

THE FOUNTAIN PEN: JOURNAL OF ENGLISH

VOLUME 01 NUMBER 01

MARCH 2018

The
Fountain
Pen
Journal of English

March 2018
Volume 01 Number 01

Printed and Published by
Dr Asgar Hassan Samoon
On behalf of
The Higher Education Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Printed at
Ranbir Government Press, Ambphalla Jammu (J&K)
Published from
The Higher Education Department, Mini Block, Civil Secretariate Srinagar/ Jammu (J&K)
Editor
Dr. Asgar Hassan Samoon (IAS)
Principal Secretary to Government
Higher Education Department



Higher Education Department
Government of Jammu and Kashmir



The Fountain Pen
Journal of English
Volume 01 Number 01 March 2018

This volume is published by the J&K Higher Education Department
Civil Secretariate, Jammu/Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

The articles and papers published in this volume may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty, express or implied, or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the writings published here belong solely to the author/s, and not necessarily to the author's employer, organisation, committee or other group or individual or institution. Assumptions made or claimed in the articles are not reflective of the position of any entity other than the author(s)— and since we are critically thinking human-beings, these views are subject to change, revision, or rethinking at any time— please do not perpetually attach these views to the author(s).

© 2018 J&K Higher Education Department
Civil Secretariate Jammu/ Srinagar, J&K
ISSN— XXXX-XXXX (Print)
ISSN— XXXX-XXXX (Online)

EDITORIAL BOARD

CHIEF PATRON

JENAB SYED MOHAMMAD ALTAF BUKHARI
Hon`ble Minister for Education

PATRON

SMT. PRIYA SETHI
Hon`ble Minister of State for Education
Government of Jammu & Kashmir

EDITOR

ASGAR HASSAN SAMOON (IAS)
Principal Secretary
Higher Education Department
Government of Jammu and Kashmir

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Aditi Khajuria Bhatia Associate Professor English, GGM Science College, Jammu & Kashmir.

Arun Dev Singh Assistant Professor English, GDC Kathua, Jammu & Kashmir.

Chander Mohan Pant Assistant Professor English, GDC Dharmari, Jammu & Kashmir.

Gurmet Kour Associate Professor English, College of Education, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Javed Mughal Assistant Professor English, GDC Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir.

Jon Mohammad Bhat Assistant Professor English, GDC Boys Pulwama, Jammu & Kashmir.

Mohd Saleem Wani Assistant Professor English, GDC Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir.

Monika Sharma Associate Professor English, GGM Science College, Jammu & Kashmir.

Nadia Shah Assistant Professor English, SP College Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Pankaj Sharma, Assistant Professor English GDC Ramnagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Rashu Sharma Assistant Professor English, MAM College, Jammu, Jammu & Kashmir.

Rubena Jabeen Associate Professor English, GDC MA Road Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Seema Arshad Associate Professor English, GDC Women Parade, Jammu, Jammu & Kashmir.

Shabeena Kuttay Assistant Professor English, Amar Singh College Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Shahida Jabeen Associate Professor English, GDC MA Road Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.

Shanawaz Muntazir Assistant Professor English, GDC Khanshab Budgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

Syed Wajahajat Hussain Assistant Professor English, GDC Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir.

Wasia Mushtaq, Assistant Professor, GDC MA Road Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.

Zahida Naseem Associate Professor English, S P College, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.

EDITORIAL BOARD

ADVISORY BOARD

- Adiba Faiyaz Assistant Professor English, Aligarh Muslim University UP, India.
Amina Kishore Professor English, University of Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi Assistant Professor English, SMVDU Katra, India.
Asma Rasheed Assistant Professor ELT, EFLU, Telangana, India.
D. Murali Manohar Professor English, EFLU, Telangana, India.
Gulfishaan Habeeb Professor English, MANUU Telangana, India.
Haris Qadeer Assistant Professor, English University of Delhi, India.
Javaid Iqbal Bhat Assistant Professor English, South Campus University of Kashmir, J&K, India.
Kailash C Baral Professor English EFLU, Telangana, India.
Manojit Mandal Associate Professor, Jadavpur University Kolkata, WB, India.
Md Sajidul Islam Associate Professor English, Aligarh Muslim University UP, India.
Melissa Studdard Professor English, Lone Star College, Woodlanders, Texas, USA.
Mufti Mudasir Farooqi Assistant Professor English, University of Kashmir Srinagar, India.
Munejah Khan Assistant Professor English, IUST Awantipora, India.
Neena Gupta Vij Assistant Professor English, Central University of Jammu, India.
Neenu Kumar Associate Professor, English, University of Delhi, India.
Nitasha Koul Senior Lecturer, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Westminster, London, UK.
Prakash Kona Professor English EFLU Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
Ravinder Singh Assistant Professor English, Jadavpur University Kolkata, WB, India.
Rischa Challana Assistant Professor English, University of Delhi, India.
Sami Sidiqie Associate Professor English MANUU, Telangana, India.
Samson Thomas Professor English EFLU, Telangana, India.
Satish Poduval Associate Professor, Cultural Studies, EFLU, Telangana, India.
Shagufta Shaheen Professor, MANUU Telangana, India.
Shahnaz Bashir Assistant Professor, Media Studies, Central University of Kashmir, Srinagar, J&K, India.
Stephan Ross Professor English and Literary theory, UVIC, Canada.
Vislavath Rajunayak Professor English, EFLU, Telangana, India.
Yogesh Kumar Dubey Assistant Professor English University of Delhi, India.

COORDINATING EDITOR

- Bilal A Shah Assistant Professor English, GDC Uttersoo, Anantnag, J&K
Naseer A Naseer Assistant Professor English, GDC Larnoo, Anantnag J&K

EDITORIAL CONTACT

Please address all editorial correspondence to:
Coordinating Editor
The Fountain Pen
E: thefountainpen2018@gmail.com
T: (+91) 9697-000-771

CONTENTS

RESEARCH WRITINGS

Spectacle Spaces: Cast(e)ing Madurai in Tamil cinema DICKINS LEONARD M	01
Mirabai and the Poetics of Transformative Transgression WASIA MUSHTAQ	12
From Silence to Speech: Resisting the Domination of White Supremacist Male JATINDER KOUR	21
Children's Literature: A Stylistic Study of Selected Works of Sheikh Razi TANVEER AHMAD	32
Comic exposition in Naipaul's <i>Mystic Masseur</i> ARCHANA KOUL	39
Reclaiming a Voice: Recasting of Sita, Draupadi and Kunti in Shashi Deshpande's Short Stories Kiran Kalra	47
Koshur Pather: The Forgotten Folk Theatre ARIF NISAR	56
Inside the Cloister: A study of the life journey of a 'renegade' Nun SONAM ANGMO	66

CREATIVE WRITINGS

Hard Times GHULAM MOHAMMAD KHAN	74
The Caged Self SHALINI SHARMA	88

EDITORIAL

In a historically very significant decision, the state Higher Education Department of J&K has started a chain of research journals from 2017 covering almost all the subjects taught in our Colleges. *The Fountain Pen (TFP)* is a significant part of this larger project. The guiding objective of the Journal is to provide an intellectual platform to the teachers, scholars as well as the students of the English and English Literature so that they could project their research on an international platform. The aim is to open up alternative horizons, to promote engagement with a broader spread of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, to encourage theoretical and conceptual innovation and provide a venue for the emergence of new concepts and perspectives that benefit the potential readers as well as affect, in a positive way, the actual teaching practices adopted in our classrooms.

The Higher Education Department conceives the publication of research journal/s of international standard as a path-breaking decision regarding promotion of research among the faculty members of the state colleges, and the young researchers throughout the world. The Department certainly envisages our colleges to be focused on research-led teaching. This means that teachers are actively researching and contributing to current academic debates, alongside their teaching roles. This would not only provide fantastic benefits to our own studies, but our students will also be benefited in the way they will be taught by enthusiastic individuals who would have comprehensive and updated knowledge of their fields of study and a passion for conveying their expertise.

With this broad aim, *The Fountain Pen* covers potentially all topics related to English and English Literature including the vernacular literature available in English translation. The journal proposes to do this within a dynamic setting that embraces the globalised context of English Literature and language. In this spirit, we would also like to underscore that the quality subject matter of papers we publish counts for less than the instructions for evaluating papers we pronounce to our readers and contributors for all future volumes thus: *to be published in TFP a manuscript should necessarily be readable, well informed by latest scholarship in its field, remarkably convincing in its claims, and extremely careful in its handling of evidence.* The process of double-blind peer review makes sure that international disciplinary standards through a process of diligent editorial intervention are maintained. Most of the specialist teachers who have agreed to referee for us perform the roles of specialised readers and much valued constructive critics. Their timely advice and critical editorial intervention point us in the directions that the journal will eventually move in the next few years in setting and maintaining international standards for scholarship and creative publishing.

ASGAR HASSAN SAMOON
EDITOR

Spectacle Spaces: Cast(e)ing Madurai in the Tamil cinema¹

DICKINS LEONARD M.²

Abstract

This paper seeks to study a component of popular contemporary Tamil cinema, especially foregrounding the films—Kadhal, Veyil, Paruthiveeran and Subramaniapuram—that represent Madurai in the cinematic form. These films received unprecedented popularity amongst the cine-going publics despite these being a product of new production houses. They were celebrated as “new wave” as this low budget productions achieved cult status. This phenomenon, in the industry, is also called as the success of the “new Madurai genre.”

Key Words: media, state, misrepresentation, conflict, narrative

Introduction

Madurai is the third largest city in Tamil Nadu and one of its oldest. In the screen history of Tamil cinema, Madurai has played an important yet changing role as a narrative space. The mythological films such as *Avaiyaar*, *Poompuhar* and *Thiruvillaiyadal* depict Madurai as a centre of literary activity and temple town in the 1950s. In the historical films, such as *Madurai Veeran* and *Madurayai Meeta Sundara Pandiyan*, M.G.Ramachandran acts as the Madurai hero who secures and protects it as a separate region from external forces. Later “Dravidian”¹ cinema uses Madurai as a narrative space for political articulation. Director Barathi Raja in the 1980s set Madurai village as an actual rustic space to narrate his stories. The Madurai based popular films after *Devar Magan* (1992),

¹ A modified version of the same paper was published by the author in the *South Asian Popular Culture*, 13:2, 155-173.

² The author is a Research Scholar in the Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Humanities, University of Hyderabad.

2 DICKINS LEONARD M

such as *Gilli* (2004), *Red* (2004), *Virumaandi* (2004), *Kadhal* (2004), *Veyil* (2005), *Sandaikkozhi* (2006), *Paruthiveeran* (2007), *Subramaniapuram* (2008), *Vennila Kabbadi Kuzhu* (2009), *Goripalayam* (2009) and *Aadukalam* (2010) predominantly narrate and depict a particular caste culture as the dominant culture of Madurai.

These representations of a particular spatial setting raise criticism and indicate the investment of “spatial othering” in Tamil cinema. Films like *Devar Magan* (Son of a Devar, 1992), *Chinna Gounder* (The Younger Gounder, 1992), *Kizhaku Seemayile* (In the Southern Country/Territory, 1993), *Saami* (God, 2003), *Gilli* (Risk-Taker, 2004), *Madurey* (2004), *Attakasam* (Defiance, 2004), *Virumaandi* (2004), *Kadhal* (2004), *Sanda Kozhi* (Fighting Hen, 2005) have dealt with the southern region of Tamil Nadu. The south of Tamil Nadu is understood to be constituted by eight revenue districts: Madurai, Theni, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Tuticorin [Thoothukudi], Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari. These films increasingly construct a cinematic imaginary of southern Tamil Nadu as “a distinct entity submerged in pre-modern violence, caste bigotry and anarchy.”

Cultural Anthropologist Rajan Krishnan points out three interlinked aspects that relate the portrayal of the south in Tamil cinema. He studies the place of the south during the genesis of colonial modernity where “the south presented an administrative problem to the British”. Secondly, the history of caste clashes in the 1990’s, in the south, which were widely reported in media, “caught the imagination of the urban public,” leaving an indelible impression of the south as a place of primordial violence. Thirdly, historically the south in Tamil cinema became the place where the “rustic” attained new authenticity which, he argues, came to be positioned against the “modern” Chennai. He extends that there is a certain “exteriorisation” and “exoticisation” of the south in the language used in cinema which has Chennai as its “enunciatory location” (2008, p. 148-159).

For instance, Krishnan observes that the film *Kadhal* makes Madurai a narrative space, where caste determines one’s identity. The spatial binaries are constructed as Chennai and Madurai as they come to stand for different temporalities. Chennai city is peopled by deracinated/decasted, free individuals policed through law and orchestrated by rules; whereas Madurai is populated by the “pre-modern” castes, clans and kinships. Krishnan argues that constitution of the geographical identity in Tamil Nadu is a metonymic

extension of the caste identity of *Mukkalathor* or *Devar* in the south. He suggests the particular figure of the *Devar* as the best epitome of undying “essence of caste.” The accompanying violence, he states, has its origins in the colonial era.²

Drawing from Krishnan’s proposal of the “exteriorisation/ exoticisation” of the south in Tamil cinema, this paper seeks to clarify that all films do not present Chennai as a civic “other” to the non-modern Madurai on the cinematic screen. There are, in fact, umpteen contemporary Tamil films³ that deal with exteriorisation of the slum within an urban space such as Chennai. They implicate the unintended criminal excess of the city and problematise its sophisticated, “modern,” “civic” portrait. The films deal with goondaism, rowdyism, dons and mafia-dom in what could be called as criminalisation of the modern city. Hence, Chennai as a “modern, enunciatory location” in Tamil cinema is not an essential entity.

Hence, this paper takes a point of departure from the existing scholarship and intervenes to reflect on the representation of Madurai as a spatial construct in these Madurai films. A repetition of spaces as an actual type is signified in the films which this paper calls the recurrence of spectacle spaces. The paper draws from the “exteriorisation/exoticisation” of the “rustic” in Madurai to discuss the narrative space in the “new Madurai genre.” For instance, Krishnan argues *Paruthiveeran*’s “ethnographic realism”⁴ deconstructs the type-hero, by portraying an actual rustic environment that intercedes with the characters. The “trope” that emerged in the earlier films feeds into these later films so much so that the cinematic apparatus appears to construct a non-contemporaneous present on the screen. The films seem to embody a marginal actuality which is not coeval to the secular-modern realities; the Indian State professes to practice.

These spectacle spaces seem to mark the cinematic Madurai as an “other space.” I refer to the *Oor/Kovil Thiruvizha* (Village/Temple Festival) and the cinema theatre as spectacle spaces which are represented differently from earlier films.⁵ The village festival and cinema theatre as spectacle spaces in these films construct an anthropological gaze, where the camera participates in packaging an alienated performative culture.

Spectacle Heterotopias

The village festival site is a spectacle. It is an occasion where the village collective is present in one space and time. In fact, the fest is a cacophony of multiple presences. They are spaces which are linked to time in its most flowing, transitory and precarious aspect – there is no one particular place in a fest. They are unlike “modern” spaces such as museums and libraries which enclose in one immobile place an accumulation of time for ever.

The village collective witnesses the exhibition of various folk cultures in a village fest. Represented by a mixture of folk songs and dances; the fest stands as a spectacle site. The folk songs “*Vaaroora voyarae*” (*Paruthiveeran*) and “*Madurey, Kulunga Kulunga*” (*Subramaniapuram*) portray anthropological documentation of folk culture to the audience. The films participate in the “museumisation” and packaging of an “exotic” culture in an “exterior” space, thereby constructing Madurai.

The spectacle space signifies the co-existence of the “sacred” and the “profane” at a given time in the same place. It offers an anonymous moment of deviation/danger—a murder attempt or violence. For instance, in *Paruthiveeran*’s opening scenes, the milieu is established through the panning shots of the village festival. *Paruthiyur* festival is marked by its prominent religious symbol: the temple and its immediate external which is signified by activities like gambling, folk performances, drinking, fights and violence. Outside the temple, amongst the villagers, a battery of police men control, inspect and verify the crowd. The presence of the state machinery is an attempt to shield the sacred space. While, on the other hand, the village chieftain, Kazhuvathevan simultaneously monitors the sacred space and the external. For instance, he stands near the temple’s deity during the *Kovil Thiruvizha*. Offerings go to the deity through him. He also scrutinises the folk dances and the festive spectacle. Both become agencies of surveillance. One is privileged by the institutional marker, the police uniform; the other is signified by the cultural/spatial marker, the caste. Their presence mark, monitor and scrutinise the sacred and its’ external.

The fest illustrates the village collective as not a homogenous, bound entity. Fissures infest the village collective as violence is masked and anonymous in the spectacle space. For instance, the “profane” henchmen of *Subramaniapuram*, in

anonymity, direct their vengeance on the committee chairman, on a celebratory night for his “noble” hypocrisy. The anonymity of violence in the village fest makes it insecure – inevitably to individuals like *Gusti Vaathiyar* and *Mokkaisamy*. In fact, the police officer, at *Paruthiyur* village, reasons that a considerable police force was necessary at the village fest because the occasion is vulnerable to violence.

This is perhaps, the village fest as a spectacle space is anonymous as well as masked. For instance, the mysterious presence of transvestites who perform folk songs and dance at the fest irks *Kazhuvathevan* in *Paruthiveeran*. His dominant caste marker shrouds the authority to permit their mysterious presence within the spectacle space. The fest is an excellent example to understand that though the village stands as a collective the fissures and differences constitute it; especially when dangerous, profane individuals populate *Paruthiyur* and *Subramaniapuram*. The caste excess and the intermittent violence that is associated with it mark the festival within the rustic as an “Other space.”

Cinema theatre is another spectacle space that recurs in these films. The cinema screen is capable of juxtaposing in one real place several different spaces. *Veyil* and *Subramaniapuram* project films within a film. Hence, the spectator is made conscious of his/her identification with the film. They depict scenes that portray fan culture and performative cine publics within/around the cinema theatre. The films capture the cinema theatre as containing bodies that are performative and which form a collective. For instance, in *Veyil*, *Rajini Kanth's* fans as a collective turn hostile towards *Murugesan* and *Thangam*. As a collective, their excessive demonstration⁶ disturbs the couple's private-romantic affair. The performative fandom disrupts their personal space. Moreover, similar to the village fest, the fanfare at the cinema theatre is prone to fissures and disruption. For instance, the henchmen in *Subramaniapuram* pick up a bloody fight at the cinema theatre. The cinema theatre is prone to group clashes. It is never a homogenous fan-collective.

However, the spectacle spaces constitute a “double bind” as they secure anonymity and act as sites of economic sustenance though violence is entailed within. For instance, *Murugan* and *Aishwarya* spend a night at a cinema theatre in *Chennai*, when they find no place for a safe accommodation. The *Kannappa*

6 DICKINS LEONARD M

Cinema Theatre is an alternate home to *Veyil* Murugesan. He works as a projectionist there. The village fest is a source of economy to Douglas in Paruthiyur as he runs various hawking businesses. The group clash at the Subramaniapuram festival is primarily over an economic deal.

The spectacle spaces, in fact, recur as, what Foucault would call heterotopias⁷ that mark these films. They provide meaning as an “Other space” as they contain the expressive bodies of subaltern/“lower” caste and rowdies within the spectacle spaces. They are spaces that signify “decentralised despotism.” The films imply that the familial space ought to be “barricaded” from the dangerous/deviant individuals who comprise the caste and criminal spaces.

However, though these films destabilise dominant spectatorial address; their tragic ends attempt a shift towards the security of the familial space. Their erasures seem to recover the lost familial space back to the “modern” Indian State. Though the films dislocate the domestic, familial space – for instance, the helpless, “lower” caste Murugan in *Kadhal*; a displaced, vulnerable Murugesan in *Veyil*; an orphan/criminal/inter-caste Veera in *Paruthiveeran* and the careless rowdy sheeters in *Subramaniapuram* – the deaths relocate the systemic (casteist) structure. They do not destabilise the caste order within the narrative space. Venkatesh Chakravarthy suggests that the movie’s tragic end upholds the structure of casteist patriarchy; and preserves the absolute control and purity of the familial space in the social-imaginary, that it represents. I extend this hypothesis to reflect that though these films portray caste and criminal spaces to destabilise them, they indirectly protect them.

For instance, *Veyil*’s opening scenes depict the villain rearing pigs in a pen. This is in contrast to Sivanandy Devar’s (Murugesan’s father) vocational space. He is a butcher who sells goat meat. Though both spaces depict an occupational association; the cultural connotation they raise are caste conflict binaries. *Veyil* contains villainy at a culturally “lower” caste space. This recurs in *Paruthiveeran*. Kazhuvathevan supplies goat meat to hotels, wine shops and festivals. His domestic space is also an occupational space. Whereas, the *Kurathi*’s (the *Kurava* tribe grand-mother of Veera) business is stamped by her outcaste/exterior status. The police men mark the ascribed identity over her crime. Her domestic space is signified by the presence of pig pen and gambling toddy drinkers. Profanity seems to be contained in her space as a contrast to the caste spaces - *Ooru*.

Kazhuvathevan's business network is depicted as an "upper" caste network. This is similar to the business and governmental network of Aishwarya's father in *Kadhal*. The actuality of Madurai space appears to be marked by caste identity in these Madurai films. *Paruthiyur* and *Subramaniapuram* as rustic spaces appear to entail caste purity. In fact, the erasure of the "profane" subjects, from the narrative, appears to entitle the sacredness of rustic space.

For instance, Kurathi lives outside *Paruthiyur*. The illicit toddy business happens at the outskirts. *Kadhal* Murugan as an "other" caste is ideally enclosed in his actual presence at the *Cheri*. His house is coded with an ambedkarite blue. He is thrashed like a stray dog in the outskirts. *Kurathi* is also killed outside the *Ooru*. Veera's parents are also killed in an accident on the outskirts. Veera is beaten to death at the village periphery. Azhagar and Parama are murdered outside *Subramaniapuram*.

These films apparently construct the defying "profane" subjects to eliminate them and construct the rustic space as a caste "pure" space.⁸ Apparently, these films seem to "implement *Manu dharma* treatment to the caste defying subjects in these spaces."⁹ The films protect the caste purity by repudiating the mixture of blood between caste defying individuals. The camera acts as a cultural apparatus that profess the security of property through caste marriage alliances. For instance, Murugan and Aishwarya; Murugesan and Thangam; Veera and Muthazhagu; Azhagar and Tulasi: their love affairs are punished horrendously. Their tragic ends are bloody mutilations as they are linked to the articulation of caste norms as an actual culture in the Madurai genre.

The depiction of caste norms, as the actual culture of Madurai, in many recent films has drawn wide criticism.¹⁰ The alter-native depictions of Madurai culture seem to be *Devar* caste characterisations. They, apparently, centre on *Devar* caste culture as cultural capital. The cinematic cultural markers such as festival, marriage and conflict, depicted in these films, are conceived as cultural practices of *Devar* community. The Third Wave, by using the narrative tropes the earlier films offered, appears to account for *Devar* culture as the actual culture of Madurai. Therefore, it is understood that contemporary films on Madurai protect the caste norms in its representation.

8 DICKINS LEONARD M

Hence, the “alter-native” aspect in the “new Madurai genre” articulates caste as an “other” of the Indian modern at the same time it protects the casteist norms in their recurring narratives. The “othering” is based on this overlap.

Film Summaries

Kadhal (Love, 2004) is a tragic-romance about an inter-caste love affair that is set in Madurai city. The film captures the travails of runaway lovers and their “secured” return, homeward. The narrative constructs Madurai as an entity steeped in caste conflict and violence. The slang and cultural practices portrayed differentiate this film from other contemporary films. *Kadhal* also attempts to naturalise itself by proclaiming that it is no make-believe but a real story. This naturalisation is also more effective as a new cluster of actors, unfamiliar and unknown, add “authenticity” to their roles – reportedly, some of them were just picked off the street.

Veyil (Torrid Sun, 2005) is a tragic-romance set in a village near Madurai. The protagonist and narrator Murugesan highlights the historical changes that have undergone over a period in the place he lives in. Unlike other popular films, this one distinctively presents the narrative of a wretched, prodigal son’s life through a confessional mode. The film presents Madurai as a bloody locale of violent business deals. The police and systems of justice are shockingly absent from the whole narrative. The experiments in the narrative mode, such as childhood memories as flash-back and “unusual” characterisation, mark this film as different from others. The film depicts cinema theatre as a spectacle space.

Paruthiveeran (Warrior of Paruthiyur, 2007) is a tragic-romance set in Paruthiyur, a village near Madurai. The film portrays the love affair between the daughter of the village chief – a dominant caste patriarch (OBC) – and her cousin, a seasoned rowdy who is of a mixed birth. The village is represented as a space of caste/clan violence, bigotry and brash slipshod indolence. The folk performances within the film are famously rendered in a “documentary” mode further signifying the rustic difference from an urban lifestyle. Combined with the flash-back narrative mode, it is an excellent example of “ethnographic realism.”

Subramaniapuram (2008) is a racy thriller that recounts the tragic encounters of three young rowdy sheeters. The film depicts the Madurai town of the 1980s

and the party politics that individuals and families are caught up in. *Subramaniapuram* portrays the lives of five henchmen who are used by their powerful acquaintances and friends. The new shades in the characterisation of these henchmen clearly distinguish them from the type-heroes earlier popular Tamil films created. Cine-fan culture and village fest recur as spectacle spaces. The narration is predominantly in the flash-back mode.

Works Cited

- Asad, Talal. "Conscripts of Western Civilization?" *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honour of Stanley Diamond*. Vol. 1. Ed. C. Gailey Griner. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1992.
- Baskaran, S. Theodore. *History Through the Lens: Perspectives on South Indian Cinema*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009.
- Baskaran, S. Theodore. *The Eye of the Serpent: An Introduction to Tamil cinema*. Madras: East-West, 1996.
- Chakravarthy, Venkatesh. "David Leanin Ryan's Daughterum (1970) Manvaasanai Cinimavin Vaniga Vadivamum." (David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) and the Economic Structure of Nativity Cinema) *Kaatchi Pizhai* Vol. 1 (August/September 2010): 12-21.
- Daniel, Valentine. *Fluid Signs*. California: University of California Press, 1987.
- Devdas, Vijay and Selvaraj Velayutham. "Encounters with 'India': (Ethno)-nationalism in Tamil cinema." *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*. Ed. Selvaraj Velayutham. London & New York: Routledge, 2008. 154-171.
- Dhareshwar, Vivek and R. Srivatsan. "'Rowdy-Sheeters': An Essay on Subalternity and Politics." *Subaltern Studies IX*. Eds. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. 201-231.
- Dhareshwar, Vivek. "Caste and the Secular Self." *Journal of Arts and Ideas*. 25.26 (December 1993): 119-126.
- Foucault, Michel and Jay MisKowiec. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, 16.1 (Spring 1986): 22-27.
- Kaali, Sundar. "Narrating Seduction: Vicissitudes of the Sexed Subject in Tamil Nativity Film." *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*. Ed. Ravi Vasudevan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. 168-190.
- Krishnan, Rajan. "Imaginary Geographies: The Makings of 'South' in Contemporary Tamil Cinema." *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*. Ed. Selvaraj Velayutham. Oxon: Routledge, 2008.139-153.
- Krishnan, Rajan. "Kathanayaganin Maranam." ("Death of the Hero") *Katchipizhai* Vol. 1 (August/September 2010): 7-11.

10 DICKINS LEONARD M

Maderya, Kumuthan. "Rage against the State: Historicizing the 'Angry Young Man' in Tamil Cinema." *Jump Cut* 52 (Summer 2010).

Pandian, M.S.S. "Culture and Subaltern Consciousness: An Aspect of MGR Phenomenon". *EPW* 24.30 (July 29, 1989): 62-68.

Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Engagement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Vasudevan, Ravi, ed. *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

End Notes

¹In the Dravidian/political cinema political address, spectator identification, star/fandom, linguistic re-organization at a historical juncture necessitated a new way to understand and conceptualize Tamil cinema. The Dravidian propaganda cinema at this juncture contested Indian cinema that ideologically constructed a "national" audience.

²Krishnan discusses the colonial rule in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century created Chennai as the seat of modern governance. The south-in-opposition to Chennai begins with Poligar wars and later with the recalcitrance of the Kallar dominions. He cites Anand Pandian's detailing of how the south presented an administrative problem to the British. Krishnan infers from Pandian's narration that the history of consolidation of caste identities in southern districts and the anti-modern position the *Kallars* and *Devars* occupied from the early days of colonial statecraft. See Rajan Krishnan, "Imaginary Geographies: The Makings of the 'South' in Contemporary Tamil Cinema," *Tamil Cinema: The cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*, ed., Selvaraj Velayutham (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 147-149.

³Films such as *Pudhupettai* (2006), *Chithiram Pesuthadi* (2006), *Pattiyal* (2006) and *Anjathe* (2008) deal with gangsters in Chennai who populate the slum that is portrayed as criminal and therefore "exterior" to the "modern" urban space. Films such as *Vasool Raja MBBS* (2004), *Thirupaachi* (2005), *Arinthum Ariyamalum* (2005), *Billa* (2007), *Pokkiri* (2007) and *Polladhavan* (2007) deal with dons and mafiadom who criminalize the urban space. They account for a different kind of an "exoticisation" of Urban Chennai which is different from the makings of the South.

⁴Rajan Krishnan terms it in Tamil as *ina varaiviyal edhartham* i.e. "Ethnographic realism" in "Kathanayaganin Maranam," (Death of the Hero) *Katchipizhai* vol. 1 (August/September 2010): 11.

⁵The neo-nativity films depicted the individual subject's journey into the spectacle spaces through a narrative song. Hence, the hero/heroine's is the focal point in these spaces. Their agency is given pre-dominance over the space. For further information on this, refer Sundar Kaali, "Narrating Seduction: Vicissitudes of the Sexed Subject in Tamil Nativity Film," *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*, ed., Ravi Vasudevan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) 168-190.

⁶One may witness some angry, impatient spectators in the guise of look-alike-Rajini Kanths as they enter the projectionist's room. They comment on the lover-couple relationship and disrupt their private space.

⁷Foucault explains the distinction between heterotopias and utopias: mirror is a utopia because it is a placeless space; the image that one sees in it does not exist. One sees oneself in the mirror but one is not in that unreal, virtual space. But mirror is also a heterotopia because the mirror exists in reality, as a real object, and shapes the way one relates to one's own image. It exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that one occupies. Heterotopias are absolutely real and unreal spaces at the same time.

⁸Valentine Daniel refers *Oor* as the sacred geographical space marked by the temples of a village. The term *Oor* is defined in a person-centered manner: a place is named and referred to according to the people who populate it. *Oor* is where higher castes live and therefore it is considered pure and respectable in contrast to a "colony" or *cheri*. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs* (California: University of California press, 1987) 63-94.

⁹Since the caste structures within the film narrative protect the women as sacred objects of caste purity they repudiate the women subjects from marrying "other" caste men. Cinema participates in this discourse where the socio-political structures protect land and property through caste-marital alliance. The narrative and characterization do not disturb or displace the dominant caste structures. In fact, they recover and uphold them. The films offer sympathies and individual rescuers as response to this recovery. Widespread criticism on these films appears in Tamil little magazines. For instance, Chandran in his article "Kadhalum Kadhal Saarntha Nilamum" (Love and Land in *Kadhal*), comes down heavily on these films for being casteist. He equates these films to those of Mani Ratnam, Sankar, Kamal Hassan and Selvaraghavan for its ideological currency; see, http://www.keetru.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10900:2010-09-05-08-15-20&catid=11:cinema-review&Itemid=129.

¹⁰Shrirasa's "Madurayai Mayyamitta Thirai padangal" (Movies based on Madurai), analyzes the representation of Madurai in Tamil cinema screen history. He reflects how in recent filmic representations, Madurai comes to stand to signify *Devar* caste culture as the normative culture of Tamil Nadu. Apparently, he also observes that many producers and directors belong to *Devar* community in the Tamil film industry, which is based in Chennai; see, http://www.keetru.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11160:2010-10-27-21-27-14&catid=10:cine-news&Itemid=130

Mirabai and the Poetics of Transformative Transgression

WASIA MUSHTAQ¹

Abstract

The poetry of 16th-century Indian saint, Mirabai, is translated, narrated and performed in varied genres globally. Her poetry, in fact, has generated a living tradition in itself granting Mira popularity that moves beyond cultures, castes, classes and religions. Mira was not only a devotional poet but also a voice for the voiceless, underprivileged and the subaltern in general. A Rajput princess by birth, Mira took to streets and refused to adhere to any of the set norms. By transgressing the conventional boundaries at the personal, social and the feminist levels, she emerged as a vanguard of freedom and identity for all. Her defiance at multiple levels struck a transformation and thus, she carved out a niche of her own free from conventions. All this was, however, possible through language only. The language was the means of expression for her. It was the linguistic medium only that enabled her to transform things around her, and it is the medium of language only which grants her sustenance today also. The translated version of her poems in English has made her cross the national boundaries too. The paper, therefore, aims at exploring all these dimensions of her poetry in English and looking at the contemporary relevance they bear. The ways in which Mira used language for expressing the self, challenged the dogma through her poems and declared herself an open rebel would be explored.

Key Words: Mirabai, poetic transformation, language expression

Mirabai, also known as Mira, was born in 16th century Rajasthan to a royal Rajput family. A keen interest in religious matters since her childhood contributed to the development of divine qualities in herself. The religious temperament became an inseparable part of her personality, and she annihilated herself from the world by drowning in the divine love of Krishna. This love grew gradually to such an extent that she eventually accepted her Lord as her husband. She be-

¹ The author is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Government Degree College for Women, M. A. Road Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. She can be contacted at wasia.mushtaq@gmail.com.

came a perfect devotee and would spend all her time with her beloved. The realisation of love granted her the strength to move out of the conventional boundaries and claim a space of her own, and to achieve it, she took refuge in the mystic realm and created a third space for her where no social, religious or gender constructs existed. She was more than a devotional poet; she was “a fearless, passionate, defiant, clear-eyed, rebel...who walks with those poets who during periods of oppression, war and social unrest cast everything into the fire that they may pursue a dignified human life- a life blazing with spirit and intellect” (Schelling, 1993, pp. 14-15). She transgressed the social, religious and patriarchal bondages and proclaimed:

*My lord is the courtly Girdhar, none else
My husband is the one who wears the peacock crown*

The frequency and intensity of her love was so great that nothing could intervene in its spirit. It was a state of mind wherein the experience of god was so pure, unblended and uninterrupted that it drew and absorbed the powers of the soul into a profound state of affection, confiding and resting in Krishna. During such ecstasy, she had no sight but of her beloved Krishna. The purity, gentility, devotion, rebellion and love vibrated with right accents in her poetry. K P Bahadur opines:

Mira’s love for Krishna was multi-faceted. She looked at Him as the Lord and Creator, the Saviour, Preserver and the Supreme Being who absolved his devotees of all sins and freed them from the rounds of rebirths. More than this, however, she surrendered herself wholly to him, body, mind, heart and soul, addressing him as Dear, Darling, Lover, Beloved, Lord, Life-companion and so forth...Mira’s love had the touch of Divine (2002, pp. 36-37).

All the poems of Meera make us feel the presence of someone completely eternal and unworldly. Her association with the Dark One has spoken for itself for centuries now. Her poems speak of her ecstatic union, of the despair that precedes it and the fulfilment that follows it. They project a sheer strength of beauty, founded in the sharp-edged perception of a person who has opened his or her self to experience in every dimension. Mira’s poems are predominantly simple expressions of her joys, sorrows, devotion and rebellion. Her apparently

14 WASIA MUSHTAQ

unorthodox behaviour was actually her consonance with the devotion. She knew that she was transgressing boundaries, but she was so engrossed in her attachment with her Lord that she ceased to care. When she said, “none except Gopal is mine”, she declared very openly that it was only He who suited her and therefore, she had vested all her love and devotion in Him. She rebelled and by challenging all (private to public) successfully carved out a niche for her. She went beyond everything, beyond caste, beyond ego, beyond worldly opinions and attained liberation saying:

*Dyed I am in the love of the Dark One
I have taken to anklets, started dancing flaying the clan honour
Seeking company with the saints, I am drowned in devotion
Singing the praises of Hari, I keep away from evil
Without him, the world is empty and a lie
I only know the love of Girdhar and dance in devotion*

The family in which Mira lived was the first circle of opposition that she had to raise a voice against. She had many boundaries which were set by her family to restrict her moves. Starting with the marriage itself, she initially refused to marry the groom chosen for her. However, upon being forced into marriage with Prince Bhoj Raj, she refused to adhere to any of the rituals and norms of the dynasty. The first defiant move from her side was the refusal to worship the family deity of Rajputs, *Kuldevi*. Having declared Krishna as her husband, she categorically refused to bow down before any other god, thereby, inviting the wrath of the clan. After refusing to adhere to the norms of family, she disavowed the preference for a son. She claimed the name to live by the works and by her sayings and not by giving birth to any son and thereby, refused to continue the Rajputana lineage. This was a significant blow she gave to Rajputs who valued women as mothers only and not as women in themselves (Jain and Sharma, 2002). After refuting the norms within the family, she moved into the public domain violating the laws at a much larger level (Bahadur, 2002). Establishing relationships outside the family and mingling with others has always been seen as something forbidden in the society especially for women. It was strictly prohibited for women then also to move freely in public, but Mira never bothered about any law. She openly mingled with people from other communities especially saints and the low castes and in fact revered them, preferring their low so-

cial status to the elite standing in the society. She was criticised for this behaviour but she rendered all the forms of criticism completely impotent by refusing to budge from her stand. Mira was very firm in her stand and established popular moves of resistance to domination. She categorically did away with all the bondages saying:

*I will go and merge with the great ocean
Matters to me nothing of that world
I know nothing of the officials; meditation is all I do
To attain the grace of god, the entire wealth I have forsaken*

Mira resisted all sorts of oppositions by asserting herself and countering the Rajputs with as much valour as they were known for. The fearlessness that she emerged with became prominent in her poems, the way she uttered them and the language she used portrays her inner strength. There is a constant presence of phrases like I will, I will not, I do, I am, and I have which are emblematic of the substance she was made of (Kishwar & Vanita, 1989). Her poetry was an expression of the disregard that she felt for the world and the public opinion. By stepping out of the feminine boundaries also known as *Maryada*, she disarmed her distracters. She leaving all behind took to streets saying:

*Father, Mother, Brother, Friend- none is mine
Gave I up the order of clan, who can do anything?
With tears, I nourished the creeper of love
Servant Meera is drenched in the love of Lord
My lord is the courtly Girdhar, none else*

Her spirit to rebel operated at multiple levels and encompassed nearly all domains ranging from personal to social. Kumkum Sangari opines:

The rejection of earthly marriage, alongside the honour of the family, of kul, and the bonds of kinship, is in effect a rejection not only of their educative and organising functions but of the whole social order within which they are enmeshed. Further, the break with domesticity is a rejection of the primary domain where sexuality is customarily regulated (1990, p. 1467).

The spirit of defiance in her was executed in various ways. Be it in relation to the oppression, which women were subjected to as low castes; be it the suffocation that women had to suffer from owing to a high caste stature or be they merely the women who had to sacrifice themselves at the hands of tradition, Mira had a say for all (Mukta, 1994). Women from different backgrounds even today identify themselves with her. She emerged as an epitome of strength that one required to make an individual place in the society. Her work displays a collective practice of resistance. She refused to be a part of a particular clan and brought into practice a new trend which incorporated every section of the society ranging from women of the upper class to the ones who belonged to the lower section of society. "Mira's refusal to be a part, a sect... to belong to the world and to leave her work to the world rather than to her Rajput lineage opens up the possibility of co-authorship by diverse sections of subaltern classes" (Bhatnagar & Dube, 2004, p. 10). All the ways in which Mira has so far been viewed or studied reveal that she has remained a vital tradition of protest and resistance.

An important aspect in relation to Mira's critique of patriarchy that has been highlighted by the feminist scholars is recognised as the *bidaai* genre (Bhatnagar & Dube, 2004). *Bidaai* refers to the leave-taking of a woman on the eve of marriage. Mira critiqued the ideology of the genre of *bidaai* and relocated the effect of the poetry or the songs which were sung at that time. The ideology of this genre reinforced the tradition of "child marriage, exogamy, treating daughters as temporary residents in the natal home, and disinheriting them after marriage... these songs sentimentalised the cruelty and detachment with which a woman was made stranger in her only home that she had known" (Bhatnagar & Dube, 2004, pp. 18-19). Mira subverted the ideological content of this genre and disintegrated the effect from patriarchal ideology. She channelised it towards a modern secular vocabulary which is now called a women's work identity outside the patriarchal domain. However, in the religious domain of Mira, it is named as women's desire for dedication to a self-chosen ideal. Whenever Mira produced a leave-taking poem, it was addressed to a childhood female friend. She enjoyed being a renouncer, detaching herself from the cords. Her desire for renunciation was directly in opposition to the patriarchal religion. Mira turned the *bidaai* genre upside down. The exile of a woman from her natal home forced upon her by her parents and the society becomes in Mira's poems, the renunciation of the

natal and marital family brought about by the daughter. Thus, Instead of suffering passively, as the trend was, Mira turned tables by emerging as the radical denouncer who shuns off her shoulders everything that confined women to patriarchal premises. She says in a poem:

*I find the ignominy cast on me sweet
Some talk ill, some scandalise; I shall walk my strange path
Why should I wander directionless when I have found a great teacher
People can't see me talking to my teacher
Meera's Lord is the courtly Girdhar, let the evil ones burn in hell*

"In reconfiguring bidaai as renunciation, Mira validates those very experiences in women's lives that, in folk traditions, are proof of women's weakness and emotional insecurity. She remakes these experiences of weakness and emotionalism into transformatory experiences that give women privileged access to renunciation" (Bhatnagar & Dube, 2004, p. 23). She dared to speak and claim on behalf of all women the right to dedicate themselves to ideals of their own choosing and to seek their own transcendence. She says:

*Dancing before the Girdhar
I'll test the spirit of my old love for Him
Wearing jingle bells, my heart tells me that His love is pure
Honour, modesty and the traditions of clan
Nothing matters to me now*

Mira liberated herself altogether from the earthly bondages and invested the state of marriage with spirituality that had no place in the socio-patriarchal marriage relation but was a large part of women's narratives, autobiographies and folk songs. The way Mira described herself allowed her to move freely in public, among men, to converse with them and travel from place to place. Mira not only spoke of a rebellion but acted the same way. She threw away the traditional signs of the feminine self that of wearing jewels, decorating the self with material things and in turn, sought empowerment through the love of Krishna (Jain & Sharma, 2002). She says in a poem:

*False is the ruby and the pearl
False is the worldly splendour
False is all glamour
The only truth is the love of beloved*

Mira aimed at making the world understand that choosing a life-time ideal was an effective way to counter medieval Rajput patriarchal ideology. She highlighted the gender-specific self-alienation of the Rajput women. According to her, a woman is disconnected because she is alienated from her family, children and the right to property. Her role and ability as producer, her creativity and productivity, her power to shape and influence the world around her and connect to the social world as the agent is always hindered by the pre-constructed norms. The voice which Mira symbolised represents a particular configuration, expresses a particular social relation and accounts for a humble yet powerful subalternity. Mira did away with all the forces which promoted and symbolised tyranny, injustice and bias. Mira as a woman tore apart all the constructs ranging from physical to psychological powerfully. Her poems, therefore, are emblematic of a powerful spirit of individualism, womanhood and contain effective resonances related to the spirit of Feminism. Kumkum Sangari opines:

A fifteenth or sixteenth century rebellious woman poet-saint, who pursued her devotion to Krishna with complete dedication, composed exceptionally beautiful songs of love and longing for god and endured severe persecution because she did not behave as a member of the royal household should or because she crossed caste boundaries, seems a likely candidate for those who would look to the past for exemplary women of power and independence (qtd. in Bose, 2000, p. 162).

By transgressing the orthodox boundaries at the personal, social and the feminist levels, she emerged as a vanguard of freedom and identity for all. The account of Mira's struggle for her personal freedom is one of the most inspiring works that survives in the domain of women poets or bhaktas. Her popularity moves across all boundaries, be they religious, social, cultural, national or international. She continues to exist as a figure of inspiration and canonisation within an emerging non-institutionalised global spirituality and liberation. Mirabai emerged as an irrepressible woman in whom people found and continue to find inspiration and hope. Nancy Martin opines:

Something about this woman has caught people's imaginations...women struggling to overcome social and familial expectations; low caste communities facing oppression and degradation; nationalists seeking independence from colonial domination; star crossed human lovers and would be lovers of god; spiritual men and women trying to live against the grain of worldly notion of power, wealth, and success and others seeking to be true to their hearts and to follow their passions...this appeal has reached across time and culture to touch the lives and hearts of people far from India and far from the bhakti world of medieval India in which she lived (2010, pp. 12-13).

Mira has captured the imagination of hundreds of people throughout the world. She has risen from the status of a sixteenth century woman saint-poet to a revolutionary. Hers is now, in the words of Nancy Martin a "popular and living tradition" (2010, p. 31). In India, her stories and poems have crossed the linguistic, regional and the religious boundaries and with the passing years her popularity has increased. The rebellion against the society and suffering, surviving and thriving because of it is fundamental to Mira's story. "There is thus always a latent potential for resistance and challenge to the status quo in the telling of her tale, a potential that can be readily developed by an alternate community as people identify with her character and plight in different ways and imagine her life differently"(Martin, 2010, p. 14). Mira's poems have been carried by South Asian people as they have migrated to other regions of the world. So now we find Mira everywhere in the Caribbean and South Pacific, in Europe and Africa and in the North America creating and reinforcing intercultural and religious identities. In fact, her poetry, at times, exists as "objective-correlative" for nearly all categories of readers. Futehally states that "Mira's poems become our own, we cannot help seeing that it is our own experience of being locked with ego, and ... our own joy upon being released, which allow us to recognise the essence of the poems..."(1994, p. 13). The rebellious, revolutionary and defiant aspect of Mira has been summed up in words by Nabhadass as:

*Modesty in public, the chains of family life
Mira shed both for the lifter of mountains
No inhibitions. Totally fearless
Her tongue sang the fame of her tasteful lord*

She cringed before none. She beat bhakti's drum

(quoted in Hawley 2005, p. 128)

Mira, through her mystic rebellion, became a catalyst for others to raise their voices. Her advocacy of being true to the self is not only facilitating the psychological and spiritual healing, but also striking transformations even in the present times.

Works Cited

- Bahadur, KP. *Mira Bai and Her Padas*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd. 2002.
- Bhatnagar, R. & Dube, R. Meera's Medieval Lyric Poetry in Postcolonial India: The Rhetorics of Women's Writing in the Dialect as a Secular Practise of Subaltern Coauthorship and Dissent. *Boundary 2*, 31, 1-46. 2004.
- Bose, M. *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2000
- Futehally, S. *In the Dark of the Heart: Songs of Meera*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 1994
- Hawley, J. *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas and Kabir in Their Times and Ours*. India: Oxford University Press. 2005
- Jain, P. & Sharma, S. Honour, Gender and the Legend of Meera Bai. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, 4646-4650. Retrieved: www.jstor.org. 2002
- Kishwar, M. & Vanita, R. Poison to Nectar: The Life and Work of Mirabai. *Manushi*, 50, 75-92. 1989.
- Martin, N. Mirabai Comes to America: The Translation and Transformation of a Saint. *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, 3, 12-35. Retrieved: jhs.oxfordjournals.org. 2010
- Mukta, P. *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994
- Sangari, K. Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25, 1464-1475, 1537-1552. 1990
- Schelling, A. *For Love of the Dark One: Songs of Mirabai*. Boston: Shambala. 1993

From Silence to Speech: Resisting the Domination of White Supremacist Male

JATINDER KOUR¹

Abstract

The Black female literary tradition suggests that the Black women's lives and their various accomplishments have always been denigrated and overshadowed by a brutal history of domination. In 1833, Maria Stewart, an African American writer, challenged Black women's oppression and powerfully articulated a discourse through her speeches that laid the foundation of resistance movements, liberating Black women from the oppression of sex and race. The history of Western Literature, from Plato and Aristotle to the modern times, is the history of multiple strategies of exclusion and marginalisation of voices that do not represent and echo the thoughts of dominant white male. Historically, a web of negative images characterised and defined Black women, and these still filter through American culture in the Twenty first century. The paper discusses Gloria Naylor's novel, 1996 (2006) to analyse the ways through which she has made herself the subject of her fictional memoir and narrated the brutal and horrific experience she had in the year 1996.

Keywords: Domination, Resistance, Black Feminist Consciousness, Hegemonic Discourses, Marginalisation, Feminist Epistemology.

The Black female literary tradition suggests that the Black women's lives and accomplishments have always been denigrated and overshadowed by a brutal history of domination. Maria Stewart, an African American slave who later became an activist, writing in 1833, challenged the Black women's oppression

¹ The author is an Associate Professor of English, Government College for Women, Udhampur, Jammu and Kashmir. She can be contacted Email: jatinder6kour@gmail.com

and powerfully articulated a discourse through her speeches which laid the foundation of resistance movements, liberating Black women from the oppression of sex and race. Speaking from a position of direct experience, Harriet Jacobs's words filled the widespread silence and ignorance about the condition of Black female slaves and challenged many misconceptions about slave women that were predominant at that time. Only by experience can one realise how dark, deep and foul is the pit of abomination. Black women's work and family experience and their grounding in traditional African American culture show that African American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female. Such unique experiences have forged a distinctive Black consciousness about their material reality and equip them with a unique angle of vision denied to their masters. This connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives of all African American women pervades the writings of the Black women writers and activists. The ability of Black Women to create these individual and unarticulated yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated self- defined and collective standpoint is the key to Black women's survival. Audre Lorde cautions, "It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment" (45).

As such, history of Western Literature right from the times of Plato and Aristotle to the modern times is the history of multiple strategies of exclusion and marginalisation of voices that do not represent or echo the thoughts of the dominant white male. Despite the fact that Black men and women have played a very conspicuous role in the development of American culture yet the culture of America remained synonymous with white male only and strategized to push these hapless Black women to the brink-to the margins of the society by creating negative stereotypes. These stereotypes were then used to represent, explain and define the positions of Black women. The web of negative images like Jezebel, mammy and others existed historically and continued to entrap and filter through American culture even today in the modern times. This history, this tradition according to Mary Helen Washington, "is a matter of power, not justice and power has always been in the hands of men, mostly white" (32). For most of this long history, women were not only deprived of education and financial independence, but they also had to struggle against a male ideology

condemning them to virtual silence and obedience. Michael Foucault continually sought to elicit the insurrection of subjugated knowledge, “Knowledge disqualified and silenced by hegemonic discourses and practices in order to provide a different perspective on the truths, norms, unquestioned identities imperatives and practices of a period” (371). To quote, Nancy Hartsock:

We need to engage in the historical, political and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history . . . we need to recognise that we can be makers of history as well as objects of those who made history, our nonbeing was the condition of being, of the one, the centre. The taken-for-granted ability of one small segment of the population to speak for all (192).

Therefore, sustained and exhaustive endeavours on the part of black feminists and critics led to the standpoint for Black women as a unique perspective wherein the reality was observed from the point of view of the marginalised and oppressed. Marginality, as Bell hooks argues, “Can be a space of radical location in which women of colour situate themselves in relation to the dominant group through ‘The other ways of knowing’” (1991, p. 45).

She opines that we should reclaim the word ‘margin’ from its traditional use as a marker of exclusion and appropriate it as a location of positivity. This claim is further succinctly captured by Sandra Harding, an American philosopher of feminist Epistemology, who observes, “Starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted account not only of women’s lives but the whole social order” (1991, p. 32). She then elaborates that the perspective of ‘the other’ should be the focus allowing the other to gaze back shamelessly at the self who had reserved the right to gaze anonymously at whomsoever he chooses. This paper is entirely based on this premise and the above discussion of how the articulation of unique experiences like those of slave women and the horrifying brutalities perpetrated by the dominant society unless articulated shall be denigrated as the rantings and ravings of a ‘Madwoman in the Attic’. Hannah Nelson complains, “I have grown to womanhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear” (quoted in Gwaltney, 1980, p. 7).

Gloria Naylor, recipient of National Book Award for her very first book, *The Women of Brewster Place*, goes on to narrate a very horrifying personal though the

fictionalised account of her victimisation by National Security Agencies of United States of America. She very forthrightly conveys her sense of disquiet towards contemporary surveillance, "I didn't want to tell this story. It's going to take courage. Perhaps more courage than I possess, but they have left me with no alternatives. I am in a battle for my mind. If I stop now, they'll have won; and I will lose myself" (3). In an interview with Ed Gordon, Gloria Naylor explains her objective of writing 1996:

Since many of these things did happen to the real Gloria Naylor, by using myself as a protagonist, I was able to have the book act partly as a catharsis. Basically, what 1996 is about, it is about our loss of privacy in this country that the Government has moved well beyond just the simple following of people and the tapping of their phones. But now they have a technology that is able to decode their brain patterns and to detect what people are actually thinking. And they have another technology called microwave hearing, where they can actually input words into your head, bypassing your ears. Now, they are both, both of these technologies are documented, and people have patents for part of the process. So, what I wanted to do in 1996 was to say to my fellow Americans is that we have to be vigilant about any attacks on our civil liberties, even innocuous attacks because they can snowball and lead to other things (Gordon, 2006).

It is quite significant that Naylor published her book through Third World Press, an independent and Black-owned publisher established in 1967. The book has been completely ignored by critics and has not been treated as a work of Literature rather condemned as 'ravings and rantings of a madwoman', simply because in this Naylor has raised her voice against the authorities in USA. Naylor by writing this fictional memoir has made a strong case for solidarity around questions of the state's infringement on civil rights.

The storyline begins when Gloria Naylor, an inspired, prolific and successful writer purchases a Victorian cottage on St. Helena island—a very picturesque and idyllic location, in order to peacefully reengage herself and work on writing her next novel in a very peaceful environment, reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of Her Own*. She is fascinated by the sheer beauty of this place, "There's

stillness about the place, the sandy soil under her feet, the gentle marshy breezes coming from the East, all seem to speak of eternity”(10). The use of stillness and gentle breezes is especially noteworthy in this poetic prose of Naylor, oblivious of the havoc it shall cause in her life. However she later comes to realise that even such a heavenly place, she as a Black, a woman is without a ‘sanctuary’. Her Room, her sanctuary is denied to her by White Supremacist Powers. She becomes a victim of pernicious abuse as a result of minor dispute with a crotchety neighbour on the island who happened to be related to a high level NSA official. Naylor complains that Eunice Simon’s stray cats leave droppings in her vegetable garden which she had nurtured herself with all the care and passion. Things go awry, when an exterminator puts rat poison around Naylor’s house and because of this, one of the cats dies. Eunice’s brother is a high official in National Security agency and as Naylor reconstructs the story, Eunice instigates her brother that Naylor is a drug dealer and a vicious anti-Semitic (the Simons are Jews). Naylor’s house is broken into and ransacked thoroughly. Before this, she is constantly followed about and cars keep on honking endlessly in front of her cottage in order to disturb her peace of mind. Initially she does not notice much but then she observes a pattern in this harassment; everywhere she goes she feels she is being stalked, as if somebody is constantly keeping her under surveillance. She vividly describes the image of her devastated garden as a reflection of the creeping psychological breakdown as the intrusive surveillance mounts further:

The (tomato) plant had gone totally Black as if someone had scorched it with fire. I also saw that Brussels sprouts were beginning to wither. I dug up the tomato plant and all the Brussels sprouts. It was like losing a part of myself. I had worked so hard on that garden (65).

With African American women especially, gardening and all the creative chores are an extension of their personality, a symbol of their being— their survival— they are basically nurturers as within African American literary imaginary, the motif of ‘gardening’ functions as a pivotal expression of Black female creativity, especially at the moments when Black women had little time or opportunities to write. Gardening is synonymous with writing. As Alice Walker’s essay, *In Search Of Mothers’ Garden*, gardening was fundamental to their

existence. Naylor here has made inter textual connection to Walkers' writing and thereby placed her writing in Black Feminist lineage. Here Gloria Naylor has narrowed the lens by focusing on her tripartite identity- narrates an unusually vivid time in her life-the experience of surveillance in writing this fictional memoir.

Gloria's experience of constant surveillance shakes her to the core so much so that she loses her grip on her circumstances, undermines her sense of agency, and fragments her interiority. The garden becomes a space of destruction as surveillance becomes more intrusive into her life and personal space. The team of young boys engaged to harass her, decide to destroy her garden simply because they understand by watching her closely that she holds her garden very precious to her.

Her laptop is also stolen and hacked by these boys who believed, "She's trapped in the world she's entered-our world. And we can do anything with her that we wanted" (53). There was no one to turn to, because nobody would believe anything, moreover involving people might jeopardise their lives as well. At such a critical juncture in her life, a chance meeting with her friend C J Hudson, a Professor seems to be godsend and she is relieved to find someone whom she trusts completely to confide in. She tells him that she is reluctant to spoil his holiday by ruminating over her personal issues, and he assures that things would be normal after some time. But Gloria discovers to her shock and utter sense of disbelief that CJ was being used by the authorities to further harass her by stealing her laptop and handing it over to the boys to reconfigure it as if he had given them complete control over her life. Gloria Naylor is devastated, "Couldn't he have simply said, not this time . . . And for the first time since this whole ordeal began, I cried" (76). Though he was exploited by the NSA for his homosexuality but he could have resisted rather than let himself be used for the destruction of his closest buddy Gloria. Up to this point this entire process of surveillance seemed remote and impersonal, but now with the friend's apparent betrayal she lost her faith in her own community as well, not being able to find anybody trustworthy she was in a strange battle for her survival and alone. Naylor's personal experience has been depicted as representative of the collective one though it's a Black experience yet Naylor discovers a National Security Agency Watch list, with a roster of "(e)very Black

Latino, and Asian writer who has had any press coverage” (33), thus providing a space to other oppressed groups to voice their own unique experiences.

Naylor flees the island and returns to her home in Brooklyn where her tormentors continue to agonise her by using more sophisticated tools. Actually, the boss Dick Simon was faced with a very crucial situation where this project was deemed as botched up operation but he was not ready to admit it. His sole purpose was to harass her, persecute her endlessly, so that she gets so frightened that she loses her grip on life and is turned insane. But Gloria’ strong moorings despite a massive shock she gets after her friend’s betrayal, keep her mentally aware but at a loss as to why and what is happening to her. The treatment gets more intense as the surveillance team uses high-tech mind control weapons to read her thoughts and put negative, self-destructive thoughts in her mind. She while watching a Mel Gibson’s movie Brave heart suddenly thinks aloud, “*I am a bitch. It seemed to have just floated up from the bottom of my mind . . . I am just the worst bitch in the world. I want to kill myself. Where was this stuff coming from?*” (99). Desperate to find answers to these puzzling and intriguing questions, she surfs internet to get a clue as to what is happening to her. And to her dismay she finds many who have complained about such techniques being used by the state to peg them down. Gloria details how they used gas lighting harassment to attempt to drive her crazy. Wikipedia defines “gas lighting as a form of psychological abuse”- It uses persistent denials of fact which, as they build up over time, make the victim progressively anxious, confused, and less able to trust his or her memory and perception. The only way to fight gas lighting is to pretend you are crazy and hope your hidden enemies will stop or the last resort is to be courageous enough and do what Gloria did and expose them. Gloria writes how they used sounds to drive her up the wall. She speaks of systematic door slamming, harassers acting like they needed to use power tools all day long and many other things, but the most sinister technique used on her was an audio spotlight device, such a device according to scientists, can project a sound wave inside your head but it does not use a sound wave that hits your ear drum. Therefore it’s hard to distinguish between your thoughts and those that are being induced there by someone else. Coupled with gas lighting and other harassment techniques, audio spotlight can send a person for a heavy dose of medication. She was driven to such an extent that there was no way she could seek anybody’s help as she tried she found that either people did not

believe her because there is no proof only the targeted individual knows what he or she is subjected to. Though she decided to visit a psychiatrist and felt relieved that the concerned doctor would completely trust her state of mind but his medical knowledge prompted him to think of her as schizophrenic when she confided in him about the dangerous and evil thoughts of suicide entering her mind out of nowhere. He put her on medication and even when received threats by NSA and his office being bugged, he stood by her. Yet at her own place, the ugly thoughts would invade her lonely and vulnerable mind and tried to shatter her sense of equanimity. In this context, Patricia Hill Collins points out that Brittan and Maynard claim, "domination always involves the objectification of the dominated; all forms of domination imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed" (518). She later observes that self-evaluation and self-definition are two ways of resisting oppression. And you are an 'other' if you are different from what Audre Lorde refers to the 'Mythic Norm' others are virtually anyone that differs from the societal schema of an average white male. Gloria Anzaldua theorises that the sociological term for this othering or specifically – attempting to establish a person as unacceptable based on certain criteria that fail to be met (205). Continuing the thread of discussion where I left off above, I would say Gloria was totally othered and marginalised by her tormentors. Here situation was that she was a woman who spoke her mind – a renowned writer brought to such a state, where she seemed to be losing her grip on her circumstances though her detractors too were having sleepless nights and it simply boggled their mind as to how this woman was fighting alone and why was she not succumbing to the intense pressure they went on building around her. Any normal person would have buckled under pressure. Bell hooks goes on to define marginality as a "central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse- it is found in the words, habits and the way one lives. . .It is a site one clings to even when moving towards the centre.... It is an inclusive space where we move in to erase the category" (149-50). All this while the only space, where she would find solace was a public library in Brooklyn where her detractors just could not invade her being just like in her childhood she stayed in library and encouraged by her mother would devour books until she was exhausted, here again her only sanctuary was her library. Away from those maddening techniques used to threaten her very existence, she decides to speak to her virtual community her own people. Though a Black friend had literally backstabbed her yet her own community, her own people and all the people

would listen to her story. So the only alternative to let her story be known to the world so that she is able to survive the trauma was to 'WRITE' just as African American women right from the days of slavery had penned down their memoirs to establish their agency and narrate their side of story and speak of untold horrors heaped on them, so that the world came to know about the falsehoods spread about them to justify their white owners' domination of these African American men and women. Ger Shun Avilez observes, "The fictionalised Gloria situates writing as the means by which she can regain a sense of control over her life and mind, yet this act is also a channel of creating community outside of a framework of kinship" (89). Gloria Naylor's decision to speak about her horrid tale of her victimisation was though a difficult choice as she felt:

Writing, even under the best circumstances is not an easy task, and I was asking myself to write under an impossible condition. I asked myself to dig in just a little bit more and pull up the strength to tell my story. I asked myself to look beyond the scars. The yellow pad was on the table before me and so was the pen. I only had to pick up and start, one sentence a day . . . my biggest problem was fear. I was afraid that dredging up the past would overwhelm me and all those feelings I'd pushed inside would rise up and fill me with incapacitating despair. . . that my experiences would be chalked up to the ruminations of an ill mind. . . I was walking in darkness and perhaps would stay there for the rest of my life. But the only way to find out about any of this was to start. . . if I could manage just one sentence a day, then I wasn't alone and I wasn't worthless. It didn't matter how many were against me or how strong. If they couldn't keep me from that one sentence, I had won. (128)

According to Patricia Hill Collins, "when Black women break their silence individually (through autobiographies or inquiry projects) they are adding to, and shifting the collective voice of Black women" (48). In particular, Patricia (1998), discusses the importance of writing/speaking about concrete experiences (similar to what Gloria Naylor had gone through) stating, "When Black women valorise their experiences, they reclaim the authority of experience" (48).

From such debilitating circumstances, where Gloria had to fight a battle for her mind every day, she drew sustenance in the literary tradition of her foremothers who had, not only gained an agency for themselves by writing, but had thrown open the path for millions of struggling women and sown the seeds of consciousness. This way, they would become aware of their circumstances and would know that they have a perfect right to fight for their survival. Otherwise, majority of them had internalised the fact of their subjugation and would not dream of reacting even if they were battered. Bell hooks has reclaimed the margins as a space of resistance. Black women have always been in search of survival strategies that are liberating, allowing them to transcend the psychological constraints they may have found themselves in, and engage the real issues they are struggling within their daily lives. Liberation process shall partly start when these women understand the significance of raising the voice in the struggle against the oppressor— a starting point which many Black women are afraid of, therefore silenced. In the poem entitled, “Litany for Survival”, Audre Lorde (1979) addresses this fear:

And when we speak we are afraid
Our words will not be heard
Not welcomed
But when we are silent
We are still afraid
So it's better to speak
Remembering
We were never meant to survive. (32)

Naylor's act of speaking/writing was a sacred activity, aimed at her own salvation as well all those suffering under the heavy weight of silence which centuries of oppression had imposed on them.

Works Cited

- Avilez, Ger Shun. *Radical Aesthetics and Modern Black Nationalism*. U of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Gates, Henry Louis. Jr., edited. *Reading Black Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*. Meridian Publishers, 1990.
- Gordon, Ed. 1996. Under the Watchful Eyes of the Government. Interview with Gloria Naylor, 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5168026>

Harding, Sandra. "Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking." *From Women's Lives*. Cornell UP, 1991.

Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 1990.

Hooks, Bell. *Yearning: Race Gender and Cultural Politics*. 1991.

Kempadoo, Kamala. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labour*. Routledge, 2004.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing P, 1984.

Naylor, Gloria. 1996. Third World Press, 2006.

Smart, Barry [edited]. *Michel Foucault; Critical Assessments*. Routledge, 2002.

Children's Literature: A Stylistic Study of Selected Works of Sheikh Razi

TANVEER AHMAD¹

Abstract

Style is the consistent occurrence in the text of certain features among the ones offered as a choice by the language as a whole. Stylistics is the study that maps this deliberate choice made by the author and thus analyses a text from a linguistic orientation, highlighting the themes and the use of language in general. The overall goal of the one employing stylistic techniques to study a text is to know why a text means what it does and how. In the current paper, a stylistic analysis of some selected works of Sheikh Razi is undertaken. The various choices that the author has made in these works are analysed at the levels of phonology, syntax, and semantics.

Key Words: Stylistics, semantics, phonology, syntax, Sheikh Razi

Introduction

Style is the consistent occurrence in the text of certain features among the ones offered as a choice by the language as a whole. Stylistics is the study that maps this deliberate choice made by the author and thus analyses a text from a linguistic orientation, highlighting the themes and the use of language in general. The overall goal of employing stylistic techniques to

¹ The author works as a General Line Teacher in the School Education Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir. He can be reached at tanveer@gmail.com

study a text is to know why a text means what it does and how. On the other hand, it helps a reader to appreciate the beauty and meaning of a text, though some linguists, for example Gower (1986), claim that such an approach actually impedes the act of comprehending the meaning and appreciating the aesthetic beauty of a text. However, Sebeok (1960), Widdowson (1975) and Carter (1989) etc. believe it (stylistics) to be a handy 'means' in helping decipher a text, if not an end in itself. In the current paper, a stylistic analysis of some selected works of Sheikh Razi is undertaken. The various choices that the author has made in these works shall be analysed at the levels of phonology, syntax, and semantics.

Children`s literature must, out of regulation, be simple yet loaded with moralistic lexis, theme and ideology. It should not only interest the target readers but also inculcate in them the values of the socio-cultural setting of the landscape that the writer and the target share. On an imaginative scale of the hierarchy of figures of speech or style devices, it should also utilise mostly those of the devices that are seemingly easier to grasp by the target reader and less of those which are difficult to comprehend. Thus to write children`s literature, it is a twin tedious job to balance the theme and the usage of style devices with which to drive the point/s home. Sheikh Razi, in this regard, makes an interesting writer who balances the themes with the easiest, so to speak, of style features. It would be a logistic premise to expect more usage of style devices like personification, imagery, alliteration, reduplication, onomatopoeia, simile etc. in children`s literature than, say for example, metaphors, symbolism, paradoxes etc. and vetting the books- on whose analysis the paper is based- it becomes vivid that such a choice is definitely made by the children`s literature writer of *bulbul, gul ta gulzar* and *samakh ta wanay*. A vivid example of this would be how he uses a metaphor in one line i.e. /sormi ceshmav donth horum/, comparing the 'tear drop' to a 'hailstone'- quite complex for a young reader to understand- but soon in the second line he gives an explanation of the used metaphor saying /osh horum/, thereby not only using a replacement for the word 'donth' but also simplifying its meaning to the young reader

as a 'tear drop'. However, it would need a statistical study based on replete data to arrive at a clearer picture of the frequency/infrequency of the style devices used in children's literature- a task out of scope in here.

Phonology

i) Rhyme

At the phonological level, rhyme is one of the figures of speech used by the poets. In rhymes too, one feels the 'aabb' rhyme scheme has been most employed by the poet in his works should be easy for children than the other alternative rhyme schemes. In *pihvin*- a poem in

The poem *Martsavangun* is a small yet beautiful poem that is rhythmic. It is replete with internal rhyme.

Fakhir myon aasun ba chus martsavangun
Azanan chu zanun ba chus martsavangun
Shinan raet safedi kulev sabzavari
Vozul thov me angun ba chus martsavangun
Techhar rot me paanas ta kul khaandanas
Retith chum na traavun ba chus martsavangun
Yetshaan chum me Kaeshur jawan buda ta shur mur
Wany gotshsakh paathun ba chus martsavangun

ii) Reduplication/Parallelism

In the poem *Makaywaet*, the style used by the poet is reduplication/parallelism. Every line of the poem ends with the word 'makaywaet'. In between, there are words reduplicated to highlight the importance of this food crop. The adjectives that have been used/reduplicated are *sondir* 'sweet', *zabar* 'great', *jigar* 'lovely' etc. Besides, there are other adjectives used by the poet to highlight the taste and nutritional value of the crop.

iii) Personification

Going by the abstract, one would see more of personification in children`s literature than any other style device. Such a choice is definitely found as Razi uses personification more often. His poem *Bijli* that has been compared to ‘mother’ is, from the very outset till the end, femininity or feminine love personified. Not only this, the author uses first person narrative in which ‘bijli’, a non-agent entity, *talks* about itself in the whole poem, giving the reader a knowhow of how and where electricity is used and for what purposes.

Oasum me kormut qasad panun farz nibovum

Preth gash daaras raash anith gash me hovum

The poem talks about the uses of electricity in our daily lives. The usage of personification to make the target reader enjoy it makes it a very comprehensible piece of literature, even though there are some very broad concepts discussed in the poem as well. For instance, the author also talks about electricity as a tool of globalisation as one can be aware about what is happening in the world just by switching to multimedia outlets like TV, Internet, and Radio etc. which depend on electricity- [*luunt me daerith*, as the author puts it].

Aangun banovum duniyahas, insaan basovum

Kati koar Maghrib oas, onum Mashriqas hovum

The author talks about the notion of globalisation in which the twain of the East and the West has seemingly met, at least, on a cyberspace mode. Even though the author wouldn’t like to bore the young reader with stuff like that, yet he introduces a concept like that of globalisation and thus gives the child reader the luxury to understand it that too without being overtly didactic. Linguistically, also to note in the poem is how the first person narrative is exploited by resorting to the use of almost all the declensions for the 1st person pronoun /ba/. It is not only used *per se*, but, also can be felt as a pronominal suffix in various verbs like *osum*, *banovum*, *onum*, *sajovum*, *alovum* etc.

Semantic/Lexical level

Even the poems that have been enlisted in his book *Gul ta Gulzar*, form children's immediate surroundings with which they are familiar and whose inculcation is a dire necessity for them to understand and broaden their encyclopaedic knowledge of the close by environment. It consists of poems almost about all birds/animals/insects like *Kotur, Machtular, Gur, Kantur, Kukil, Kastoora, Kaav, Satut, Ganth, Haer, Tshaavij, Daand, Geb ta Sih, Braer, Huun*, etc. Similarly, other poems that adorn the book are about trees/plants found in the immediate environment of the child, with acute emphasis on being concerned about the child's local sensitivity. Thus, we find poems like *Tserikuj, Fress, Brenn, Makaywaet, Martsawangun, Kikur, Vir* etc. which form part IV of his book *Gul ta Gulzar*. In fact the whole of *Gul ta Gulzar* forms a mini-encyclopaedia for the target reader who must dearly be acquainted with these things/themes described by the poet. It would not only interest the target reader but would also act as an enculturation tool for him/her to get familiar with its local landscape as well as the words for the said objects found in the culture of the target readership.

At times, poets use certain nominal expressions- like names of persons or places- to, semantically, invoke a similar theme, object or idea. Here the usage of words like 'Shalamaran' and 'Nishatan' by the poet is to motivate the young reader that many places of beauty, tranquillity and serenity can be discovered by the child readers by the dint of their knowledge, which otherwise is not possible. The usage can, also, be called as antonomasia- the use of proper nouns to reproduce the attributes possessed by the objects used.

Imagery

The imagery, an important and easy to understand feature of poetry, used by the author in his poems is, as already mentioned that of the close by environment with which the young reader is and should be familiar. As such we see the mention of immediate flora and fauna. In his poem *Asi (kya) kor*, Razi makes a mention of many birds as:

*Gatsh kotran ta bulbulan Qumran ta bey jalan
Wuchh raata kreeli sund hasher waesil mazaar kor*

The poem is replete with the mention of birds prevalent in Kashmir. Also, without looking to be moralistic, the author in the last line asks the young reader to acquaint himself with knowledge as the world belongs to men who use the pen which liberates them of racial bias, caste hatred and social intolerance.

*Yus nindri woth ta bronth pok razi temis chu khosh
Tas kya wanun chu bey ti kanh yem zan hushaar kor*

Not only this, the author has dedicated a full poem to the young reader on the importance of knowledge. The whole poem *Tul Qalam* is replete with advice for the readers especially the younger generation that knowledge holds the key to development and prosperity.

*Shechh khabar ha boznaviy tul qalam
Sar ba sar nuurana chaviy tul qalam
Shalamaran tay nishatan pay anakh
Peshkash Gulzar thaviy tul qalam
Mehfilan andar grezan chaeniy sokhan
Majlisan manz jay traviy tul qalam
Saath abduk wuni chu aes Raeziye
Wada azluk yaad payiy tul qalam*

Right from the start until the end, the poem highlights the benefits of being knowledgeable. Here 'qalam' is symbolically used for 'knowledge' even though it literally means 'a pen'. The poem is, on Jakobsonian model of the functions of language, directive in function focussed on the young reader or 'the addressee', as Jakobson calls it, seeking to affect (mould) his behaviour. The very act of '*qalam tulun*' is liberation for the reader for it is fraught with enlightenment (wada azluk yaad payiy), respect (Majlisan manz jay traviy), pride (Mehfilan andar grezan chaeniy sokhan) etc.

Kath Wanay is another poetry collection of Sheikh Razi meant for the children. It is, mostly, moralistic and by the use of stylistic features, he

38 Tanveer Ahmad

affects the young readers' mind to inculcate in themselves the values of life. In fact, the whole poetry for children written by Razi is simple, motivating and full of values that inculcate in the children the value of being moral and pious.

Works Cited

- Beg, Mirza Khalil Mohammed. 1983. *Zubaan, Usloob Aur Usloobiyat*. Aligarh: Idara-e-Zubaan wa Usloob.
- Beg, Mirza Khalil Mohammed. 2005. *Tanqiid Aur Usloobiyati Tanqiid*. Aligarh: Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.
- Carter, R and P. Simpson. 1989. *Language Discourse and Literature*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Chapman, Raymond. 1973. *Linguistics and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Stylistics*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd.
- Gower, R. 1986. 'Can Stylistic Analysis Help the EFL Learner to Read Literature' in *ELT JOURNAL*, Oxford, Vol. 40, No. 2.
- Khan, Masood Hussain. 1966. *Sha'ro Zubaan*. Hyderabad: Department of Urdu, Osmania University, Huderabad.
- Narang, Gopi Chand. 1989. *Adbi Tanqiid Aur Usloobiyat*. New Delhi: Educational Bookhouse.
- Sebeok, T. A. 1960. *Style in Language*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Widdowson, H. G. 1975. *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. London: Longman

Comic Exposition in Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur*

ARCHANA KAUL¹

Abstract

As a prolific writer, V.S. Naipaul fascinates and impresses his readers with the range and amplitude of his work. His cosmopolitan nature presents a range of worldwide experience entwined with a rich tapestry of images reflecting the crises and turmoil of the present world. His novels permeate deep into Indian culture and ethos set largely in the surrounding of Caribbean thought and style. Naipaul's first novel, The Mystic Masseur is a true reflection of this spirit. In his first attempt of extensive story telling, Naipaul show cases the richness and variety of men and women encompassing his novel. The paper is an attempt to study Naipaul's art of fiction; the fictional style he adopts to present the life and times of Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair. The deftly articulated autobiography within a biography marks the genius and skill of a writer that Naipaul is, along with his art of characterisation, display of satire, irony and other techniques.

Key Words: Biographical, Exposition, Characterisation, Irony, Technique.

The scholarship on Naipaul is fairly extensive. Particularly in the context of the novelists who have been writing since the fifties, Naipaul is one of the few writers like William Golding and Iris Murdoch who have received worldwide attention from the readers and critics. Naipaul is indeed a prolific writer. Since *The Mystic Masseur* first published in 1957, he has written twelve novels, nine travelogues, a large number of stories and essays which show that he has been a committed writer for the last thirty-five years. The range and the amplitude of his works are fascinating and impressive.

The readers often find Naipaul's oeuvre as a window to the crisis and turmoil of the modern world. In variety and range Norman Mailer is the only writer who comes close to Naipaul in presenting in his work a window to the

¹ The authour teaches English at SPMR College of Commerce, Canal Road, Jammu. She can be contacted at arch_mag2000@yahoo.com

contemporary world. But Mailer's writing remains typically American. Unlike Naipaul he has not visited India, Iran, Nigeria and Argentina and has not written on these countries in a compelling manner. Therefore, the cosmopolitan nature of Naipaul's work presents the emergence of a new type of writing in which the authors take the whole world into the conspectus of their imagination. This is the unique quality of his writing and appropriately he has received worldwide recognition.

When we come to his fiction we find their locale is largely confined to Caribbean Islands. In these novels he appears to be a chronicler of people: their customs, manners and behaviour; and their hopes and aspirations. Herein, he finds richness and variety of men and women that Balzac has found in the Paris of the nineteenth century Boston and New York. The critics have pointed out the immense variety of men and women in Naipaul's novels. Moreover, they have also discussed the presiding themes of rootlessness and a sense of metaphysical alienation in his novels. They have analysed his techniques of irony, grotesque and caricature employed in these novels along with their symbolic and allegorical nature showing the predicament of the Caribbean men and women, who ultimately are universal human beings of our times. Indeed, a study of the rich and ever-growing scholarship on Naipaul is an immensely rewarding experience as is the reading of the original works of the author.

However, the novels of Naipaul raise certain questions which the scholars have not framed in an appropriate manner. For example, there is the problem of bilingualism in Naipaul's novel. How an author, whose mother tongue is not English, has succeeded in creating a literature in English like a native speaker? Moreover, in what way has he succeeded in bringing Caribbean imagination in the form of English novel! In English fiction Joseph Conrad is an example that a Polish speaker can write great novel in English and be one of the greatest novelist of English Literature. Hence we study the fictional style of Joseph Conrad. F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* has shown that the uniqueness of Conrad's fictional techniques by which he succeeds and becomes a novelist in great tradition of English fiction. No such question has been raised in relation to Naipaul and his art of fiction. It may be because Naipaul is still writing. We expect his greater work yet to come. That is why 'the readers' final judgement

will wait for the creation of masterpiece of the author and then such questions will be raised. In a way this is the right approach to a living author.

In a small way this problem can also be explored by exploring the influence of other writers on Naipaul, and the way he has developed his distinctive style which is growing, developing and maturing from novel to novel. In this context a study of the fictional styles of Naipaul would be rather relevant. Several aspects of Naipaul's fictional techniques such as caricature, irony, grotesque, etc. have been pointed out by the scholars in relation to his individual works. But these aspects of his fictional style have not been studied in a systematic manner. Hence, in this paper his first novel *The Mystic Masseur* will be taken up to focus our attention on the devices which have not been discussed such as nature of exposition in this novel along with art of characterisation with strains of autobiographical reflections seeped in from time to time.

His first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, was published in 1957. It represents the early phase of the author in which he closely follows the Dickensian narrative style. Naipaul has talked about his indebtedness to Dickens. Bidhu Padhi has mentioned in the article 'Naipaul on Naipaul and the Novel' published in *Modern Fiction Studies* that Paul Theroux, the critic and novelist has discussed the nature of Naipaul's apprenticeship under the shadow of Dickens. (455-465.) In this paper efforts have been put to bring out not only the influence of Dickens but also the innovations that he makes by combining some elements of psychological fiction with Dickensian techniques. It is this innovative nature of exposition in *The Mystic Masseur* that would be discussed here. The nature of exposition conceived in this novel remains almost the same with further innovations in characterisation, irony, satire, etc. Here, Naipaul follows the method of realistic novels which is the main tradition of English fiction. According to this tradition, the portrayal of protagonist's life is divided into chapters under some appropriate heading representing a beginning, middle and an end. This method of giving titles to chapters is a way of focusing the readers' attention onto the central characters of the novel. This technique has been used variously by the writers like Fielding, Dickens and other writers.

In other words, the writer acts as a guide to the reader. For instance, when Dickens used this method, he did more for publication as his characters used to get published in a serial form in popular magazines. So, proper title to a chapter

enabled him to keep beginning, middle and end always into his perspective. This method has also been employed to keep the reader's sense of curiosity and suspense alive in his mind. Naipaul follows the chapterisation technique of Dickens rather closely in all his novels. This is a way for him to keep the readers sense of curiosity always developing in their minds. Moreover, it appears that the author's choice of this technique is a brilliant stroke of a genius as he attempts to integrate the Caribbean experience into the main stream of English fiction. Further, in the paper attempt will be made to point out that Naipaul merges this method with other devices of the novels of Stream of Consciousness such as, point of view, flash back, epiphany, etc.

In *The Mystic Masseur*, the title of the chapters suggests a purpose or a message. Such as 'Pupil and Teacher', 'Leela' and 'Quarrel with Ramlogan', etc. The chapters are bound together by the action of the protagonist, in which his desolation within and progression without are depicted in juxtaposition. The material gain of Ganesh, the protagonist, leads him to the loss of his inner conscience. Ganesh was a spiritually honest and sympathetic person before he joined politics, though after becoming an MLC he does retain his honesty and caring nature but he gives up his mystic self. He leaves his interest in mysticism and spiritualism, and fully involves himself in the things of the world. From here, we can say, starts his fall as a spiritual man. And the little bit of simplicity and honesty left in him is also corrupted when he becomes an M.B.E. Therefore, Ganesh leaves the spiritual in him for the materialistic gains.

Naipaul has employed the device of psychological representation through the third- person narrator who has composed a biography, which is *The Mystic Masseur*. The unreliable omniscient narrator of Ganesh, has written a biography-cum-history based on the fragment of an autobiography which is a piece of confession. The autobiography is a confession of the so-called guilt of the protagonist. So the novel is conceived as a biography-cum-history based on a confessional autobiography. Here we see the influence of Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. The author remembers his past, and in so doing he makes a plan to start a new life. This is a sort of spiritual awareness or implied epiphany which is muted at the climax of the novel. This is how the techniques of psychological fiction have been subsumed in the outer framework of the Dickensian fiction in *The Mystic Masseur*.

Moreover, Naipaul makes the narrator to pass comments on the social and moral issues in the novel. Again this is a well-known Dickensian device. He employs the technique of authors' intrusion by presenting a scene, and then giving the authorial commentary in order to bring out the psychological motivation of his protagonists. For example, in *Oliver Twist*, when Oliver is working as an apprentice under Mr. Sowerberry, a coffin producer, he regards with great admiration the people at funeral places. To this the unreliable narrator says that 'Oliver Twist was moved to resignation by the example of these people. I cannot, although I am his biographer, undertaken to affirm with any degree of confidence....'(55.) Thus after acknowledging himself to be Oliver's biographer, the narrator goes on to focus the reader's attention to a particular incident which would affect Oliver's life. Furthermore, the author again intrudes by the remark: 'And now, I come to a very important passage in Oliver's History.' Then Oliver hits the powerful Noah. In this way, Dickens himself intrudes into the text to set the readers on the tract.

Similarly, Naipaul also makes several authorial intrusions in the novel. For example, in the very first chapter a subtle distinction is made between the author and the narrator. The author is a young boy who has never read the Ganesh's booklet, *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*. He has only got treatment from Ganesh for the ailment in his foot. Thus author's view-point is projected in the first person only by childhood reminiscence. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator has read his other two books, *The Year of Guilt*, and *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*. But he bases the biography of Ganesh on the first book. This subtle distinction between the narrator and author has been maintained throughout the novel.

Again, for instance, in the chapter twelve, the omniscient narrator's work ends with the remark 'So far the autobiography, and the private man. But by this time Ganesh was a public figure of great importance. He was always in the papers.'(212) Then the author emerges in the first person and informs us Ganesh is the writer of two more books *Profitable Evacuation* and *What God Told Me*. After the publication of these two books he suppressed other publications and disbanded the Ganesh Publication Ltd. Similarly in the epilogue where the author as young student confronts G. R. Muir, Esq., M. B. E. in England, the subtle distinction between omniscient narrator and authorial commentary has

been kept in the novel to keep the double vision of the protagonist presented throughout the novel. On the one hand, Ganesh is a mystic, a penitent, and a moralist. On the other hand, there is a streak of genius and mountebank in his character. It is this ambiguity where Ganesh the mystic ends and Ganesh as a simulator begins that is what makes him a type of Don Quixote who represents the predicament of everyman. Precisely this is the appeal and beauty of the novel has been sustained through unreliable narrator and self-mocking author.

In the novel, Naipaul has characterised the transmutation of Ganesh from an unsuccessful primary school teacher to a mystic masseur. And from a mystic, he manoeuvres his way into politics, where he goes on to become M. B. E (Member of British Executive). The novelist is a good story teller, the story of Ganesh's rise from his humble beginning has all elements of a good story, it is credible and it keeps the suspense and curiosity of reader alive throughout. As has been pointed out by E. M. Forester in his *Aspects of Novel*, that a great story teller will always satisfy the need of 'how, why, [and] what of a story' (117). In the same tradition in *The Mystic Masseur*, the narrator from the very beginning ties readers to the 'element of surprise'. In just a few lines he fills our mind with the question of 'how' (he becomes a hero), 'why' (he wants to become a hero) and 'what' (are the causes). Moreover, the author has also presented the life of Ganesh in a state of situational irony where failure brings its own reward in the life of protagonist. Ganesh from the unknown man becomes a unique man. This is the story of a small man becoming a unique man.

Naipaul presents the satire within the framework of comedy. The comedy easily conforms to the Aristotelian concept of comedy as reflected by Aristotle in *On the Art of poetry* in *Classical Literary Criticism*. 'Comedy represents the worse types of men....For the ridicules consists in some form of error or ugliness that is not painful or injurious; the comic mask, for example, is distorted and ugly, but causes no pain.' (37) The novelist shows Ganesh as a village bumpkin, credulous and stupid. Infact, in all aspects he is ridiculous, but still he is seen as rising, achieving fame and wealth. In spite of his uncouthness and credulity, he is able to rise in life. Naipaul distorts these weaknesses for the purpose of comedy and satire.

The plot of the novel fits into the classical four part division of a comedy: exposition, complication, climax and resolution. The exposition of the plot starts

from the first chapter 'The Struggling Masseur'. Naipaul here refrains from the use of the heading 'Prologue' and instead utilises the chapter in depicting what would be the action in the novel, who are the main characters and what are their motivations. All these lead to the success of the protagonist. The contents of the Prologue are revealed from the very start. The unreliable narrator shows us beforehand that the protagonist will be a hero of the people later on in his life. He will receive honour and will be famous and 'would be a British representative at Lake Success' (11).

In the manner of a good artist, the novelist has introduced the main protagonist indirectly, to the extent of making the narrator and his mother as characters of the novel. Shakespeare also introduces his main character indirectly. For instance Othello gets introduced from the conversation of Iago and Roderigo. Likewise in this novel, Ganesh is introduced by the narrator in conversation with his mother, who comments on seeing the narrator's swollen foot, after two days: "It is looking a little serious. Is only Ganesh now for you, boy? Who the hell is this Ganesh" (12). Thus, within the first chapter exposition of the plot along with Ganesh's character takes place, where we come to know that Ganesh will be a masseur by profession. Narrator in the exposition keeps on giving clues of the future life of Ganesh.

It is from second to seventh chapter that the narrator depicts the complication in which the exposition of the character takes place. Here the narrator becomes a biographer, gives us the life and times of Ganesh, and at times reflects on Ganesh's autobiography. The novelist emphasises upon the rusticity and simple mindedness of Ganesh as later on he develops opposite characteristics as a cultured man of the wide world. The irony is implicit throughout the novel. The real break comes in his life when he changes from his western dress of trousers and shirt to Indian dress of *dhoti* and *koortah* and *turban*. Ganesh's move from spirituality to politics gets determined by some events which take place one after the other, strongly dictated by fate, as Ganesh puts it in his autobiography, "If I needed any further proof of the hand of Providence in my career,' Ganesh wrote in *The Years of Guilt*, 'I had only to look at the incidents which led to the decline of Shri Narayan.'"(22) Ganesh rises to become the President of 'Hindu Association' by cleverly defeating Narayan in the contest. But he does not stop here; he rose to become ultimately the Member

of British Executive Council. But one of the vital aspects remains to be highlighted is the spiritual upliftment of Ganesh. As Ganesh progressed from dull, unimaginative boy to a sensible and intelligent man, he diverges away from spiritualism and becomes more and more materialistic in his attitudes.

The novel ends with the materialist rise of Ganesh. It is fully exposed in the 'Epilogue', in which the narrator reveals how Ganesh has completely changed. He does not want to be called Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair but G.R.Muir, Esq.,M.B.E. The art of fictionalisation employed in *The Mystic Masseur* points out that exposition in the style of Dickens is the main technique of the novel. Naipaul keeps this technique growing and developing in other novels. He extrapolates it with parody, satire and other devices of psychological fiction. Therefore, *The Mystic Masseur* is a seminal novel, in which the author has attempted to bring the Caribbean experience into the main stream of English fiction.

Works Cited

Leavis, F. R. *The Great Tradition*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1948; rept. 1958.

Padhi, Bindu. "Naipaul on Naipaul and the novel". ed. William T. Stafford. *Modern Fiction Studies*. Special Issue: V.S.Naipaul. Purdue University, 30, III, Autumn 1984.

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. London: Collins, 1838.

Naipaul, V.S. *The Mystic Masseur*. UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964

Forester, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. UK: Edward Arnold & Co., 1945.

Aristotle, *On the Art of poetry in classical literary criticism*, trans., T. S. Dorsch. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965; 1975.

Reclaiming a Voice: Recasting of Sita, Draupadi and Kunti in Shashi Deshpande's Short Stories

KIRAN KALRA¹

Abstract

This paper is a feminist rereading of mythological female characters as recast in Shashi Deshpande's short stories. A Nation is often reflected in its myths and legends. Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two most significant epics of Indian mythology which continue to influence the lives of Indians especially the Hindus. Both the epics, being written by male writers, fail to provide an insight into its women characters. A close reading of these epics reveals that though women characters are an essential part of these narratives, they have not been given any significant voice. The paper attempts to explore the women's experiences of repression and subordination since ages by undertaking a study of recasting of Sita, Draupadi and Kunti in Shashi Deshpande's short stories.

Keywords: Recasting, Myth, stereotypes, epics

We are, I am, you are by cowardice or courage the one who find our way back to this scene carrying a knife, a camera, a book of myths in which our name do not appear
Adrienne Rich

In academic circles, however, despite the fact that different scholars have developed various approaches to explain the functions of myths, a precise definition of myth is so far unavailable. The famous myth critic Northrop Frye also notes that "The word myth is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his chosen context is"

¹ The author is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Government Degree College Paloura, Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir. She can be reached at kirankalrasuri@gmail.com

("The Koiné of Myth", p. 3). Simone De Beauvoir also in her discussion of myths underlines the complexity of defining myths. She says, "It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form" (p. 175).

In his book of cultural critique, *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes echoes his views on myth. His main objection to myth is that it removes history from the language. It makes particular signs appear natural, eternal, absolute, or frozen. It thus transforms history into nature. Its function is to freeze or arrest language. It usually does this by reducing a complex phenomenon to a few traits which are taken as definitive. Crucially, myths remove any role for the reader in constructing meanings. Myths are received rather than read. A message which is received rather than read does not require an interpretation through a code. It only requires a specific cultural knowledge (Robinson).

A Nation is often reflected in its myths and legends. In the Indian context, particularly myths are significant. They shape the lives of the people. An Indian child is from the very beginning of his life, fed on the stories from mythology and legends. These stories further help in not only moulding his personality and developing his character but also affects the choices he makes in his life.

Women and girls are accorded a respectable status in all ancient Hindu texts and scriptures. In the Indian society young girls are worshipped as 'kanyas', wives are valued as 'Lakshmi' and mothers are revered as 'Durga Maa'. The reality is in sharp contrast to the glorious treatment bestowed on them in theory. From the story of Sita's *agnipareeksha* to prove her 'purity' to Draupadi's humiliating *cheerharan* (stripping), to Nirbhaya of today's times, a woman's destiny has actually remained unchanged and unturned over the ages.

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* are the two most significant epics of Indian mythology which continue to influence the lives of Indians especially the Hindus. Both the epics, being written by male writers, fail to provide an insight into its women characters. A close rereading of these epics reveals that though women characters are an essential part of these narratives, they have not been given any dominant voice. Instead, they have become stereotypes of how a woman should be and how she should not be. Moreover, myths and legends are used by the patriarchal Indian society to subordinate women. Examples from mythologies are used to make women learn to be subservient to the wishes of

men. Sita is considered to be the role model for all the daughters and wives. No father would like to see her daughter grow up to become a Draupadi. Simone De Beauvoir argues that since all cultural representations – myth, religion, literature or popular culture – are the work of men, then women internalise these images and definitions and, thus, they start to ‘dream the dreams of men’ (290).

Pacing with the feminist movements going on across the globe, women writers especially have attempted to revise and rewrite these myths. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a registering of protests and contrary opinions by women writers. They attempt to deconstruct the phallogocentric ideology created by the patriarchy. In the Indian subcontinent, writings of Savitribai Phule, Namita Gokhale, Urvashi Butalia and Ismat Chughtai struggled hard to put women’s voices as a legitimate concern of history. They no longer follow the patriarchal model of writing instead they ask questions, portray real women with real desires and emotions. They highlight the indispensable roles of women in the society and ensure that their voices are listened to and not just heard. Search for an identity and exploration of the self form the backdrop of all women writings.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the pioneering Indian women writers. She has written four children’s books, some short stories, and nine novels, besides several perceptive essays. In many of her short stories, she takes her characters from Indian mythologies. Most of her protagonists are women and, Deshpande shows them caught between patriarchy and social obligations on the one hand and their desire for self-expression and individuality on the other. “Woman’s struggles in the context of Contemporary Indian Society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as a human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories” (Amur, p. 10).

This paper is a feminist rereading of mythological female characters as recast in Shashi Deshpande’s short stories. The paper attempts to explore myths as ideological tools of patriarchal systems. For the study, the paper takes into consideration Shashi Deshpande’s short stories “The Day of the Golden Deer,” “And What Has Been Decided” and “Hear me, Sanjaya” in which she has recast mythological women characters, Sita, Draupadi and Kunti respectively. Deshpande presents these mythological women afresh as real human beings in

flesh and blood with their own set of emotions and feelings and lends them a voice so that they can tell their stories. She says, "To me, history is also a myth. I have a problem with myths, which are also written by men. However, where are the women's voices in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, or the *Puranas*? Were women never allowed into the mainstream" (Deshpande)? Since most of the Indian mythological texts are written by men, they fail to do justice to their women characters. In Deshpande's short stories these mythical characters have been recast in the contemporary era, and the story is narrated from their point of view.

In her short story, "Hear me Sanjaya...," Shashi Deshpande has lent voice to Kunti, the mother of the Pandava brothers in the epic *Mahabharata*. The story is set in a time after the epic war is over and Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti leave for the forest after handing over the kingdom to the victorious Pandavas. The story is in the form of Kunti's monologue, and it was earlier titled "*Kunti Uvachha*" or "Kunti Speaks." Kunti utters this monologue when she sets out for a walk with Sanjaya, a charioteer of King Dhritarashtra. In the *Mahabharata*, Kunti's actions play a significant role, but no reasons or explanations are given for her actions. She asked Arjuna to share his wife Draupadi with his brothers, but it was never explicated in the epic that what was the intention behind such a bizarre decision. Kunti's sorrow at parting with her son, the feeling of guilt at spoiling Draupadi's life, are not given any expression in the epic. Deshpande's story is an outburst of these emotions. Incidentally, in the story, Kunti, who remained silent in the epic, speaks out her heart and mind and Sanjaya, who spoke the most in the epic as he was entrusted with the task to narrate the war to the blind King Dhritarashtra, becomes speechless in front of her.

The story covers the whole life of Kunti beginning from the time when, as a young child, she was given away to King Kunti Bhoja where she was given a new name Kunti after the name of the King. Her original name Pritha got lost in this transaction and now nobody remembers that name. She wonders 'My father gave me away—how easily he gave me away. As if I was a bit of property... I cannot even remember if it made me angry. But I remember I was frightened' (137). From Kunti's time to present day India the position of women has only deteriorated. A father considers his daughter not only a commodity to be given away in marriage but also a burden because of the huge amount of dowry which needs to be given by the father to the bridegroom. Also, there is a practice in

India of changing the name of a girl after marriage. It has a great psychological impact on the mind of the girl because for a girl this is not a simple transition from one home to another and merely a change of name but the whole identity of a girl is changed.

In another important episode of her life as a young and unmarried girl, Kunti could not keep her baby born out of marriage. Sage Durvasa gave Kunti a boon to invoke any god to bear a child. Curious, Kunti invoked Surya, the solar deity and bore a baby. Afraid of being an unwed mother, she placed the baby in a basket and set him afloat on a river. This child was later found and adopted by a charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha and was called Karna. However, the memories of this incident haunted her throughout her life. She tells Sanjaya that, 'the sound of a river makes me uneasy, it fills me with strange thoughts.' It is not easy for a mother to part with her child and later when she yearned to hear the word mother from Karna's mouth, he refused.

In the story of Deshpande, Kunti admits that after getting married to Pandu, the king of Hastinapur, a painful realisation of the fact that she is not beautiful was drawn upon her. Also, she enviously witnessed the dotting love of her husband for his exquisitely beautiful second wife, Madri. There was a curse on Pandu that he would die as soon as he tried making love with any of his two wives. Forgetting his curse, Pandu engaged in marital bliss with Madri and the curse came into being and Pandu died. Madri decided to undergo the traditional ritual of Sati and jumped into the burning pyre, giving away her life. As a result, the responsibility of raising five kids came to Kunti. In the story, she also regrets that she was not even accorded the privilege to accompany her husband in his journey afterlife and it was Madri who accompanied King Pandu to heaven. At that time Kunti could not help but feel that Madri's "taking away all the glory, leaving the struggle, the drudgery for me" (p. 84).

Kunti, in her life, failed in all three stereotypical roles that define a woman in the society- daughter, wife and mother. Later, as a mother-in-law, also she wronged Draupadi. She decreed that Draupadi should become the wife of all the five Pandava brothers. Though the epic does not give us any reasonable justification for such a decision of Kunti, but here in Deshpande's story, she tells Sanjaya that it was to save the unity among the brothers, as she had seen how enamoured Pandava brothers, especially Bhima, was of Draupadi. Thus,

through these small details, the character of Kunti is not only presented in a new light but is also infused a new life.

The story titled “The Day of the Golden Deer” explores the feelings of Sita on her desertion by Rama. *Ramayana* presents Sita as a dutiful wife who accompanies her husband to forest for a fourteen year long exile. In the epic, she makes many sacrifices and quietly suffered her lot. Deshpande’s story begins when Sita receives a message of her husband Lord Rama through her brother-in-law Laxmana that Sita should go on an exile. It is a tale of Sita’s anguish and suffering. Though she was not an ordinary woman, as according to Hindu mythology she was an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, but she had to face the plight of a woman. Even after proving her chastity by giving *agnipareeksha*, she was sent to exile. In the story, Sita was perturbed by the fact that Rama instead of coming to Sita himself to pronounce her exile, sent Laxmana as a messenger. In the epic, Sita displays a stoic confidence that her husband will rescue her, but here in the short story Sita rationally analyses that Rama as “a victim of his own idea of himself,” chasing the deer of perfection, where he should never do any wrong. He has sacrificed Sita only to save his image as a righteous ruler. Here Sita does not consider Rama as a god or as a king, who is supposed to be just and righteous, but as an ordinary human being who has got drunk with the wine of too much love and admiration and is willing to abandon his wife only to please people. She asks Laxmana, “...he is dutiful, I know that, Laxmana, and righteous, too. I never doubt that, but tell me this, Laxmana, what happens to those who are crushed under the chariot of his righteousness” (p. 68)?

Deshpande’s Sita is a strong woman who is not willing to suffer just to please others. She accepts her mistakes without any hesitation when she was wrong especially her desire for the golden deer which led to her abduction by Ravana. She blames Dasharatha for the fourteen year exile, which Rama, Sita and Laxmana had to go through and calls it the weakness of a dotting old husband for a young and beautiful wife. And she very well realises that this time she will have to suffer because of her husband’s weakness, his desire to be the perfect ruler. She knows he is still chasing that golden deer which is nothing but a mirage, a delusion, and a chimera of perfection (72).

Sita, in the story emerges as an ordinary woman with human feelings and emotions. When Laxamana insists that Sita should understand her obligations

towards people, Sita is anguished and says 'I am no queen- only a woman who wants to live in peace with the man she loves. With the children of their love' (67).

Deshpande's short story not only helps us to understand Sita, but it also reinterprets Rama for us. Rama whom we know as the ideal son, a righteous ruler, a role model for elder brother failed to be a perfect husband. It was because of his passion to prove himself as a king who put duty before self that Sita had to stand on trial to prove her purity. Rama sends Sita on an exile when she was pregnant and leaves her alone to bring up their two children. Finally Sita chooses to return to her mother, the Earth's womb, for release from a cruel world as a testimony of her purity.

In the epic Mahabharata, Draupadi was a victim of polygamy. In the epic, Draupadi is portrayed as a woman screaming for vengeance and is held responsible for the great epic war. In the story "And What Has Been Decided?" she voices her resistance at being considered a commodity in marriage to be shared between the five Pandava brothers. She also resists being held responsible for the epic war. It is a story of a young girl falling in love with Arjuna and eventually marrying him. She would have been very happy if she was allowed to marry only Arjuna. But that was not her destiny. The mother said that all five of them must share whatever they brought home. Draupadi knew that it was foolish but she had to obey. And so Draupadi became the wife of five men. She was treated as a commodity. No one even saw the woman in her, 'the woman hungry for love, for passion' (32). She was Yudhishtira's Queen, but not his beloved and he always kept a distance between them. Bhima treated her like 'a fragile, precious flower he is afraid to pluck' (32). Nakul and Sahadev were only boys. She wanted to reserve all her feelings for Arjuna alone. But he had withdrawn into his shell for he did not want what he could not share with his brothers. To add to her woes, she had to share Arjuna with Subhadra. At times, she had had a wild desire to ask Subhadra: 'How is it with him alone? How does it feel to have Arjuna in your bed? How is it to know that his desire for you is a friend not an enemy' (33)? It was that one year of disguise – the only time when Draupadi was truly free, all by her: 'Each day complete in itself, ending where it began, enclosing us in its security. And I going to bed each night, happy to be by myself, to have no one to share my bed' (33).

Draupadi's woes had no end. She was used as a pawn in the games of men. Yudhishtira offered Draupadi to the Kauravas after he had lost himself in the gambling. Ironically, none of her five husbands came to her rescue when she was humiliated by the Kauravas. When Draupadi demands to be avenged for the humiliation she had faced in the assembly, all the five brothers remain stoic saying 'Peace is always better than war' (26). They claim that they are frightened not of dying but of killing. Draupadi realises '... how dense and close a thicket the five of them form, a thicket none can penetrate' (30). Draupadi can trust each of them separately, but not 'the entity they form together' (30). The rebellious nature of Draupadi can be seen when she says 'I thought. .. that an oath is an oath, a promise is a promise. I imagined these things are meant to be kept. Whoever they are made to. I did not know that promises made to women mean so little, that they are so light they can be as easily blown away. .. as this'(28). This brings a stir among all of them and Krishna convinces her and promises that her honour would be safe in his hands. Finally the king responds and says: 'The Queen wants war and she will have it' (33) as if it is Draupadi's decision and it is she who is wholly responsible for the Great War. When Draupadi looks into Krishna's eyes something strange happens and she sees a vision of horror, of the battle-field - the war, all the men she knew dead and her sons as well. As the horror of the vision slowly fades, the question begins: 'What have I done' (34)? And she terribly repents for she has provoked her husbands to wage the war. As she stands still, shivering, she hears voices, from inside, speaking in different tones - 'Strong. Sure of themselves. Businesslike' (34). Draupadi realises that her husbands have already prepared for the war and she has been made and utilised as a pawn by creating that it is her decision, thus they have put the cause of the war on her: 'It's begun. They are already preparing, they have decided on war, they know there will be war. But why, then, did they not tell me that? Why did they make me believe it is my decision, my doing? Why' (34)?

The exploration of these myths reveals that two types of women were created in these religious narratives. The first category was that of women who were submissive to the patriarchy. They were good daughters, wives and mothers. Sita served as a role model for displaying the common features of a good wife and woman which are modesty, fidelity, obedience and excellence in domestic jobs. On the other hand, the second category is of those women figures that do not conform to the patriarchal norms. They are presented as 'femme fatales',

'seductresses' or 'witches.' So we have Draupadi, a headstrong girl, held responsible for the epic war in Mahabharata. Her chastity was never a concern for anybody nor was she ever treated as a queen.

It can be very aptly concluded that in the recastings of Shashi Deshpande, the female protagonists, in addition to reclaiming their voice, are given sovereignty. Those women that are always defined in relation to men as wives, mothers, daughters or lovers are presented as individual entities with a control over their mind and body. They look back at the events and perceive the situations. In the process they learn about themselves and become wiser.

Works Cited

- Adamson, Joseph, and Jean Wilson, editors. "The Koiné of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language 4 October 1984." *The Secular Scripture and Other Writings on Critical Theory, 1976? 1991*, University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 312– 326. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt1287xbp.23.
- Amur, G.S. 'Preface' *The Legacy and Other Stories*. Calcutta: Writer's Workshop. 1978 Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1949.
- De, Aditi. "Breaking That Long Silence"
<http://www.boloji.com/articles/1871/breaking-that-long-silence>
- Deshpande, Shashi. *The Stone Women*, Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 2000.
- Rich, Adrienne Cecile. *Diving Into the Wreck: Poems, 1971-1972*. [1st ed.]. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Robinson, Andrew. A to Z of Theory Roland Barthe's Mythologies: A Critical Theory of Myths." *Ceasefire*, <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-barthes-2/> Accessed 10 February

Koshur Pather: The Forgotten Folk Theatre

ARIF NISAR¹

Abstract

Under the influence of modernity, the folk, oral and verbal traditions of Kashmir have seen a decline from last three decades. Perpetually, the folkloristic materials, if not history, is dwindling from our lives. The reasons stand numerous, but to evaluate one single reason lead to the question of alternatives that would salvage our rich folk and oral tradition from oblivion. A victim of this absence is the Bhand Pather, or what we call the Koshur Pather of Kashmir. The paper, after touching upon the theoretical and historical context of Kashmiri folklore, shall briefly highlight the importance of Bhand Pather to the popular imagination. Moreover, a shallow attempt would be made to look at how the aesthetics of Bhand Pather represents the socio-cultural and political life of Kashmir, and why this folk art, once so glorified in public domain, is now missing and losing its relevance in the daily social life of Kashmir. Discussing these issues could help to find the ways of preserving this art form in literature and culture studies.

Keywords: Bhand Pather, Folklore, Struggle, Survival.

'Without struggle I am nothing!'—he screamed his assent—'take me or kill me now!' (Shalimar the Clown)

Shalimar, the clown in *Shalimar the Clown*, speaks his heart out in an embattled arena, who personifies his profession of being a 'bhand', an actor who has lost his art. His words allude to the struggle of *Bhand* art, which goes through a perpetual struggle to survive. The bemoaning of Shalimar in the novel appropriates the lament of Ahmad, a Bhand actor who in an interview says, 'I perform because I cannot live without doing so, but I fear that this art will die with us' (Swami, *Frontline*). The rhetoric tone of Shalimar and Ahmad's lament reveals how much 'pather' (resistance) is left in them. The art is alleged to have been hijacked by the hard times in Kashmir. Shalimar's

¹ The author is a *Research Scholar* in the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He can be contacted at arifamu4@gmail.com

identity is submerged into an artist, who strives to find his existence in a militant outfit group. His artistic voice in the novel is polyphonic that speaks for every *Bhand* artist, and for *Bhand Pather* itself. Rushdie's attempt to show the metamorphic change in Shalimar's character signifies the idea of folk values in a society.

A cursory look on the history of Kashmir reveals that our folk tradition and culture is crawling towards a broken silence. What has brought this silence to our rich culture and folkloric tradition, which was once glorified like rituals and religious activities? Under the influence of modernity the folkloristic understanding of our culture, if not history, is dwindling from our lives. The reasons stand numerous, but to evaluate one single reason leads to the question of alternatives that prevent our rich folk and oral tradition from getting submerged under the burden of modernity. What would help the folk, oral and verbal traditions to survive in a conflict zone, where people, in spite of gathering for a social and cultural festivity, gather to mourn? The paper ventures into this fundamental question of how folk art, like *Bhand Pather* is struggling to survive.

The richness of Kashmiri culture can be discerned in its folklore. Traditionally, the folklore of Kashmir is rich in content and history. An attempt to study the richness and diversity of folk culture provide the scope for folkloristic explorations, which in Kashmir's context is in the infant stage. Gulashan Majeed writes in the introduction to *The Aspects of Folklore* that 'no serious effort was made to study Kashmiri folklore analytically nor was [it] taken as a challenging field of study by our scholars' (p. 12). The preliminary works of collection, documentation and compilation of folklore materials in Kashmir began very early. The collection and compilation process was then carried out by the European missionaries during the years of colonisation. Indeed, the folkloristic treasure of the valley is significantly important to our popular imagination, it helps us to understand the past and shape the present. Though most of the Kashmiri literature has its basis in the folk and mythological narratives, the significance of folklore to Kashmiri literature is not widely acknowledged. The folk and oral tales reflect the mythical past of the land. The historical narratives about the origin of the Valley of Kashmir take up the references from the folk and mythical stories. However, the

bearing of these references is missing in contemporary discourse that creates literary ambivalence towards the folkloristic treasure.

Bhand Pather, or what we call the *Koshur Pather*, the theatrical folk art form of Kashmir has received a great setback in this context. The present paper, after touching upon the theoretical and historical context of Kashmiri folklore, shall briefly, highlights the importance *Bhand Pather* to the popular imagination by venturing into the history of Kashmir. Moreover, an attempt would be made to look at how the aesthetics of *Bhand Pather* represents socio-cultural and political life of Kashmir, and why this folk art, that was once glorified in public domain, is losing its relevance and missing out from the daily social life of Kashmir? An engagement with the above questions could find the ways of preserving this art form in literary and cultural studies. If the Historical discourse deals with the facts and events in the historical process, the folk narratives speak for the real, conflated with the imaginary that subsist across times, through poetic process. More importantly, today scholars appreciate the multiple documentations on history, but the folk traditions and arts are pushed to shades of obscurity from the social and cultural domain. At the same time the artistic and cultural life of Kashmir is marginally ignored in the main stream discourses that strive to redefine the Kashmir's history and tradition through performing and verbal arts. No histories are documented without the folkloristic understanding of particular place or a region. Folklore being a language of every day discourse helps the historians to draw their facts in documenting the history of people.

The history of folk arts goes back to the religious and ritualistic activities and has always been present in a society to reflect upon the socio-cultural and political aspects of life. With the development of a society towards progression in different aspects, the literary and artistic sensibilities exhibit the exuberance of the societal progression through different artistic mediums. Folk arts being the cardinal cultural elements of society from times immemorial play a vital role in conferring and questioning the societal norms and values through different artistic expressions. There are no societies that do not have folk and verbal arts, because each and every society is historically oral in nature, which continues to transmit folk art and folk literature through performance and orality. And, the oral character of a society renders a scope for folk forms of art to evolve freely

from one generation to generation. These folk forms of art help a society to sustain the tradition and culture for generations to come. People in any society living together make life precious and valuable, and together they make some norms and customs, which we behold as culture.

Kashmir, indeed, has rich and enormous treasure of folk arts and culture. Historically, Kashmir has a very distinct past. On one side if we look at the folkloric tradition of the valley, it is very rich and diverse, while on the other side the valley's past has remained gloomy because of the numerous conflicts and foreign invasions from time and again. Historically, the valley Kashmir has been ruled by different foreign regimes, and this colonisation prolonged until the conflict takes its birth with the partition of India and Pakistan in the year 1947. The partition has left the valley Kashmir in a state of turbulence and turmoil with the seeds of hatred towards any alien rule. Politically, there are many variants of the truth to claim about the land, but culturally and historically, Kashmir has retained its distinctive nature of being a land with its own legacy in folk arts, literary traditions and aesthetics. It was only after literary discourses about the historicity of land, the debates of reconstructing Kashmir's history and identity came into fashion. Sadly, within the main stream discourses, an absence is observed towards the artistic life of Kashmir. A victim of this absence is the *Bhand Pather* of Kashmir.

Natural beauty, people, and culture- all make Kashmir aesthetically beautiful, but the true efficacy of Kashmir is embedded in its mystic and Sufi traditions. Historically, the uniqueness of Kashmiri culture has nurtured Kashmir's amiable social-fabric for centuries. And whenever these cultural values are demonstrated to shape the identity of people, all the religious, political, or economic disparities are dwarfed by its emancipation and grandeur. An element of this amiable socio-cultural fabric is Kashmiri folk theatre – *Bhand Pather*. In a lecture delivered at RP Memorial Foundation Society on 16th December, 2000, T. N. Dhar sums up the entire gamut of Kashmir's culture by using the term '*Rishi Waer*¹' or the valley of spiritual masters '*Pir Wear*²'. The integration of different cultures and religions adds richness to the Kashmir valley. Indeed, this diversity has given Kashmir valley a distinct and diverse outlook. Kashmir's folk arts primarily, (*Bhand Pather*) rich in content happen to represent the diversity and distinct nature of Kashmir. *Bhand Pather*, in context of

Kashmir, has been a tradition for centuries, which is rich in its own history. It used to articulate resistance and discontent, but today it is struggling to survive within the present conflicting situations. It is very unfortunate that people are showing indifference towards *Bhand Pather*, and are least bothered to uphold its pertinence in the social life of Kashmir. With such apathy towards these folk arts, it can be argued that people are slitting the roots as well as the routes of their tradition, which indeed is sign of cultural catastrophe. *Bhand Pather* has been a victim of such indifference and contemplation. This attitude towards *Bhand Pather* might be because of the academic inferiority that is clearly demonstrated in our time. So the challenge that *Bhand Pather* faces in contemporary time should be met with the modern formative methods and concepts, which again is the responsibility of academicians, theatre veterans and scholars. These endeavours by academicians and scholars could lift *Bhand Pather* as an institution from the academic and cultural marginality, and relocate its position of being an intellectual medium to transmit social, religious and political commentary through performance.

Kashmir has a natural disposition that eventually gave birth to very distinctive folk and cultural activities. Kashmir has always been fertile in cultivating the fine art and other forms of art. However, it is not easy to trace and chart the exact history of any these art forms of Kashmir, but we find their mention in texts like Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*.

The cultivation of fine arts by the people of Kashmir has an ancient background. Some terracotta tiles of the fourth century A.D excavated at Harwan depict a *danseuse* in a dance pose and other tiles show a female musician playing a *dholak*. We find several references to dance, drama, and music in the pages of the *Rajatarangini*. It was, however, in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D that these arts attained their full vigour. (Bamzai, p. 315)

This folk theatre since long times back serves to reflect the lives of common masses with an experimentation of everyday life. 'The first references to the *Bhand Pather* are found in Bharata's *Natyashastra* (written sometime between 200 BC and A.D. 200)' (Menon, p. 156). We find the first dated reference in Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, an old Indian text written between 200BC and 200AD that deals with the performing arts, music, dance and theatre. According to Jisha

Menon, Bharata Muni has referred to the Kashmiri folk theatre i.e. *Bhand Pather*. Bansi Pandit drawing the similar notions writes that, 'Many descriptions in the book seem especially true for Kashmir. The bhana, a one-act play described by Bharata is still performed in Kashmir by groups called *Bhand Pather* (bhana patra in Sanskrit)' (Pandit, p. 12). These breezy references though direct to historicity of *Bhand Pather*, but contextually its basic premise of being a people's theatre is misconstrued. First of all, it is not a solo dramatic performance or a monologue but a social drama of Kashmir with an embodiment of mythological stories of legends and saints, and social satire of different time periods. Bansi Pandit notes that this folk art form conforms to the dramatic conventions of Bharata's dramaturgy. This notion is also appropriated by Javid Iqbal Bhat who notes that, 'Interestingly, Bharata mentions a dance called "Bhandka", which, Abhinavbharati, as per Prof. Pushp, calls Bhandnachun (the dance of Bhanda)' (Bhat, p. 48). However, Bansi Pandit's idea seems opposite to what is commonly believed about *Bhand Pather*, that it is not a solo performance rather it is a social drama in which the communication of actor-spectator is very important, which evokes the idea of epic as well as traditional theatrical conventions. Ali Mohammad Lone in one of his essay 'Theatre' talking about the influence of Sanskrit traditions on Kashmiri tradition observes that, 'not only did *Bhand Pather*, still known by its original name, spread during the old times but it always steps ahead the traditional Sanskrit drama'³ (Lone, p. 37). Ali Mohammad Lone's notions about *Bhand Pather* take it back to the Sanskrit classical dramatic tradition, which is also highlighted by Bansi Pandit, Javid Iqbal, Jisha Menon and others. Thus, Lone's observation acknowledges the fact that Kashmir's folk theatre in Kashmir is older than the classical Sanskrit drama.

Despite the poor recognition in the Indian Subcontinent, Kashmiri folk theatre finds its mention in world theatrical conventions. The *Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* defines *Bhand* as, 'North Indian storyteller, joker and buffoon. The name derives from the Hindi word Bhanda' (buffooning). *Bhands* according to *The World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre* are the traditional folk entertainers found in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. The *Bhand* performance is associated with Muslim community, which has lost all its traditional notions of folk entertainment. 'Like the Kashmiri *Bhands*, most *Bhands* in North India are Muslims' (Schechter, p. 151).

Bhand Pather in the changing world continues to dramatise history and tradition. It has played a vital role in building the identity and cultural ethos of Kashmir from earlier times to present times. Long before, the electronic networks which are seen as strong mediums, *Bhand Pather* as cultural inheritor has been reconstructing the real and lived history of Kashmir through performances. There has been, however, reappraisal about the historical notions since the conflict narratives have come to fashion. While taking narratives into reconsideration, again an absence has been observed to the true 'folk culture'⁴ in upholding the essence of cultural history of Kashmir that is embedded in the indigenous folk forms like *Bhand Pather*. However, Zutshi's argument proposes how the ordinary and common people have been important to the political culture of the valley through different modes acting as political mediators between urban centres and rural areas, but at the same time they have been marginally ignored. This would not be an inference to link it to particular religion, rather what seems to be appropriate is to locate a unique site to discern its true nature. Then, at the same time, the idea of *Kashmiriyat* is associated with its true nature that is stimulating for *Bhand* performances. Nurtured by Shaivism, Sufism and Rishism, *Bhand Pather* promotes idea of living together with a vision of community where people live in a space of multicultural harmony. The idea of *Kashmiriyat* holds an important relation to *Bhand Pather*, as we find the same notions remarked here:

Nothing defines the limits and promises of Kashmiriyat better than the *Bhand Pather*. .. the travelling theatre lends itself for a study of the shifting landscape of the inter-communal relationships, and. .. offers a non-idealised version of Kashmiriyat.. .. *Bhand Pather* underlines not merely the shared cultural space and the interweaving of everyday Hinduism and Islam but demonstrates practically the sharp differences as well. (qtd. in Menon, p. 170)

Bhand Pather as a symbolic artefact happens to symbolise the diversity and distinct Kashmir's culture that highlight the true essence of Kashmir. More importantly, Kashmir has always been a place for religious communities to live in harmony; therefore most of the artistic activities which originated from rituals got sanction from the public very freely. These notions are highlighted by Zutshi remarks, 'Kashmir appears as a unique region where religious communities

lived in harmony since time immemorial and differences in religion did not translate into acrimonious conflict until external intervention' (p. 2). Highlighting the importance of cultural and symbolic artefacts such as *Bhand Pather* in close association with the ways of thinking and living would be an important site to understand the nature of Kashmiri society. Various initiatives were made to revive Kashmir's past glory, but these initiatives brought severe changes to the folk theatre of Kashmir. With these changes, it can be argued that the Kashmiri indigenous folk theatre i.e. *Bhand Pather* has lost its conventional contours. Such manifestations have pulled its indigenous status from collective work to the individual interest of writing dramas, which lessens its folkloristic nature. New audiences emerged with the coming of new means of entertainment, thereby replacing or changing the existing means of entertainment. Although these changes from traditional notions to the modern connotations have helped this art form to survive but at the same time it has lost its visual imagination and folkloristic manifestations of being a collective folk art form. This apathy towards *Bhand Pather* is not perceived by the literary scholars and writers who can infuse a new life to this dying folk art in their scholarly and poetic works.

Bhand Pather is an amalgamation of Kashmir's multiple identities that carry an essence we call *Kashmiriyat* since ages. Indeed the scope, and the subject of *Bhand Pather* has never been uplifted as it should have been, now the question is, for how long the marginal position towards this folk would persist? Although, the vitality of any form art is never meant to highlight its essence for a particular point of time, but the signification attached to the artistic construction accommodates the true nature of art forever. To quote Farooq Fayaz would infuse the purpose and need to revive the true nature of this folk art form:

Given to understand the complexity of the subject, historians began to believe that there is a need to bring into the ambit of historical literature; the subjects, which until recently, had been from its domain. For comprehensive and objective understanding of any human institution apart from economic formation of social system, emphasis is now laid on the study of custom settings, tradition structures, behaviour patterns and group mentalities. (p. 227)

Farooq Fayaz's inference though speaks of the local folk verses of the valley in its traditional sense; it would more or less spawn the demand for folk theatre in traditional sense. *Bhand Pather* being a folk art, is a cultural activity going through various changes, modifications or distortions for that matter, this artistic form has struggled to survive through the changing times up to the present times of modern media. Kashmir's folk theatre, thus traditionally known to us as *Koshur Pather* or *Lukki Theatre* adds the richness to Kashmir's culture from times immemorial. It is rich traditional art of Kashmir, and it has a close association with various religious and ritualistic activities. In whatever shape it has come to us, its traditional richness makes it very significant element to Kashmiri culture. With the establishment of many theatre groups and theatre clubs, all the folk and traditional arts have once again gained some prominence in contemporary times. In this regard, the remarkable efforts of Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art and Culture turned out to be the renaissance for Kashmir's folk arts and cultural activities. Our precious cultural wealth, folklore, needs academic attention and support for survival and safeguard for generations to come. As long as academicians do not show interest in safeguarding the folk tradition, *Bhand Pather* and other folk forms will be considered marginal to the intellectual discourse in Kashmir. But equally it is the responsibility of the common people to reach out to these traditional folk forms in order to make them important sites for local narrative centres. The folk, oral and verbal traditions of Kashmir are waiting for a cultural renaissance to end the struggle for survival, which indeed is an academic concern.

Works Cited

- Bamzai, P.N.K. *Culture And Political History Of Kashmir :Vol. 1, Ancient Kashmir*. Gulshan Books Srinagar: 2007. p 315. Print.
- Bhat, Javaid Iqbal. "Loss of a Syncretic Theatrical Form." *Folklore* 34 (2006): 39-48. Web.
- Farooq, Fayaz. *Kashmir Folklore: A Study in Historical Perspective*. Srinagar : Gulshan Publishers, 2008. p 227. Print.
- Khan, Mohd Ishaq. "The Rishi Tradition And The Construction Of Kashmiriyat." *Kashmiriyat Through the Ages*. Srinagar: Gulshan, 2011. 107. Print.

- Lone, Ali Mohammad. "Theatre." *Hamara Adab: Ham Asar Theatre Number(Annual Magazine)*. Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture And Languages Srinagar/Jammu, 2010. p. 34-54. Print.
- Majeed, Gulshan. *Aspects of Folklore With Special Reference to Kashmir*. Srinagar: Centre of Central Asian Studies, 1997. Print.
- Menon, Jisha. *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition*. CUP: New York. 2013. p. 156. Print.
- Pandit, Bansi. "Intorduction." *Explore Kashmiri Pandits*. Dharma Publications, 2008.12. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2005. Print.
- Schechter, Joel, ed. *Popular Theatre a Sourcebook*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013. 151. Print
- Swami, Parveen. "A Struggle for Survival." *Frontline*, 14 Aug. 1998, p. 61–65.
- Zutshi, Chitralekha. Introduction, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. Print.

Endnotes

¹ In a 2000 lecture, he emphasised on the importance of the valley Kashmir by using this term. See Dhar, T.N. "Five Millennia Old Culture & Literature of Kashmir - Some Landmarks." RP Memorial Foundation Society, 16 Dec. 2000. Lecture.

² Another term used for the valley Kashmir, which literary means 'the garden of sages'. See Khan, Mohd Ishaq. "The Rishi Tradition And The Construction Of Kashmiriyat." *Kashmiriyat Through the Ages*. Srinagar: Gulshan, 2011. 107. Print.

³ Translation by Mohammad Ashraf Bhat, research scholar in Jamia Milia Islamia.

⁴ Chitralekha Zutshi in her book talks about the Kashmir's political culture by examining the Kashmiri narratives of regional belonging including religion across pre-colonial and colonial periods. See Zutshi, Chitralekha. "Introduction." *Language of Belonging Iskam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*. Ranikhet: Permenant Black, 2011. p. 12. Print.

Inside the Cloister: A study of the life journey of a 'renegade' Nun

SONAM ANGMO¹

Abstract

The paper looks at the life journey of an Indian Catholic nun who renounces the institution of nunnery to seek spiritual fulfilment outside. The award-winning novel, Othappu by Sarah Joseph is undertaken for this study. The paper seeks to evaluate the critical observations of Margalitha, the chief protagonist who feels conflicted with her surroundings. Margalitha's decision to leave the convent is denounced by all and arouses religious as well as lay indignations. The research methodology and critical approaches employed in the paper primarily centre on a feminist critique of lay and religious institutions that levy control over a woman's choice. Margalitha's experiences within the clergy and lay society exposes the hypocrisies within these institutions, where both seem disparate but work in very similar ways to marginalise a nun who gives up her monastic robes. The paper further looks into the genre of life narratives that serve as a potent means of an individual's self-expression and in many ways, an assertion of the self. Othappu as a feminist fictional life narrative reinstates the individual's triumph against all odds.

Keywords: Othappu, Feminism, Spiritual assertion, Religion

The evolution of nuns in India has been a result of significant religious and historical developments in the country. They presently have an equal stake in the modern world as their lay counterparts. Although, Nuns live in separate quarters in their own institutions, they still live and cohabit in the very society that all of us are privy to. They participate in the issues and demands that society presents each day, yet they are still considered by many to lead a separate existence given their spiritual life mission, and this ambiguity about their perceived difference paves the way for their collective marginalisation. In

¹ The author is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Government Degree College Samba, Jammu and Kashmir. She can be reached at sonamangmo.88@gmail.com

Sarah Joseph's *Othappu*, we see glaring evidences of their marginal and peripheral status.

Nuns are women who have endured a lot like their lay sisters and share a collective history. The genealogy of Christian nuns in India can be traced to the evangelical missions by the Roman Catholic Church and the missionary enterprises of foreign colonisers. The Britishers administered missionary missions in various parts of the country to further Christianity, this endeavour had a definite imperialistic agenda as well. In Bengal, the commercial centre of the East India Company, education and modernity were introduced in the form of British colonialism. Their most successful weapon of coercion was the Macaulay and Charles Grant marked system of education that continues to hold sway till date. Christian nuns grew as part of convent boarding schools and other Christian educational institutions in British India.

The tracing of Christian nuns history in the India can be assessed by the arrival of the missionaries during the seventeenth century in Kerala. Missionaries arrived in India with a firm prerogative of foregrounding western morals and values. The Christian missionaries set out to 'reform' the Indians, making them acquire finer and civilised ways. The novel, *Othappu* is set in the overwhelming Christian presence in Kerala. The Christian community in Kerala is quite diverse where the author of *Othappu*, Sarah Joseph makes ample use of showcasing the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Kerala. The central character of the novel, Margalitha belongs to the catholic faith propagated by Saint Thomas.

Kerala is home to different sects of Christianity ranging from Catholics to the Syrian Christians who have often come to warring states. The Christian nuns of Kerala cannot be generalised into a single category for some belong to the orthodox realm, confined to the nunnery and the four walls of a convent; some reside in Kerala, while many have moved their bases outside Kerala and are located in various corners of the globe. Some lead their lives as pure nuns, in prayers and quiet contemplation. They confine themselves to a cloister limit themselves to an institution, foregoing any worldly contact. They live their lives in seclusion, dedicating themselves entirely to prayers and an isolated existence.

There are other nuns, who are referred to as 'sisters', who move around in the world working in convents and charitable organisations.

Although there are texts where Christian nuns have written about theological practices and about the workings of the church, a few nuns have also chronicled their own lives by writing autobiographies. In recent times, Sister Jesme's autobiography stands out, where in her work titled, *Amen: the Autobiography of a nun* (2009), Jesme recounts her experiences as a nun working within the church. Sister Jesme, a native of Kerala and an academician by profession in her autobiography, presents a vivid account of years of abuse and humiliation she suffered at the convent. Her work has been at the receiving end of many clerical organizations, but the book is rare in terms of its stringent critique of the hypocrisies and corruption in the church where Sr. Jesme's narration of her experience of abuse and humiliation within the convent, gains central ground.

In the Indic context, Partha Chatterjee in his book *Omnibus* (1999) explores how women in India began writing autobiographies that began in eighteenth century Bengal. Partha Chatterjee also distinguishes between the 'manly biography' and the *charit* and *namahs* and the 'womanly katha' and *jiban*. He states that autobiographies written in India in the nineteenth century began in Bengal where these autobiographies were known as *Atmacharit*. He gives instances of how the first autobiographies chronicled the lives of Indian kings and saints, where *Buddhacarita*, *Asvaghosa* and *Harsacarita* by Bana formed the genre of secular hagiographic writings" (p. 138). Women's life narratives, on the other hand, Chatterjee contends, were not set to embody the value and eminence that a *Atmacharit* carried. They were labelled as Smritikatha: "memoirs", or more accurately, "stories from memory" (p. 139). In the chapter titled, 'Women and the Nation', Chatterjee explores how many middle-class Bengali women wrote about their life stories while carrying on with their duties of a wife, mother and running their households. He states that these 'New Women' were writing about their domestic life and although they were too subjective and amateurish, their written narratives, still gave a profound account of the female unconscious and female subjectivity. Women's life narratives are in themselves a novelty, as they foreground the less heard woman's voice within a patriarchal ambit. Nuns' life narratives give an even greater twist to the life narrative form, as they force to

bear upon this genre, the burden of revealing the peculiarly marginalised group's story.

Sarah Joseph's acclaimed novel *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2005), translated by Valson Thampu foregrounds the life narrative of a Christian nun who seeks salvation outside the monastic realm. *Othappu's* protagonist Margalitha's act of renouncing the convent evokes all-round condemnation that leads to her ostracisation from the immediate lay community. She is accused of committing 'othappu', a Malayalee word meaning 'scandal', or temptation. Her decision is perceived to be highly transgressive, as she flouts rules of patriarchal institutions like religion and society.

Margalitha is marked and identified as having committed an unspeakable act. Her brothers have taken over the family affairs after the death of her father. Her mother raises a great hue and cry when she learns about Margalitha's decision. Her brothers indulge in cursing Margalitha as they feel that her action has tarnished the family name and soiled their personal reputations. These acts justify the ridicule that a nun or a lay woman faces if she does anything outside the ambit of the patriarchal domain. Margalitha's actions like any other woman's actions still is tied to the honour of the family name and the honour of the family members. Her *othappu*/scandal lies in her withdrawal of the religious vows. Christianity, like most of the religions, is patriarchal in its conception. Margalitha is further suspected of enjoying illicit relations under the religious garb of a nun. The notion of man's fall from paradise is tied to Eve's disobedience and fall into temptation. The woman continues to be regarded as a sinner.

This yearning of a teenaged catholic girl to dedicate her life to Christianity is a complex emotion that can be understood if one takes into account the religious piety foregrounded in catholic girls and the socio-cultural investment of Malayalees in the activities of the Catholic Church. In *Othappu*, Margalitha is fired with this emotion to become a nun since a tender age. Apart from her family's deep roots in Christianity, she is also influenced by the dialogues and discourses of the sisters in the convent. Her personal interactions with the nuns, accentuates her desire to join the nunnery. The reader of *Othappu* witnesses Margalitha as having abandoned the monastic robes and who has been locked in

a store room by her family at the very outset of the novel. The reader discovers Margalitha, broken in spirit, soiled in her own clothes, left to ponder and agitate over of her momentous decision of renouncing the nunnery. The author, Sarah Joseph makes it clear that Margalitha is brutally honest and her decision to join the nunnery was born out of her deep desire to seek spiritual development.

Margalitha, in the past, seems to be genuinely happy and fulfilled as the nunnery offered a viable space for service to the poor and underprivileged. However, she is deeply troubled by the hypocrisies of the church and institutionalising of discriminatory practices. She recalls how her convent's headmistress, the mother superior discriminated among women and deemed fit and able only those nuns who had an influential and powerful family background. 'Mother superior preferred the rich and the aristocratic. With everyone else, she was harsh and autocratic.' (*Othappu*, p. 61.)

Caught up in the hard duties required of her and the 'shamness' of the actual service being performed, she revokes her decision to join the convent. Her rebellion further breaks out because of the sexual desires that stir within her, the claustrophobic atmosphere and the celibate fervour of the nunnery seem to stifle her. In her letters to a fellow priest Karikkan, Margalitha explores her doubts, where she opines that ultimately all their service is useless. Existential dilemmas pervade in all her letters. Margalitha and Karikkan subsequently choose to leave the monastic order as they fall in love with each other.

Margalitha, lying in the storeroom of her natal home in a trepid state, remembers the night before she left the convent. She remembers vividly the white sari that Aabelamma had given her. Pacing forth all night, she makes her final decision of leaving the convent. The moment that sums her final call is critical in understanding how and where she is confronted with the utter transience and apathetic nature of the things that human beings do. Looking over a pile of clothes, she feels the fragrance of holiness is absent. In fact, she feels nothing of the divine that is associated with these clothes. The inner storm of an individual comes to fruition in the following lines.

To be used again, they had to be washed. After all, what did clothes add up to? Did a vocation lie in the cloth? Margalitha stepped out of the cloth-scheme of things. With a deep sigh, she opened the door and walked out

into the wider world. I am leaving. Like the wind that never returns...Margalitha walked down the steps (Othappu, p. 07).

The novel also showcases the hardships that Margalitha has to endure that come in the wake of the gendered workings of the Church with separate residences for Fathers and Sisters. The Male Monastics dwell at the parish while the Female Monastics stay at the convent. The gendering is more acutely seen in the ritual visits of the Church Fathers called for preaching at convents. The Male Monastics come to lecture at the convent and give sermons, while Christian Sisters residing at the convent are never asked to reciprocate this gesture.

Margalitha's personal dilemma of leaving the convent can be better understood if one lay significant credence to the three major vows that nuns have to undertake to join the convent. The three vows are; the vow of chastity, the vow of poverty, and the vow of obedience. Margalitha, living in the convent feels deprived of the calling of all the three vows. She feels like Chaucer's Prioress, an aristocratic lady under the garb of a nun. As opined by Jancy James, she wants a change from being served to serve others (Othappu, p. 23). Being born in a wealthy and well-connected family, like the Channery-master household, Margalitha sacrifices an affluent lifestyle to live her life dedicated to serve others at the convent. However, her strong, individualistic, and rebellious streak overwhelms her at every point. She finds it difficult to proclaim obedience to the cloister, and finds herself at odds with her fellow nuns. She constantly debates the depth and gravity of her vows. Her attraction for Father Karikkan, the corruption in the Church, and the lack of a sustained calling, force her to question her decision to join the nunnery. She finds herself disinterested in the daily duties and chores expected of her. She lies cornered on all sides and remains confined in an angst ridden mental state. She regularly confides her doubts in her friend and mentor, Sister Aabelamma, about how her dwindling faith.

Margalitha remains a mere spectator in the working and activities of the nuns. Her shock and aversion on the bleeding wounds of Sister Patricia at the convent, makes her an outsider in the Church. The same sight was hailed by other Sisters as bless, seeing it as a sign of another Sister attaining the blessed state of sainthood. Her casual remark to Sister Aabelamma on the whole

episode sums up the discontent brewing inside. “‘What madness is this?’ she asked Aabelamma. ‘What is your problem if there is one more woman saint? ‘What is my problem?’ Margalitha muttered under her breath” (Othappu, p. 150).

Margalitha’s journey towards her self actualisation takes place when she lays bare herself. Her inhibitions, weaknesses and her skeletons come out during her stay at the forest in Father Augustine’s hut. Seeing Fr. Augustine caring for a sickly baby causes a feeling of grave revulsion for her. She can’t bear to look at the sickly thing, the hut which seemed to be reeking of its smell. Margalitha’s upbringing and even her stay at the convent never propelled her to come in direct contact with poverty and the resultant filth and misery. Praying in clean environments, she had chased spiritual ecstasy. Margalitha’s repulsion stems from her childhood fears. She couldn’t bear to look at anything ugly as the narrative makes us aware of. “She would look away at once from the blind, from the leprous and from the mentally retarded. No matter how hard she tried, she could not bring herself to look at them a second time” (Othappu, p. 41). Margalitha’s change of heart comes from her seeing the care and service displayed by Father Augustine towards the poor on a daily basis. Father Augustine in his hut wiped the dirt, cared for the sickly baby to such an extent that makes Margalitha’s heart heave. Her initial revulsion changes to a warm feeling of compassion when she sees the helplessness of sickly thing. Consumed with guilt and concern for the baby she picks up the baby and cares for him day and night trying to provide some relief and comfort to his ailing body. She thereafter shows him the beauty of nature and tries to show him the things nature had on display, the rabbit, the porcupine, the sky, the grass, the spring. In the loving arms and care of Margalitha, the baby on the verge of his death decides to live. This simple act marks the development of the growth of Margalitha’s character propelling her to follow her own path however difficult the pathway.

The author Sarah Joseph makes us realise how her protagonist, Margalitha finally tastes freedom when she delves out of her comfort zone, she embraces the filth and squalor outside and becomes the person who indeed holds her faith. The novel ends by declaring the feminist ideal of nonconformity to any oppressive structure or institution, for instance, the church or even the family. It

celebrates the proclamation of individual strength and foregrounds humanism. Sarah Joseph's politics portrays humanism as its frontal agenda.

Nuns' life narratives and stories within the discipline of the church continue to be many and quite varied. Joseph, through the gendered prism of nunhood, she brings alive countless issues through the journey of a nun who has renounced the convent. Kerala's rich history of Christianity and its diverse forms form an interesting penumbra to the story of a woman who attains self-actualisation despite all odds. Margalitha's faith in herself and her faith in Christ never diminishes. With each new challenge, she rises and inches closer to her spiritual zenith.

The apparent 'othappu' of Margalitha becomes a blessing in disguise where she sees through the double standards and corruption of her religious institution, reflecting the omnipresent corruption of the society at large. She leaves the institution in search of her truth and despite the repercussions chooses to live in the very society that ridicules her and ostracises her. The individual triumphs in the end and to borrow a phrase from Jancy James, *Othappu* truly reads like a 'feminist gospel', foregrounding a lone woman, a former nun's experiment with truth.

Works Cited

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus: Comprising Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, The Nation and its Fragments, and A Possible India*. India: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Christian Missionaries in British India. Social Science Research Network; 30 Jan 2008. Web. 28 Dec 2014. papers.ssrn.com/so/3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1087397

Christian Missionaries in Kerala. Shodhganga; 2014. Web. 10 Mar 2015. shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/22485/14/14_chapter_4.pdf

From Missionary Machinery to Nation Making: Christian Higher Education in Modern India Christian Educational Institute; 29 Apr, 2011. Web. 1 Mar, 2015. www.salesiancollege.net/Abstract.pdf.

Joseph, Sarah. *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*. Trans. Valson Thampu. India: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Norris, Pamela. *Eve: a Biography*. USA: New York University Press, 1999. Print.

Plascow, Judith, and Joan Arnold. ed. *Women and Religion*. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974. Print.

Hard Times

GHULAM MOHAMMAD KHAN¹

“You know, it was the worst of times. With the fall of the darkness in the late eighties, fear and hopelessness enshrouded our valley. The deepening fear of the gun and a throbbing uncertainty had choked the valley. Every evening, when light slowly disappears into implacable folds of darkness, we would seethe in fear, hopelessly hide and hunker down in our own home for safety, pretending dead, as they would pass in numbers, clonking the gravelly road with their heavy combat boots on the backside of our home”, wailed my aggrieved friend as we walked the same gravelly road after fifteen long years, cautiously escaping the puddles of turbid water. The road ran under a stretched-out shadowy willow bower. The fate of the road, as it looked, had been the same as that of the people.

Khalid was talking about the troubled nineties when the

smouldring unrest had shattered the possibilities of normal living for the people of Kashmir. Khalid was only seven when armed insurgency started in 1989 and thirteen when ‘*Ikhwan*’; a pro-government militia, mainly consisting of the surrendered Kashmiri militants, emerged as a brutish force of indiscriminate aggression and torture in his locality.

We walked through a number of compressed and clammy lanes and bylanes until we reached a clean-cut macadamised road that snaked past the edge of a mountain, overlooking the vast expanses of the verdure Wullar Lake. Khalid looked comely in an impeccable sky-blue *Shilwar-Kameez* and neatly creased and crisp stubble on his whitish face. We sat on the flossy green turf under the cool foliage of a sprawling apricot tree. The mild breeze that rustled the leafage across the mountains produced an ever deepening, delicate music. I was silent, silently feeling myself dissolving into the boundless ambience of the place when my friend broke the silence again;

“You know, you never told me the reason behind the deformity of my left hand. Their bullets tore my hand when I was only a kid.”

¹ The Author is an Assistant Professor of English at Government College of Engineering and Technology Safapora, Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir. He can be contacted at gluoomkk@gmail.com.

His words sent chills down my spine. I could not believe it at first. I looked at his hand and imagined my own bleeding after being broken by a barrage of bullets. It was a horrible feeling. I truly had never asked him about his mangled left hand. His hand only supported a twisted finger and the misshapen thumb. It was not something much to be looked at.

Presently, both of us studied Creative Literature at a university outside Kashmir in Delhi. After returning home from Delhi, Khalid had invited me to his village in Bandipora, a place of bewitching scenic beauty located on the shores of majestic Wullar in northern Kashmir. It was our second year outside, but I truly had never enquired about his hand, fearing it might have hurt him. His hand obviously looked hard-featured and, therefore, I would purposely dodge its mention in our conversations.

“How is that possible? You never told me that”, I rejoined. I was deeply saddened for I was the one who had started the discussion. Immediately after eating lunch at his home and leaving for the apricot bower, I had just asked him about the impact of insurgency and anti-insurgency on his village and the surrounding places.

“I have been waiting for the last two years, yet you never bothered to ask. May be the deformity might not have caught your attention, but that is impossible too. My failure to confide it to you all these months is just a story of shame, horror and helplessness”, he continued.

I loved the way Khalid talked. Though he never intended to impress, his way of narrating any experience, any story would always impress me. I knew he was appropriating the much celebrated beginning lines of the Charles Dickens’ novel *A Tale of Two Cities* when he said, ‘it was essentially the worst of times.’ He was indisputably a brilliant student. For him, books were like love letters. He would put them in order, read and reread them, and closely remember them as if they were really love letters written to him. Inspired by many French, German and Russian writers and theorists, whom he would frequently quote to strengthen his argument, he never believed in ideological or epistemological fixities rather he would love to think and transgress beyond these fixities.

“Oh! Tell me how did all this happen?” I said.

“I was nine years of age when I saw the gun and the gun-man for the first time, ten years when at less than

half a mile from my home I saw a bullet-ridden torso of a local militant tied to a tree with ropes and rags, eleven years only when I myself was hit by a bullet in my left hand. If the bullet maker ever knew the pain a bullet brings he would never have made a bullet. You never know it until you feel it.”

Whenever Khalid talked about any serious subject or any miserable memory of the past, he would intently change his tone; a mixture of fear, terror and helplessness would descend and dissolve into the thin layer of liquid covering his eyes. Sometimes his expressions expressed him better than his words. Where his words would stop, his silence, the impetuous calm in his eyes and a mixture of hope and anger spread over his face would start speaking even louder.

“A bullet-ridden torso tied to a tree! Who tied him to the tree and why did anybody kill him like that?” I enquired.

“The self-styled *Ikhwanis* would torture and massacre every insurgent they apprehended in different horrible ways. One day after killing a dangerous and wanted insurgent in our locality, they perched his head atop a gun barrel and paraded through the little cluttered streets of our market. The whole village was terribly baton-charged and driven like

cattle to the market street to give audience to the show. They did all this to petrify the villagers and obviously to appease the government. They were loyal anti-insurgents to the government, but the fact was that they inflicted the worst brutalities on the poor villagers. They looted our land and robbed our money and killed those who refused or had nothing to offer.”

Before coming back to discuss his deformed hand, Khalid talked at length about Ikhwan, its formation, conversion, (initially Ikhwan upheld a radical pro-Pakistan ideology and later on it converted and became a strong pro-Indian militia), its loot and bloodbath peregrination and its assassinations of a number of local members of the Jamat-e-Islami—a religio-political organisation. He told me that the infamous Ikhwanis would hardly eat from their homes. They would burst into any home of their choice in the village and intimidate the inmates to cook rice, chicken, mutton, cheese, fish and different other varieties they could think of. The threatened families would call a *waaze* (cook) to cook the dishes well. Any carelessness in using the spices and other ingredients would result into a severe beating of the family head and bantering of the whole crockery.

One day, Khalid told me, an infamous *Ikhwani* commander of a certain belt barged into a home in his village around 10 o'clock at night with his troupe and fired indiscriminately on all the people taking dinner in the kitchen. Later in the night when villagers came to see the family, all they saw was the battered bodies and the bowls of rice and curry filled with blood. After the burial of all the seven members of this family, the *Ikhwani* gang had again visited the village on the pretext that a seven year old kid of the victim family was still alive. They had come to kill that kid; they were afraid that the kid might revenge the murderers once he would be young. After an hour long combing search operation they finally nabbed the kid who was hiding in a hencoop in the neighbourhood. In the open day light, Khalid had seen with his own eyes, the murderer *Ikhwani* commander held the boy's hand and took him to a nearby small wooden bridge that hung atop two huge boulders on either side of a stream. In the middle of that small bridge the *Ikhwani* commander had knelt down to the height of the kid to offer him a chocolate which the kid had accepted tremulously. The *Ikhwani* had then asked the kid to uncover and eat the chocolate. Khalid told me that the commander, terribly infamous in

his locality, fired all six bullets of his pistol into the head of this kid while he uncovered the chocolate cover. After the murder the *Ikhwani* had yelled, "I bribed the little bloody avenger with a chocolate and he promised to be silent forever."

Khalid was very different from the young students I had known during my college days in Kashmir and all our new acquaintances at Delhi where both of us currently pursued our higher studies. Whenever he talked to anyone with even a little seriousness, the mention of Kashmir Conflict would hardly escape his words. If the listener, like me, happened to be a keen and curious one, a considerate critical commentary on different facets and dimensions of the conflict would follow. He would astutely relate every single experience of his life to the gory onset of militancy in Kashmir; the fact is that we all grew with nothing as prominent as militancy around us. A strange consciousness marked with a freezing fear of the 'blood and iron' manifested in his sometimes emotionally packed and sometimes meaningful but incongruous speeches. The fear and the sensitivity of the conflict had remarkably seeped into his bone and marrow. Unlike most of my friends from Kashmir, he would

read and write about Kashmir for hours at a stretch. However, he would act with a genuine control over both the word and emotion whenever he discussed Kashmir Conflict with his friends in Delhi. Sometimes, when I also happened to be the part of the discussion, he would intently dislodge the pattern of Kashmir political history and tell them lies about Kashmir in order to stay clear of any ideological disagreement with the mainstream political think-tank. During one of our evening walks through a busy lane near our rented room in Delhi I remember Khalid lecturing me, "It is really tough to talk about Kashmir when you are outside Kashmir. When you move outside Kashmir, you carry with you the suspicious identity of a full community, a full history of a 'political other' and a fear that nettles you wherever you go. It is a great Socratic irony; we know everything about ourselves, but we have to listen to them. Staying outside Kashmir has positively helped me only in one way: it has helped me to get to know the outsiders perspective on Kashmir. And this perspective, unfortunately, comes very close to Edward Said's perspective of 'Orientalism'. It feels sad to say, but it is undeniably right that their perspective has constructed us as 'the other'".

"All this is harrowing, Khalid. I have heard about *Ikhwan*, but I haven't heard about this brutality before. *Ikhwan* was not as brutal and destructive in our district. Anyway, tell me who fired your hand and why did he do so?" I enquired, in fact, interrupted as Khalid talked about several episodes of horror in his town.

"It is a story of shame, Zahid. I haven't narrated it to any of my friends before. Every time when my friends enquire about the deformity of my hand, I concoct lies to elude the truth. You can confide your secrets to your friends, not the memories of shame. All stories are not meant to be narrated. Some are meant to dissolve and disappear within, some to be forgotten and some to be remembered. You know, some of our best stories have fallen through the cruel spaces of the printed words of our history and my story is one of them. It has happened to disappear. Let it disappear."

"Khalid, stories never disappear. Your weakness to narrate your story has weakened your understanding of yourself. Every life is a story, and all stories have life in them. You have to live your story. Your story may be only a different story; I mean a bit more different. Anyway, don't think too much about it. Tell me your story. Today, I want to listen to your story", I

said without actually knowing whether all I said was worth saying it or not.

“I have grown up watching this spread-out verdure sheet of vegetation and the deep silent waters of Wullar Lake from these altitudes. I have always found peace in trading my story to these silent waters. Today I sit here again, and the waters are still silent as before. Today I again feel like troubling the waters with my story. It had been a strange but a peaceful dramatic monologue for many long years. Today you are with me; I do not know how you will listen to me. Whatever Zahid, there is an unfathomable patience in these waters. They have the patience to listen to a story for thousands of years. We humans need a bit of this too.” Khalid smiled as he talked. His long silky hair flipped in the mild breeze.

“I may not have the patience of these waters, but I will try to listen to you patiently”, I rejoined. He looked at me and smiled.

“I was just eleven years of age when one vapid summer afternoon, as I returned home from my school, I saw the compound of my home crowded with people. I saw our neighbouring women huddled on their windows curiously staring at my home. I straddled through the crowd and

someone stopped me near the main entrance. An elderly person held my arm and told me, “Beta, there are gunmen inside. You stay here with us until they let us in.” Someone took away my bag and slate. I was hungry. I couldn’t ask anything to the person and stood in silence with all the assembled people. Nobody moved or talked. I still remember it today like I remember several desperate and melancholic moments I have spent under this apricot tree bower; it was the heaviest silence ever in my life. After some ten minutes I heard someone vociferously abusing and jeering and heckling inside the house. I looked up at the man who held my arm. He had his eyes shut and his head drooped. After some strong shouts and abuses came the pathetic shrieks of my father. He cried like I cried when my teachers would beat me. Yes, he cried like a young boy for help. They tortured my father inside. As I heard the cries of my father, I also cried. I tried to run inside but the person held me back. Whenever I recall all those moments of the past today, I really feel sad for those people who stood helpless in the compound and those who only heard the cries of my father and helplessly gazed at our home from their windows. They could only stand and stare when others

suffered at the hands of these *Ikhwanis*. They could do nothing but only wait and suffer in the silence with me. How can I forget that day, how can I forget those people! That was a poor, unfortunate generation that lived with fear and helplessness only. The fear of gun, the fear of death lived with them when they worked in their fields, when they dined in the evenings, when they offered the morning prayers, when there was a knock at the door, when there were curfews, when they were in the markets; it was in everything, it was everywhere. It had become a consciousness. History too has been cruel to this consciousness. It lives with me and those silent waters and not in the pages of history. Zahid, you know Dan Brown, the American novelist? In his novel *The Da Vinci Code* he rightly observes, 'history is written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books – books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe.' We are that obliterated and conquered foe. The situation in which my father suffered was created by history which it refuses to claim now. That situation to me is more powerful as a narrative than any narrative recorded in our books of political history. We are mere identities for those winners; we actually do not exist

The Fountain Pen

Vol. 01, No. 01, March 2018

for them. My history will die with me. My dear, it is therefore, I always tell you that we have to rewrite our history."

It saddened me deeply to hear this. I had a feeling of a strange seriousness and guilt seeping through the pores of my body into my soul. I realised I had never been a serious friend. I should have known this before. My heart leaped out to him when he said about his crying father. He had been through a sea of troubles, but he never intended to bore me with a prolix lecture about his troubled past. He knew my nature was a bit barmy and he would also put up the same whenever we were together.

"Khalid, I have nothing to do with Dan Brown or who writes our history and how he writes it. I want to listen to your story. Why did those goons behave like that? What happened to your family?"

"Dear, in listening to my story you actually listen to the story of a full generation. My only fear is that this story will be lost. Such stories have been rejected by the writers of our history. We are disowned by our own writers."

"Your fears have always been strange. Teach your philosophical fears to your friends in Delhi. I just want to know your story. What

happened that day? Why did they torture your father?"

"It was never the same after that dreadful day. It was the beginning of a sad phase in our life. And it has been worsening in the abyss of my memory ever since. They had fastened the arms and legs of my father with ropes and beaten him with gun-butts. When the gun-men left in the evening, I ran inside hurriedly only to see my father lying on the rug unconscious. His cheeks were smeared with blood, his lifeless hands were bruised and both his knees bled. Our neighbours rushed him to the hospital. I only remember that I wept and sobbed and waited for news from the hospital with my mother, sister and two younger brothers till late in the night. The next morning one of my two elder brothers returned from the hospital. He consoled our effete, hopeless mother, "There is no need to panic, mother. He is out of danger. The doctor said that he will be just fine." Living was actually never out of danger for us after that. It took father one complete year to be able to stand on his legs and to eat with his own hands. My father, who now looked weak and doddering, almost lost his hold from the string of time and life. In that single year he seemed to have passed through long decades of turmoil, suffering and

dejection. It changed his way of life. He forgot all his lovely and fondly ways of loving me and my two younger brothers. I remember, every evening when the family would assemble in the kitchen for dinner, he would nestle me into his lap, take my hand into his own and wash both of them in a thick silver metallic bowl filled with warm water and make me eat food from his plate. Those were the hardest times for my mother too. Every night, before going to bed she would pray for hours and in her prayers she would weep for hours. There was none to console her, sympathise with her. I and my two younger brothers would sleep in the same room. We would never ask her why she wept every night because we had grown habitual. It had become a kind of lullaby for us to get off to sleep.... Zahid, I live with these memories. They live with me in both the conflicting calm of Kashmir and the drudging drone of Delhi."

"I can understand, Khalid. Tell me why did they raid your home and why did they take the offensive everywhere?"

"Why did they raid our home? That is the most sorrowful side of the story. After that afflicting episode, I slowly began to realise that something was seriously wrong with the family.

My two elder brothers, who were illiterate and mostly worked in the fields, would now return early from the fields and sulk in their rooms without talking much with their friends and neighbours. Those days the neighbouring boys would come and sit with my brothers on the small veranda adjacent to the kitchen door and gossip for hours. They would not leave until their mothers loudly and repeatedly called their names. Then there used to be no walls, there were homes only. Only one thing continued from the past into the present; the fear of being surrounded and watched by the gun and gun-men..."

"Khalid, you are not evaluating the historicity of text here. Why are you taking digressions? Tell me what happened next? I have nothing to do with the walls and houses." I interrupted before he would digress further and slip into the complexities of his mind and memory.

"Sorry Zahid, I do not do that intentionally. I think it is the circumstances that made me so. My past cannot be narrated in any better way. It has no concatenation. Anyway, after that gory experience the vitality and intimacy that marked the relationship of my parents for years wilted away. It was replaced by a profound desolation that reflected on their faces all the time, and that also

hastened them to their dotage. Whenever they talked, they talked about my sister. We were and still are six siblings: five brothers and one sister who is the eldest. When the *Ikhwani* goons raided our home, my sister was just seventeen or eighteen years of age. Why did they beat my father and why did my elder brothers stop talking to people or moving out into the market street to join their friends.... I could not understand all this until the damage was done. I could not even follow the routine serious evening conversations of my parents before the dinner. I was too young to understand the disconsolateness that engulfed everything in our family. It is now that I pass through the multitudes of pain of those evening conversations, of that small smoky space above the hearth in our kitchen in which hung the oceans of grief, of those shrieks of my father which grow louder in the wilderness of my imagination every passing moment, and those helpless moans and prayers of my mother."

"Why were your parents so worried and why did they only talk about your sister? What happened at that stage that you could understand it only later?" I interrupted again to keep him from digressing any further.

"My father was tortured because he refused to give away his daughter

to those *Ikhwani* goons. My sister, Kulsum, as my mother told me later was the most beautiful girl in our whole hilly hamlet. I was so young then that I could not even understand that my sister looked beautiful. The *Ikhwani* gang had come to take away my sister that day. They would wear the uniform of Indian army and exploit the powers given to them by Indian Government with brutal indulgence. They would beat you if you happened to walk the same road as they did, they would guide the Indian army to terrorise us; the already fragile folks and they would write an "*Ishtihar*", a death warning, and paste it near the main entrance of your home during nights if you failed to give them a certain amount of money by a certain deadline. One wintry day, I was in sixth, they had a lot of fun with the headmaster of our school, who according to a certain still ambiguous narrative was a member of *Jamat-e-Islami*. That night, I remember it snowed heavily; he was dragged out from his house by the same goons. They tied him to a small tree on the snowy banks of a stream and shot him many times in his head. It was still snowing in the early morning when I saw with my own naked eye the elders of our village untying his body from that tree. I saw his brains scattered in

the snow. What will a father do when his daughter is touched and manhandled in front of his own eyes by these goons? A father would rather prefer to perish than wait and watch his daughter being abused in front of his eyes. My father did the same thing. In any conflict, like ours, the woman is the worst sufferer. She is not only helpless when she is abused or raped by the oppressor or when her son disappears or gets killed; she is also helpless when purposelessness of life is thrust upon her, and when she is excluded from the domain where she actually suffers more than her counterpart. The voice of the women is the most silent, suppressed and stifled in the history of conflict of our valley. It was my sister who suffered the most in our family. Her silence and suffering like all other women are more voluminous than the empty printed books written over our political history."

As we talked, our attention was distracted by the groan of a long convoy of olive-green Indian military trucks that drove past the snaky road above us. The traffic was forced to a standstill until the convoy passed. Those green trucks symbolised fear and power. Our eyes keenly followed the military trucks until they disappeared into the foliage of trees.

Before Khalid would continue, I deliberately reminded him;

“What happened to your sister? Is she fine now?”

They did not take away my sister that day. They just calmed their connoption by repeatedly kicking and punching and smacking my father who resisted their demands. A sense of insecurity and despondency completely changed our ways of living after that day. My parents and elder brothers lived under a continuous soul-eating shame and fear of Kulsum being taken way anytime. My parents would not allow her to go to the market or to ‘*Yarbal*’ to fetch water. She was in no way better than the immured Bertha we find in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. My sister, unlike Bertha, was not deranged though. It was the shame of one’s sister being touched and manhandled by *Ikhwanis* that forced back my elder brothers from walking into the market place to their friends for routine gossip. Everything went on like this as if it were all so considerately conspired against by nature herself. It was one chilly autumn morning - a year after that episode - my father woke me up and asked me to follow him. He brought me downstairs to see what was pasted on the main door of entrance. It was an ‘*Ishtihar*’ written in prominent Urdu words in chaste

green ink. My father told me to read out the words for him. Because Urdu was the medium of instruction at our school, I could easily read out the ‘*Ishtihar*’ to my father. The ‘*Ishtihar*’ as usual was threatening. It was aimed to intimidate our family that one of those goons was interested in marrying my sister, and that if my father resisted again, he would be ‘simply shot dead this time’. After I was finished with the reading, my father peeled it off, crumpled it and flung it into the burning hearth in the kitchen. The already fragile hopes of my parents were dashed again. Have you ever seen a burnt curled up paper; my parents were nothing less. Their hopes were burnt. In the dark groove of uncertainty we lived and feared and waited for hope and disaster.

Finally, one night in the same autumn, there was a knock at the kitchen door. It was a death knell. Nobody of us moved. We had just finished the dinner. We looked at each other. Father asked the sister to hide behind the locker in the corner. We didn’t open the door. My two younger brothers had fallen asleep. The knocks got louder. The dog that always guarded our kitchen door started barking. Close to my father, I crouched in fear. Aslam, my elder brother stole glances at my father. Mother got up from the small wooden pallet near the

hearth and sat close to Aslam. Finally, they broke open the door and seven to ten tall *Ikhwani* goons in olive-green military uniform appeared before us. It is this episode in our life, the remembrance of which haunts me the most. They barraged my father with a series of questions. My ailing old father stammered as he answered. I hugged my father's arm and wept aloud. He was the world's most helpless father then. One of them with a long beard and curled moustache pointed his gun at my father and yelled;

"I want to marry your daughter. Is that a crime? Where is she? We are taking her tonight with us. We have not come to eat our dinner here. We have just come to take away your daughter. Tell me, where is your daughter?"

"She is not here. I do not know where she is?" answered my father after a long pause, beads of sweat sprouting on his old rugged temples.

"You do not know what will happen tonight if you do not tell us the truth. I will take away your daughter even if God himself comes to your help. One last time, tell me where is your daughter? We will leave your family without any harm. If you don't say I will empty this gun of mine into

your chest right in front of the eyes of your family", threatened the *Ikhwani*.

Hearing all this, my helpless young sister abruptly came out from behind the locker and screamed aloud. We could not help weeping. My sister knelt before them and pleaded;

"Leave us for God's sake. My father is already unwell. Do not kill him for God's sake. Please, forgive us. We have never lived peacefully since you tortured my father last time. We beg you to leave us alone."

"Do not waste our time. You should be thankful that your father is still breathing. Today we have come to take you away with us. In case your old decrepit father repeats the same old annoying antics, we will take away his breath along with us too. Follow us without shedding these useless tears or we also know many other ways to make you follow. Just get up and follow us, we do not want a bloodbath here", the large hairy *Ikhwani* goon threatened again.

I remember my helpless sister dragging back to my father, holding his left hand close to her cheek and weeping relentlessly. What followed was the most lugubrious thing that ever happened in my life. They all pounced on us. It was a blitzkrieg. They pulled and dragged my sister. Someone kicked me on my stomach, I

collapsed. There was a strange scuffle. My father, with my brothers trying to help him, fought out the left energy in his feeble bones to break free my sister from their clutches. I got up and tried to help my father. Then there was a gun shot. The bullet hit my left hand and then the thigh of my father. The moment had the fury of hell. I don't know what happened later. They took away my sister that night. Again our helpless neighbours came to our rescue. At the hospital, they incised three of my fingers which were badly injured. Father remained in the hospital for a month, where he finally lost the battle of life. Mother too had grown very fragile to bear the sea of troubles. She passed away barely two months later.... Zahid, those were the real hard times."

Khalid stopped. He dropped his head down and rubbed his eyes. I saw a drop of tear falling and soaking his white kameez. I wanted to console him, but I could not find the words. I had never taken my friend seriously before. In Delhi he never made me feel for a moment he has suffered in his life. He would only teach me how to write a good research paper. He would sometimes tell me, 'I want to become a writer not for myself but for someone else.' I would never tell him as to who was his 'someone else'. His 'someone else' was none other than his

The Fountain Pen

Vol. 01, No. 01, March 2018

own people, his own parents and his own troubles that ever since boiled in the cauldron of his soul. I wanted to tell him about his sister, but I failed to muster the courage now. Before I could say anything, Khalid broke the silence,

"We tried but failed to know anything about our sister for next five days. We saw her only after five days when she came to see her dying father in the hospital. Though she suffered the most everybody cursed her after that. After a year of our parent's demise, we married Kulsum to a simple man who, like my two elder brothers, worked on his rice fields. His family lived at fifteen kilometres of distance from our home. Though she still looked beautiful, no one was ready to marry her in our own village after that day. It has been fifteen years since that episode I have never seen a smile on her face. It is her two little kids that at least give a reason to her brothers to smile. We want her children to be a new happy generation. I want to work hard to secure a job to help her children to be the part of a new world."

In the meanwhile, a wave of chilly wind that swept across the vast expanses of the Wullar reached to us below the bower of that apricot tree. Khalid had almost finished his story. I also had no intentions to push him

deeper into his sorrowful past. The winds took speed and wheezed across the green mountains into an unknown land, probably, carrying Khalid's sorrowful story on its wing. The still waters of Wullar began to surge. As the wind grew faster, the waters tore open the thick layer of water-nut leaves and ran unabashedly towards the shore; I looked at Khalid, a smile ran across his cheeks and dissolved into the glitter of his eyes.

"Let's walk back home", said Khalid. "It will get colder now. My sister will be waiting for us to join her for *noon-chai* (Kashmiri afternoon tea). Let's go then".

As we walked back to Khalid's home, I asked him a question. If there was any sense in my question I had learned it from him just then;

"Khalid, you said that your painful memories of the past always haunt you. But, don't you think there is any solution that can alleviate your pain and suffering?"

"Absolutely, there is a possibility. I don't want to avenge my enemy with the gun. I can write my stories, my history and my identity with my pen. A pen can do a gun for us. In writing the stories of my people, my parents, and my besieged land, which history books have forgotten to cover, I will be

avenged... Zahid, only this is the possibility."

Back at Khalid's home everything looked different to me now. His sister still looked very beautiful. I deliberately traded some jokes during *noon-chai* to bring back a smile on Kulsum's face. She didn't smile though. I thought she might have forgotten to smile now. We enjoyed the *noon-chai* and played with Ubaid and Uzair – two cute little kids of Kulsum.

The Caged Self

SHALINI SHARMA¹

I look for the unknown
For known is too hard to endure

I look for the love that's unfulfilled
For fulfilled is hollow to the core

I look for the breeze that's pure
For impure is full of fatal lure

I look for the space in distant skies
For closer one is too constricted for a flight

I look for the hope unrealised
For it keeps me moving far and wide

I look for freedom from judgements
For judgement is pinning me to ground

The caged self can no longer hold
The spirit that's born to rebel and soar
Soar high and high into the unknown sky.

¹ The poet is an Assistant Professor of English, Government Degree College Nowshera, Nowshera, Jammu & Kashmir. She can be email at shalsharma75@gmail.com