samkara, just as the birds flying in the sky leave no footprint, people who have tread the spiritual path have left no foot mark behind.[17] There is a very high risk of losing one's way. But once the rules of the game are understood, the anxiety and fear vanish. Once the player submits to the rules, the seductive dynamics of play overwhelm her.

The player uses three stones as implements: symbolic of *prakrti,* the creative power, with all of creation constituted by the three *gunas –sattva* (subtle and purified intelligence), *rajas* (robust and energetic dynamism) and *tamas* (grossness/density and apathy).18 Here Akka brilliantly incorporates Samkhyan and Vedantic notions of *prakrti* and *maya* respectively. She regards the stones as (1) *prakrti,* the tripartite Samkhyan material matrix of which the world is an evolute; and (2) maya, the ineffable power of projection that brings the world into being, as postulated by Advaita. *Prakrti* is real and can manifest this world through undergoing transformation, while *maya* illusorily manifests this world. The rising and falling *ammanai* stones, thrown and caught by the hands of the skilled player, engender, sustain and dissolve this world of innumerable names and forms, differences and divisions. Only the true adept, established in equanimity in all situations and contexts, can manipulate the creative force itself, resist its seductions, withdraw from the cosmic game in order to experience the sublime state of unity/non-duality instead of the ceaselessly looping multiplicity, frenzy and distortion that characterize human existence.

The play does not consist simply in mechanically throwing and catching the stones, or merely possessing the dexterity to sustain the cycle of this action, but also requires an intelligence that is able to identify and know the nature of the three stones. This is called *vichara* (practice of deep and sustained thinking in order to understand). Akka's adept player offers a philosophical critique of *maya* during the game. When *maya* is understood, it moves away from the player as *prakrti* moves away from *purusha.* 19 The strategy adopted here for gaining victory over *maya* is through the repudiation of *maya.*

Significantly, the play is also between the stones and the anonymous player, even more than it is between the

player and an opponent/partner. Either the three stones or the player will win the game. From the *advaitic* perspective, one is either caught in the web of *maya* which creates the world, or one is intelligent enough to negotiate and thus escape the *gunas*, and thus attain freedom. The moves of the game intensify in an almost sexual rhythm. Just as a lustful man tirelessly makes advances to his beloved only to be reproached and rejected, the three stones return to the player determinedly, only to be spurned and once again thrown in the air. Insolent *maya* pursues the struggling *jiva* (soul) with the same resolve. The adept who desires emancipation, however, with greater tenacity and virtuosity overcomes the advances and such seductive entrapment. One of the strongest ties that can bind a *jiva* is sexual desire, hence Akka's choice of the erotic metaphor of a *sarasapurusha's* sexual advances.

This mesmerizing contest between the resolved, audacious adept and crafty, experienced *maya* with her infinite and ageless guile attracts mortals as well as celestial onlookers. As the game progresses, masses of spectators arrive. Gods, demi-gods, legendary as well as ordinary men and women, Vedic seers, philosophers, throng to watch this extraordinary act. The crowd is so dense that there is no space even for a sesame seed to fall on the ground. The audience speculates and bets on the winner, whispers, sighs, hoots, cheers, chatters. Some are gripped with intense anxiety about the anticipated failure of the adept. Some take on the role of commentators and describe earlier games, adding that the supernormal efforts of Vishnu as Krishna, balancing Mount Govardhana on the tip of his little finger, or the majestic serpent Adishesha bearing the weight of the earth on his head, cannot compare with the power of the ongoing game of *ammanai* in the theatre of *samsara*: this is the first time a player has dared to engage in combat with *maya*. Onlookers wonder who will win. Overwhelmed by the sight of the adept's courage, some witnesses shower her with fragrant petals and prostrate before her.

Thus Akka creates three frames of spectators: those within the song, witnessing the game; those outside the song, i.e., her female audience; and those who perform the song, either specifically for an audience or informally and collaboratively while doing household work. Almost all her songs have as their central figure a woman/women who aspire to self-realisation. This knowledge has always been an upper-caste male prerogative, a privilege of men versed in the *shastras* and trained in the *devabhasa*, Sanskrit. Women were not entitled to this intellectual pursuit; *jnanam* (the path of knowledge) required *viveka* (the capacity for discrimination) and *vairagyam* (dispassion), and it was believed that women lacked these attributes. Akka violates this scriptural and cultural rule by addressing her songs to women, and composing them in a vernacular, spoken Tamil. Invoking the gender-segregated, homo-social spaces and way of life common to all of India, she uses tropes centered on female experiences. Her articulation focuses on these confined spaces that could not be entered and appropriated by men, radically inverts or subverts all the established codes.

Notes

1. Sw Nitayananda Giri, ed., *Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal Patal Tirattu* (Thapovanam: Sri Gnanananda Niketan, 2002).
2. *Ammanai* is a type of poetry belonging to the family of "*taravu kocchaga kalippa*". This is a type of poetry associated with a game of the same name that was popular with teen girls and often assumed the form of questions and answers. Ammanai generally follows the rules of a *venpa*, but can occasionally have *kalitalais* and belongs to the *kalippa* family. In Tamil poetics there are four types of *pa* (poems) *venpa, asiriyappa, kalippa* and *vanchippa*. These classifications were based on musical considerations such as rhythms, temporal aspects related to rhythm (timing of beats) and cadence the rhythm of sound. *Venpa* is a form of classical Tamil Poetry. A set of well defined rules define the grammar for *venpa*. All 1330 couplets from *Tirukkural* composed by Tiruvalluvar are examples of *venpa*. A set of well defined metric rules define the grammer for *venpa*. One set of rules constrains the duration of sound for each word or *cheer* while another set of rules for the possible sounds at the beginning of a word that follows a given sound at the end of the preceeding word. A *venpa* has to confirm to both these sets of rules. Every *venpa* consists between two to twelve lines.
3. According to M.Ramalingam, *Ramappaiyan Ammanai* is the oldest historical ballad available. This is the story of Ramappaiyan's invasion against Sadaikkan Setupati.(p. 532, *Medieval Indian Literature*, Volume 1, Chief Editor, Ayyappa Paniker, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi)
4. Ms no 543,*The Journal of the Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library*, Volume xxi, no 1, 1967, pp 1-6,ed O.A Narayanswamy.
5. I have drawn the philosophy of play from two divergent traditions: Samkara's commentary on the *Brahmasutra* and *The concept of play in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. See *Brahma -Sutra Shaankara- Bhasya*, Badarayana's Brahma-Sutras with Shankaracharya's Commentary, Translated by V.M Apte, Popular Book Depot, Bombay,1960, Sutra No, 2.1.33, pp 338-39 & The Concept of Play in Hans Georg Gadamer's *Hermemeutics: An Educational Approach*, Kjetil Steinholt & Elin Traasdahl, pp73-96, in *Theory in Context and Out*, Volume 3, Edited by Stuart Reifel, *Play and Culture Studies*, Ablex Publishing Westport, Connecticut, 2001
6. *Brahma -Sutra Shaankara- Bhasya*, Sutra No, 2.1.33, pp 338-39
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Sutra I.i.2 p.10
9. Ibid, Sutra II,.i.33 p338
10. *Tattvas* are energies at a lower level that of kala. According to

Ksemaraja, *tattva* is what expands itself (*tanannat tatvam*)which means; that which causes manifestation to appear,. See *Hindu Tantrism*, Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, Teun Gourdriannn, Leiden, E.J Brill, 1979, p101. "No less than 70 categories were admitted by the karma system of Kashmir while also the number 94 seems to have been known. *Saktisangamatantra* returns to the Samkhya system in so far that it holds that prakrti was evolved immediately from Parabrahman" ibid., p.53.

11 "Tantrism seems to be inspired by a genuine awe for the female as the seat of reproduction, the source of all life. But it would again be wide of the mark to the state that it acted as a liberating force which aimed at the improvement of the social status of women." ibid., p.34.

12. Ibid., p. 52.
13. *Saundaryalahari* ascribed to Samkaracarya, edited and Translated by W.N. Brown, (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 'Introduction,' p 27.
14. Srividya is an example of one esoteric Tantric tradition that is widely prevalent amongst the *smarta* brahmans. It has a Veda-oriented origin with classical gods and sages in prominence. For further information see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1996).
15. *Siva Mansika Puja, Kirtani & Atma Vidya Vilasah of Sri Sadasiva Brahmendra* (in Sanskrit with English translations); published by Sri Kamakoti Koshsthanam, 1947.
16. Katha Upanisad, 3.14, in Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upanisads*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt1998), pp. 390-91.
17. Mandukya Karika, IV, 95, in *Eight Upanisads*, Vol Two, Tr By Swami Gambhirananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1958), pp. 308-09.
18. S.S Suryanarayana Sastri, ed., *The Sankhyakarika of Isvara Krsna* (University of Madras, 1973), Verses, 12-14, pp.36-43.
19. Ibid, Verse 66, pp.115-16

Some Reflections on Islamic Milk Kinship

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An author of a recent, comprehensive and authoritative legal treatise, in an exposition of Islamic family values in the contemporary world affirms that 'the family' (*al-usrah*), the 'nucleus of society' (although perhaps a relatively recent phenomenon in Islamic discourse), stands 'on the foundation of stock (*'irq*), blood and *nasab*, and affinity and milk kinship'.[1] Most scholars agree in theory that kinship is not a biological fact but a universally deployable system for structuring social relations. In empirical practice, however, research on kinship has focused almost exclusively on descent and alliance. This essay addresses kinship in Islamic society where motherhood is glorified, childlessness is socially unacceptable, and adoption is religiously prohibited. Islamic *shari'a* law treats relations of kinship and alliance under the heading of 'closeness' (*qar bah*). This is then divided into three subtypes: *nasab* (relations of filiation, both agnatic and uterine); *mus harah* or *shir* (relations by marriage); and *rid'a* (relations by breastfeeding). This essay is a study of *rid'a* or, 'milk kinship' which has been largely neglected while in Islam there exists a whole body of detailed laws and regulations—which regard it similar to blood relationship: affection is due to one's milk kin, but one does not inherit from each other. Infant fosterage is technically known as *rid'a* or *rad'a* in *Shari'a*, refers to the process whereby a baby is breast-fed by a non-maternal nurse, and as a consequence there emerges a relationship between the nursling and the nurse whereby some degree of marital prohibition in analogy to that of consanguinity would be established between the two and a further, defined set of relatives. As such milk relationship differs from the institutions of fosterage, despite the fact that it is often referred to as 'fosterage'—since the latter did not involve the child and nurse in any legally recognized relationship, even though a deep emotional attachment might well develop between them.

The studies of elective, non-biological and non-biogenetic kinship relations have been the prominent focus of interest in recent anthropological studies. Another burgeoning theme of the manipulation of the kinship is the development of new reproductive technologies, which are designed to circumvent problems of infertility and detrimental genetic inheritance – which have the effect of fragmenting the accepted role of fatherhood and /or motherhood between distinct persons.[2] Muslims have for the most part welcomed these new reproductive technologies as a remedy for infertility.[3] And yet some of the possibilities such procedures raise are still problematic for many, coming from a variety of ethical perspectives. Governments and patients alike have turned to Islamic authorities for guidance with regard to issues such as assisted reproduction, organ transplantation, euthanasia and abortion.[4] Lively debates, symposia and a considerable literature have emerged on the '*fiqh* (jurisprudence) of medicine'.

The development of the new reproductive technologies more generally provides three basic methods, all with significant variations. The first is artificial insemination of the prospective mother by either the husband (for example, in case physical disability prevents intercourse) or by a donor (for example, in case of infertility). The second is *in vitro* fertilization (literally 'in glass fertilization', as opposed to *in vivo* fertilization, or fertilization through sexual intercourse), or the production of so-called 'test-tube babies'. Again, this may use the semen of either the father or a donor, but the egg may be donated also (or instead) if the mother is capable of producing any. Lastly, there is surrogate motherhood, in which a female third party is commissioned by the husband and wife to carry an embryo to term on the latter's behalf. Again, there are numerous variants, depending on the source of semen and eggs, either or both of which may come from the respective parents or be donated. Technology may be circumvented altogether

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by the simple expedient of having the father impregnate the surrogate mother directly, in which case the former's wife can only be mother of the child. The focal point of present essay is on Islamic legal reaction to these new reproductive technologies more generally, as a way into understanding changing notion of kinship in contemporaneous Muslim societies.

I. Human Milk Banks

For Muslim religious specialists, milk kinship provides a way of thinking through and resolving the ethical dilemmas of the use of new reproductive technologies. Rather than disappearing under modernity, milk kinship endures as a resource for the mediation of social relations and intellectual challenges. One example directly concerning our interests here, which will serve to introduce some of the issues pertinent to the discussion of assisted reproduction, is that of 'human milk banks'. [5] These banks were first introduced in the first half of previous century after wet nursing in contemporary industrial societies had almost completely disappeared from the scene and following scientific evidence that babies breastfed by their own mothers or wet nurses showed a lower mortality rate than artificially fed infants.[6] The milk banks comprise a store of fresh human milk donated by lactating women for dispensation to prematurely delivered babies whose own mothers fail to produce any milk or as many physicians considered the mothers colostrums to be an unsatisfactory food for the premature infant. Despite their comparative rarity, they have been a focus of concern for Islamic scholars:[7] might not complicated chains of milk kinship be instituted? Might there not be a risk of subsequent, inadvertent milk incest?[8] To this, the *fugaha* (Muslim jurists), are divided into two groups. The majority of the Muslims jurists, from classical to the modern, are unanimous that all human milk which 'still a baby's hunger', 'raises the bones and makes the flesh glow', as the *hadith* put it, creates milk relations and entails impediments to marriage.[9]

An expert on Islamic medical ethics, Hassan Hathout, describes the discussion at the 1983 symposium on 'Islam and Reproduction' held by the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences in Kuwait,[10] where 'ultraconservatives suggested that there should be a detailed milk registry and that every donor and the family of every recipient should be given a complete record of who received the milk of whom'. Hathout comments, this would render such milk banks 'practically impossible'. However, on the other hand, scholars such as the renowned Sunni jurist Yusuf al-Qaradawi at this conference, cited rulings on the basis of the opinions of Ibn Hazm of Corodova (d.1064)[11] and other scholars of the Al-Zhahiriyah school and their followers that milk kinship could only be instituted by suckling at the breast to argue that milk from milk banks would not institute milk kinship. Medical and jurisprudence scholars at the symposium after having close discussion on the varied classical and contemporaneous views, then proposed that since Imams and reputable Jurists of old times had diverging views on the issue, Muslims should feel free to choose the view which ensures the best interests of those babies and in the way which is easier and more practicable, an attitude which is more in keeping with the goals of Islamic jurisprudence.[12]

The human milk banks' issue was again minutely discussed at Islamic Fiqh Council (*Majma' al-Fiqh al-Isl m1*) of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, whose opinion carries great weight in the Sunni Muslim world, passed a resolution after a medical and legal study along these lines in 1985: entitled resolution No. 6(6/2) 'Milk banks' (*bunuk al-halib*), it argues that milk banks lead to confusion (*ikhtilat*) and doubt (*ribah*).[13] The system of social relationships in the Islamic world, it proposes, offers a premature or underweight child that needs human milk its requirements through natural nursing, clearly harking back to the communal nursing of pre-modern times, not obviously applicable to the needs of premature babies. The council concludes by prohibiting the spread of milk banks in the Islamic world, and the use of milk from them. It is this worry over kinship 'confusion' that is echoed in discussions of medically assisted reproduction, as well as the large dose of moral outrage common to many of these discussions, at this Western innovation that would undermine the sound moral underpinnings of Islamic society, corrupting its genealogies and spreading adultery. As the Islamic Council puts it:[14]

> To Islam, breast feeding creates a bond similar to a lineage bond and forbids, according to the consensus of Muslim jurists, exactly the same which is forbidden due to actual lineage relationship. One of the goals of the *Sharia* is to safeguard the lineage of a person whereas milk banks lead to mix up and doubts.

II. Reproductive Technologies and Religious Morality

The Islamic medical ethics are a burgeoning topic among *ulama* and academic scholar alike. Some of the most interesting issues are those centering on the new productive technologies such as *in vitro* fertilization, where milk kinship becomes an important consideration in thinking Islamic kinship in a new age. *In vitro*

fertilization involves fertilizing an eggs out side the body with a sperm and then transferring it to the uterus of a woman for gestational and delivery: this allows eggs, sperm and uterus to be from unrelated parties, unrelated that is, in term of a marriage or 'partnership'. The latter woman, the 'gestational carrier', may be seen as analogous to a 'milk mother'; commercial surrogacy arrangements can be seen to parallel those of mercenary wet-nursing (*zir*, the Arabic term for wet nurse), the subject of classical Islamic legal debate. In the context of treatments involving donor sperm and eggs, allowed by a minority of Islamic jurists, milk kinship and fosterage become mechanisms for the legitimization of relations between a resulting child and the recipients, the 'social' parents: pater and mater (in anthropological, if not Islamic, terms). The mediating possibilities of milk kinship thus endure in the face of new challenges, both in the context of the rich history of Islamic jurisprudence and as part of the cultural arsenal that Muslims deploy in attempting to realize their social projects.

The many possibilities extended by new reproductive technologies have been keenly debated by Islamic legal specialists. [15] While such thinkers are keen to stress that Islam favors scientific and medical advances, certain ethical boundaries should, they maintain, be preserved. Assisted conception between husband and wife, including artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilization, is, broadly speaking, deemed unobjectionable. They believe that triangle formed by father-mother-child should only be thrice side, without interjection of other parties. Where techniques might involve further parties, controversy arises: a parallel is often drawn here with adultery (*zin*), nominally subject to the harshest of punishments under Islamic law, and its results, the 'confounding of kinship relations' (*ikhtilāt al-ansāb* [pl. of *nasab*]). Sunni Islam has reached a broad consensus that such techniques are prohibited, and that the resulting children are to be treated like 'bastards', 'children of *zin* ', with no paternal relation, although they are still related to their mothers.[16] The possibility of polygyny in Islamic law somewhat complicates matters: some early opinions did not rule out using an egg from one wife, fertilizing it with the husband's sperm, and implanting it in another wife's womb. Such a scenario has, however, come to be deemed unacceptable according to the current, broad Sunni consensus.[17]

Shiite (Shia or Shi'a) opinion, on the other hand, is more diverse, and some authorities even allow some controversial procedures. Milk kinship comes into consideration in a number of ways. Most relevant are those possibilities involving one woman's egg and another's womb. Besides the 'two wives' scenario, these might take the form of the use of a donor egg, or that of a surrogacy arrangement, where another woman agrees to bear to term an embryo formed of a husband's sperm and the egg of his wife, for whom pregnancy is impossible. With regard to the latter, such an arrangement could be a commercial one, and as Muhammad Rida al-Sistani, son of Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, probably currently the most widely followed Shiite authority of all, considers in his own comprehensive treatise on NRT whether one could liken such arrangements to the mercenary wet-nursing contracts that posed such problems for classical jurisprudence. He opines that *nasab* ('filiation') is not a genetic relation. [18] In such situations, whether permitted or not, the question arises as to who will be considered the mother: the genetic mother, the provider of the egg or the gestational carrier. The situation is complicated under Islamic law on the one hand, as we have seen, by the possibility of polygyny, and on the other by the extant existence of a secondary type of motherhood, milk motherhood.

Most Sunni and many Shiite authorities maintain that it is the genetic mother, the provider of the egg, who should be considered the mother. Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and widely followed by Shiite population in Iran and Labnan, holds what has become the most notorious position of all with regard to assisted reproduction: he does not forbid donor treatments, surrogacy arrangements or the use of gametes after death, as, he holds, *zina* requires the physical act of sexual intercourse.[19] In order to avoid kinship 'confusion', he makes clear that the principle of relation is that it is the originator of the sperm or egg that is to be considered the father or mother–that is, in donor procedures, the donor. What then of the woman who carries the child: does she have no relation of maternity, not even one on the lines of milk kinship? Or, as Muhammad Rida Sistani, puts it, 'is it possible to rule that marriage is prohibited between the child and the owner of the womb, and her daughters related to her through milk kinship?' For, 'if the breastfeeding woman is forbidden to the nurseling just through breastfeeding for a day and a night, or fifteen suckling (as in Shiite), because that entails the strengthening of his bones and building of his flesh, then what of one who is created inside her and all of whose flesh and bones comes from her?'[20] The precedent of milk kinship is now being used to argue: that nurturing a child in one's womb is at least analogous to the nurture afforded by a breast-feeding woman.

Unlike Sunni, some of leading Shiite authority primarily in South Asia has a different view.[21] They don't

allow procedures using donor sperm but procedures involving donor eggs and surrogacy arrangements may be permissible where the man who provides the sperm is married to both women, the source of the egg and the gestational carrier. Such a marriage to a surrogate mother could be a temporary one, temporary marriage, again, being a characteristically Shiite institution. The same might apply in cases of egg donation: the husband of the woman who was to receive the eggs should also marry, even if temporarily, the egg donor; and this is in fact a position held by a number of Shiite authorities in West and Central Asia.[22] For most of South Asian, plausibly because of syncretic elements which are accretions from the local environment, both Sunni and Shiite, as Ayatollah Khamene'i says, the principle of paternity and maternity follows genetic lines. The mother is the egg producer, but the gestational carrier resembles those women prohibited in marriage through breastfeeding. Her legal ruling becomes that of the milk mother; through the nurture in the womb she becomes the nurture mother. The consequence of following the genetic principle is that, in the case of the use of sperm or eggs from third parties, new and unconventional—albeit clear—patterns of relation are created. A child of donor sperm will be the child of the sperm donor and not of the man who raises that child. This has consequences for concomitant principles: inheritance and veiling. In the case of the inheritance, that resulting child and their genetic parents would have mutual inheritance rights, this problem could to some extent be obviated through gifts and bequests; also, care would have to be taken with regard to the regulation of conduct between the child and the couple who have sought treatment. As we have seen, relatedness entails marriage prohibitions, and marriage prohibition determines rules of seclusion, bodily concealment and comportment. Where such a relation is absent, as it would be for couples using donor sperms and eggs, for instance, the usual intimacy of domestic life would be severely disturbed.

However, as a group of Islamic jurists based in Delhi precisely pointed out that these complexities indeed are not a practical barrier to undertaking such procedures, there are other legal rulings that would serve to alleviate such problems.[23] The first and foremost is milk kinship: In the case of donor gametes, if the resulting child were male, then there was no problem because the mother suckles. In case of donor sperm, that is, if the child were male then there is a potential problem for the wife: she would have to veil in front of him when he reached puberty. But if she carries the child, in the instance of the use of a donor egg where she is not the mother one understands, thus having breast milk, and then suckles the child, then a milk kinship relation will be established which institutes a marriage prohibition, thus removing the problems of intimacy. If the resultant child is female then there is potentially a problems between her and the husband: in case of the use of donor sperm, where husband is not considered the father, then the child will be in the position of a *rabl bah*, 'foster-daughter' or 'ward', that is one's wife's daughter by another man: the *rabl bah* is forbidden to the husband so long as he has had sex with her mother.[24] Therefore, precedent of milk kinship, along with guardianship, provides a resource for Muslims to take advantage of the possibilities for remedying childlessness that the new reproductive technologies offer. Indisputably, my Muslim informant is equally clear that, *'in public, use of such donor procedures is denied, and resulting children are being presented as having arrived in the conventional manner. In fact, not only infertility is stigmatized; any intervention in the culturally sensitive areas of sexuality and reproduction is normally considered dubious. Social pressure to conform, the opinion of 'the neighbors', is of paramount importance'*.

Notwithstanding the above pragmatic veracity, the prevention and treatment of infertility are of particular significance in the Muslim world, as the social status of the Muslim woman, her dignity and self esteem are also closely related to her procreation potential in the family and in the society as a whole. Both, *Quran* and *Hadith* have affirmed the importance of marriage and family formation through marital procreation, no third party is permitted to intrude into the marital functions of sex and procreation during the span of marriage. Infertility is acknowledged in the *Quran*, and its treatment is encouraged in order to preserve the integrity of the marital union.[25]

III. Contemporaneous Perspectives

The characteristically Islamic legal institution of milk kinship as evident from discussion lives on, despite a steep decline in shared breastfeeding in modern times. It provides a useful and unique way of thinking through some of the ethical dilemmas that new reproductive technologies pose. Furthermore, it allows couples to take advantage of such techniques while maintaining the propriety and convenience of their domestic lives, in keeping with its longstanding tactical uses. But while milk kinship offers a way of mediating the intellectual challenges that modern science offers to revealed religion, there is surely another sense in which Western, 'scientific' understandings of kinship relatedness offer milk kinship itself an existential challenge. There is no ready 'scientific' reason why one should not be able to marry one's milk

sister. Contemporary Islamic thinkers expend much intellectual energy in attempts to demonstrate the congruence of Quranic statements and scientific propositions, regarding embryology and astronomy, for example. But those whom we asked for an explanation of the 'logic' of milk kinship would only reply: 'It is not possible to define the reason for this legislation. One must work with the legal rulings as they arise in the legal texts'.

Although much of Islamic legal debate on milk kinship may seem abstruse, it had, and continues to have, a social reality outside the scholastic domain. It was common, in the pre-modern South Asia, for women living in the same household or locale to breastfeed each other's infants as need and convenience required. Urban, upper-class women frequently had option to the services of professional wet nurses (*zir*).[26] Milk relations were thus also perforce common, although it seems hard to believe that the full ramifications of the jurisprudential schemes were followed through: certainly contemporary ethnographic accounts suggest that popular conceptions of the extent of milk relations are often at odds with those of jurisprudence. That, apart from situational spontaneity local notion or popular conceptions of milk kinship that may themselves vary also necessitated the practice.[27] In modern times, residence patterns have changed, with a decline in large, mixed households;[28] and the advent of artificial baby milks has rendered wet-nursing an option rather than a necessity. [29] Pater Parkes sees further structural reasons for the decline in the incidence of milk kinship in the shift in political organization away from patrimonial dynasties towards modern state formations.[30]

However, despite this undoubted decline, milk kinship is far from a dead letter. It remains a prominent section within contemporary Islamic legal handbooks, and a field in which Islamic scholars can parade their erudition. Apart from Islamic legal discussions of new reproductive technologies, one can come across a number of contemporary examples of milk kinship in the pages of glossy magazines read across the most part of the Islamic world. Many such magazines feature *fatw* columns, where religious specialists give *fatw* s that is 'opinions' in response to readers' questions. For instance, in an issue of women's magazine *Sayyidat1* (2000), Shaykh Abdallah bin Jibrin of the Saudi Arabian Fatwa Issuing Department is asked to clarify:[31]

'Is it possible for me to marry a girl whose older sister is the milk sister of my younger brother'?

He answers:

There is no problem with marrying the milk sister of your brother if your brother was the one who suckled from her mother and you did not, and likewise if the suckling one, that is the sister of the girl in question, suckled from your mother. So the girl is permitted in marriage to you, and neither the suckling of her sister by your mother nor the suckling of your brother by her mother affects you in this regard.

And, in the same issue, he faces another milk kinship query:

I am a boy of sixteen and want to marry the daughter of my uncle [*'amm1* , father's brother], but I have discovered that her younger sister suckled with my older sister. So is it possible for me to marry her, bearing in mind that she did not suckle from my mother?

His reply:

It is not a problem that you marry her, and the suckling of her younger sister with your sister does not affect you. That is, she is considered marriageable [*ajnab1 yah*, 'a non-relative'], in as much as she did not suckle from your mother and you did not suckle from her mother nor from one of her sisters, so there is no kinship [*qar bah*] between you. As for her younger sister she is not permissible for you or your brothers, as she suckled from your mother and became a sister to all of you.

These examples show that common believers are aware of the legal consequences of non-maternal breastfeeding in creating impediments to marriage. In other words, the rules laid down by the *Qur'n* and subsequently elaborated in *hadith* and *fiqh* literature still influence strategies of marriage and hence family structure in our days. To this day in modern Saudi Arabia, the concept of milk kinship is being promoted as a way to cement the family bonds of orphans into families, not just through conventional adoption but also by the stronger bond that milk kinship implies: as a way to strengthen the family bond of adopted children with their adoptive families–as equivalent of a blood relative. For example, Noura Al-Asheikh, General Director of women's issues at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Makkah during an interview to *Arab News* (2007),[32] says that they try to promote milk kinship as Ö to find families for orphaned children. 'We at the ministry try to study the possibility of finding a nursing mother in the hosting family to breastfeed the child to ensure its legal position in that family', she said.

Notes

1. Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Al-usrah al-Muslimah F1 -l- lam al-Mu sir* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2000), p. 20.
2. In fact, this fragmentation is not in itself either new or rare: anthropology has long had to make a basic distinction between pater and genitor, that is, biological and social fatherhood, and there is a similar, if less commonly made, distinction between mater and genetrix. It is also relatively familiar through step-relationships and adoptions.

3. See M. Inhorn, *Local Babies, Global Science: Gender, Religion, and In Vitro Fertilization in Egypt* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 'Making Muslim Babies: IVF and Gamete donation in Sunni versus Shi'a Islam', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 30 (2006), pp. 427–50.
4. V. Rispler-Chaim, *Islamic Medical Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). Also see Farhat Moazam, *Bioethics and Organ Transplantation in a Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
5. Banked human milk is regarded as 'the next best' after the biological mother's breast milk. Donation of breast milk from one woman to an unrelated infant has a long history. Before last century, the infant would have been directly breastfed by the woman who was referred to as a 'wet nurse'. In the first half of last century, milk banking saw resurgence in popularity, but around the 1970s, this began to change. The first reason for this loss of interest in human milk was the heavy promotion of infant formula, including formulas specially designed for preterm infants. Later, a fear of transmission of viruses, including HIV, in body fluids led to an anxiety about donation of body fluids, including breast milk.
6. Unlike West, the Asian system of human milk banking has been slow progress, despite the fact that the incidents of low birth weight and pre-term babies are very high in these countries – it is imperative for the survival of these babies that constant and adequate supply of milk is guaranteed to them. It could possible only in 1989 that Asia's first human milk bank was set up at the Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital (LTMGH) in Mumbai. Since then, only a few such banks could come up so far. Apart from varied hurdle such as financial and technological requirement, milk banking practice is particularly problematical in Islamic countries from a religious point of view.
7. Avner Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 139-42; Sayed Sikandar Shah, 'Fosterage as a Ground of Marital Prohibition in Islam and the Status of Human Milk Banks', *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1994), pp. 3-7.
8. During its stay in the Special Care Baby Unit, an infant would therefore have been nourished by milk derived from a large number of women, and the question arises whether the children of these women as well as the other infants who consumed their milk are to be considered brothers and sisters and therefore should not marry one another. The prohibition will naturally extend to cover an expansive network of relations beyond the suckling babies. Khatib-Chahidi reports incidence about Muslim couple who refused adamantly to allow their premature baby to be fed with the 'mixed' mother's milk from the milk bank, J. Khatib-Chahidi, 'Milk-Kinship in Shi'ite Islamic Iran', in V. Maher (ed.), *The Anthropology of Breast-Feeding: Natural Law or Social Construct* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), pp. 109-32.
9. Three leading jurists in early Islam, Abu Hanifa (d. 767 AD), Malik bin Anas (d. 795 AD), and Al-Shafi'i (d. 820 AD), are said to have accepted the view – later also supported by the Syrian Hanbali jurists, Ibn Qudama (d. 1223 AD) – that even pouring stranger's human milk into an infants mouth or nose involves prohibition of marriage. In support of their view they quote following *hadith* of the Prophet:

   (i) *Rid'a* will not be established, but by milk of which the bones and flesh of the infant is made up.
   (ii) Salim who was a grown-up person; and Sahlah was ordered to put her breast milk in a cup and then give it to Salim to drink.

   See, *Hadith – Translation of Imam Malik's Al- Muwatta*, Book 30: Number 30.2.11-13: also available *at http://www.ummah.net/Al_adaab/hadith/muwatta/*; *Hadith –Translation of Sahih Muslim*, Book 008: Number 3424: also available at *http://www.ummah.net/Al_adaab/hadith/muslim /*: both sources were accessed on 25/11/2008.
10. The IOMS's report can be found *at http://www.islamset.com.*
11. Ibn Hazm , *Al-Muhalla fi'fiqh* , Cairo: 1928-33.
12. The report available *at http://www.islamset.com/obstetrics/human milk bank*; accessed 15/02/2009.
13. *Resolutions and Recommendations of the Council of the Islamic Academy, 1985-2000*, Jeddah: Islamic Research and Training Institute, 2000, pp. 9-10 (electronic version available *at http://www.irtipms*; accessed on 25/12/2008.). See also, Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Al-fiqh al-Islam1 wa-Adillatahu* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2002), pp. 5085-86.
14. *Resolutions and Recommendations*, p.9. For lively discussion on the issue, see Rispler-Chaim, *Islamic Medical Ethics*, pp. 122-26; Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, pp. 140-42.
15. For example, debates such as on Infertility, Artificial Insemination, In-vitro fertilization, Surrogacy and Womb-relation, can be found on the Internet *at http://www.islamset.com*. Most of these issues were recently debated by Islamic Fiqh Council. For resolutions passed by Council from 1985-2000, see *Resolutions and Recommendations*, 2-12th Sessions.
16. *Resolutions and Recommendations*, pp. 28-9. For Shiites, traditionally, such child has *nasab*, neither to father nor to mother. This also leaves the problems of whom to ascribe maternity to in the case of the (illicit) use of donour eggs or a surrogacy arrangement. Here the Sunni for the most part favour the gestational carrier and deliverer of the baby, citing the Qur'anic verse (58/2), 'Their mothers are none other than those who gave them birth', Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, text, translation and commentary (Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1997), p.1432.
17. *Resolutions and Recommendations*, p.29. A. Yacoab, *The Fiqh of Medicine: Responses in Islamic Jurisprudence to Development in Medical Science*, London: TaHa Publishers Ltd., 2001. They stress that the fusion of sperm and ovum should take place only within the marriage contract. If the woman becomes widowed or divorced then the marriage contract has come to a conclusion and stored semen of the husband would be alien to her.
18. Muhammad Rida al- Sistani, *Was 'il al-Inj ab al-Sin '1 yah*, Beirut: Dar al-Mu'arrikh al-'Arabi, 2004, p.316 cited in Morgan Clarke, 'Shiite Perspective on Kinship and New Reproductive Technology', *Isim Review*, 17 (Spring 2006), pp. 28-9.
19. For detail exposition, see M. Inhorn, 'Religion and Reproductive Technologies: IVF and Gamete Donation in the Muslim World', *Anthropology News*, 46 (2005), p.14; Morgan Clarke, 'Children of the Revolution: Ayatollah Khamene'i's 'liberal' views on In Vitro Fertilization', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34 (2007), pp. 287-303.

20. Sistani, *Was'il al-Inj ab al-Sin'1 yah,* pp. 480-81.
21. For example, All India Shia Personal Law Board (AISPLB) based in Delhi, though recently come into an existence, is an organization whose opinion carries great weight among the Shia Muslim in India.
22. For such strategies in Iran, see S. Tremayne, 'The Determinant Factors of Egg, Sperm and Embryo Donation in Iran: Religion, Donors and Recipients or the Medical Practitioners', in M. Inhorn and D. Birenbaum-Carmeli, ed. *Assisting Reproduction, Testing Genes: Global Encounters with New Biotechnologies* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007).
23. See also, Morgan Clarke, 'Shiite Perspective on Kinship', pp. 28-9 ff; idem, 'Islam, Kinship and New Reproductive Technology', *Anthropology Today,* 22, 5 (October 2006), pp. 17-20.
24. It is unclear to me whether it is the sperm donor or the husband who is to be considered the 'originator' of the woman's milk here. If it were the husband, then he would be milk-related to the child (following the principle of *laban al-fahl* or *sir-i-milk).*
25. For detailed exposition, see Gamal I.Serour, 'Bioethics in Reproductive Health: A Muslim's Perspective', *Middle East Fertility Society Journal,* 1(1999), pp.30-35; Gamal I.Serour, Mohamed A. Aboulghar and Ragga T. Mansour, 'Bioethics in Medically Assisted Conception in the Muslim World', *Journal of the Assisted Reproduction and Genetics,* 12 (1995), pp.559-65.
26. Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses,* p. 106 ff.
27. S. Altorki, 'Milk-kinship in Arab Society', *Ethnology,* 19 (1980), p. 240; R. Ensel, *Saints and Servants in Southern Morocco* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 118.
28. Altorki, 'Milk-kinship in Arab Society', p.240.
29. Khatib-Chahidi, 'Milk-kinship in Shi'ite Islamic Iran', pp.109-32.
30. P. Parkes, 'Fostering Fealty: A Comparative Analysis of Tributary Allegiances of Adoptive Kinship', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 45 (2003), pp. 741–82. Yet, in non-industrial society traditional ways of feeding infants and the Islamic ethics of breastfeeding are still very much alive, particularly the rules concerning milk relationships between a nursling and a non maternal nurse.
31. *Sayyidat1* , Vol. 20, No. 1016 (2000), p.90. See also *Majallat al-Azhar* (al-Azhar University periodical), 58(1985-86), pp.1116, 1878; 59 (1986), p.207; 59 (1987), pp. 1391, 1559; 68(1994), pp.779-80.
32. *Arab News,* 7 September 2007; available at *http:// www. arabnews. com;* accessed on 15/6/2008.

Geometrical Art Vs Vital Art: A Critique of the Modernist Abstract Art

SOPHY PEREPPADAN

Experimentation with form, during the Modernist period, by disrupting the continuity between the subject and the object, the world and the canvas, by adopting unusual and multiple points of view, by smuggling ugly and strange themes instead of standard and socially accepted material into the artistic world, and by abandoning all linear sequences in distorting accepted modes of communication, exhibited a new kind of art in style, content, form, and medium. This kind of interrogation of the notions of artistic value called for a reconsideration and revaluation of the values previously accepted as standard by society.

The Modernist experimentation with form foregrounded and focused on the text. Through the advocacy of impersonality and objectivity, the author abstracted himself from the work, thereby making the work independent. This made the work open to the reader. A Modernist text obviously presupposed a group of elite, educated and active individuals as the reading community. It was not open to everybody as in the case of the Romantic text ("[Poet] is a man speaking to men"[1]). Only a well-read, intelligent, and insightful reader would be able to find relations and produce meanings. Thus the seemingly open and ideology-free Modernist text became more and more opaque and part of ideology by separating a group of educated middle class for its readership. Once the text was cut off from the control of the author, it became responsible for its own existence. The text now had to find strategies to ensure its readership. This resulted in a very self-conscious mode in the presentation of the text. The extreme experimentation with form questioned the viability of the representational medium itself. In the visual arts this resulted in collage, in which the artists smuggled the external world itself onto the canvas. In literature and poetry this exhibited two types of consciousness. The first group believed that language still retained its representational ability, though ages of misuse had rusted its power to incarnate the world that it wanted to call forth. But this could be rectified. So they ventured on purifying "the dialect of the tribe" (Eliot, "Little Gidding" 272). This group comprises the Modernist conservatives such as William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot who believed that language could still invigorate meaning and represent the object. The other stream of thought was supported and postulated by the Dadaists, Surrealists, and women writers such as Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes. They believed that language had lost all its ability to contain the world outside. They saw language as a medium which is autotelic, which can only represent its own self. They celebrated the potential that language possessed, to generate meaning through prattling as if out of play. In their use of language it was a helpless medium which could be turned and twisted in any manner possible. This took language to the extreme ways that were not sanctioned by the norms of society. Often this type of writing coincided with a strong and fundamental critique of patriarchy and capitalist bourgeois society. The syntactic disruption using fragments, juxtaposition, and the use of free verse resulted in forming a critique of a society which still insisted upon syntax and privileged wholes, sequences, order and coherence. Since this kind of play with language did not intend any representational object, we can see this as what Roland Barthes called the "intransitive mode," which means that language did not move towards any definitive object in the world. Because of this tendency of language to poise itself as self-projected, it was often confused with nineteenth century aestheticism. Here I try to argue that unlike nineteenth century aestheticism, which was escapist, experimentation with form in the twentieth century conceives of itself as

The Modernist works should be analyzed as taking

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up the challenge of social critique while at the same time struggling to protect meanings from changes and transformation. Thus Modernism values transparency and literalism. The literal is that which has no history, whose meanings do not exceed its surface significance. In the literal therefore, there is a denial of history as well as a confining of meaning to what is universally and transhistorically true. The reactionary and revolutionary experimentalism in the art of the Modernist period ran the risk of denying its own history. Once art denied its own history, it was now capable of following its own intrinsic laws. The extreme form of this kind of freedom took art to two extremes: non-objective abstraction and the 'readymades' in which art does not distance itself from the familiar world of objects, but literally borrows them. In Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades such as the *Fountain*—a urinal turned upside down and signed "R. Mutt," which was presented for an art exhibition—the fact that the artist selected it and signed on it itself was enough to make it an art work. This means that art is now putting into question artistic production in relation to social production. It now 'uses' the products of social labour in a way that foregrounds its own labour. Thus art appears as that which is in excess of the literal. On the one hand the Modernists wish to access the realm of the universal, while on the other they are afraid of being detached from the particular experience and thereby losing legitimacy and transparency. The task for them is to see the present as the meaning and density of historical experience. Thus they have to make a show of the literal as subscribed by an excess of meaning. Eliot's theory of the "objective correlative," Ezra Pound's imagiste principles and his theory of "absolute rhythm," Joyce's "epiphanies," and the "things" themselves of William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, are all attempts to designate atomic facts as always already capable of "unconcealing" a hinterland of obedient and dedicated meanings. The paradox of Modernism is that the seemingly literal is very deceptive. It is only the tip of an iceberg which has a large part hidden and submerged. The literal is only a kind of metonymic representation of a cluster of related and whole meanings.

Marianne Moore's poem "Poetry" is a good example for the Modernist insistence on both the literal and the figurative.[2] A short analysis of this poem would substantiate all the above assumptions about Modernist poems in general. This thirty seven lined poem is a prose piece with six sentences cut and pasted onto the page in the format of a poem with more or less regular arrangement in the number of the lines in each stanza and the number of syllables in each line. The lines are conceived as time units. The language of the poem is deliberately colloquial, and this is emphasized by expressions such as "however," "in the meantime," and "after all." The theme of the poem presents a pragmatic situation, and the careful placing of the punctuation marks and pauses enhances the tone of an open discussion. It begins in the form of an argument presenting one's personal opinion ("I, too, dislike it"), and concludes with the hope that this situation can be improved ("then you are interested in poetry"). The poem explicitly articulates the dangers of literalism by instituting a response to the crisis of legitimization in poetry, and by itself forming an apology for poetry. In the capitalist society of the twentieth century, the existence of poetry also can be ensured only through an economy of profit and gain. Thus the values recommended by the poem are 'genuineness' and 'usefulness.'

A closer inspection of the poem shows that the surface features as seen above are only virtual, and that it is full of particulars. Under the cover of the literal the poem exhibits an extreme nostalgia for method. The explicit articulation of the dangers of literalism is a confession of its own inner misgivings. In the arbitrary stanzaic arrangement and the syllabic distribution on the page, the experience of freedom (arbitrary stanzaic pattern) is severely qualified by method (syllabic verse). The question here is of the literal and the figurative. The Modernists privilege a mixture of both: "'imaginary gardens with real toads in them.'" The poem exhorts poets to choose useful materials for poetry:

> Hands that can grasp, eyes
> that can dilate, hair that can rise
> if it must, these things are important not because a high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful.

Again, in the choice of materials for poetry, the poem turns to the organicity and the pragmatism of the biological world:

> [. . .] the bat holding on upside down or in quest of something to
> eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
> a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flea [. . . .]

According to the poem, though these things are important for their organicity, one can accept materials from the inorganic world too without making any discrimination even against "'business documents and/ schoolbooks.'" With a "perfect contempt" for triviality in writing, the poem invites the new generation to be

"literalists of/the imagination" and to present "the raw material for poetry in/all its rawness."

It was such a belief in the rawness of the material for poetry and the genuineness of presentation which forced Ezra Pound to found the Imagist movement,[3] the first of the Modernist 'isms' in 1912. Pound was instigated to see the beauty of prose, for the first time through Ford Madox Ford, at the publication of his third volume (*Canzoni*). It is possible to see the influence of Ford in the principles of Imagism that Pound expounded:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome [Pound, *Literary Essays* 3].

These three principles deal with two main concerns: content and form. While the first principle cautions the poet about content, and how this should be treated in a poem, the second and third warn about the form in relation to content. According to these principles form is discovered by the elaboration of the content. Pound calls this "significant form." Pound later in the "A Few Don'ts" published in *Poetry* in 1913 gave young writers a few more instructions:

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something[. . . .] Go in fear of abstractions. Do not tell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose [. . . .] Use either no ornament or good ornament [*Literary Essays* 4-5].

These also emphasize the necessity for brevity, clarity, and precision. According to Pound language has to be calcined in order to achieve this. Proper chiselling and burning up of the impurities of the language are the basic requirements for such condensation and to achieve transparency between form and content. Here the tendency is to bring poetry in the direction of minimalist representation, in which word and thing are fused together. Arbitrariness of representation is to be reduced to the minimum through the exact correspondence between language and the thing represented. There were other contemporary Modernists also who shared Pound's ideas and publicized similar re-presentative methodologies. Joyce's concept of "epiphany" is a parallel type of thought, and it also gives prominence to a new presentational strategy:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.[4] In its principle "epiphany" credits individual fragments and particulars with the capacity to reach the universal. Eliot's theory of the "objective correlative" also belongs to the same family of concepts. By this phrase Eliot means that,

[. . .] a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked [. . . .] The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion [. . . .] (Joyce 216)

Eliot also emphasizes it as an "inevitability" that the form and the content, the external and the internal world will coincide.

In his theoretical formulations Pound is deeply indebted to T. E. Hulme, with whom Pound came to be acquainted in 1909, in the 'Poets' Club,' which conducted weekly meetings on Thursdays. It was when Pound was working on his article on the luminous detail that he attended, unwillingly, one of Hulme's lectures on Bergson. Carpenter notes that Pound was attracted by Hulme's words:

[. . .] but he woke up when he heard Hulme saying that the artist does not *create* a truth but *discovers* it, picks out 'something which we, owing to a hardening of our perceptions, have been unable to see ourselves.' The real challenge to a poet [. . .] was to satisfy this 'passionate desire for accuracy.' (Carpenter 170)

Pound's call to make the language of poetry "harder and saner," and to achieve presentational immediacy by exploiting the evocative power of words to the maximum can be seen as a direct influence of Hulme. The similarity with Hulme's argument is striking in Pound's use of a mathematical metaphor to insist upon poetry's ability to provide concreteness of reference. Hulme wrote in *The New Age* in 1909:

In prose as in algebra concrete things are embodied in signs or counters, which are moved about according to rules, without being visualized at all in the process [. . . .] One only changes the x's and y's back into physical things at the end of the process. Poetry, in one aspect at any rate, may be considered as an effort to avoid this characteristic of prose. It is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily [. . . .] Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language (Hulme 134).

Influenced by Hulme's concept of such a scientific language, Pound wrote in 1910: "Poetry is a sort of

inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like, but equations for human emotions" (Pound, *Spirit of Romance* 14). Pound also wanted poetic language to be as precise and clear as the language of science. By advocating such a scientific precision in language Pound seems to be promoting literalism.

Hulme's influence on contemporary artists, poets, and philosophers was remarkable. This young philosopher cum poet had put his indelible imprint on the Modernist avant-garde revolutions before his death in the First World War. Appearing as "the antenna of the race" Hulme impressed upon the young activists that the immediate necessity of the time was to destroy the conception of "*continuity*" (Hulme 3) [italics Hulme's] that was handed down from the nineteenth century. He could sense that the "Renaissance attitude" has been decaying, and that a new sensibility had been evolving during the early phase of the twentieth century. Hulme analyzed Modernist art in terms of Primitive art and Renaissance art, and borrowed Wilhelm Worringer's ideas to demonstrate his understanding. Worringer qualified Primitive art as geometric art and Renaissance art as vital. The classification was in terms of the difference in human nature during primitive and later times. During the early stages of civilization and during the classical times, man was aware of his finitude, and he perceived nature as a controlling power over him. He had a sort of awe and reverence before these powers. He found himself to be an alien in nature, and he was distanced from the processes of nature. This kind of respectful and reverential attitude towards nature made early man abstract the essential forms and characteristics of natural objects in their works rather than presenting them as they were seen. Thus according to Hulme "[t]he first gods were pure abstractions without any resemblance to life" (Hulme 89). Worringer christened this art as "geometrical art" because here the tendency was towards abstraction. According to him Egyptian and Byzantine art are examples of this kind of art. In geometric art we find nothing reccognizable in nature, but only abstract figures and forms, whereas the counterpart of this—"vital art"—was mimetic. In this art the world is more realistically and naturally represented. This kind of art is seen in Greece and in the Renaissance world and later. Mimetic or realistic art presents a man who is more akin to nature, and there is a kind of complete identification with nature. This gives preference to organic forms and natural shapes. Such a naturalistic art results in a "happy pantheistic relation between man and the outside world," (Hulme 86) and Worringer names this tendency "empathy." This quality is a characteristic of Romantic art (which Hulme hated!).

Hulme says that in the modern world the tendency is towards abstraction. This is not due to the awe or fear it has of nature, but is a reaction against the Romantic vital art. In the modern world abstraction is employed in order to capture the universal in the particular. Thus Modernist abstract art becomes a protestant reaction against the realistic and mimetic tradition. During the nineteenth century, when all modes of production had turned into the assembly line mode, art alone remained in the handicraft mode. In a fast-moving technological society art was alienated from mainstream production. Art responded to this alienation in a revolutionary manner. It became more and more introspective. Its purpose was not to reflect socially sanctioned experiences, but to experiment with modalities germane to itself and achieve its own unique social legitimacy. As a result, art became a critique of society, and it began to free itself of all ideological bondages. Once art was severed from social control it started claiming its own ontological space by following new modes of presentation. In the twentieth century the development of abstract art can thus be seen as an ontological necessity. Abstract art can be considered to be one of the symptoms of art's critical attitude towards society. By deconstructing the mimetic tendency in art, the canvases began to present distorted and dismembered objects for viewing. The German Expressionist painter Franz Marc wrote in 1912:

> Do people seriously believe that we new artists do not take our form from nature, do not wrest it from nature, just like every artist that has ever lived? . . . Nature glows in our paintings as it does in all art. . . . Nature is everywhere, in us and outside us; but there is something which is not quite nature but rather the mastery and interpretation of nature: art. In its essence, art has always been the boldest removal from nature and 'naturalness.' The bridge across to the realm of the spirit, the necromancy of humanity [. . . .] We no longer cling to reproduction of nature, but destroy it, so as to reveal the mighty laws which hold sway behind the beautiful exterior (Marc, 132).

In one mode of abstraction the real world was still available in its traces and memories. A famous example for such a canvas is Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* which was painted in 1911. This canvas experiments in the exploration of a "sophisticated union of the phenomenon of movement and the immobile surface of a canvas on which it is portrayed" (Tisdall 54). In this painting the action and the perception are split into time units or, in other words, it spatializes time. It is not the desire to watch a nude which is being fulfilled here. In non-objective abstract art, all recognizable forms

vanish from the canvas. It becomes a representation of its own self. In Wassily Kandinsky's *Composition*, for example, the colours and forms do not remind us of anything in the external world. This work of art is itself a new object which is capable of generating new ideas that are not necessarily conditioned by society.

In this paper my attempt has been to prove that the Modernist experimentation with form led to the production of works which elicited modes of desire that in turn, required active human subjects to experience it. I have tried to prove that such manoeuvres presuppose an interest in human emancipation that would at the same time legitimize aesthetic production. My analysis of poems from a wide range of Modernist sources proves that in all these cases the 'literal' is both privileged and feared—privileged because it is prime raw material for art, and feared because it tends to obliterate the imagination if used indiscriminately. Thus the Modernist seeks to reconcile the literal with the figurative by permitting chance and serendipity to configure determinate meaning, and by bestowing upon the creative human artifact the ability to concretize the possibility of order in an essentially chaotic and contingent world.

NOTES

1. William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," p.163.
2. Moore, pp.649-650.
3. For an important early study of Imagism, see Glenn Hughes, *Imagism and the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry* (1931; Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1960). Another important study of the movement is Stanley K. Coffmann, Jr., *Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry* (Norman, Oklahoma: U of Oklahoma P, 1915). For a more recent study, see John T. Gage, *In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981). For a good treatment of the influence of the ideas of Ford Madox Ford on Pound's Imagism, see Herbert N. Schneidau, *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969) pp. 3-37. For a useful discussion of the use of metaphor in Imagism, see Suzanne Juhasz, *Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1974). For a discussion of the contemporary backdrop of Pound's Imagiste theory and practice, see William Pratt, "Ezra Pound and the Image," in *Ezra Pound: The London Years: 1908-1920*, ed. Philip Grover (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

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British Imperialism and Romantic Imagination: English Poetry in Nineteenth Century Bengal

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Nineteenth century Bengal was a period of great intellectual ferment and social awareness. It was also a period of contradictions. On the one hand it was witness to the reform movements initiated by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohan Roy and on the other there was the opposition to widow remarriage by Radha Kanta Deb, the leader of orthodox society in Calcutta. One of the great debates in the East India Company in the early nineteenth century was between the Orientalists, who argued that the Company should continue its policy of supporting native educational institutions, and the Anglicists, who argued for the establishment of a Western mode of education. By 1818-1819, the British Empire was expanding and hence the need for a single link language was felt by the ruling elite. The Hindu College was started in Calcutta in 1817 at the initiative of a group of Bengalis who wanted instruction not only in their own language but also in English. Indian Clerks and translators were joining administration and knowledge of English was essential for these jobs.

The beginning of English education in Bengal is to be seen in terms of private enterprise. Contemporary records, such as Ramkamal Sen's *A Dictionary of English and Bengali* (1834) and extracts from newspapers collected in two volumes of W. H. Carey's *The Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company* (1882) refer to schools set up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by Drummond, Sherbourne and Halifax among others. There were also schools run by Bengalis. Some of these schools organized recitations, debates, and stage performances of scenes from Shakespeare. Already during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, several plays of Shakespeare were staged in Calcutta. The General Committee of Public Instruction was established in 1823, the year the first grant was made. English schools were set up under the patronage of the Calcutta Diocesan Committee, the Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society and most importantly the General Assembly's Institution of the Church of Scotland founded in 1830 by Alexander Duff. English had already replaced Persian as the language of diplomatic correspondence. It was this atmosphere that saw the rise of a literature written in English.

Pyarichand Mitra who wrote under the pen name Tekchand Thakur begins the fourth chapter of his novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal* with a description of the early days of the new schools that taught English.

> When the British first came to Calcutta to carry on trade, the mercantile profession was in the hands of the *baboos* of Sett and Basak families, but there was none in Calcutta who knew the English language. Negotiations of trade with Englishmen used to be conducted by means of gestures. Necessity, however, is the mother of invention, and within a short period the local people began to learn English. When presently the Supreme Court came to be established, the cultivation of English too grew. . . A youngster who, at a wedding function or a dinner party, could rattle forth compound words, became a much-admired cynosure of the gathering.[1]

One of the important ways in which colonialism strove to exercise its control was by means of language. As Gauri Viswanathan points out, "[the] imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England" was the motive for the coming in of the discipline of English in the curriculum in India.[2] The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place.[3] This it does by means of two processes. The first is one of "abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English'" and involves a "rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication". The other process is that of "appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the center, the process of capturing and remoulding the

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language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege."[4] It is this process of appropriation that seems most evident when considering the corpus of poetry written in English in nineteenth century Bengal. The first book of poems in English by an Indian appeared five years before Macaculay's famous minute–*The Shair and Other Poems* by Kasiprasad Ghose. Michael Madhusudhan Dutt's *The Captive Ladie* (1849), *The Dutt Family Album* (1870) and Toru Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) soon followed.

In the nineteenth century there appeared a group of poets in Bengal writing in English. Their poetry was strongly influenced by the works of the British Romantic poets whom they eagerly read and imitated. All the features of what is popularly referred to as the Bengal Renaissance are reflected in the poetry of Derozio, Kasiprasad Ghose, Soshee Chunder Dutt, Madhusudhan Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt and Greece Chunder Dutt. Nineteenth century poetry written in English in India was imitative. Mimicry played an important role in the definition of the new class of poetry. Bhabha's insight into the nature of mimicry and imitation are of interest here. Mimicry is, according to Bhabha, "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power." According to Bhabha mimicry is much more than opposition. The hybridities that result from displacement and dislocation challenge notions of authenticity and become forms of subversion and resistance. "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority."[5]

R. Parthasarathy says that the earlier poets writing in English "from Henry Derozio... to Aurobindo Ghose... are only of historical interest. They wrote like English poets and, as a result, failed to establish an indigenous tradition of writing in English."[6] While it is true that the poets belonging to the nineteenth century writing in English definitely illustrate a historical and social phenomenon, nevertheless, they are part of a literary tradition, a tradition that allows the entire group writing at this time to be viewed together. These poets write in a language not their mother tongue and what one notices in their poetry is an amalgamation of the east and the west. A critic comments that "the derivative Romantics of *The Bengali Book of English Verse* had no inhibitions at all about writing on Indian themes as much like their English models as possible.... For the most part the forms and subject-matter are nineteenth century romantic."[7] As Henry Schwarz writes,

> Not only were the poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge printed and taught in the English-language schools of Calcutta well before English literature had been conceived as a school subject in England, but company administrators like T. B. Macaulay and John Stuart Mill were fervent admirers and practitioners of romantic poetry and philosophy, which informed their visions of a new, rational order in the East and were in turn informed by the potentialities of day-to-day colonial administration. The most powerful element of romantic thought was its elevation of aesthetic experience to the highest achievement of human subjectivity.[8]

Derozio's poetry reveals a strong influence of Romantic poetry, particularly the poetry of Wordsworth and Byron. At the same time his poetry also attempts to expose the social evils of the time. In 1828 was published *The Fakeer of Jungheera, A Metrical Tale and Other Poems*, a long narrative poem exploring the theme of sati. The poem is Derozio's most sustained and ambitious poetical work that deals the romance between the Muslim Fakeer and a Hindu girl. The Hindu Brahmin widow, Nuleeni, is carried from the funeral pyre of her husband by her former lover, the bandit chief Fakeer to his stronghold at Jungheera. They are about to embark on a happy life when the king's men kill the bandit. The poem also has a sub plot about the Legend of Shushan, the legend of King Vikramaditya and the spirit Betaal. The poem reveals an enthusiasm for Orientalist themes in keeping with the general interest in Orientalist subjects witnessed during that time. Derozio's work reveals the influence of Western sources, the poetry of Thomas Campbell, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore as well as Orientalist texts and the translations of William Jones and H.H. Wilson. The subject matter of the poem is interesting in the light of social reforms regarding sati and widow remarriage in India in the nineteenth century. It is, however, important to note that William Bentinck's law (1829) regarding the abolition of sati did not come into being when this poem was written. Derozio's attitude to the practice of sati is evident in the poem.

> O! this is but the world's unfeeling way
> To goad the victim that it will soon slay,
> And like a demon 'tis its custom still
> To laugh at sorrow, and then coldly kill.[9]

Derozio supported the movement against *sati* which resulted in its abolition and wrote a poem, "On the Abolition of Sattee", in the *India Gazette* (August 8, 1831) celebrating its abolition.

Derozio's favourite poetic form was the sonnet and he was the first Indian poet to use the form. He is also the first Indian poet to bring a note of patriotism in his poetry. Derozio's patriotic poems reveal his pride in India's

glorious past. He describes the splendour of his country and the sufferings under foreign yoke and even expresses a desire to join the freedom struggle. The nationalistic zeal is seen in poems like "To India - My Native Land," "The Harp of India," and "To the Pupils of Hindu College". The sonnets addressed to India passionately proclaim the former glories of the poet's native country, India, while moaning its present state of degradation. The "The Harp of India" refers to a long line of gifted artists who once contributed towards the greater glory of India:

O many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave[10]

This awareness of ancient achievements follows a description of the present condition of the country.

Thy music was once sweet – who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain? –
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain:
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain[11]

The poet describes moments of past glory and contrasts that to the country's present state and hopes that India might be able to regain her former position and glory. He goes on to reveal his commitment to his country and muse and promises to take an active role in the restoration and rejuvenation of India.

. . .but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain![12]

"To India - My Native Land" looks back to the time of India's past glory and contrasts it to the country's its present state.

My country! In thy day of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
And worshipped as a deity thou wast
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?[13]

In the sonnet "To the Pupils of the Hindu College", Derozio speaks of his students, some of whom became important later in literary and social circles in Calcutta,

Expanding like the petals young flowers
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers[14]

One of the students upon whom Derozio had the strongest influence was Kasiprasad Ghose. Kasiprasad Ghose (1809-1873) wrote poems which were published in local periodicals, the *Literary Review* and the *Calcutta Monthly Magazine*. His collected poems were published in *The Shair, or Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830). He made a serious study of English metre in order to master English poetic form and technique, a fact that he acknowledged. A report in the *Calcutta Gazette* (1828) notes:

English education, among the inhabitants of Bengal, has hitherto had little more than the mere language for its object; a sufficient command of which for conducting the details of official duty, comprehend the utmost ambition of many native students. The spelling Book, a few Reading Exercises, a Grammar, and a dictionary, formed the whole course of their reading, except in a few isolated instances of superior ability and industry; and little more was effected than a qualification as copyist, or accountant. The Hindoo College is intended to compass something more; to teach Bengalee youth to read, and relish, English literature; to store their minds with the facts of history and science, and to enable them to express their conclusions in a clear and polished style; founded upon a comprehensive view of the constitution of society, and the phenomena of nature.[15]

Kasiprasad's formative years were spent at a point of time when the influence of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio as teacher at Hindu College was widespread on the students of the College. Henry Meredith Parker's *The Draught of Immortality* as well as Derozio's' poems were published, in 1827 in Calcutta. The same year also saw the publication of Kasiprasad's *The Shair and Other Poems*, the first publication of English poetry by a Bengali. The title page of *The Shair and Other Poems* had a couplet from Byron

Nor mote my shell awake the weary Nine,
To grace so plain a tale – this lowly lay of mine.[16]

This volume of poems was dedicated to Lord Bentinck, the then Governor General of India. The first canto of the poem, "The Shair, A Poem in Three Cantos" was dedicated to Horace Hayman Wilson. These are important as suggestive of some key features evident in Kasiprasad's works – the influence of the British Romantic poets on his work, the influence of the British that of the Orientalists which often provided the background of his poems.

The opening lines of "The Shair" echo Derozio's sonnet "The Harp of India" which begins

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?

Unstrung, for ever, must thou there remain?
Thy music once was sweet – who hears it now?[17]

Kasiprasad's poem begins,

Harp of my country! Pride of yore!
Whose sweetest notes are heard no more!
O! give me once to touch thy strings,
Where tuneful sweetness ever clings.[18]

In both the poems the poet's country is symbolized by the harp, an instrument which is very dear to the British Romantics. Both the poems refer to the past when the music from the harp was sweeter since it was played by worthier souls and end with a wish on the part of the poet to revive the glorious traditions of the past. The numerous allusions to Derozio reveal the influence he exerted upon other poets in Calcutta. The sentiment, diction, imagery and metaphor in Derozio and Kasiprasad are almost identical.

"The Shair" tells the story of a Shair, who loved a woman named Armita. The beloved dies and driven to extreme emotions of sorrow, the Shair throws himself off a cliff into the sea. The use of the term Shair for the hero of the poem is explained in the Preface. The poem does not have any other Persian influence and relies on heavy ornamentation in imitation of the English style. There are references to Indian birds, the koil and the bulbul, to lotus blossoms, to Surya, the sun, but the diction is very English.

His descant chaunts the Koil now
From yonder mountain's gilded brow,
The rose is blushing sweet to hear
Her Bulbul's tale with pity's tear.
Where opening lotus-blossoms gay
Yield to the kiss of Surya's ray[19]

The entire poem is in couplets and there is an element of artifice. Kasiprasad was able to use English poetic devices as evident in the English tone and form of the lines. He praises his country's greatness in the manner in which English poets eulogized ancient Greece.

Land of the Gods and lofty name;
Land of the fair and beauty's spell;
Land of the bards of mighty fame[20]

One section of the *The Shair and Other Poems* is titled "Hindu Festivals", with Kasiprasad describing eleven festivals. The influence of William Jones is evident in the poems in this section. The poems are prefaced with a sentence explaining the origin of the festival or of the god or goddess they commemorate. "Dasahara" has a sub-heading "Or *Ganga Puja*, a festival in commemoration of the descent of GANGA the river, upon the earth." The poem "Ras Yatra" has the sub title "Or a festival in commemoration of one of the many gambols of KRISHNA, the Indian Apollo, with the milk-women."[21]

The poems in this volume are written in the Romantic style, including three long poems in the first section – "The Haunt of the Muse," "The Lover's Life," and "Hope". There are several smaller poems which have titles like, "Sonnet to the Moon," "Stanzas Written in Spring," "The Setting Sun," or "Evening in May". A poem called "Morning in May" has the following lines where one witnesses the existence of very Eastern motifs with the very Romantic image of the cuckoo bird.

Hear the cuckoo's far, sweet cooing
From the cage's gloom,
And he love-lorn Bhramar's wooing[22]

Reviews of Kasiprasad's poetry concentrated on his achievement in writing in a language that was new to him. In Britain several contemporary journals noted the publication of *The Shair and Other Poems*.

The poet who followed Kasiprasad Ghose as the most famous exponent of Indian writing in English in nineteenth century Bengal was Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1824-1873). Like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who turned to writing in Bengali after his first work, a novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), Madhusudhan Dutt too began his literary career by writing in English and then turned to Bengali, becoming one of the greatest poets of modern Bengali literature. In an essay, "The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu" (1854), Madhusudhan wrote of his love for the language and literature of the West.

I acknowledge to you, and I need not blush to do so – that I love the language of the Anglo-Saxon. Yes – I love the language – the glorious language – the language of the Anglo-Saxon. My imaginative visions forth before me the language of the Anglo-Saxon in all its radiant beauty; and I feel silenced and abashed.[23]

In a poem composed as a student at Hindu College, "Written at the Hindu College", Madhusudhan echoes the sentiments found in the poem of his teacher, Derozio, "Sonnet to the Pupils of Hindu College". Madhusudhan's poem is a sonnet like Derozio's and expresses the same hopes about the future greatness of the students of the College.

Oh! How my heart exulteth while I see
These future flow'rs, to deck my countyr's brow,
Has kindly nurtured in this nursery![24]

In his poem "Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College", Derozio addresses his students. Madhusudhan Dutt, in this poem, refers to his contemporaries, some of whom became important figures in nineteenth century Bengal, such as Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Govin Chunder Dutt. Both Derozio and Madhusudhan reveal an awareness of belonging to the Hindu College, the premier institution for the dissemination of English education in India.

Madhusudhan was an Anglophile in his youth and even when his enthusiasm for everything English became moderate later, he never lost his faith in the superiority of Western civilization and culture. While still a student, he contributed to the *Gyanambesan*, the *Bengal Spectator* and the *Literary Gleaner*. He also published poems in a literary magazine, *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* edited by D.L.Richardson who taught English literature at Hindu College. Madhusudhan had a great desire to leave India for England to be a famous poet as is evident in his letters and early poetry. He sent his poems to England to the editors of *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Bentley's Miscellany*. A poem written at a tender age reveals his ambitions and preoccupations.

I sigh for Albion's distant shore,
Its valleys green, its mountains high;
Tho' friends, relations, I have none
In that far clime, yet oh! I sigh
To cross the vast Atlantic wave
For glory, or a nameless grave![25]

Madhusudhan's conversion to Christianity was a significant step in the direction of achieving the desire of his youth to reach "Albion's distant shore". On 9th February 1843, at the Old Mission Church in Calcutta, Madhusudhan was baptized and given the name Michael. The ceremony was accompanied by a hymn he had composed for the occasion.

Long sunk in Superstition's night,
By sin and Satan driven,-
I saw not, - cared not for the light
That leads the blind to heaven.[26]

Madhusudhan's early poems, like those of Derozio and Kasiprasad Ghose, exhibit an affinity with Romantic poetry. One of the sonnets composed at this time reveal the vision of an idealized Britain as perceived by the poet.

For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free
Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty
Makes even the lowest happy; - where the eye
Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee[27]

Two long poems, "The Upsori" and "King Porus" by Madhusudhan reveal a growing interest in Orientalist themes. This interest was a result of the work of the Orientalists in India, the works of William Jones and others.[28] These poems also mark a movement away from the early poetry so reminiscent of the English poetic tradition towards the development of his individual literary sensibility.

Between the years 1849 and 1856, Madhusudhan remained in Madras composing the bulk of his mature English poetry. *The Captive Ladie* was published in 1849 and he contributed regularly to the *Madras Circulator and General Chronicle* and the *Athenaeum* and also edited *Madras Spectator* and the *Hindu Chronicle*. It was for the *Madras Circulator* that he wrote the long poem *The Captive Ladie*. The poem is based on the story of King Prithviraj and his abduction of Samyukta and his subsequent defeat in battle to Muslim invaders. The poem is subtitled "A Fragment of an Indian Tale" and in the Introductory stanzas he introduces the topic of his long poem.

Then come and list thee to the minstrel-lyre
And Lay of Eld of this my father-land,
When first, as unchain'd demons, breathing fire,
Wild, stranger foe-men trod her sunny strand,
And Pluckt her brighter gems with rude, unsparing hand.[29]

The poem has two cantos, each of which is preceded by lines from Byron's *The Giaour* and Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. The Muslims are described as fearful, while the Hindus are shown to be fighting for life and liberty. The battle scenes are described with great vigour and power and the poem has many references to Hindu mythology and to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Michael Madhusudhan Dutt's 'King Porus- A Legend of Old' has an epigraph from Shakespeare ("We never shall look upon his like again!") and one from Byron ("When shall such hero live again?") and deals with King Porus and his encounter with Alexander.

Like to a lion chain'd,
That tho' faint – bleeding – stands in pride –
With eyes, where unsubdued
Yet flash'd the fire- looks that defied;
King Porus boldly went
Where 'midst the gay and glittering crowd

Sat god-like Alexander;
While 'round, Earth's mightiest monarchs bow'd
King Porus was no slave;
He stooped not – bent not there his knee, -
But stood, as stands an oak,
In Himalayan majesty.
'How should I treat thee?' ask'd
The mighty king of Macedon:
'Ev'n as a King', replied
In royal pride, Ind's haughty son,
The conq'ror pleas'd,
Him forth releas'd:
Thus India's crown was lost and won.[30]

"Visions of the Past", a verse fragment was published before *The Captive Ladie* in 1848 in the *Madras Circulator*, is replete with Christian themes and imagery and is about a vision which the poet sees in a bower of two divine beings that vanish and reappear. Besides this fragment, Madhusudhan's other English work encompasses a dramatic poem, "Rizia, the Empress of Inde". After his return to Calcutta he translated his Bengali plays *Ratnavali* and *Sermista* and another translation of the first nationalist play in Bengali by Dinabandhu Mitra, *Nil Darpan*. It was in keeping with the spirit of the times that Madhusudhan began to compose literature in Bengali instead of English. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 caused a national unrest against the British rule in India and the subsequent years witnessed the gradual birth of nationalism in Bengal. It is this scenario and personal circumstances that influenced Madhusudhan's decision to write in Bengali.

The Dutt Family Album is the first anthology of poems by Indians in English and contains poems by Govin Chunder Dutt, Greece Chunder Dutt, Omesh Chunder Dutt and Hur Chunder Dutt. The poems in *The Dutt Family Album* are modelled on Romantic and Victorian poetry, sometimes with lines from an English poet included as an epigraph. Educated at Hindu College under the supervision of D.L.Richardson the members of the Dutt family wrote on Christian sentiment, nature and Indian history and legend. The strongest influence on these poets was British Romantic poetry. Govin Chunder converted to Christianity, visited England and published *The Dutt Family Album* in 1870.

In his Introduction to an anthology of Indo-English poetry in 1918, T.O.Dunn wrote about *The Dutt Family Album*

The literary merits of the compilation, carefully judged in the light of the special circumstances of its production, are considerable. The quality of the verse, the range and variety of theme, the command of various metrical forms, and the restraint and dignity of the style are everywhere pleasingÖ Indian history, legend and landscape, the picturesque element of the Christian and the Hindu faith, and such ideas as would attract the oriental in his first encounter with the West, provide the subjects of their verse.[31]

In a poem "A Farewell to Romance", Govin Chunder addresses Romance

Who hath not seen thee, fair one, when the day
Urges his courses over the dappled clouds[32]

The echoes of Keats are obvious, "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?"[33]

Govin Chunder's verses also appeared in the *Calcutta Review* (1849). Hur Chunder's poems were published in *Fugitive Pieces* (1851) and *Lotus Leaves: Poems Chiefly on Ancient Indian Subjects* (1871). Greece Chunder's *Cherry Stones* was published in 1881 and his second volume *Cherry Blossoms* in 1887. He also wrote a book of poems called *The Loyal Hours: Poems Welcoming the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh on their Advent to India in 1869 and 1875* (1876) which gives an idea of the political inclinations of the family. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's works include *Miscellaneous Verses* (1848), *Stray Leaves: or Essays, Poems and Tales* (1864) and *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems* (1878).

The poem 'A Farewell to Romance' reveals the great love and admiration these poets had for Romantic poetry,

The varied melody of Shakespeare's shell,
The Doric flute of Milton, or the reed
Of 'sage and serious' Spenser ever dear,
In breathless silence heard so oft before
By thee and me, (thou dids'st confess the spell);
Or what less deep, of late, thou lov'st to hear
The strains of Scott that stir the soul indeed.[34]

A special affinity with the poetry of Wordsworth is discernible in many of the poems. Two poems in the *Album* are dedicated to him, 'Wordsworth's Poems' and 'Wordsworth'. The influence of Sir Walter Scott is evident in the historical poems in the *Album*. The beginning of Omesh Chunder Dutt's 'The Chief of Pokurna' reveals the way the poet uses an English idiom to describe an Indian setting,

Within the merry greenwood,
At the dawning of the day,
Four-and-twenty armed men
In silent ambush lay,
They wait like couchant leopards,
Their eager eyes they strain,
And look towards the lonely glade,
Towards the distant plain.

The description of the chief of Pokurna is even more revealingly,

A brave gerfalcon on his wrist,
The bugle on his breast,
The sunlight gleaming brightly on
His nodding plume and crest.[35]

The historical poems are chiefly concerned with either Rajput or Mughal history. This interest in history is in keeping with a general interest in Indian history in the nineteenth century, seen in historical novels, plays and poems.[36] This interest is due to the fact that colonial ideology, as Ashis Nandy states, "postulated a clear disjunction between India's past and its present. The civilized India was in the bygone past; now it was dead and 'museumized'".[37]

In the preface to his volume of poems *Lotus Leaves: Poems Chiefly on Ancient Indian Subjects*, Hur Chunder Dutt writes of this interest in history,

> We have many historians in India from school-histories up to elaborate treatises, but no work embodying Indian historical incidents and characters and older traditions in a poetical form. Yet India is truly the land of romance and poetry. . . . Turning to its history we find in those gigantic epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata such an inexhaustible mine of the romantic and the poetical, and its later history such stirring incidents, such oriental gorgeousness, such rapid rise and extinction of dynasties, such a marvelous development of the plans of Divine Providence, that neither the poet nor the romancer can be at a loss for subjects to write upon. . . . All that. . . . [poets do] is to versify or put into metre certain passages in the history of India arranging them in chronological order, and as metrical compositions exercise a more powerful influence than prose, especially on the young, he trusts his labors will not be altogether without its uses.[38]

The poems written by members of the Dutt family were predominantly derivative in nature and they were influenced by colonial ideology in the usage of myth in their poems. They approached the history of India through the works of historians dealing with remote regions and legends of India. "The Death of Mohammed Ghori," "Jehangir's Lament," "The Flight of Humaoon" and "Sunjogta" deal with the history of Delhi while poems like "Tara Baee" and "The Flight of Rana Sangha" deal with legends of Rajasthan.

The influence of Colebrooke, Willima Jones, James Todd, Monstuart Elphinstone, Grant, Duff and William Erskine on this school pf poetry is immense. Todd's *Annals* presented Rajasthan in vibrant colours.

> The struggles of a brave people for independence during a series of ages, sacrificing whatever was dear to them for the maintenance of the religion of their forefathers, and sturdily defending to death, and in spite of every temptation, their rights and national liberty, form a picture which it is difficult to contemplate without emotion.[39]

This is very much how the Dutt's depicted history and historical figures in their poetry.

The middle of the nineteenth century witnessed the institutionalization of English education with Orientalism being invoked only in the cause of nationalism. After 1857 and the establishment of the rule of the Crown, the British attitude to India hardened. Together with the spread of English education and western ideas, Indians had also begun to absorb western historiography. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a deep interest in the study of history grew in India with writers like Rajnarayan Bose, Bhudeb Mukherji, Chandra Nath Basu and Bankimchandra Chatterjee using history in the defence of Hinduism. In an essay, Bankimchandra Chatterjee writes that the reason Indians are weak is because of a lack of a sense of unity or national pride and that this is not possible unless Indian history is described and interpreted by Indian historians.

> There is no Hindu history. . . . Who will praise our noble qualities if we do not praise them ourselves.? . . . . When has the glory of any nation ever been proclaimed by another nation? . . . The Hindus have no such glorious qualities simply because there is no written evidence.[40]

Writings such as these contributed towards creating the nationalist mood that led poets like Hur Chunder Dutt to write poems on historical subjects. Orientalist thought had been dealt a severe blow during the time of Lord Bentinck. As David Kopf notes, that between 1829 and 1835,

> . . .the College of Fort William was dismantled, the Asiatic Society experienced grave financial difficulties, the Calcutta Madrassa and Sancrit College came precariously close to extinction, the Calcutta School and School Book Societies were rendered impotent, Serampore College anglicized its curriculum and lost its attractiveness to Indians, and such Bengali socioreligious reform movements as the Brahmo Sabha began their long drift to cultural nationalism.[41]

This is an important development since it enables one to realize that the poetry of the Dutts was often a reaction to a government policy which sponsored Western education and considered it infinitely superior. The Orientalist period was invoked predominantly in the cause of nationalism. Hur Chunder Dutt's poem "Sonnet: India" reveals this nationalism. The poem begins with the love of the poet for his country, then moves on to a vision of India's past and ends with a hope for a bright future.

Thy days of glory memory recalls,

And castles rise, and towers, and flanking walls,
And soldiers live, for thee dear land who fell[42]

The frequent reference to the conflict between the Rajputs and the Mughals in the historical poems by the Dutts is a parallel to the situation prevalent between the Indians and the English. The historical poems by the Dutts champion the cause of the weak against the strong and express ideas of freedom from subjugation.

To-day we'll free our country from
A tyrant's hated reign,
To-day we'll break, no more to wear,
Base thraldom's galling chain.[43]

The year 1875 could be said to be the end of Orientalist poetry so prevalent in nineteenth century Bengal. 1876 saw the publication of two works that marked definitive stylistic departures from the earlier school of nineteenth century Indian poetry in English. The first was the publication of Toru Dutt's *A Sheaf Glean'd in French Fields* and the other was the first book of poetry to be published in English outside Bengal, Behramji Malabari's *The Indian Muse in English Garb*. Another interesting development is the publication of poetry written in English by Indians abroad unlike the earlier school of poetry which was predominantly published from Calcutta. Malabari's work was published in Bombay and was followed by Vesuvala C. Nowrosjee's *Courting the Muse* (1879) and M. M. Kunte's *The Rishi* (1890).

The poets writing in Bengal in English in the nineteenth century used the medium of poetry and the English language to express nationalist ideas as well. This school of poetry is the site of an interface between the colonizer and the colonized and is also an example of subversion as the colonized used the colonizer's language to establish a nationalist identity.

Notes

1. Quoted by Amalendu Bose in "Bengali Writing in English in the Nineteenth Century" in N. K. Sinha, ed., *The History of Bengal: 1757-1905* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1996), p. 514.
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3. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 35.
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6. "Indo-Anglian Attitudes," *TLS*, March 10, 1978, p. 285.
7. David McCutcheon, *Indian Writing in English: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Calcutta:Writers Workshop, 1997), p. 56.
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9. A. Mukhopadhyay, A. Dutta, A. Kumar and S.S. Mukhopadhyay, eds., *Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio*, (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001), p. 109.
10. Ibid., p. 11.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, p. 99.
14. V. K. Gokak, selected and edited, *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1970, p. 53.
15. *Calcutta Gazette*, Thursday, 17 January 1828.
16. *The Shair and Other Poems*, Scott & Co., Calcutta, 1830, p. i.
17. *Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio*, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 2001, p. 11.
18. *The Shair*, p. 1.
19. Ibid., p. 6.
20. Ibid., pp. 68-69.
21. Ibid. pp. 125, 128.
22. Ibid., p. 175.
23. "The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu," in Kshetra Gupta, *Madhusudhan Rachanabali*, Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1993, p. 638.
24. "Poems", *Madhusudhan Rachanabali*, p. 454.
25. Ibid., p. 438.
26. Ibid., p. 467.
27. Ibid., p.449.
28. See Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002).
29. Ibid., p.480.
30. Ibid., pp. 66-67.
31. The Bengali Book of English Verse: A Record and an Appreciation *(Calcutta: Jogemaya Prokashani, 1918, rpt. 2004), p. xix.*
32. V. K. Gokak, *The Golden Treasury of Indo-English Poetry*, p. 71.
33. John Keats, "Ode to Autumn", in A. R. Weekes, *The Odes* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 64.
34. V. K. Gokak, *The Golden Treasury of Indo-English Poetry*, p. 73.
35. Ibid. pp. 79- 80.
36. Nishi Pulugurtha, "The Poetry of the Dutts" in Somdatta Mandal, ed., *The Indian Imagination: Colonial and Postcolonial Literature and Culture* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2007), pp. 185-192.
37. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 17.
38. Hur Chunder Dutt, Preface to *Lotus Leaves: Poems Chiefly on Ancient Indian Subjects*, Calcutta, 1871.
39. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India* p. xvii.
40. *Bankim Rachanabali*, Vol. II, p. 236.
41. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, (Berkeley:University of California Press), p. 241.
42. Theodore Dunn, *The Bengali Book of English Verse* (Kolkata: Jogemaya Prokashini, Kolkata, rpt, 2004), p. 27.
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Book Reviews

Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, London and New York: Allen Lane-Penguin, 2009. pp. xxviii+468, hb. UK £ 25.

In this *magnum opus*, Sen moves beyond 'justice as fairness' paradigm of Rawlsian contractulism. Rawlsian contract treats every member of a liberal polity as equally advantaged or disadvantaged in formulating a principle of justice. Rawls' notion of formal right to justice as a rational choice of an individual on the basis of certain consensual primary goods, according to Sen, does not address the relational aspect of justice. Sen highlights this relational aspect of justice over the rational: relational aspect is embedded in an agent's sensitivity to consequences to everyone else, while rational aspect is supposedly agent-neutral. He distinguishes the two by asking two kinds of questions; rational questions presuppose a third person view such as asking, "What is it like to be a bat?", while relational questions place the human being at the centre by asking, "What is it like to be human?"(p.414) Sen attempts to find a different answer from other liberal-contractarians by delineating the very necessity of talking about justice,

> In arguing that the pursuit of a theory of justice has something to do with the kind of creatures we human beings are, it is not at all my contention that debates between theories of justice can be plausibly settled by going back to features of human nature, rather to note the fact that a number of different theories of justice share some common presumptions about what it is like to be a human being. We could have been creatures incapable of sympathy, unmoved by pain and humiliation of others, uncaring of freedom, -unable to reason, argue, disagree and concur. The strong presence of these features in human lives does not tell us a great deal about which particular theory of justice should be chosen, but it does indicate that the general pursuit of justice might be hard to eradicate in human society, even though we can go about the pursuit in different ways. (pp.414-15)

Sen is highlighting the fragile and fallible state of human nature that afflict judgments of right and wrong and making a plea for adopting a pluralist stance towards the idea of justice in order to make it relevant to the human condition. Liberal-contractarians reduce the inner resources of human nature and its problems to a matter of rational choice that makes public use of reason to offer justifications for choices. Such justifications are often based on an idea of just and right that guide social choices. Sen is unhappy about implications of social ordering of choices as it merely calculates the preconceived just outcome without taking into account how diverse agents interact, decide and actually behave. The interactive and constantly evolving games of strategy making between agents in order to settle for the just and the good arise always in relation to other such strategies and not merely by pre-calculating the best rational outcome for the agent. From the agent's own position, what seems to be subjectively adequate must converge either with other similarly placed agent's preferences or in response to such preferences. Such a positioning of the agent in relation to other agents provides the clue to individual's liberty and its necessity in a social and cultural environment that largely seeks freedom of action and weighs consequences of such freedoms. In the sphere of justice, an individual's determination of the sense of this freedom is closely connected with an idea of good and justice. The question is, how does freedom of action ensure just and good outcomes?

Sen theorizes on this possibility of justice on the dual bases of 'equal basic liberties' for all and counterposes it to 'inequalities' that can be used to garner the greatest benefit to the disadvantaged. On the positive side of it, basic liberties for Sen would amount to 'functionings' such as income and poverty alleviation that would ultimately expand the freedom of choice. Inequalities there act as a stand-in for evaluating the capacities to promote certain kind of functionings that implicitly assumes certain kinds of social arrangements. For a proper theory of justice Sen emphasizes on that kind of an evolved rationality that allows for linking up one's priorities, methods and visions about progress to a

redeemable and similarly placed global context. Sen emphasizes global justice that emerges as a mantra for overcoming positional limitations of a proposed theory of justice that ignores the whole world for serving the purpose of 'justice in one country'. What economic and political theories of justice should aim at is to first free itself from all forms of closure in terms of position and situation in order to break through a narrow concept of neighbour as the settled community(ies) and establish 'relations with distant peoples' (p.172). Sen proposes a two level understanding of a praxis of justice: at the first level an agent's cognitive framework of choice within a discursive matrix of distribution of rights and entitlement determines his concerns of justice while at the next level a transpositional perspective takes over that can neutralize the closed bounds of a framework of justice. Such a perspective does not ensure a transcendental solution to injustices and unfair practices that methodologically boils down to a 'view from nowhere'. Such a view from nowhere produces 'closed impartiality' based on an underlying ethical or cultural code. The style of thinking 'justice' in terms of abstractions that is fairly closed and disconnected from other such competing or complementary ideas turn out to be exclusionary and it denies the possibility of responding to or follow 'different types of reasoning' (p.178).

Narrowing of Mainstream Economics

This brings Sen to the point of exorcising some of the skeletons from the cupboard of justice. The very idea of rationality as used in Rational Choice Theory (RCT), for Sen leads to a paradoxical 'prisoner's dilemma' that merely indicates the standstill of options between actors. The brand name RCT within mainstream economics merely results into maximizing individual well-being in which hypothesizing about the position of the other is always considered as the basis for goals of maximization. RCT within the so called Welfare Economics assumes a terrifying proportion of normative restriction on the free choice of the agent as stated in Pareto's condition of optimality. The impossibility of a Paretian liberal seeking an optimal level of distribution through balancing of demands and supply in an imperfect world, according to Sen, undercuts the diversity of choices into a straitjacketed interpretation that narrowly establishes equilibrium. Speaking in the same vein, Sen discarded various strategies of playing an informational game, as any choice of strategy between participants of a game does not guarantee acceptable outcomes. Within mainstream economics, Sen does not see any possibility of resolving the problem of choice except by way of taking an ethical turn towards justice.

This turn towards justice called for Sen's renewal of a mix between ethics and economics, which weighs foundational principles behind economic decisions and their outcomes. Such foundational principles constitute a significant body of writings. Sen engages the readers of his *magnum opus* in a dialogue with thinkers of the very First principles of economics. Much more than exorcising them in the light of the problem at hand, Sen expropriates their ideas in the annals of justice. A few examples may suffice to show how Sen invokes a key economic philosopher such as Adam Smith in order to examine how inequality and injustice is sustained in the reasoning of the 'impartial observer', who sets up a fixed set of goals through institutional mechanisms. The so called impartial observer calculating each one's entitlements and dividends from institutional processes does not provide sufficient reasons to make others reasonably accept someone's needs and demands. Sen rather problematizes the notion of an impartial observer by pointing out procedural parochialism involved in the so called impartiality that tend to reject various other ways of achieving justice as non-impartial. If 'Impossibility Theorem' leads us to a social ranking of goodies in consonance with fully revealed social preferences, then why is it that there always is a 'tragedy of commons'? Sen advocates 'plurality of impartial reasons' that results into mutual reciprocity between actors seeking a just distribution of goodies, which involves a sensitivity to consequences as well as to agents who have to evaluate the ground reality in terms of assessing justice.

The exclusionary neglect of agent independent concerns within theories of just distribution of income and resources, for Sen displays a kind of rationality that is not reflexive enough to see its own follies. What Sen called as transpositional justice arises here: the basic human rights and liberties are universal, and independent of the context in which justice is construed in an agent-relative manner. But universalizable tenets of basic human rights and liberties are still institutionally imperfect, yet such imperfect obligations are necessary in allowing human rights to stand. Transpositional notion of justice not only surpasses the narrow concept of utility, but it also overcomes the illusion of bearing values and interests in 'real' life of the agents. This illusion of justice being seen to be done in a positioned state of existence becomes meaningful if it could withstand public scrutiny. Judgments about justice must accommodate various kinds of scrutiny based on a variety of reasoning. Sen called it as 'non-parochialism as a requirement of justice', which is, an openness towards plurality of reasons that

are outside the 'captivating hold of entrenched traditions and customs'. (p.404) Sen further characterized it as the virtue of 'open impartiality' that does not exclude possibilities against its determined outcomes. Open impartiality can synchronize the interests of a focused group with that of 'rights as freedoms'. Such a synchrony leads to freedom from fear as well as to formation of values. The question that we can ask here is, to what extent does open impartiality set the stage for justice in economic decisions?

Sen gives an answer to this question by delineating a broad view of freedom, one that encompasses both processes and opportunities and allows for recognition of 'the heterogeneity of distinct components of freedom'. Freedom is both constitutive of social and cultural choice and it is also instrumental to interconnected range of social and economic opportunities, political liberties and normative safeguards. This leads Sen to provide for interpretative freedoms to economic phenomenon in terms of public reasoning that takes into account heterogeneous components of freedom such as link between human security and political power, democracy and development. This is also an attempt to provide for an evaluative criterion for mainstream economics that involves an inclusionary incoherence. In Sen's parlance political rights, including freedom of expression and discussion, are not only pivotal in inducing social responses to economic needs, they are also central to the conceptualization of economic needs themselves. Such a heterogeneous mix of components of freedom is a state of inclusionary incoherence that needs to be neutralized by an open impartiality. In Sen's words,

> There is no embarrassment in accommodating several distinct features within the idea of freedom, focusing respectively on capability, lack of dependence and lack of interference. (. . .) A theory of justice can pay attention to each. (p.309)

If a theory of justice pays attention to this, it results into a description of plausible economic and social rights that reduce 'capability inequality', which needs not be seen only as agency-freedom, but also needs to be seen as well-being freedom. Such freedoms only can connect agency with well-being. This is exemplified in comparisons of freedoms and capabilities unfolding a multi-stage theory of justice.

Injustice Re-examined

Beyond the paring of equality/inequality, justice/injustice as contraries, Sen in his multi-stage theory of justice examines the import of injustice in terms of its experiential circumstances. Sen's paradigmatic statement: 'In this little world in which children have their existence there is nothing so finely perceived and finely felt as injustice.'(p. vii) This experiential domain of injustice compels us to think of reducing it as far as possible. This reduction is possible by working through responsibility that assumes asymmetries of institutional and power relations. Such asymmetries are useful in making better placed peoples more responsible towards those who are lesser mortals. This approach stands in contrast to application of reason in institutional arrangements for distribution and harps on 'comparison of justice for choosing among feasible alternatives'. (p.9) This comparative approach to justice is a point of departure *from* what Sen called 'transcendental institutionalism' that draws an idea of justice only on the basis of 'just society' or an ideal and perfect arrangement of institutions. Such a comparative approach can be based on 'social realizations' (based on actual behaviour of people and realization of justice). Sen bases his argument about choosing among feasible alternatives on actual situations of poverty, distribution of income and resources and perception of what is unjust, unfair and unequal. Injustice for Sen lay in destruction and diminution of capabilities of human beings involved in a struggle for existence which cannot in any way be compensated by entitlements. Injustice becomes the cornerstone for a theory of reasonableness that may determine the play between Rawlsian veil of ignorance and demands for justice. This demand for justice grows within our engagement with perspectives on justice in a well-ordered society, where the role of basic institutions of society lies in establishing a social world, within which alone, we develop 'care, nurture and education (. . . .) and into free and equal citizens.'[1] Just as Rawls established the ontological ground of justice into an institutional framework of 'social good' in the same way Sen also advocated equanimity of liberatarian theory of justice that combines evaluative aspects of justice with its well-defined institutional framework. Cases of injustice arise by way of malfunctioning of the institutional framework, which interestingly enough, can self-reflexively see those cases and correct itself. This is where equanimity of liberatarian choice would play its role.

Injustice is a by-product of reasoned alteration between neutral and partial ordering of choices at the societal level that develops out of asymptotic behaviour of individual agents. Such asymptotic behaviour arises not out of institutional settings but it arises out of aggregation as well as segregation of individual's choices over different choice sets. The question that Sen addresses is, can choice

sets be operationalized with a consensual contract between supposed liberatarian forms of reasoning and action within a well-ordered society? The question is raised in the context of reorienting the notion of 'capability' and 'individual functionings' into reasonableness of the demand for being just to the deprived and the marginalized. This is also a simultaneous assertion of a positioned subjectivity of the marginalized within the mainframe process of choosing and deciding, which is Sen's mainstay in the book.

The situation is exemplified by a supposed value conflict between distributive justice and recognition.[2] Similarly between liberal-contractarians and communitarians, the conflict of values arise centering the role that cultural specificity plays in assigning 'values' to development. They cannot resolve between themselves should the 'values' of justice be specific to culture or they should be trans-cultural. The developmentalist stance to eliminate cultural differences on the anvil of a common goal of 'just' material progress and prosperity complicates the debate between communitarians and liberal-contractarians. The thesis shall attempt to sort out the debate on the basis of an idea of 'good' based on the idea of 'justice' or rather on the basis of eliminating injustices that arise in the overall impact of a programme of development.

In its overall thrust, Sen's attempt to pluralize the debate between liberatarians and contractualists in terms of equally possible solutions to questions of injustice is a novel attempt to move beyond the liberal paradigm of constrained freedom of choice. He privileges 'freedom of choice' both in theory and practice to evolve an alternative of parallel reasoning and resolving the problem of injustice. The book is extremely readable, well argued, meticulous and detailed in analytical as well as in phenomenological terms. Sen's inspirational attempt to such panoply of thoughtful and pleasurable essays is itself a striking achievement. Anyone interested in economics or philosophy should read this book for a defensible account of justice.

Notes

1. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 43.

2. In his book, *The Idea of Justice* Sen has exemplified the divergent views of justice with the example of three children and a flute: Anna, Bob and Carla fight over a flute. Anna claims that she should get the flute that is lying on the ground because she knows how to play it, Bob says he should get it because he is poor and has no toys of his own, and Carla says she should get the flute because she made it. Theorists of diverging schools of justice would have different views, Sen writes: 'The economic democratic who is committed to reducing social gaps might feel that Bob should get the flute because he is poor; the libertarian would say that Carla should get the flute because she has made it; while the utilitarian hedonist may feel that Anne's pleasure would be greatest because she can play the flute.' (p.3)

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Bhalchandra Nemade, *Nativism (Desivad)*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2009. pp. 179. Rs. 360

Bhalchandra Nemade's 'nativism' concept and his reflections are already, for the last almost twenty years, a part of literary thinking in the departments of languages in the Universities and a widely discussed issue in Marathi intellectual circles and also in some other states such as Gujarat where the 'native' stream still runs strong. But what was earlier available in dispersed essays, and translations of some of them, and by word of mouth has now been put together as four coherent lectures with an appendix that puts some of his thoughts into critical/ evaluative action.

It is a rich text bustling with ideas, rather a text with ideas jostling with each other – a clear evidence of Nemade having so much to say in a defined temporal space and anxious that he may miss out on something. It is a statement of the current vicissitude of a complex, variegated, long-lived, and in many respects a unique culture, the Vedic culture that is, that has been under siege in its own home for several centuries but has survived because it has always given birth to great minds that have acted as barriers against floods of counter-culture ideas that have off and on been swamping the vulnerable, intrinsically pluralistic, Hindu mind.

In these four lectures – 'Nativism,' 'Modernity,' 'Orality (Native Styles),' 'Marathi Novel' – and two appendices, Nemade seeks to ward off the onslaught of 'Modernity' (p.14.) on the already battered Hindu mind. His worries stem from what is rather uncommon among 'educated' Hindu intellectuals – the deep respect in which he holds what he calls (p.11) 'the oldest civilization of the world', the 'Vedic' civilization, though that one word is not used.

The apparent subject, the immediate concern, of course is the metropolitan Indian literary culture that has constituted itself following the contact with the West. It is a culture in which – (i) 'language controls literature'

(rather than the other way round)); (ii) there is critical bankruptcy (uncritical acceptance of and exclusive use of western frameworks to the almost complete exclusion of the long unbroken tradition of Indian literary thinking; (iii) uses borrowed themes and forms; (iv) is expressly addressed to, panders to, the western audience); (v) denigrates the Indian self-hood, and (vi) is in disjunction with the lived life of the Indian peoples. This 'literary culture' is a symptom of the much deeper malaise – the subordination of the Indian mind and academy to the West – 'suffocation'. From being a part of a long existing donor tradition, the Indian mind has become a receptacle of alien ideas having entered into a Theory – Data relationship with the Western academia. Denial of self-hood by the 'educated' Indian, his virtual contempt for the self, is the marker of his modernization and 'internationalism'. It seems that the very consciousness has been coloured, the *citta* itself afflicted. The consequence is a cultural anomie, a split self, the old self atrophied with no new self to take its place, a confused Indian changing colours and caps from one event (sports!) to another. The product of this environment, particularly the education system, is an individual who at best is ignorant and at worst has contempt for everything Indian. Long ago, Max Mueller had noted (in his 1880s lectures to the ICS published as *What India can Teach Us*) how the Indian takes care to 'distance' himself from his heritage and Ananda Coomaraswamy talking about 'the educated Indian' in his *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* wryly commented in the footnote that 'that is how the victims of Indian education are described'. And much before that in 1812 in a letter to his father from Calcutta, Macaulay, talking of the School education in Calcutta, said that "Hindus who take this education have no respect left for their religion – much better than proselytisation". If anything, Hindu self-denigration is now endemic. Nemade's anxiety therefore is how, in the face of this onslaught, "to salvage and preserve the vestigial values and native ways of life: tolerance, pluralism, spiritual point of view, beauty and grace of individual traditions... ritual observances, folklore, art and architecture, language and literature. . . ." (p.43).

And this is possible only when we cease, he says, to consider Indian Knowledge as an extension of, and free ourselves from, the mental bondage of Western knowledge paradigm which has so far been dominantly empiricist and reductionist. That is, we 'decolonize' by overthrowing the three imperatives of 'modernity', 'scriptalism' and 'internationalism', the cobwebs of the 'educated' Indian mind. The causes of this Hindu enslavement are – fascination with the written word and the translation of an essentially oral culture into scriptal – witness patronizing scholars going into 'tribal' (*sic*) areas and impressively transcribing their narratives, turning a living emotional experience into a fossilized word. Second cause is the stifling of Indian expressiveness by mass adoption of English as if it were a native mother tongue of all Indians and, third, the official support to materialism and commercial values.

The way out is assertion of 'nativism'. Throughout his arguments, Nemade adds on to the semantic domain of *nativism* and places it in a configuration of *native, nativeness, nativistic* and *nativism. Nativism*, according to Nemade, does not have to be constructed – it is a pervasive social phenomenon in all societies, a geographical principle (attachment to land), an emotional principle (love for the country/people/practices), and a cultural principle of autonomy, an intellectual principle of assimilation and equilibrium and a social principle of differentia, plurality. In literature, *nativism* rejects the opposition between native and 'universal' (for all great 'universal' compositions were intrinsically native, addressed to their own people and age and in fact no work that is not native can become 'universal'), rejects the notion of World Literature as Anglo-American or European alone, rejects 'modernist' neurotic themes as alien to the Indian experience and philosophy of literature, and accords primacy to orality as the 'native style'–in sum rejects the metropolitan Indian literature as derivative and as out of tune with the lived life of the people.

There are objections; it is pointed out, to *nativism* objections that spring from 'bogus internationalism' – charges of 'narrow mindedness', narcissism and bigoted nationalism in the era of European/American 'globalization'. Several factors have contributed to the 'loss of faith in the so called third world' (p.24). And that is the new imperialism of the mind. One feels that this has been facilitated by the assiduously cultivated belief in 'modern' as a higher culture rather than as an alternative culture, a postulate that the Latin-American thinkers (Third World?) have now been strenuously arguing for more than a decade (see, Jorge Armand, *Beyond Modernity*, 2000, Merida, Venezuela: Universidad de Los Andes, p. 8. Mimeo). Nemade would happily, I am sure, look at, and analyse, these straws in the wind and feel somewhat reassured.

The case has been very convincingly argued by Nemade. No one can dispute, least of all the set of 'un-colonized' minds - and that set is growing even among the 'educated' – that instinctively see the truth of the author's anguish. I am close to him in age and have experienced the same anguish and have for years been arguing the same case though not perhaps in the same

focused and cogent manner as he has done. I may therefore risk saying that the problem with us is that at some stage we get defensive in that we try to argue often within the terminological frame of the paradigm we are contesting. The apparent 'reason' of the shibboleths of that paradigm – secularism, human rights, democracy, racism, genocide, equality, and so on – paralyse us and we are unable to take issue with these shibboleths. How can we argue against 'secularism', 'human rights', 'genocide' etc.? So we hedge. We do not boldly take on these 'charges' against the Hindu history, traditions and practices – let there be no doubt that in India these are directed against Hindus. We do not argue that India is 'secular' because wherever 10 persons are present, 8 are Hindus; we do not argue that that is also the reason why India is the only working Asian democracy; we do not argue that Hindu social political thought never accepted 'slavery' as a human practice (contrast it with Aristotle's *Politics*). What may be the clearest statement of egalitarian political ideology only comes to us through many intermediaries, as a tantalizing passage in Diodorus Siculus (2.39; *Classical Accounts*, p. 236) which seems to derive from Megasthenes: "Of several remarkable customs existing among the Indians, there is one prescribed by their [sc. Indian] ancient philosophers which one may regard as truly admirable: for the law ordains that no one among them shall, under any circumstances, be a slave, but that, enjoying freedom, they shall respect the principle of equality in all persons: for those, they thought, who have learned neither to domineer over nor to cringe to others will attain the life best adapted for all vicissitudes of lot: since it is silly to make laws on the basis of equality of all persons and yet to establish inequalities in social intercourse." We do not argue that the Hindu mind goes far beyond human rights, to the rights of all beings, *jiva*. We do not assert that the assumption that this is among the 'ultimates' in Political Theory and in Ethics is open to debate as also their actual practice on the ground. For example the anthropocentric view that if man encroaches on the elephant or leopard country and that elephant or the leopard retaliates, it is the elephant or the leopard that should be shot does not make sense in the traditional Hindu thought in general and the Jaina value system in particular (though now it does make sense to the *de-culturised* Hindus) as these non-western thought systems talk of the *rights of all living beings*. Why is the human being so important? Because he has mastered the gun? We do not assert that the societies that are using 'human rights' as a whip today are guilty of having practiced slavery throughout their history till 19th century. We do not assert that the principle of 'rights' is a self-centered *conflict oriented* [1] principle and generates, has generated violence. *Contra* 'rights' we have the time-honoured Indian core construct of 'duty,' the other-centered harmony-promoting principle that sets up for many young educated Indians a contradiction between the School and the Home. Without denying the injustice that developed in the actual practice of *Varna* system, we do not tell them not to transfer their guilt of 'genocide' of the Jews to us and that the Hindus have in fact been victims of attested genocide over centuries. In fact any critique of the Western civilization annoys the Indian intellectual no end – he is happy only in self-denigration. Centuries of oppression that Hindus suffered and the repeated defeats in the battle field have altered the Hindu character – he is now the opposite of what Al-Beruni had said he was – the Hindu always speaks the truth, he said; the Hindu is proud of his knowledge; the Hindu is not afraid to die. Where have those people gone? Like the Jews, the other persecuted race, Hindu self is a fractured self. In other words, "the fault dear Brutus is not in our stars that we are underlings".

There are, therefore, some caveats to be introduced in Nemade's discourse and some contestables - conceptual, terminological and assumptive. To begin with, I think there is claustrophobia in the structure of feeling. If we get out of 'Delhi-vision' and 'Tele-vision', we find that our culture is fighting back very resolutely. Nemade himself points out that the Hindu mind does not throw out anything, that it tests the new things that come, that it sifts and assimilates what is in harmony with its core. I think that is happening at this time. For the second time, after Islam, the Indian culture has confronted a powerful alternative culture and thought system and for almost 200 years now, the processes of emergence, submergence, assertion, modification, adaptation, rejection and assimilation have been going on. It is like the confluence of two streams – the two run parallel for some time and you can see two different colours for some time. And then a mixed colour and finally one of the colours, an inflected colour again dominates and the river has that colour then. Those who have been to Devaprayaga will actually see this – two turbulent streams, Bhagirathi and Alakananda, meet and after a stretch of flow, the colour of Bhagirathi is the colour of Ganga. I see this very clearly in our young girls, who are in any case the most vibrant section of Hindu society – it is not uncommon to see a young jeans-clad, mobile-wielding, car-driving young multi-national executive first offering flowers in the small society temple, then getting into her car and driving off. And this is the section that has been 'westernised'.

Some of the contestable, to mention, in view of the space-time coordinate, only a few are: (i) the use of words such as 'Brahmanical' and 'Brahmanism' that in our

'modern' discourse always show a lack of de-synonymising between 'Brahmin' as caste and 'Brahmin' as *sampradaya*, a school of philosophy (in disputation through India's intellectual history with Buddhist and Jaina *sampradayas*) and we must remember that Buddha, contrary to the popular impression, had deep respect for Brahmins (as caste) – read the *Jatakas*. Equation of *varna* and *jati* (they are not the same) belong here.

(ii) expressions such as 'Brahmin dominated Hindu society' (p.32), a notion deliberately cultivated by the British in 19th century as 'state policy' and continued in free/partitioned India by the present dispensation, need to be expounded and debated.

(iii) the reading of India's intellectual history on page 49, is highly contestable in the matter of ideational relationship between Vedas, Upanishads, 'early Brahmanical cults' (?), Jain and Buddhist systems, 'classical Brahmanism' (?) – the quick summary on page 49 does no justice either to the rich textual tradition or the density of thought therein. Many intellectuals are prone to summarizing what will take decades to read and understand.

(iv) one wishes that Nemade had not made statements such as ". . .even the purely Kshatriya documents such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* . . .began to flaunt *Ahimsa*. Rama after killing Ravana, says, *Ahimsa paramo dharma:* and another warrior hero Yuddhisthira at the end of mass destruction of life, deliberates with the *Rishis* in Shantiparva on *shanti*. . . Then in the second millennium, numerous Bhakti cults . . .rebelliously continue to re-inforce Jain, Buddhist and several other *Nastika* ways of life suppressed by Brahmanism." Well! This is swashbuckling opinion-making–every verb and noun is contestable in this and there is a hint of lack of intimacy with major intellectual texts. Shows that even in Nemade, a modernist lurks.

To cut the story short. Bi-polarities are the bane of western humanist-sociological mind – their modern science has successfully gone beyond that (*More Are Different* is a celebrated book by a scientist). The Indian mind nurtured in, what has always been since ancient days, a multiple, pluralistic, pluri-theistic, multi-linguistic and multi-belief system has never functioned in either-or mode or in the linear mode – cyclicity and configuration are basic drivers of the Hindu mind. One who wants to contest the other paradigm must operate with his own categories as was the rule in Indian *vada parampara*. It isn't India or West even now – it is *more* and *different*. And what would you say to the TV, a western invention that is perfect fit for India's *shravya-preksha* orality.

Let us wait. Oral cultures have in built mechanisms of recovery. And as it is, strong cultures resist both kinds of loss – that due to the text-internal factors and that due to the text-external, contextual factors - to preserve culturally central systems of ideas.

Notes

1. Recent and contemporary Western Theory is in fact *conflict centered*. Post-Renaissance, it successively substituted for the Pre-Renaissance God-Man adversarial relationship, first the adversarial Man-Nature relationship (witness Descartes in *On Method*: "The goal of knowledge is to bend nature to man's purpose".), then the adversarial Man-Man relationship (witness Marx's class war) and now of late the adversarial Man-Woman relationship. *Conflict* of course has been sanctified post- Karl Marx as the necessary condition of progress, again something debatable.

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Shreesh Chaudhary, *Foreigners and Foreign Languages in India – a Sociolinguistic History*, New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009. pp. 586. Rs. 950

Foreigners and Foreign Languages in India by Shreesh Chaudhary deals with the sociolinguistic history of the Indian subcontinent from the earliest encounters with Sanskrit and Greek to the English of the British colonizers. Within this long linguistic and cultural interaction is about one thousand years of Arabic, Turkish but mainly Persian period followed by the development of Urdu. Shreesh Chaudhary has done a highly commendable job in recounting this linguistic narrative with profusely documented situations where the native speakers assimilated the foreign idioms. It is also very interesting to note that the native elite never took long to adapt itself to the emerging circumstances of new political realities. It was almost with great enthusiasm that they learnt, practiced and communicated in the language of the colonizer.

The present day linguistic situation is very well described by Chaudhary when he talks about his grandson's sociolinguistic interactions :

> My son's son, Rishabh, born in 1998, attends an English school in Hyderabad. He speaks Maithili with his father, me and my wife; Bengali with his mother and her parents; English, Hindi and Telugu with his friends. He watches English, Hindi and Telugu programmes on the television and plays computer games in English.

This sociolinguistic interaction, with some local

variations, is true of all children in the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, its political and cultural implications have never been properly understood by those who pretend to be the guardians of our socio-political organizations. For them, for all those who fought for the freedom of the country and later became its rulers, consciously or unconsciously, the European model with one language, one culture, one nation remained the ideal model of a political city state. Instead of dividing the Indian subcontinent into a few hundred administrative units with English as its administrative language, the language of one region was elevated to the status of the official and national language of the entire subcontinent. This political blunder resulted in disastrous consequences. Other linguistic regions reacted violently and the country was divided into several linguistic states with enormous political power. As all administrative work was supposed to be conducted in the regional languages, the states became hermetically sealed for all outsiders, the citizens of the same country.

In the ancient times, the Indian subcontinent was divided into several thousand princely states or political units. Whenever a foreign power invaded India, it imposed a unitary form of administration and language on the area conquered by it. As a result, the number of states was gradually reduced and more uniform administrative units came into being. With the British, it extended from Afghanistan to Burma with Ceylon and Nepal also a part of the same set up. If the narrow sectarian interests had not played havoc with the political aspirations of our people, this whole region would have been today one federal republic of the Indian subcontinent.

In this context, Afghanistan is extremely important. In ancient India, this region was the cultural centre of our people. Afghanistan was the preeminent centre of Sanskrit language and culture in Paninian times. It was also the greatest centre of Buddhist art and culture. Subsequently, the cultural and religious colours changed. But the history of a people is not just the history of one community or religion or language. The Indian subcontinent, very different from the European homogenous linguistic and ethnic states, has always been a multilingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious region. No micro regional language or culture ever dominated its entire political space. It was always due to a given foreign administration that larger and larger units were formed. The normal course would have been to inherit this politico-historical legacy. Unfortunately, this was not to be. None of our great leaders had the intellectual and political vision of a Bharat that could extend from Afghanistan to Burma with Ceylon and Nepal as its integral parts. And, yet, it was all there to take it if we had not been mentally stuck with our extremely narrow sectarian interests. There was one administrative language, one administrative block, fashioned by the vicissitudes of history over a thousand years of political upheavals. From the very beginning of the freedom struggle, this historical evolution was ignored. Our leaders dreamt only of a Paninian India of 500 BC with uniform language and culture.

This excellent book of Shreesh Chaudhary traces the history of these linguistic transformations during the last two thousand years but maybe it is too late to have any impact on modern India. His grandson may speak several languages with his friends in a fluid colloquial register, but for all that matters, for official work as an administrator or the one who has to deal with him, he has no choice but to have a very high level of proficiency of discourse in one regional language, only to throw it in the cultural dustbin when he moves to another region-state. This multi-ethnic, multi-cultural entity that is India is now a linguistically highly compartmentalized country with hermetically sealed communicative channels.

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Pradeep Trikha, *Multiple Celebrations, Celebrating Multiplicity: Girish Karnad*, Ajmer: A.R.A.W.LII. Publications, 2009. pp.92. pb. Rs.400

When Girish Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in 1964 to mitigate the lack of plays on a historical theme on the Kannada stage, he was bringing a consciousness which was extremely attuned to the realities of his times. Though written during his stint at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, Karnad's *Tughlaq* is not merely a faithful portrayal of the times and experiments of a troubled ruler in the pre-Mughal subcontinent. He brought into the script the dilemmas of modern India – clashes between the ideals of the then Prime Minister Nehru and the powerful classes who were suspicious of his motives, the desire to build a secular polity in a society which was deeply divided by the scars of partition. When Karnad wrote the play he was utterly unsure of it being staged. So he let his creative energies loose, conceiving scenes of epic proportions, requiring a large cast. Yet *Tughlaq* has been performed regularly through the decades traversing the changing political climate of independent India – the

India of Indira Gandhi and the imposition of draconian internal emergency in 1975, the era of Rajiv Gandhi's vision of the twenty first century, but mired in several controversies, the communal tension of the nineties with the ugly and shameful face witnessed in Gujarat in 2002. At each stage directors have sought to seek interpretations from the text which have made the play seem to be well-suited for commentary on the contemporary events. Such renewal of relevance becomes possible because Karnad had not attempted a superficial mirroring of history or contemporary reality, or a mere universalisation of the themes in the play. His analysis in *Tughlaq* historicised the action, the characters and the relationships. It is only by being steadfastly faithful to its period of representation that the play becomes timeless in its relevance.

Tughlaq has been staged in varied performance conditions. From the first production at the Indian National Theatre in Bombay in 1965, to Ebrahim Alkazi's memorable production for the National School of Drama (NSD) Repertory at the ruins of Purana Qila in 1974, to Prasanna's 1982 production for the NSD – the play has allowed the opening up of varied new dimensions. While the Purana Qila staging brought out the historical resonances within the ambience of this pre-Mughal fort, Prasanna's decision to use the string curtain to divide the performance space between the street and the court, between the plebeian and the aristocracy, returned to the play Karnad's adoption of the original performance traditions of the "Comapany Natak" and the Parsi theatre.

Tughlaq thus becomes a play which, while being unique in its particular respects, is representative of an entire generation of modern Indian theatre in the decades of 1960s and 70s, which was in search of developing newer idioms, borrowing and adapting from traditional performance forms of the country, striving to represent and analyse on the stage the realities and contradictions of independent India.

It would be difficult to reach an adequate understanding of the importance of *Tughlaq* and the meanings it generates without attention to its performance conditions and contexts. Yet that is what Pradeep Trikha attempts to achieve in the monograph which is the subject of this review. Trikha's survey of Karnad's dramatic career on the basis of textual reading of the scripts. Though this by itself cannot be considered a demerit it could be seen as the limitation of the work.

Trikha offers a fresh perspective on the symbolism in Karnad's work from the point of view of a contemporary reader who seeks to correlate the plays to today's realities like the return to critical interest in mythologies and religion, the increased communication in a cyberworld and a simultaneous distanciation of individuals. In fact, one of the virtues of Trikha's criticism is that he focuses on Karnad's recent work. The chapterisation follows a thematic rather than chronological order. The first chapter 'Karnad via Girish: The Playwright Iconised' introduces the reader to the Karnad's recent plays like *Bali, The Sacrifice* and *Wedding Album* and locates them within the recent developments in the world of Indian theatre. Trikha's analysis of *Wedding Album* builds on Karnad's portrayal of the desire of the mother to fetch NRI grooms for her daughters, by connecting it to the dowry market in India where grooms of various accomplishments are sold to the highest bidder.Trikha demonstrates how Karnad as a social physician is able to diagnose the maladies of the Indian society and recommend remedies.

Chapter Two focuses on the reworking of myths and folklores in *Yayati, Hayavadana, Nagamandala* and *The Fire and the Rain.* The 'new', the contemporary is given the treatment of the 'old', the mythical and the folkloric, as the myth and the present interpret each other. Trikha pays particular attention to the indictment of patriarchal society and the sense of insecurity which results from the control over women.

The study of modern relationships in what Trikha terms the 'cyber-spaced world' is the subject of the third chapter, where he studies some of Karnad's recent plays – *Broken Images, Flowers* and *Wedding Album*. The love triangle and the dissipation of the idea of the home is shown to hurt the modern woman. Trikha demonstrates Karnad's use of language in shaping characters who gradually lose control over themselves.

Karnad's use of historical subjects to comment on the present concerns Trikha in the next two chapters. He goes behind the texts to reveal the well researched nature of the plays like *Tughlaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. But the plays do not remain splendid documentation of the past, but Karnad's ability to rework elements of history allow him to make his plays contemporary. According to Trikha *The Dreams of Tipu ultan* being written in English for the BBC to mark India's independence presents simultaneously a paradox as well as an opportunity. He celebrates Karnad's bilingualism which is an uncanny represetation of half a century of independent India. The play itself is a bringing forward of the historical resistance to the erstwhile colonial masters. Yet Karnad's mastery shows how Tipu's dreams, influenced by Western ideas, were the source of his downfall.

Though Trikha's monograph is a tribute to a playwright he admires, his prose is not inspired by Karnad's mastery of narratives. He moves uncontrollably from one point to another without allowing each one to register itself before the reader. On more than one

occasion one is left wondering if the chapterisation is of any consequence. If Trikha's bumpy prose is not enough, the numerous typographical errors are bound to catch attention.

There are also some statements in the book which give away an element of thoughtlessness. Trikha describes *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* in Aristotelian terms as a play that leaves the audience purged 'from their passions spent and calm of mind restored'. Immediately afterward he states that in the play, 'Karnad, like Brecht intends to "break down the emphatic link between spectator and performer"' (p.72). Trikha finds no contradiction between Aristotelian and Brechtian methods. While discussing the passion of the masses in *Tughlaq* he suggests that Karnad's play helps interpret the communalism of the 1990s in India which has 'to an extent effected (sic) *secular* image of *Hinduism*' (p.62. My emphasis)!

The book opens with a Foreword by G.J.V. Prasad which traces Karnad as a bilingualist, as someone who is deft in both English and Kannad, and able to move from one language to another with ease. Prasad refers to Karnad's beginnings at Oxford to lay stress on his return to India even though the promise of a different fame beckoned him in the form of represtning India in English, the diasporic route adopted by many. Karnad's return to India brought him in company with generation of playwrights who together transformed the modern Indian stage.

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Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, Noida: Harper Collins India, 2008. pp. 321. Rs. 395

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* created many a ripple when it bagged the Man Booker for Fiction for 2008. The Booker Committee judges praised it as a "new voice", an eye-opener with rare insight and sound ending. The western reviewers were tickled by the "chatty" murderer protagonist's exposé of "the underbelly of India's tiger economy"; his ability to lift the lid off the "economic miracle" of India and the courage to show its darker aspects.

The Indian reviewers were not as amused though. For some the novel is "inauthentic", for others just "tedious and unfunny slog." Many question Adiga's credentials as an insider-outsider to write about India. Son of a doctor, and having lived and studied primarily in the USA, England and Australia his knowledge about "real India" seems to be limited to media coverage, contend his critics.

The novel tells the story of one Balram Halwai, resident of Laxmangarh in Gaya district. In school it is drummed into them that they are lucky to belong to a place where Lord Buddha received "Light". Balram contends, however, that it is Darkness they are doomed to live in. Balram recounts how he learnt to dream big, got out of Darkness and became a successful entrepreneur. But unfortunately, his is not the usual rag to riches tale worth emulating. It is not even a crime-thriller. It is a grim and angry narrative in epistolary form. The letters are written to the Chinese Premier in the course of seven nights. Balram Halwai is not "an original thinker" but he is "an original listener." As Mr. Ashok's chauffer he picks up a few useful tricks and becomes adept at turning everything to his advantage. As a fugitive murderer he fears detection but knowing the working of our law enforcing machinery, he is relaxed and chooses to narrate his tale to the visiting Premier.

With his mordant humor, bitter sarcasm and amusing observations the protagonist reveals his march from childhood to manhood, from his innocent past to his corrupt present. Reading on, we put the pieces together and know that his father was an impoverished rickshaw-puller but he had a dream — to educate his son, so that "he should live like a man." But Balram cannot continue his education, he has to work as teashop boy. His parents die untimely death spewing blood lying in a dirty government hospital without medical aid. The narrative goes to and fro and we find ourselves interested further in him, to know how a child who cannot see even a lizard being killed and whose biggest boyhood ideal/idol is the bus conductor, Vijay (with his Khaki uniform and a shining whistle) becomes an inveterate murderer and a grabbing entrepreneur. That is what keeps us glued to the story.

Balram tells a few key points to the readers in the beginning: first, he is a fugitive murderer; second, the police are after him; and third, he cannot be caught as long as he has the "brown" envelop and there are officials ready to accept it. Another significant pointer pertains to his identity. He starts his life without a name but amazingly, he acquires four identities that come handy to him in his chequered career.

His parents call him Munna but since it is not a real name the teacher decides on Balram. Soon, impressed by his quickness the school Inspector calls him "White Tiger" a rare species in "*this* jungle" of idiots (p.35). In Delhi his rustic ways earn him an appellation "Country-Mouse". Subsequently, he becomes —Ashok — and flourishes as Ashok Sharma, the entrepreneur. Once the school

Inspector had gifted him a book entitled *Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi* which he never read but unfortunately, he becomes a regular reader of the *Murder Weekly* handed down by his driver friends.

This otherwise grim murder story becomes amusing with Arvind Adiga's acute sense of humor. Balram boasts to the Chinese Premier that one day India will beat China in progress because we may not have drinking water, good roads, sewage system, Olympic Gold medals but we have democracy. It is another matter that our democracy is run by beastly musclemen, upstarts like the conductor-turned-politician, and the Great Socialist with ninety-three criminal cases pending against him.

The novel works on irony: Balram, who is a victim of the malevolent system never thinks of heralding change when he gets wealth, albeit by criminal means. He adopts with ease the devious ways of the corrupt whom he has detested all along. He has chalked out his plan to move from one enterprise to another: from Call Center Taxi business he will shift to real estate and thereafter open a school where the children will be taught *great lessons* of life and not about Gandhi or Buddha. One shudders to think of an educational institution run by a semi-literate, unscrupulous murderer.

Witty turns of phrase, mordant humour and acute observations give strength to the story to hold readers' interest. Balram is unrepentant, "I'll never say I made a mistake that night. . . when I slit my master's throat. I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (pp..320-21). But somewhere in his heart he seems to be sorry for his master. He is a restless man troubled by nightmares and uncertainty. Still he makes things light. He never appears worried and here we cannot but appreciate his tenacity as he closes his narrative with the declaration, "I think I am ready to have children, Mr. Prenier" (p.321). We keep down the book with a big, disturbing question before us: what kind of progeny will he produce?

Writing for *Times Literary Supplement*, Sameer Rahim observes that the novel resembles the stories of the *Murder Weekly* which feed Balram's imagination, "quick, entertaining and full of vividly drawn types: the scheming servant, the corrupt businessman, the spoilt wife."

To be fair to Adiga, however, let us say that whatever be the merits and demerits of *The White Tiger*, it cannot be denied that it raises some pressing social issues and though we find it hard to sympathize with Adiga's villainous protagonist we cannot but appreciate the caustic humour with which he exposes the ever widening social gaps, the corroding political system and the erosion of values. "I'm tomorrow," Adiga has Balram utter with confidence. Will this be the signal of our future – corrupt, unscrupulous and devilish?

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