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Space, Place, and Landscape in Literatures of the World

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EDITORIAL NOTE

MEJO, or the MELOW Journal of World Literature, is a peer-refereed E-journal brought out biannually by **MELOW**, the **Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World**. It is a reincarnation of the previous publications brought out in book or printed form by the Society right since its inception in 1998.

MELOW is an academic organization, one of the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in World Literatures. The Organization meets every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages and grooms younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

The papers presented at MELOW conferences are screened, selected, edited and published by a Board of Editors especially appointed for the purpose. Whereas in the initial years the Society favoured a book publication, in subsequent years it was a journal that was published annually. With the changing times, MELOW decided to move on to online publication. The result is *MEJO*.

Dear readers, this is the fourth issue of *MEJO*, the MELOW Journal. While the third issue brought out the essays selected from the 2017 conference held at Chandigarh, this issue contains essays from the 2018 conference held at Dharamshala. The papers have been selected by a panel of reviewers from the presented and revised submissions.

We, at MELOW, wish you happy reading!

EDITORS

About MELOW

MELOW (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) was first set up in 1998 as MELUS-India. It is an academic organization, among the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in world literatures, and literature across borders of time and space. The organization meets every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages younger scholars and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

The MELOW revamped journal has existed in hard print for about a decade. The present issue comprises a selection of papers presented at the 2018 MELOW Conference in Dharamshala.

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ISAAC SEQUEIRA MEMORIAL FUND



+ -

Professor Isaac Sequeira

(5 January 1930--7 September 2006)

Professor Isaac Sequeira from Hyderabad, who worked at the Osmania University and was closely associated with the ASRC, Hyderabad, was a mentor and patron to several generations of academics in India. His sad demise in 2006 created a void hard to fill. We, at MELOW, wish to keep alive the memory of our Patron and guiding light who played a key role in all the activities of our organization.

We have set up an Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund out of which a cash prize of Rs.5,000 is awarded for the **best paper presented at our conferences** (see details below).*

With effect from the 2010 conference, there is a **Special Invited Lecture** by a person of eminence funded by the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund.

Several individuals have come forward to offer contributions towards the corpus and donated generously to the ISM fund. Donations of Rs.1,000 or more may be sent in cash/by draft **payable to MELOW at Chandigarh**. Contributions may be mailed by registered post/courier to Prof Anil Raina, Dept of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh-160014.

***THE ISM AWARD**

- In the memory of Prof Isaac Sequeira, MELOW annually awards a prize for the best paper presented at its conference. The award comprises a certificate and a cash prize of Rs.5,000.
- The competition is open to Indian citizens who are members of MELOW. The participant/delegate should be less than forty years of age at the time of the conference. The abstract and complete paper should be submitted by the stipulated deadlines before it is presented at the conference.
- A panel of Judges is appointed by the Office Bearers of MELOW.
- If required, these rules may be amended by a simple majority of members present and voting at the Conference.

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Plenary Lecture

Nature and Art in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

Tej N Dhar

Retired Professor of English

Abstract: Barbara Kingsolver's writings are intimately connected with her sustained interest in the world that is threatened by what Cheryll Glotfelty calls the "global environmental crisis." Because of this, the connection between the natural and the human world, with a heavy accent on preserving the natural, is at the heart of her novel-writing. The essay provides a brief exposition of her views on literature and its role in our time that is threatened by environmental degradation and demonstrates how these are realized in their fullness in the *Prodigal Summer*. Kingsolver locates the novel in a familiar space that abounds in all species of natural growth—farms, forests, trees, and a variety of animals—weaves three narratives, seemingly different yet interconnected, centred round three major characters, who are also trained professionals, and focusses on their thinking, actions and interactions with other characters, but making sure that they are vibrant and engaging beings and not mere mechanical ploys. Combining this mechanism with her skilful use of language, Kingsolver succeeds in producing a novel that is both pleasurable and educative.

Keywords: Ecology, Ecological consciousness, Environmental crisis, Land ethics, Location, Nature, Novelistic art

Barbara Kingsolver is a novelist, poet, essayist, and political activist. Her views on the nature and function of art/literature, about which she has written in her essays, are intimately connected with her sustained interest in the world that is threatened by what Cheryll Glotfelty calls the "global environmental crisis" (xv). Because of this, she uses her fiction as an effective medium for promoting awareness about the varied aspects of this crisis in an artistic and pleasing manner. This essay provides a brief exposition of her views on literature and its role in our times that are threatened by environmental degradation and then demonstrates how Kingsolver realizes her purpose in its fullness in the *Prodigal Summer*.

Almost in the manner of the classical and neo-classical writers and critics, Kingsolver comments on the relationship between reality and art in her essay “The Not-So-Deadly Sin”: “I believe the purpose of art is not to photocopy life but distill it, learn from it, improve on it, embroider tiny disjunct pieces of it into something insightful and entirely new” (258). This view of art comes close to the Aristotelian theory of mimesis, that “an imitation need not be a straightforward copy of the object imitated...nor need an imitation be an object which actually exists” (Heath xiv). Even while writers learn from life, they refashion what they see around them to create something new, which gives it a unique cognitive and aesthetic value. The idea of improving upon what is out there also echoes Sir Philip Sidney’s view that only writers can improve upon what is given to them: “Only the poet ... lifted up with the vigour of his own invention doth grow, in effect, into another nature ... her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.”

These views are rooted in the idea that writers have the ability and skill to “plant a seed in the good dirt of imagination” (258). In another essay, “If You Ever Want to Go Home Again,” Kingsolver emphasizes the ability of the writers to make things on their own: “We’re not keeping diary here, we’re inventing! Why can’t you believe we are capable of making a story from scratch?” (34). In a similar vein, she says that there are no real people in her fiction: “I can’t see the slightest point of that, when I have the alternative of inventing utterly subservient slave-people, whose every detail of appearance and behaviour I can bend to serve my theme and plot” (38). Elsewhere, she reconfirms: “I need characters to count on to do what I say What’s more, they must do it all convincingly” (258).

If Kingsolver clarifies that characters are meant to help her realize her purpose in a convincing manner, to serve the theme and plot of her work, it implies that she writes with a specific purpose in mind. And that, as will be demonstrated in the discussion of the *Prodigal Summer*, is geared towards “raising consciousness about the environment” (Glotfelty xxiv), which is also involved with ethical and aesthetic concerns.

Kingsolver is an avid advocate of this activity and represents nature in literature with an acute ecological awareness, both because of her upbringing and training. She studied biology as an undergraduate and did a Masters in ecology and evolutionary biology. Since her parents had to cope with depression, the result of greed that disregards human needs, and war born out of

hate, “they reared me under the constant counsel to trust spiritual values ahead of material ones, and look to the land for shelter. ‘A house can burn down,’ they said, ‘but a piece of land will always be there’” (“Small Wonder” 20). So she became an environmentalist. After four years of science writing, she took to writing fiction and published her first novel *Bean Trees* in 1988. She has followed it up by many more works of fiction and non-fiction. The result is her sustained interest in nature and its connection with the human, which is the main matrix of her fiction and seen at its profound best in the *Prodigal Summer*.

Kingsolver’s involvement with nature and the vision within which she sees the connection between the social and the natural and the earnestness with which she pursues that vision is clarified in several of her interviews. I quote from two of them to make my point. The first one is from her 1993 conversation with Donna Perry in which she clarifies that she writes books only on the subjects that she considers important: “I’m only going to write a book if it’s addressing subjects I care about. Otherwise, why write a book? It’s not worth the time, and it’s not worth the reader’s time, and it’s not worth burdening the world another pile of pages. It surprises me constantly that almost everybody else in the United States who writes books hates to be called a political writer. As if that demeans them” (154). This clarifies that she writes with a clear intent and is not afraid of being called a political writer.

Kingsolver elaborates on that in her interview with Stephen Fisher: “Certainly an appreciation for nature is an important feature of my work, and it arose in part because I grew up running wild in the woods with little adult supervision and I studied biology as a college student and then went to graduate school in biology. I am one of thousands of species that live in this place, and I don’t ever forget the other ones are there. Species diversity is a biological fact. I think a lot about the world out there beyond the artifice that human beings have created” (27).

The subject that figures in Kingsolver’s novels has two aspects: the cause of the environmental crisis and its reflection in literature. In a well-researched essay on the crisis, Lynn white Jr states that the roots of the crisis lie in the joining together of science and technology with “democratic culture.” This gave “mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecological effects, are out of control” (12). One major outcome of this is what Christopher Manes calls the silencing of nature by veiling its processes, which humans do

because of their “own cultural obsessions, directionalities, and motifs that have no analogues in the natural world” (15). So there is need for a “viable environmental ethics to confront the silence of nature in our contemporary regime of thought” (16).

In the nineteenth century America, writers were deeply interested in nature, for they considered it an essential part of the human world. In fact, in their writings, the “human world is set against,” what Cynthia Dietering calls “the overarching background of nature” (183). D. H. Lawrence noticed it in his study of the American literature of the nineteenth century. Traces of this are evident also in the work of twentieth century writers like William Faulkner. After that, there has been a slow withdrawal of nature from mainstream fiction. This tendency of focusing only on the human has led many to realize that “fiction that never looks beyond the human realm is profoundly false, and therefore pathological” (Dietering 194). Many writers who took notice of this began to realize “how we inhabit the planet is intimately connected to how we imagine the land and its creatures” (Ibid 194). Finding that this was missing because the landscape had been poisoned by the brutal use of technology, a great deal of dystopic fiction drew attention to the manner in which this had happened.

Moving away from this negative way of looking at the relationship between the human and the natural world, Kingsolver writes fiction and non-fiction to re-establish a healthy and fruitful connection between the two, which is based on her sound understanding of how nature actually works. For this, she writes from a location that one may not normally associate with the place of work of a writer. She describes that in her essay “Knowing our Place”: “I’ve grown accustomed to looking up from the page and letting my eyes relax on a landscape upon which no human artifact intrudes. No steel, pavement, or streetlights, no architecture lovely or otherwise, no works of public art or private enterprise—no hominid agenda. I consider myself lucky beyond words to be able to go to work every morning with something like a wilderness at my elbow” (36). This is because she “needed only to be someplace where I could think straight, remember, and properly invent. I needed the blessed emptiness of mind that comes from birdsong and dripping trees. I needed to sleep at night in a square box made of chestnut trees who died of natural causes” (37).

Such thinking could be associated with crankiness, and Kingsolver has an interesting essay “God’s Wife’s Measuring Spoons” that provides details of unusual responses to her person

and her style of work (246-266), but she considers herself blessed, for her good luck for “being able to work under the full-on gaze of mountains and animate beauty. It’s a privilege to live any part of one’s life in proximity to nature. It is a privilege, apparently, even to know that nature is out there at all” (“Knowing Our Place” 38). Living in land is not merely convenient, but also edifying: “It reminds us that our plans are small and somewhat absurd. It reminds us why, in those cases in which our plans might influence many future generations, we ought to choose carefully” (40).

After establishing her place of work right in the midst of nature, Kingsolver writes the *Prodigal Summer* to work out the synthesis of nature and art. Her clear statement of intent on this has been quoted by Linda Wagner-Martin: “I grew up chasing butterflies, went to graduate school in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and still look at the world through the eyes of a scientist ... Leaving the halls of science for the world of literature and the humanities was like jumping across the Grand Canyon: I can plainly see a great divide that exists between two kinds of thinking. I wanted to write a novel to bridge that gulf somehow. Specifically, I wished I could explain a handful of ecological principles: speciation and natural selection, the keystone predator, genetic diversity and resilience, and the Volterra principle. Which (for instance) shows mathematically why spraying a field with pesticides actually will increase the number of pests in the next generation. These principles profoundly shape the world around us, in which we hope to survive So I took my leap across the Canyon, and *Prodigal Summer* is its name” (117-118). The bringing together of the natural world and the human world, with the specific intention of the preservation of the natural is at the heart of Kingsolver’s art. In the process, she reaffirms the positive vision of Henry David Thoreau, about which she writes in “The Dispersion of Seeds,” that he “dismissed the notion that poetry and science are incompatible, and captured for his readers the simple wonder we hastily leave behind in the age of reason” (238).

Taking Kingsolver at her word and ignoring Lawrence’s well known warning of trusting the tale and not the teller might appear risky, but the discussion that follows clearly demonstrates that in her case there is no such risk. The novel *Prodigal Summer* successfully fictionalizes what she intends, in a pleasing manner. And therein lies her artistry. As a first step in this direction, Kingsolver frames an appropriate setting for building her narrative that is actually a combination of three narratives woven round its main characters and their lives. There

obviously is nothing new about creating an appropriate setting for a novel, for that has been an essential feature of novel-writing right from the time the novel came into its own, to make it different from another variety of prose fiction, the romance. As an essential part of the novel's architecture, novelists create a space that is recognizable and believable, quite often with historical markers, to make what happens in it acceptable. It provides an environment in which characters come to life, and is thus necessary for its very being. But in *Kingsolver*, location is much more than that, for it functions almost like a character. It has a personality of its own and it is through its varied attributes, which represent different aspects of nature, that the natural and the human are brought into a credible symbiotic relationship, in which the two affect each other in beneficial ways.

Prodigal Summer is set in Zebulon County, a familiar geographical terrain that abounds in all species of natural growth—farms, forests, trees, and a variety of animals—and away from the hustle and bustle of cities and towns. This is a fit place for its three narratives, in which the lives of its main characters are bound in close relationship with all varieties of life around them. In the beginning, the narratives seem independent of each other, but as they unwind at a slow pace, there is also a gradual unravelling of their interconnections, which becomes visible at the end of the novel. The narratives are prefaced with a poem, a wedding song, which functions like an epigraph for the novel, for it suggests the mood for entering into their world and the kind of things that happen in them. That is why it is in the form of an invitation to come out of the rooms that are choked with dead dreams, surely a sign of shame, and a preparation for a new spring in which “murdered dreams shall wake” and “mute birds shall sing” (xxiii). The narratives are propelled in the direction of creating this celebratory mood, which leads one of the characters to say that the summer is really a “prodigal summer, the season of extravagant procreation” (51).

Central to the narratives are human beings who are also professionals, with a clear understanding of their chosen area from nature's variety, backed by scientific study, which gives a distinct coloration to their personality. When we meet Deanna Wolfe in her cabin in the midst of a forest in the first narrative, we find that she has been there for two years, alone, with birds and animals, and trees for company. She is singularly free from civilizational contraptions and does not have even a watch. She senses time by the rhythms of nature around her, with which she is in constant communion. When she had been asked by a friend,

how she could live alone with the quiet of her secluded location, her answer was: “When human conversation stopped, the world was anything but *quiet*. She lived with wood thrushes for company” (53). The same feeling she has also for solitude: “... solitude is only a human presumption. Every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot; every choice is a world made new for the chosen” (1).

Deanna attends to her job with unusual dedication, goes for trails every day, and it is because of her vigilance that “one of the most heavily poached ranges of southern Appalachia was becoming an intact ecosystem again” (59). She wants to ensure that coyotes, who had been hit hard because of poaching, are not hurt. One day, when she is confronted by Edie Bondo, with a gun in his hand, she rightly senses that he has come for hunting animals, coyotes in particular. So she makes it a point to keep him away from them in whatever way she can. But because she has been away from male company, and almost forgetful of being a woman, she is attracted to him physically, and ends up sleeping with him. A bit of her unhappy past, her childhood without her mother, her flirtations with her teachers, her unhappy marriage, pass fleetingly in her memory, providing additional basis for her attraction towards Edie. Though she has a physical relationship with Edie, Deanna does not allow that to interfere with her mission and does everything possible to ensure “the return of a significant canid predator and the reordering of species it might bring about” (62). It is because she is acutely conscious that “North America’s richest biological home was losing its richness to one extinction after another, of plants and birds, fish, mammals, moths and stoneflies ...” (63). She knows that “the return of a large, hungry dog might work to restore stability, even after an absence of two hundred years. Rare things, endangered things, not just river life but overgrazed plants and their insect pollinators, might begin to recover” (63). In short, she understands and makes efforts towards restoring balance in the natural system that works in a chain of interdependencies and keeps the ecosystem healthy.

In this narrative section, as well as in other sections, the dialogue is the key technique for building the ideational core of the novel, which is directly related to issues arising from human indifference to nature. Deanna tells Edie that “There’s people I love. But there’s so many other kinds of life I love, too. And people act so hateful to every kind but their own” (175). That is why, nature in the novel is not exactly like what it is in Wordsworth, valued because of its beneficial effect on the humans. In *Kingsolver* the accent is on recognizing that

nature, which includes everything non-human, is important primarily in itself, because it has its own mechanisms for keeping it going, in which even predators are essential. That is why Deanna says: “I don’t love animals as *individuals*, I guess that is the way to put it. I love them as whole species. I feel like they should have the right to persist in their own ways” (177). She makes a fine distinction between natural predators and fake ones, like cats, who, if let loose in the woods can be like firebombs. She also says that “herbivores tend to have shorter lives, and they reproduce faster; they’re just geared toward expendability. They can overpopulate at the drop of a hat if nobody is eating them” (178).

When Deanna succeeds in finding the coyotes and is really worried about their wellbeing, she issues a threat to Edie to make sure that he does not even think of harming them. Because of this, he disappears from the scene. When she finds that she is pregnant, she sends a message to her old friend that she would be staying with her to give birth to her baby.

There are two distinct features to this narration, which apply to the two other narratives as well: the dialogue between humans is used for a specific purpose: to widen the knowledge of ecosphere for promoting awareness about the relationship between humans and animals and the need for saving the animals from extinction. This gives the novel the flavour of a novel of ideas, the ideas that are not philosophical or metaphysical, but ecological, and meant to improve our understanding of how the human and the animal are bound to each other in a very sensitive balance that needs to be maintained at all costs. The artistry of Kingsolver lies primarily in making sure that her characters do not look like holders of ideas—mechanical and one-dimensional—for what they discuss arises from where they have been placed. They are drawn as vibrant beings, with unusual passions and dreams, which makes them interesting and also intensely human. In fact, almost all of them are well focused, but open too. That is why they keep on growing and also responding to the world around them. Towards the end of the novel, Deanne not only looks like a mother to be, she is also inclined to move back into the human fold and see herself as part of a larger family.

The second narrative is connected with Lusa Maluf Landowski, who has a complicated lineage, and is a trained researcher on moths. Drawn towards Cole Widener, a farmer, she marries him to stay with him in his house, where she meets his large family of five sisters-in-law and their numerous children. There she has new experiences. She senses that “the

mountains breathed,” learns “to tell time with her skin” (31), and finds that nature that had been thought dead for fifty years, was “alive and kicking” (45). When Cole dies, she goes through a severe conflict, to stay on or to go back to her work place. She decides to stay, in spite of the hostility of Cole’s family, because she has a dream in which something moved into her blanket, “a mountain with the silky, pale-green extremities and maroon shoulder of a luna moth. He wrapped her in his softness, touched her face with what seemed to be the movement of trees She pushed herself down against the whole length of him, rubbing his stippled body like a forest between her legs, craving to dissolve her need inside the confidence of his embrace. It was those things exactly, his solid strength and immensity, that comforted her as he shuddered and came into her” (79). When she wakes up and looks out from the window, she sees the sky and then the honeysuckle, and that proves a revelatory moment for her. “What he’d reached out to tell her that morning, as she sat near the window was that words were not the whole truth. What she’d loved was here, and still might be, if she could find her way to it” (80).

Luna seeks the help of Garnett Walker, who is a part of the third narrative, to raise goats for earning money to keep the farm going and take the vital decision of not growing tobacco, though that could have been financially advantageous: “... we’re sitting on some of the richest dirt on this planet, and I’m going to grow *drugs* instead of food? I feel like a hypocrite” (122), she tells one of her sisters-in law Jewel. Luna’s interactions with Cole’s sisters-in-law and the children of Jewel, who is on the verge of death because of cancer, form a sizable part of this narrative. Luna explains her position to her and, in course of time, she gains acceptability among the Wideners. She also changes and becomes pleasingly human and encourages the dying mother to let her adopt her two children. She passes new knowledge to the children because they are curious to know about things that they see around them but do not understand. That there are trees that are needed by bugs and bugs are needed by birds and birds are needed by us. That makes the forest “a whole complicated thing with parts that all need each other, like a living body. It’s not just trees; it is different *kinds* of trees, all different sizes, in the right proportions. Every animal needs its own special plant to live on. And certain plants will only grow next to certain other kinds...” (354). When the novel ends, she is firmly stuck there as part of the Widener family, for she realizes that she is “married to a piece of land named Widener” (383).

The third narrative consists mostly of the humorous jousts between Garnett Walker and his neighbour Nannie Rawley. The first battle between them is related to spraying. Garnett's view is that "Success without chemicals was impossible" (87). Since Nannie is an organic farmer, who opposes spraying, he considers her a "deluded old harpy in pigtails" (87). But her reply to him is that by spraying, he is "killing all my beneficials. You're killing my pollinators. You're killing the songbirds that eat the bugs. You're just a regular death angel" (273). The two also differ on what Garnett calls the God's plan. In a letter to her he writes that the question we need to answer is: do we think of ourselves merely as one species among many or as keepers and guardians of the earth. And "If the Holy Bible is to be believed, we must view God's creatures as gifts to his favored children and use them for our own purposes, even if this occasionally causes this one or that one to get extinct after a while" (186-87). In the two previous narratives, this view has already been rejected. So Nannie too does the same. She reminds Walker how his own family lost its fortune because of the extinction of the chestnut trees. Far from affecting only a particular family, the extinction of any species will have disastrous consequences, because "Everything alive is connected to every other by fine, invisible threads. Things you don't see can help you plenty, and things you try to control will often rear back and bite you, and that's the moral of the story.... The world is a grand sight more complicated than we like to let on" (216). Quite modestly, she tells him that "We're that foolish, to think we know how to rule the world" (217). God, in fact, "gave us the mystery of a world that can re-create itself again and again" (217). And He provided food for every beast and every fowl. Garnett's main interest though is to restore the chestnut tree to the American landscape and for this he is willing to work with the Chinese chestnuts.

The interesting part of this narrative segment is that the interconnections between the three are quite clear by now. Deanne plans to spend time with her old friend Nannie. Lusa is in touch with Garnett and Garnett is willing to meet his two grandchildren who have been adopted by her. The relationship between the two neighbours that began at a sour note turns into one of friendship. Nannie helps Garnett recover from his dizziness and he helps her with shingles to repair her house. They live in amity and peace. What Lusa experiences by living on the land of her dead husband could be applied to the novel too: "It seemed to Lusa that all these scattered accounts were really parts of one long story, the history of a family that had stayed on its land" (437).

Thus we see that in these three seemingly separate narratives, Kingsolver creates an interesting novel in which the lives of individuals, with all the drama that is possible in them within the confines of the space in which they live, are also meant to promote awareness about the relationship between the human and the natural worlds. This joining of the two is made pleasing by her control over her language and style, which has been commented upon by several critics, including Linda Wagner-Martin (129-30).

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Isaac Sequeira Memorial Lecture

Culture, Nature and Literature

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Hyderabad

In the beginning was the earth and man made himself comfortable on earth by either colonizing it for his uses like Robinson Crusoe did or by requesting the earth and her prior inhabitants, the animals, the insects, the plants and the rivers for permission to live there and construct an abode. That is the classical Indian way and in Hindu ceremonies we still chant the benedictory verses placating the forces of nature and those who have a prior claim to nature for a space with them and among them. Built into our way of living is an acceptance that nature determines culture, that the geography of the space determines the history of the people and determines moreover the way they think and speak and act. It is not for nothing that Ahimsa is a part of our DNA even though at times we too indulge in acts of violence. Buddha and Gandhi had to be from India. The Indo Gangetic plain was responsible for a civilization to emerge where the metaphysical questions of the Upanishads were a natural and logical outflow of the geography, the equable climate and the general air of homeliness the space there emanated. Up North we were sheltered by the Himalayas, abode of the Gods and on three sides of our land we were protected by the sea, with the Indian Ocean washing the feet so to speak, of our Mother India. No wonder Swami Vivekananda sat at her feet on that lonely rock and meditated on India and came up with the solution to her problems. He went west and exchanged India's spiritual knowledge, of which he was a great embodiment, for western material help to feed the starving masses of our country. Ours as Diana Eck (2012) says is a sacred geography, dotted by shrines and powers which watch over us and in its ideal state Indian society is at home and in a condition of at-one-ment with the geographical space which is India. Indeed the Indian mind goes far beyond India and believes that all the world is one family—"Vasudaiva Kutumbakam." We have had our wars and our misunderstandings but the Vedic spirit and the Buddhist spirit spread far and wide, particularly in the East and not a life was taken or blood shed to propagate through logic, persuasion and example the Indian way of Life. The national airlines of Indonesia is the Garuda, Myanmar is thoroughly soaked in Indian values, The Thai Kings are called Rama, and indeed the Ahom dynasty was founded by Thai Kings, the Far East has the Ramayana as entertainment. In Indonesia there is Bali which is a Hindu enclave and C.D. Narasimhaiah was fond of telling the story of his

visit to a museum where he met a Mohammedan Curator who invited him to the Ramayana performance that evening. At the performance the curator was so excited that he was anticipating the next episode with child-like enthusiasm and clearly he knew the Ramayana inside out. CDN asked him how he, a Muslim, could empathize with a Hindu text and the answer was moving. "Dear Sir" he said "I Might be a Muslim following Islam. That is my religion, but I am a Hindu by culture." We were part of Pancha sila and we have been at peace and have gone to war only when provoked. This is India *subaeternatis*, in her ideal condition. But we cannot live in the ideal all the time, gravity must bring us down. We too in India are coping with the ravages of environmental degradation, climate change, Tsunamis, cyclones and the Earth itself as Conan Doyle's 1928 short story is screaming (Doyle). We too are caught up in the discourse of global capitalism and we sometimes seem to be losing our way. We have cultural resources which can enable a better approach to nature and allow us to contribute significantly to the problems of environmental degradation.

Compare this ideal record with the West and its world view. Whether we are engaging with the Christian world view, the Church fathers and the Missionaries or with the secular philosophers like Hegel or Marx, the Judeo-Christian pattern of thought is what under writes everything and is a common element. There is a teleology which is fundamental to the West which has the perfection of spirit or matter as its goal and sees this as a linear progression, bound by history. Christianity had a Founder, a date and its teleological end is the end of History with the Apocalypse and the holding to account of those dead and gone in a final act of Grace. Or it is Hegel's world spirit which the West makes its own because it has history and reason on its side and it must naturally preside over the dialectics of Ideas till the perfect state is reached through a process of thesis, its anti thesis and resultant synthesis, which last will be the new thesis inviting in turn its own antithesis and synthesis, thus repeating its linear movement in History till the Perfection is reached. Or it could be Marx who substituted Matter for Ideas and saw the movement of History as a linear progression from Tribal state to Slave society, to Capitalism and then the victory of the Proletariat--all this in a dialectic of class struggle leading to the perfection of a classless society. In all this the linear, the historical, the rational were important signposts and all of them shared a fundamental acceptance of the Judeo Christian view of things. That I believe is the main point of difference between Dharmic societies like ours and the West which has and continues to wield power and influence over us. Indeed though colonialism is over the decolonization

process has not been completed and our land, territory, space, landscape are helplessly in the hands of the West which controls things in a neo colonial grip. We only have an illusion of being agents in our destiny.

In the Bible I remember an episode where Jesus transfers the hysteria of a devotee on to the sheep which then madly fall into the sea. I used to ask how animals could be treated thus and I realized that this was symptomatic of an attitude which is common to Semitic faiths, that nature and animals have no souls, that they are meant for man to use and exploit. The Cartesian subject–object binary is very much part of this Judeo-Christian world view, and compels the binaries between Nature and Culture to determine environmental discourse. This is characteristic of the West. The Subject is in an oppositional relationship with Nature which is out there and which needs to be tamed and conquered. That is why there was in America the destruction of the indigenous people who had a very different relation with nature, seeing it as a continuum of themselves. That also explains the degradation of the Aborigines of Australia. The Nature–Culture divide determined the course of Western culture, and colonialism and the conquest of space are only symptomatic of this teleology. Much of the literature of the West is, therefore, the direct outgrowth of this binary way of thinking. When Crusoe lands on the island he is thinking primarily of survival and he sees the landscape as something to be exploited. He fences himself into a “civilized” space, keeping out Nature which is barbaric and dangerous. Soon he expands his colony and indeed subjugates the Other, the barbarian, and divests him of his identity and names him Man Friday. Friday serves Crusoe and Defoe’s novel becomes an apology for British colonialism and the manner in which the British colonialists treated the local natives whom they encountered. Colonialism, therefore, deterritorializes the land, and divests the occupants of that land of their singularity and specificity. Here is an example of the typical Judeo- Christian way of looking at land, nature and space. This is from John Smith’s tract “A Description of New England,” which is a classic colonial document:

Who can desire more content, that hath small means or but only his merit to advance his fortune, than to tread and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he have but the taste of virtue and magnanimity, what to such a mind can be more pleasant than planning and building a foundation for his posterity got from the rude earth by God’s blessing and his own industry without prejudice to any? If he have any grain of faith or zeal in religion, what can he do less hurtful to any, or more

agreeable to God, than to seek to convert those poor savages to know Christ and humanity, whose labors with discretion will triple requite thy charge and pains? What so truly suits with honor and honesty as the discovering things unknown: erecting towns, peopling countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, teaching virtue; and gain to our native mother country a kingdom to attend her, find employment for those that are idle because they know not what to do—so far from wronging any as to cause posterity to remember thee, and remembering thee, ever honor that remembrance with praise!”(Stern and Gross 2-3)

This is a remarkable passage because it illuminates the colonial mind set so well. Smith sees this activity of colonial adventure as useful. He is clear that the landscape must be peopled. He has no doubt that those indigenous people should be converted to Christianity. He also knows that these people can be put to work to triple the yield. There is a Christian purpose in colonialism because it is the burden of the colonizer to give the Mother country, a kingdom where people from the Mother country who are idle and do not know what to do, can be sent for gainful employment. He is also clear that in so doing he and others of his ilk are not offending or wronging any one else and that doing this is a Christian duty of remembrance of God. Thus the venal nature of man finds justification in religion and sees nothing wrong in desingularizing the native population, obliterating their culture and teaching them a new language as Crusoe did to Friday. This trajectory of thought is familiar to anyone who reads about colonialism but the point to note is that both the landscape and the people who live in it are lumped together and are suitable instruments in colonial conquest. We in India should understand this because of the way our Samskriti has been undermined by British colonialism, how the introduction of English education has created cultural amnesia. But the native resilience of the Hindu saw to it that the culture was preserved and is still active and I would argue that the nature of Hinduism is itself a guarantee for managing difference in our society and preserving its plural nature, and its heterogeneity (Malhotra).

This Nature-Culture divide is not the last word on the matter. Should it not be possible to break this binary and see culture and nature as in a symbiotic relation, one flowing into the other, indeed one becoming the other? In Transcendental writing in America, Emerson came close to suggesting the identity of Man, Nature and God and to see Nature as a hieroglyph of

spiritual truths. He was heavily influenced by Hindu thought and between him and Thoreau a remarkable literature of respect for the environment grew. The Transcendentalists, do not see nature as the other, as something to be conquered. Indeed in *Walden* Thoreau has many passages where he sees himself dissolving into the unknown, into nature. His love of nature is of a piece with his love of man and the disadvantaged. His opposition to slavery is not accidental, nor that he should have written tracts on Civil Disobedience. By a strange permutation of intellectual history, Gandhi was profoundly influenced by Thoreau's tract on civil disobedience which itself could not have been written without an understanding of Ahimsa, a Hindu and Jaina value. But it does not stop there. For Thoreau the lesson of nature is that all creatures have a place in the sun. Any diminution of any person is a diminution of the Self and Man, Nature and God are of imagination compact. That is as close to Vedanta as you can come.

The Romantic poets were also caught up with nature and defended the rural countryside against Industrialization and environmental depredation. As in the case of countless mystics, we see the subjective experience imposing itself on the Objective world and flowing into it, such that the Subject-object dichotomy popularized by Descartes is dissolved and we see a unity. It is not surprising that the Transcendentalists and Romantics had an understanding of Hindu thought and were influenced by it. The Hindu way is close to the Ecosophy of Delueze and Guattari (Guattari). In contrast to the Judeo-Christian linear view of history, a view underscored in Hegel and Marx who both saw history as a linear progression to the perfection in Ideas and in Matter, the Ecosophy of Delueze and Guattari and, I may add, the Hindu view, speak of the world as an organic and interconnected structure with no hierarchy. You can enter this Ryizomatic structure anywhere and you will see that there is an interconnectedness in all things, in Man, Nature and the Cosmos. Rajiv Malhotra has invoked the notion of Indra Jaal or Indra's net in a book eponymously titled (Malhotra), which is similar in conception. There are jewels in this net, each shining upon the other and in turn being shone upon by the others. Every thing is interrelated. Thus in a new Eco-criticism which hopefully will learn from Ecosophy, Culture will not determine what Nature is, or organize Nature according to our subjective perceptions. That sort of thing has allowed the depredation of nature leading to environmental disaster and Global capitalism which is the latest face of an earlier colonialism. On the other hand, taking inspiration from Ecosophy, if

humans see themselves as a part of nature and not *other* than it, we will be enabled to come up with initiatives to save the cosmos and Nature from the machinations of global capitalism.

2

Let us now turn to an important Indian writer in English, R. K. Narayan, who embodies in himself, a desire to write about India in English, and succeeds in giving the flavour of that life. For Narayan, nature and the landscape are deeply implicated in the lives of the characters. Swami in *Swami and Friends* (1935) wanders into the Mempi forest and needs to be rescued from it. The forest and the Hills bearing the same name are part and parcel of the consciousness of the Malgudi citizens. The Sarayu River, significantly named for its mythic reverberations, is where characters go to meditate on their disappointments or on problems facing them and if they do not find satisfaction, they even take recourse to drowning in the river. Indeed the River, like the forest, frames Malgudi and Narayan has in his non fictional prose spoken eloquently about nature and ruins which people should simply let be. Narayan kept pets, among which were a parakeet and a monkey. So animals and birds are part of his world view and are part of nature and a part of Malgudi. The whole town rises up when the temple elephant is about to be killed by Vasu, the taxidermist, in *Maneater of Malgudi* (1961) who has upset the citizens with his labours, killed many animals and stuffed them. He is portrayed as unspeakably evil and Malgudi is made up of people, nature and animals and all three are framed by Narayan's sense of the Transcendental, which gives his novels a moral character. The interrelatedness of Man and Nature and God is in the finest traditions of Hindu thought. A new Environmentalism is visible in Narayan and for him as for Ecosophy Man, Nature and the Cosmos are of imagination compact.

He also understands the inter connectedness of people. In *The Dark Room* (1938), according to Lakshmi Holmstrom (1973), he imitated the speech patterns of different kinds of Tamils from different social classes in addition to using plain English as his medium of expression. His signal achievement has been to suggest Tamil culture in English without, in the manner of Raja Rao, dislocating language or in the manner of Salman Rushdie chutnifying it. His characters drawn from Tamil life, people a landscape called Malgudi. In Malgudi we have upper caste and lower caste, North and South Indian, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, coexisting. The good characters are those who do not upset this social equilibrium, the evil ones are on the side of progress which leads to disaster. One character wants to introduce a

novel writing machine, another speculates and comes to grief, Margayya's son gets into venal ways, another character loses innocence and attempts a seduction. These are against the laws governing Malgudi, where life has gone on smoothly for generations in spite of changes and even violent disruptions (Ramanan 25-36).

Malgudi is what may be called a chronotope and is a miniature India. A chronotope is about the interconnectedness of spatial and temporal relations and this is an important element in Narayan. In this world everyone is related and everyone shares a belief system which is Brahminical and Tamil. Narayan depicts Malgudi as it had changed *externally* from the 1930s to the 1990s and he depicts these changes subtly over the years spanning six decades in the history of a small South Indian town. The Malgudi of Swami or Chandran is different from the Malgudi of later characters like Sampath or Raman who find that there are more policemen in Malgudi than before, and that traffic in Malgudi has increased with more cars on the road. That is, of course, Narayan representing the changing face of India, which Malgudi embodies. The Characters also lose their innocence and there is a difference between the innocence of Swami, and Chandran of the 1930s and the knowingness of Vasu, Raju and Raman of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Malgudi has changed and that change is depicted subtly. Here is a passage from the *Painter of Signs* (1976):

His reverie ended when a policeman on traffic duty on the fountain blew his whistle and gestured to him to move on. When Raman failed to obey, he blew his whistle again and flourished his arms wildly. Raman felt, they won't leave one in peace. This is a jungle where other beasts are constantly on the prowl to attack and bite off a mouthful, if one is not careful. As if this were New York and I blocked the traffic on Broadway. He would not recognize it, but Malgudi was changing in 1972. It was the base for a hydro-electric project somewhere on the Mempi Hills, and jeeps and lorries passed through the market Road all day. The city had a new Superintendent of Police who was trying out new ideas. Policemen were posted every few yards. They seemed to be excited at the spectacle of all this traffic, he thought, imagining that we are on the verge of disaster, I suppose with pedestrians and vehicles bumping into each other. (Narayan 12)

However, though Malgudi might have changed, because the objective conditions do not remain static over time, and India was a developing country, the fact is that it remains an

abiding presence, a part of an unchanging India, totally absorbed in the play of Providence. Ranga Rao (2004) has rightly called Narayan a Guna Novelist. Malgudi is the background against which the characters work out their moral issues and people in Malgudi are either Tamasic (dull and evil), or Rajasic (aggressive and capable of evil) or Sattvic (essentially virtuous and good). The dull and Tamasic with a mixture of Rajas is someone like Vasu in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* who plots to kill the sacred elephant, while he has chalked up an impressive number of dead animals and birds which he has stuffed, and aggressively intruded into the home of the printer. Raju in *The Guide* (1958), is a mix of the Rajasic evil Asura modulating into the Sattvic saint. He starts as a tea stall owner, becomes a guide, highly popular with tourists to Malgudi and meets up with Rosie and Marco, Rosie's unfeeling archeologist husband. Raju's desire for Rosie (not acceptable to Malgudi—his mother remonstrates with him) takes him into the path of evil and he gets his comeuppance when he is arrested for forgery. Sampath in the eponymously titled novel (1949) is a mixture of the Tamasic and Rajasic evil but Narayan humanely spares him a tragic end, allowing him to make amends for his evil propensities. Sampath's natural do-gooder attitudes, I believe, save him, as Narayan works out the theory of good and bad Karma in Sampath's progress. The innocence of Swami and Chandran and of Savitri, Ponni and Mari in *The Dark Room* is contrasted with the sexuality of Raju and Rosie and that of Raman and Daisy. Everything is interconnected and the problems of one character in a profound way impinge on the lives of others. This is because of the moral attitudes generated by Narayan's acceptance of the Hindu idea of Purusharthas.

The Purusharthas—the four ends of a good life—frame life in Malgudi. The four-fold ends are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Every Hindu is enjoined to pursue these ends subject to the over arching frame of the Dharmic life. Dharma is righteousness, Artha is the economic life, Kama is the instinctual and Moksha is the final liberation every Hindu seeks. A Malgudian can pursue the materialistic life, provided he does it under the control of Dharma. The Instinctual life is also acceptable so long as it is not Adharmic like Raju's love for Rosie or Raman's for Daisy or Sampath's for the movie actor. Narayan is conscious of these values and though he encounters and depicts a materialistic and venal India he is always gesturing towards Dharma. In *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) Bharati and the hero, Sriram remain tantalizingly on the brink of marriage but the Mahatma who has blessed their union is murdered. They probably marry but true to their Gandhian commitment they live for Dharma,

the country and the nation. On the whole Narayan in addition to the Purusharthas, believes in the Hindu idea of the four-fold division of life into Brahmacharya, Grahastya, Vanaprasta and Sanyasa and many of his characters go through life with these ideals informing their actions. Chandran almost detaches himself from life to become a mendicant before he is firmly married off to perform his Grahastya duties. Raju becomes a recluse and an accidental Sanyasi after a life of debauchery and immorality. The Vendor of Sweets, Jagan, becomes a sanyasi who wants to hand over his business to his son and go up the mountain and live among the gods. Of course he decides to keep his cheque book as a precaution! Narayan is sly in this. Upsetting the order is not acceptable to Malgudi and Narayan, who would like characters to move up to the last stages of Moksha after living life well in Dharmic terms. The worldly interpenetrates the spiritual. Other characters through six decades of writing for Narayan, marry, carry on their family commitments and fight battles with evil in various forms and come out successful. Narayan seems to have an implicit faith in this good and moral life. We must not forget that Narayan was taken up by the *Mahabharata* which he summarized (1978) and the *Ramayana* of Kamban, which he was devoted to due to the exhortations of an uncle and wrote a version of (1992), and that he also wrote about Puranic Characters in *Gods, Demons and Others* (1993). Narayan knew the great myths of India. And it is significant that he identifies himself with the Harikatha exponents in the villages and their leisurely and timeless way of telling stories. The timeless matters for Narayan and he was clearly conscious of the metaphysical and transcendental dimension of Indian life and his realism is tempered by his commitment to the Transcendental. History modulates into myth and Naipaul (1968) who accused him of representing a static India hardly takes into consideration this blend in Narayan. He is complex in his fusion of transcendence and immanence, of history and fiction, of myth and reality. That reality is solidly specified. We know that when Malgudi was visited by the Mahatma its population was small but by the time he writes in the 60s Malgudi has become a town with 1,00,000 people. Malgudi continues to have its Post office and its rural bank, it has its banyan tree under whose shade the Money lender or the astrologer would ply his trade. There is the Municipal Building and the Chairman and there are politicians. There is the vendor of sweets whose Gandhian qualities distinguish him from other traders and whose sweets are better than those at other eateries. In other hotels the intellectuals of Malgudi gather for gossip and news and talk. Malgudi still believes in the old style arranged marriage and marriage scenes are described by Narayan with elan. He is brilliant when he describes food and food for Malgudi is important

even if it is only the morsels which the children get from loving grandmothers who are the repository of old world wisdom. It is not for nothing that Narayan wrote his wonderful *Grandmother's Tale* (1992) as a tribute to Malgudi's senior citizens and to his own formidable grandmother. Funerals are described as in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, where Narayan cocks a snook at priests and other sundry venal types by causing the grandmother of Sriram to rise from the dead so to speak. Narayan in his own way is rebellious but never will he break the norms of ultimate acceptance and conformity. But moral issues are fought out and nothing in a Narayan novel can be predicted because like P.G.Wodehouse's, it is a slippery world, pointing to the mutability of reality and life. Thus in Narayan, I would argue that we have a great novelist who gestures in the direction of a world wholly interconnected and where Nature is seen as human and God pervades both. This is a whole lot different from the predatory writings of John Smith or Defoe.

3

I shall now turn to some contemporary poetry where these links between nature and the cosmos and man are more concentratedly evoked. Ted Hughes, for example, was a contrast to The Movement writers who were part of a civilized discourse, that is poets who valued an almost 18th century sense of decorum and propriety and indeed were called genteel. Hughes was raw and violent and he was influenced by Blake and Lawrence in his openness to experience and willingness to put himself forward like his wife, Sylvia Plath, the American Confessional poet, did. Hughes in poems like "Thought Fox" attempts to get into the consciousness, so to speak of birds and beasts, in this case a fox, and makes a connection between nature and the poet and the business of creativity. He is a shaman in this respect and moves out of the human into the non human as an act of reparation for all the damage caused to the environment. He is a nature poet but not quite in the way Wordsworth or any of the Romantic poets were. In the latter there are vestiges of the Cartesian Subject-Object divide and the poet's ego plays a role in any representation of Nature though it is in the service of a final unity. In other words the subjectivity of the poet determines the kind of response one has to nature. In Hughes this distinction is collapsed and we begin to see things from the consciousness of the non human. In one poem he makes a Crow speak to us from its vantage point in the sky looking at the human world and contemplating violence. It is almost as though Hughes believes that nature's revenge through violence may have a therapeutic effect on human beings and that the poet is the transmitter of this non human message. His "The

Horses” are so different from Philip Larkin’s horses in “At Grass,” the latter genteel and tired and dignified, the former threatening violence and aggression against human presence. In poem after poem Hughes links himself with Nature, obliterating his ego and personality. In a different way the same sort of thing happens in Seamus Heaney where we have a variation of the theme. Heaney is an Irish nationalist intent on digging into the earth to get to the ancient roots of his culture. He writes what are called *Disenncheas* poems where, as he himself put it, the poet connects with his ancient roots by digging. His poem “Digging” is a case in point. Heaney through this procedure shows that archaeological digging is a way to connect with nature and the cosmos and with national identity. In other words the nation comprises nature, the land and the human presence and promoting one at the expense of the other is against the laws of the environment. One more example and this is from some of the poets of the American Deep Imagist School which in the Sixties and Seventies uncannily anticipated the Deep Ecology of Arne Naess. Deep Ecology is expected to formulate a comprehensive philosophical and ecological world view and poets like Bly, Merwin, Simic and Wright go deep into consciousness to do precisely that. While they do not work with personal materials like the Confessional poets, they concentrate in the finest traditions of ecology, on Nature as an objective reality, on landscape, and obliterating the subjective ego, escape from the self into the mysterious sources of energy in Nature. Examples are poems like “The Night of the Shirts” by W.S. Merwin, “Knife” by Charles Simic, Robert Bly’s “Moving Inward at Last” significantly titled, and James Wright’s “The jewel” which I quote:

There is this cave

In the air behind my body

That nobody is going to touch:

A cloister, a silence

Closing around a blossom of fire.

When I stand upright in the wind

My bones turn into dark emeralds. (Ramanan 23-24)

The poem, in Richard Howard’s words about Charles Simic, draws on the “remote elements of the imagination of hinterlands” and it has the aura of the sacred. Unlike a Hopkins who

would dramatize his struggle with God, or Robert Lowell who would balance the public with the personal, and historicize his deepest urges, Wright here frankly writes about the eternal, about the ultimate, about the cosmos and the environment. His poem participates in the collective unconscious of the race and is profoundly suggestive of a voyage inwards. In some ways it is a poem by an initiate about initiates to the initiated and it has its special dictional qualities. He obliterates his ego, but nevertheless, dives deeply inwards and makes common cause with nature by relating his deepest urges to that of Nature and both to the larger cosmos. There is nothing here like the public debate in a Yeats poem. It is hermetic, closed and even obscure unless you do the mental leap towards it and understand that here Nature itself is speaking in the voice of a shamanic poet who is possessed. In this sort of poetry there is a complete abandonment of the subject-object binary. The blurring gives us intimations of immortality and it is in poetry like this that poets, conscious of the threat to the world from global capitalism and the environmental disasters imminent, can fight a rearguard action to salvage mankind. It is consciousness of Nature and environmentalism with a new look. They speak in the voice of Nature in the form of birds and beasts like mooses and these poets are making amends and making friends with nature who in her revenge could very well create a tsunami or a Pralaya. We in India understand this sort of thing and our classical poetry is a poetry of accommodation of Nature. Tamil poetry has the Tinai poetics of the Aham and Porul, the subjective self and the objective Nature speaking to each other, one in terms of the other.

If we want to save ourselves we have to befriend Nature and my essay is a suggestive attempt for us to reorient ourselves and seek a common destiny with Nature and the cosmos. We must necessarily become Ecosophists.

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ISM Award Winner

Mnemonic Maps of an Imagined Home: Exploring Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*

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Abstract: Deconstructing memories in relation to place and temporality becomes an intriguing exercise as questions on belonging, identity and interrogations of “home” emerge. Poststructuralist and deconstructive perspectives on identity, memory, belonging and sense of place bring about the need to see power structures and hegemony embedded in these notions; making them arbitrary sites of inclusion and exclusion. This paper seeks to explore the linkages between, memory, identity and home in a space-time continuum wherein memory becomes part of a socio-political and philosophical deliberation in search of negotiations to contour and buttress the idea of “home” and self in a global time of living and forgetting.

In this paper, I propose to look at memory as an ideological tool, going beyond its political ramifications to emphasize on its engendering role in the evolution of culture, identity and Being with the help of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972). This novel written as a conversation between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo becomes symptomatic of the culture of nostalgia and its engagement with the concepts of identity, citizenship and the traveller/foreigner. Altering between remembering and forgetting, memory and history, nostalgia and imagination, Calvino foregrounds the function of memory in historiography and the obligations that memories pertain to which need to be recorded and fulfilled.

Keywords: Memory, Home, Identity, Belonging, Place

Memory is identity
--Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened Of*

Let us look for a third tiger. This one
Will be a form in my dream like all the others,
A system, an arrangement of human language,
And not the flesh-and-bone tiger
That, out of reach of all mythologies,
Paces the earth. I know all this; yet something
Drives me to this ancient, perverse adventure,

Foolish and vague, yet still I keep on looking
Throughout the evening for the other tiger,
The one not in this poem.
--J.L. Borges, "The Other Tiger"

Deconstructing memories in relation to place and temporality becomes an intriguing exercise as questions on belonging, identity and interrogations of 'home' emerge in present times. Poststructuralist and deconstructive perspectives on identity, memory, belonging and sense of place have brought out the need to see power structures and hegemony embedded in these notions; making them arbitrary sites of inclusion and exclusion. Contemporaneity sees globalization seeking the blurring of boundaries and establishment of the "global village" where identities are no longer territorially marked. Re-emergence of ethnic conflicts and nationalist tendencies challenging the notion of the "world citizen" put the discrepancies inherent in the discourse of globalization into focus. This new identity in a globalised space cannot entirely do away with the importance of memory and land. One may speak of the global space superseding the collectivity that is nation and bringing forth perhaps a space devoid of any regional association. However, globalised space cannot be a post people and post memory space.

Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) in his *Social Frameworks* (1925) talked of the ways socially organized transmission in the form of oral traditions, historical accounts and memoirs, images, photographs and actions not only influenced but also affected and transmitted memories. A rather enthralling opinion presented by Halbwachs regarding the transmission of memories was the role of space as a medium for it. If Halbwachs's mentor, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) had talked of time as a social construct and temporal locator of things which occur in social, everyday life; Halbwachs through an emphasis on space brings in the significance of the mnemotechniques devised during the ancient times. The discovery of this mnemotechnique is associated with Simonides (556 B.C.-446 B.C.) who developed the art of memory and the technique of "memory palace." It is a way wherein things to be remembered are mentally associated with physical locations and is one of the earliest associations and linking of memory with place. The advent of modernism brought in the Bergsonian conceptualization wherein memory became symptomatic of an intuitive and imaginative grasp of time and interpretative renderings of the notion of self. This gets further explored by

Italo Calvino in his novella *Invisible Cities* (1972) giving us a past and a present which remain both compliant and ductile in this fantastical depiction. According to Marco Polo, “it is not the voice that commands the story; it is the ear” (Calvino 35).

Memory unlike history, is not to be categorised or theorized, but simply make its subjective, spontaneous albeit chaotic nature be felt through the prose of Calvino, much like that of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1955). The plot revolves around meetings between an aging Tartar emperor Kublai Khan and young Marco Polo who has been asked by Khan to regale him with accounts of cities that lie within his vast realm and empire. Polo tells him about cities of delight and desire, cities tinged with regrets, vibrant cities, cities that defy logic and time, cities made of dreams and overtime, and broken dreams. Captivated but skeptical of the traveller’s tales, the emperor, probes and jousts with Polo, during all their exchanges; only to be eventually revealed by Polo that each of his descriptions may be reflections of his home--Venice. “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice ... Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little” (Calvino 78). The novella resembles a prose poem and is a reordering of the emotional and philosophical reverberations of our civilized world and our human condition. Every interlude between Khan and Polo becomes a thought experiment about powerful structure-empires, governments, languages, lands and tales. “Only in Marco Polo’s accounts was Kublai Khan able to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termite’s gnawing” (Calvino 5).

Calvino goes on to create a literary mnemonic map with its own myths through the novella and a specific idea bound to a spatial temporal locus emerges. The play of history and memory enmeshes quite successfully in the novella as the various constructions and reconstructions that enable and disable them through time are brought forth. The rhizome theory put forward by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) becomes appropriate to Calvino’s fiction and helps readings and interpretations of the text to move beyond, giving the reader a perspective that heterogeneous comprehensions may be preferred in a postmodern world of multiplicity but somewhere the singular universality of a memory based identity and outlook remains. Deleuze and Guattari outlined the theory based on the morph-like ability of the rhizome where the rhizome is seen as non-hierarchical, multiple, heterogeneous and devoid of a centre. A rhizome tends to resist structures of domination, is anti-genealogical and indulges

in cycles of “deterritorializing” and “reterritorializing.” The novella gives another meaning to representation for it nudges the readers to a method of signification wherein meaning does not remain enclosed in historical circumstances entirely:

“I have constructed in my mind a model city from which all possible cities can be deduced,” Kublai said. “It contains everything corresponding to the norm.” “I have also thought of a model city, from which I deduce all the others,” Marco answered. “It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions.” (Calvino 61)

As the novella shows, the city of Venice becomes an identity marker and reference point for Marco Polo in the novella as he tries to define himself and his home in various ways through other imagined cities. Aleida Assman tells us that to think about memory one must begin with forgetting and in *Invisible Cities* we find that has been Calvino’s purpose precisely besides incorporating post-modernist perspectival tendencies onto a modern discourse of identity, memory and place. Through his personal memories of angst, separation and existential crisis, Marco Polo posits his longing for Venice, a city and home that he has to literally leave as he travels. This singular memory which becomes intertwined in all his descriptions of different cities he has seen; becomes not just a lived and sometimes hidden experience but a “jouissance” in the face of change. Using interesting anecdotes and descriptions, Calvino very deftly captures the categorization of belonging and being the perpetual “other”/foreigner in the cities that one temporarily resides. Anticipating Pamuk’s *huzun* for Istanbul, Calvino becomes a precursor to this feeling of overwhelming nostalgia and melancholy for people or place who/which might never return. Unlike nostalgia, which is always linked to the loss or being apart from “home,” melancholy doesn’t derive itself from homelessness; and instead evokes feelings of loss regarding that which once was beautiful. This is a different kind of displacement that Marco Polo in *Invisible Cities* faces unlike those who have been forcefully displaced, exiled or voluntarily migrated; it’s a cultural and emotional displacement. The novella evokes, at once, feelings of estrangement as well as existential questions, which resound with the prevalent notions and significance of the linkage between memory and identity in a post modern and global world:

Irene is a name for a city in the distance, and if you approach, it changes. For those who pass it without entering, the city is one thing; it is another for those who are

trapped by it and never leave. There is the city where you arrive for the first time; and there is another city which you leave never to return. Each deserves a different name; perhaps I have already spoken of Irene under other names; perhaps I have spoken only of Irene. (Calvino 112)

The construction of the idea of home linked to memory is developed throughout the novella; a travelogue filled with descriptions of imaginary cities evoking the sublimity of time and the self. A nostalgic memory drenched in temporal loss is what we find in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, a mnemonic longing glimpsed in Marco Polo's descriptions of his travels to Kublai Khan. Ultimately memory becomes a temporal intermesh of knowing, remembering and a deliberate forgetting affecting the being and psyche in a descriptive, enclosed topography. For Patrick Hutton, history becomes the linking factor between memory's points of "repetition" and "recollection" and carries forward the past into a better understanding of the present. The function of memory in historiography becomes significant and the obligations that memories pertain to need to be recorded and fulfilled. With the advancement in technology the connection between memory and oblivion becomes more entwined and transformed.

Influenced by J.L. Borges, Calvino too in *Invisible Cities* investigates the art of storytelling and the role of the writer as well and emphasizes the role of nostalgia in a changing global culture trying to make sense and interpret the ways of living in globalized times. In the course of his discussions with Kublai Khan, Polo, in the novella describes a series of metropolises, each of which bears a woman's name, and each of which is radically different from all the others. The descriptions of these fifty five cities are arranged in eleven groups in Calvino's text: Cities and Memory, Cities and Desire, Cities and Signs, Thin Cities, Trading Cities, Cities and Eyes, Cities and Names, Cities and the Dead, Cities and the Sky, Continuous Cities, and Hidden Cities. These cities characterized by propinquity, like Foucault's heterotopia, become for the writer a way to map and write memory into a reality reminiscent to the self. Zaira consists of relationships between measurements of its space and the events of its past; Melania, cities of the dead where everybody has numerous roles; Armalia, forest of pipes, taps, showers, without buildings; Tamara, where citizens do not see things but its images. Euphemia, "the city where memory is traded at every solstice and equinox" (Calvino 31), and Zobeide, which was found by men of various nations having an identical dream. Leonia, a city where residents pursue consumerism to its logical extreme, daily throwing out

goods to make room for new items while trash forms vast and indestructible landscapes. All become multiple ways as well as paradoxically, a singular way of investigating one's history, sense of belonging and truth to address the essential idea of "home."

Peter Washington maintains that *Invisible Cities* is "impossible to classify in formal terms." But the novella remains an exploration, sometimes playful, sometimes melancholy, espousing the powers of imagination, fate of human culture, and the elusive nature of storytelling itself. As Kublai speculates, "perhaps this dialogue of ours is taking place between two beggars named Kublai Khan and Marco Polo; as they sift through a rubbish heap, piling up rusted flotsam, scraps of cloth, wastepaper, while drunk on the few sips of bad wine, they see all the treasure of the East shine around them" (Calvino 104). Calvino provides specific information about the strategies that Marco Polo and Kublai use to communicate with each other, initially. Before he learned Kublai's language, Marco Polo "could express himself only by drawing objects from his baggage—drums, salt fish, necklaces of wart hogs' teeth—and pointing to them with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder or of horror, imitating the bay of the jackal, the hoot of the owl" (Calvino 18). Even after they have become fluent in one another's languages, Marco and Kublai find communication based on gestures and objects immensely satisfying. This becomes a poststructuralist commentary on language and its arbitrary conferment of meanings to words, as cities become text and metaphor for language, not fixed but palimpsests of past forms superimposed. "Kublai thought: 'If each city is like a game of chess, the day when I have learned the rules, I shall finally possess my empire, even if I shall never succeed in knowing all the cities it contains'" (Calvino 109).

Calvino tells us:

In Esmeralda, city of water, a network of canals and a network of streets span and intersect each other. To go from one place to another you have always the choice between land and boat: and since the shortest distance between two points in Esmeralda is not a straight line but a zigzag that ramifies in tortuous optional routes, the ways that open to each passerby are never two, but many, and they increase further for those who alternate a stretch by boat with one on dry land. And so Esmeralda's inhabitants are spared the boredom of following the same streets every day. (120)

Calvino's expression of a Borgesian worldview finds itself condensed in the many cities described by Polo in the novella. The passages in italics in the novella are narrated in the third person, with the dialogue of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan in quotes except from the seventh section where they appear as *dramatis personae*. The omniscient narrator fades into the puzzling mnemonic algebra of the *Invisible Cities*. Calvino lets the readers negotiate the labyrinthine way through the book, traversing historical epochs and maps, creating a strange urban space that seems to shape, to construct an impossible architecture of desires, dreams and memories.

The narrative structure is not homogeneous as well as it does not allow the reader to search for a centre, or a consolation for some sort of unifying meaning, indicating and defeating the cartographic and structuralist tendencies to order, categorize and name. The city of Esmeralda is full of narrators, perspectives, lines, alleys that an absent presence tries to subsume under its hierarchical model. Passersby are immersed in the tangled streets of Esmeralda, with infinite narration or, on the other hand, with infinite possibilities of reading their routes (so there is no repetition). Esmeralda resembles our contemporary disjointed sense of space and place, the loss of the dimensional mechanics of ancient Greek geometry (old world order), conformity in unity, entity and symmetry. Thus, Esmeralda anticipates this crisis of representation and its fractured bond to memory and identity; rejecting the possibility of an omnipresent narrator as well as the meaning situated in the central square. Swallows flying over Esmeralda, dominate "from every point of their airy paths all the points of the city" (Calvino 80).

The instruction on how to move around Esmeralda may at the same time suggest how to read Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. It cannot be a narratology with its roots in structuralism, in an overly structural schematization of texts, a drive to universalize and essentialize Esmeralda's urban design, a constant tendency to conceive an essential universal scientific or divine grid of its streets and squares. Calvino's Esmeralda opposes narrative theory that constructs the space of the text as a unitary, homogenous space, determined by whatever constant: "the shortest distance between two points is not the straight line but a zigzag" (Calvino 80). The rhizome, like the routes of Esmeralda, is reducible "neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added (n+1)" (Deleuze & Guattari). A parallel reading of the rhizome's characteristics and an intrinsic web of *Invisible Cities* reveals many

similarities: any point of a rhizome can be connected to or must be connected to any other, as though imaginary city plans flow into Marco Polo's account or Kublai Khan's remarks, or an invisible narrator; in the rhizome just as in *Invisible Cities* there are no points or positions, since multiplicity never allows itself to be coded; points of fixed meaning in *Invisible Cities* are eradicated by constant contradiction within each or on the whole Atlas; a rhizome can be broken off at any point and reconnected following one of its lines ("in the seed of the city of just, a malignant seed is hidden" [Calvino 132]); rhizomes as cities are in a state of constant modification; no one can provide a global description of the whole rhizome, as Kublai Khan could not master his Empire by an abstract system of signs; "“On the day when I know all the emblems,” he asked Marco, ‘shall I be able to possess my empire, at last?’ And the Venetian answered: ‘Sire, do not believe it. On that day you will be an emblem among emblems.’” (Calvino 19). Finally, the map of the rhizome as *Invisible Cities* is connected to the maps of promised lands, of the summation of all the cities into one, but not by hierarchy. As Calvino tells us that utopia cannot be a fable enclosed in only one possible narrative, in any grand-narrative of modernist manner. It might be becoming in the present, yet its map constantly changes its colours, its borders, its explanation. That is Polo's answer to the Emperor who asked to "which of these futures the favouring winds are driving us":

I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city , made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop. Perhaps while we speak, it is rising, scattered, within the confines of your empire: you can hunt for it, but only in the way I have said. (Calvino 144)

Calvino's novella becomes an elaboration of individual longing with regard to self and identity as it gets lost to time. Consequently there is also the imperative to reclaim that which has been lost to time. In Calvino, the city becomes a semblance of the metaphysical landscape, conceived to bridge the gap between material and immaterial dimensions of the construction of the self in place and time. Cities are constantly transforming themselves, like languages, from the cosmological centrality of ancient cities to the perspective of the Renaissance individual composed in the universe, to the social, functional space of modernism, to the postmodern conception of urban fabric as fragmented, a “palimpsest” of

past forms superimposed upon each other. “You have given up trying to understand whether, hidden in some sac or wrinkle of these dilapidated surroundings there exists a Penthesilea, the visitor can recognize and remember, or whether Penthesilea is only the outskirts of itself. The question that now begins to gnaw at your mind is more anguished: outside Penthesilea does an outside exist?” (Calvino 142). Calvino also addresses the politics of cartography for memory, an important component of identity, that has been moulded by maps and cartography. Erasing old thought systems of identification, it carved out new lines and borders, so powerful in conception and existence that they influenced the cognitive capabilities of an individual, a whole community and the world. “Marco Polo states ... ‘travelling, you realize that differences are lost ... your atlas preserves the differences intact’” (Calvino 125).

Perhaps the more the novella tends toward the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that singularity and unicum which is the self of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But Calvino asserts in an interview: “Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopaedia, a library, and inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and recorded in every way conceivable.” This novella gives a glimpse to a Platonic understanding of memory and identity in a fast transforming world and its associations. Remembering in this text becomes a philosophical and existential interrogation into the nature of self (transcendental as well as political) and like Plotinus, Calvino too looks at the empowering role that memory bestows to the soul, individual and collective. Delving into issues of othering, stereotyping and naming, the novella stands out as a metaphysical manifesto of an imaginative understanding of mnemonic, place-based identity and the psychical associations of space and mind in the construction of self and perhaps even the being; giving it a purpose even in seeming chaos: “seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space” (Calvino 148).

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Pictures of Native Nature in Old-Polish Literature (XVI-XVIII)

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Abstract: Polish literature created the first images of native nature in the 16th century. This was done as a reaction to the ancient Greek and Latin cultures. A typical piece of this poetics presents a safe and quiet place of life, free of political or social problems, eg Mikolaj Rej's *Żywot człowieka poczciwego* (1568) [*Life of a Good Man*]. However, even before Christianity had firmly set its roots in Poland in the eleventh century, the depiction of nature was according to the Slavic tradition. Thus, the paintings of sacred nature, which were to be valued and worshiped are to be found in Jan Kochanowski's *Pieśń o spustoszeniu Podola* (1586) [*The Song about the Despair of the Podole*], Oraz's *Pieśń Świętojańska o Sobótce* (1586) [*The Song Saint John's Eve*] and Szymon Zimorowic's *Roksolanki* (1624) [*Ruthenian Girls*]. A man living in his native land felt fulfilled and happy, cared for his old habits, felt strongly connected with the seasons of the year and the laws of nature. In subsequent centuries the concept of nature underwent changes. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came Sarmatism, a cultural concept, which stated that the Poles came from the ancient, agricultural and warrior nation of the Sarmat living around the Black Sea since the 4th century B.C. Literature from the late 17th and early 18th centuries shows native nature as the most important place on earth. The literary hero is not looking for excitement abroad, he is not interested in foreign cultures, but he cares about his own earthly estate, his homeland with which he feels emotionally connected, eg Waclaw Potocki's, *Ogród fraszek* (1691) [*Garden of Epigrams*], Jan Chryzostom Pasek's, *Pamiętniki* (1695) [*Diaries*] and Elzbieta Drużbacka's, *Opis czterech pór roku* (1750) [*The Description of the Four Seasons of the Year*].

Keywords: Polish literature XVI-XVIII, Literary description of nature, Space studies, Eco-poetics studies

Nature, Nativeness and Patriotism

Discussing the relationship between ecology and literature sometimes seems a new humanistic idea resulting from the problems of the modern world threatened by air, water and

soil pollution (Przybylski, Janion, Fedorczyk). Meanwhile, it is worth noting that from the perspective of the history of universal literature, literary works were created in ancient times, in which the motif of nature or family land was quite common. Literature in the Polish language has its origins in the thirteenth century, but in the beginning it was strongly influenced by the Latin tradition. Till the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, classical literature continued to influence Polish literature; it was only later that Polish literature was able to shed its classical influences and evolve as a literature of the Polish people. Images of nature first appeared in the native literature of the sixteenth century and since then have become a key factor in Polish literature, sometimes valued for itself, sometimes as a character in its own right.

The first example of this type of representation of nature in the Polish tradition is found in *Pieśń o żubrze* (original in Latin: *Carmen de bisonte*), in 1523. Written by a Catholic priest Mikołaj Hussowski (1475-1533), the poem was to be a literary complement to the gift prepared for Pope Leo X, to whom a Polish aristocrat intended to give a stuffed bison. The gift was not handed over because the Pope had died. Therefore, the song about the bison was dedicated to the queen of Poland--Bona Sforza. The composition and narration of the work is connected with hunting; however the Polish author searched for originality and went beyond the patterns of ancient authors. The poet makes very pertinent observations regarding the natural world and vividly describes the flora and fauna of the place, in which the most distinguished animal was the bison. While presenting the natural world, Hussowski also refers to the history of the area, which is modern day Lithuania. The originality of his poem lies in the fact that the preservation of the natural assets from destruction is prioritized over the aesthetic value of nature (Krókowski, Backvis, Ochmański). Therefore, this work may be considered as the first example of the Polish ecological poem.

Polish Renaissance Model and Literary Images of Nature

The period of the proper Renaissance in Poland began around the mid-15th century. However the most interesting achievements in the Polish literature of the Renaissance can be found in the second half of the 16th century (Pelc, Ziomek, Wilczek). At that time, the Renaissance man appeared against the background of nature. These images resulted from the aesthetic response to classical works from Ancient Greek and Latin literatures. The Greek works of

Theocrit (3rd century BC) and Latin ones of Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 1st century BC) had the greatest influence here.

An example of this type of literature in the Polish tradition are the works of Mikołaj Rej (1505-1569), sometimes called the “father of Polish literature.” Besides satirical, moralistic and didactic works, Mikołaj Rej also wrote *Żywot człowieka poczciwego* (1556) [*The Life of the Honest Man*]. It is a prose description of a country house, a safe place where you could spend a peaceful life, free from political and social problems. The hero of the work is a nobleman. Not an aristocrat, or an ordinary peasant, but a man who limits himself to the basic needs of life and directs his activities to working on the field, in the garden, and in the family environment. As to the nature surrounding him, he does not intend to conquer it, but rather take advantage of its wealth, as a host who cares for order in his estates. The “honest man” is someone who knows the realities of life in the countryside, who co-exists with the seasons and listens intently to the needs of the community in which he lives. He accepts the passing of time peacefully; is not excessively ambitious nor does he aspire for political power. This attitude towards life was promoted by the ancient stoics, who were read by the creators of the Polish Renaissance. Mikołaj Rej was, after all, a Christian who could take life's wisdom from nature's phenomena and accept death in the hope of eternal life in heaven (Witczak, Kochan).

During the Renaissance, there appeared in Polish literature, the native trend of representing nature in the Slavic tradition, which had existed before the advent of Christianity in Poland in the 10th century. According to Slavic beliefs, nature was represented by the deities of fire, water, sky and earth. In the imagination of the ancient Slavs, nature therefore had religious significance, which had to be honoured and worshipped (Baczewski, Gutowski, Linkner). Some of the beliefs and customs of the Slavs were preserved by Polish authors of Renaissance literature. An important example of a writer in whose work one can find the motifs of nature, family land and landscape is Jan Kochanowski (Korolko, Pelc, Ulewicz). It is worth paying attention to his *Pieśń Świętojańska o Sobótce* (1586) [*Saint John's Eve*], which, despite having motifs from Virgil and Horace, is based on the pre-Christian traditions. The poem is divided into twelve parts, which are narrated by women. The themes of the individual pieces focus on the following depictions: celebration after work on the fields, dance of joy, sensual love, land of eternal happiness, disadvantages of hunting, charms of pastoralism, the myth of changing a girl into a nightingale, barbarism of war and finally--the ideal woman. The song, according to Kochanowski's recommendations, should be performed

during the spring solstice to celebrate the night of the Slavic Knight Kupala as well as the night of St. John. The intention of the poet, is thus, to highlight the vitality and power of nature's forces. A man joining with the forces of earth and sky becomes their integral part, which provides him with a sense of fulfillment and meaning. He will not experience such values if he is focused on material life and is devoted to satisfying his selfish ambitions (Ziemba, Ulewicz).

Jan Kochanowski also wrote *Pieśń o spustoszeniu Podola* (1586) [*Lament on War-Ravaged Podolia*], a lyrical piece in which the images of nature and landscape are combined with a patriotic motif. The basic content here is a description of the destruction that occurred at the southern end of the then Poland, which had been attacked by the Tatars. The images of burnt towns and villages, scenes of kidnapping and arson are reinforced by images of destruction of the natural world. The war caused the desolation of forests, farms, orchards and apiaries, creating a gloomy vision of future years in which food would be lacking. The author suggests that the beauty of nature can only be appreciated in times of peace, while wars always bring chaos and poverty.

Baroque and Sarmatism

Polish literature of the next century was marked by new baroque aesthetics and religious discussions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but there were no fundamental changes in the descriptions of nature. Nature was either idyllic or bucolic. The myth of Arcadia, the land of happiness and fulfillment, which was essentially pastoral was renewed. (Witkowska, Krzewińska, Karpiński). However, at the beginning of the Baroque in Poland, a poem, *Officina ferraria* by Walenty Roździeński, the administrator of Silesian mines and smelters, was written in 1612. This work shows the development of industry in one of the regions of Poland, as well as customs, beliefs and social relations among metallurgists and miners. The work shows Silesia as a space where the best iron ore deposits in Europe are found, and the whole region as the best industrialized part of contemporary Poland (Pluszczewski, Piaskowski, Jarosz). This is a very interesting poem as far as the depiction of the natural world is concerned because it shows how a traditionally agrarian culture is transformed into an industrial model. Roździeński understands the development of civilization as an example of the genius of man and his will to dominate. He does not mark

the negative effects of the march of civilization in his work, praising builders, blacksmiths, steelworkers and miners instead.

The distinctness of the Polish model of baroque literature, in relation to what was developed in Italy or France, was the cultural concept of Sarmatism. It was created around the mid-seventeenth century, by representatives of the nobility, who began to have a greater say in state policy. According to a mythical novel, *Barok polski wobec Europy* (2003), especially popular in the Baroque, Poles as a nation came from the ancient Sarmatians, the people living around the Black Sea around the 4th century BC. Sarmatians in the representations of Polish writers were basically agrarian and very brave. By their nature they were not aggressive, and only took up arms if they had to defend their homeland. Their settling on the banks of the Vistula and the Dnieper resulted from their desire for a peaceful life without the constant threat from the Romans.

Polish literature emerging under the influence of Sarmatism shows the native local natural environment as the most important and the most beautiful place on earth. None of the other parts of the world are as important as a homely area, with well-known flora and fauna that is not intended to be damaged or changed. Szymon Zimorowic's *Roksolanki* (1624) [*Roksolankas*] is a poem that glorifies the power of love, which is only present in the natural surroundings, not in the aristocratic manor or the crowded, noisy city (Grześkowiak). The poet reaches for symbolism and love metaphors, deriving them from various sources. The first group is associated with the symbols of classical poetry: figures of Muses, Cupid, and Venus; the second group draws its symbols from folk traditions: a pair of birds, a wreath made of roses, a rosemary wreath. Therefore, the images and metaphors of this cycle of songs is a syncretic blend of ancient and folkloric motifs. For example, an image of the orchard and apple trees, simultaneously conjures up the biblical world of Eden, as well as the popular perception of erotica; apples being a symbol of female breasts. The same is true with the images of birds, where the descriptions of pigeon pairs, swallows or storks are as much a reference to the motifs of ancient literature as to the use of folk associations linking these birds with fertility, happiness and wealth.

In the last century of the Old Polish epoch, the works of Elżbieta Drużbacka are significant. In her *Opisanie czterech części roku* (1750) [*The Description of the Four Seasons of the*

Year], she once again reached out for the idyll genre to show the specificity of the Slavic-Polish approach to the world. The work consists of parts describing spring, summer, autumn and winter, which exist as a manifestation of Divine will. The work is a descriptive poem, and we find in it a meticulously outlined world of plants, animals, forest landscape, farm fields, wastelands, lakes and rivers. Descriptions of the seasons and geographical space, though not free from Greek and Roman mythology, are written freely, without erudite quotes or stylistic displays. In the poem, one notices the technique of anthropomorphizing nature and a more modern conviction about the rational order of the world (Borowy, Stasiewicz). According to Drużbacka, nature should be respected because it is proof of the existence of God, and a reflection of the harmony and beauty of the universal order.

The eighteenth century in Polish culture marked the end of the Old Polish period and the advent of the modern era, i. e. Classicism or Enlightenment (Bajda, Średniowiecze, Renesans, Barok, Matoszko-Czwalinśka). From the middle of the century, the influences of French and English culture, the philosophy of rationalism and empiricism, encyclopedic and utilitarian attitudes were becoming more noticeable in Polish literature. Native nature ceased to be attractive. According to the world view of the Enlightenment, nature became mainly an object of exploitation, a space to be acquired and managed by man. The advent of romanticism changed this approach and nature became a super reality, even divine. However, that is another kind of story . . .

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That Funny, Nomadic Boy: Interrogating the Function of Intersecting Spaces in *Funny Boy*

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Abstract: Set against the backdrop of ethnic and racial tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka which led to the 1983 riots in the country, Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* explores and comments upon the aforementioned backdrop via the medium of the coming-of-age story of a Tamil boy Arjie (Arjun Chelvaratnam) whose fears, anxieties, and curiosities become the pretext for a scathing commentary on the madness that ensues in the name of cultural and racial preservation, which ultimately results in far reaching consequences for the whole Tamil community in Sri Lanka. So the personal space of a young boy becomes a medium to explore the public space of the whole country, a process that is symptomatic of the outer world impinging upon the inner and the inescapability of it.

The texture of the novel *Funny Boy* is informed by a host of different places and spaces which become either the symbolic representations of or the sites where contesting ideas and ideologies clash with each other; more often than not we see a binary oppositional relationship between these spaces which reinforces the theme of difference that stands out in the novel—the difference between the Sinhalese and Tamils, between heteronormativity and homosexuality, between masculinity and femininity. Some of the kinds of spaces that we encounter in the novel are: (i) Fictional Spaces (the game of bride-ride, Henry Newbolt's poems), (ii) Metaphorical Spaces (childhood and adulthood), (iii) Conceptual Spaces (Gender and Sexual Orientation), (iv) Physical Spaces. It is this matrix of spaces that makes up the web-like texture of the novel—a mish-mash and crisscrossing of various influences within the bounds of spaces and locations that drive the action of the novel. This paper will specifically seek to understand how this intersectional structure of spaces operates upon and has a formative influence on the individuality (the personal space) of Arjie, who, because he cohabits multiple spaces at the same time, operates as the Deleuzian nomad when negotiating with these, thereby making him the site where contesting ideologies battle it out and contribute to the mental make-up of the young boy caught up in the quagmire of ethnic and racial violence and gender crises.

More crucially, this nomadic thought is replicated at the generic level as well because the novel confounds any attempts at neat categorization. This plays into the hands of the author, himself the inhabitant of multiple subject-positions, very much like Arjie, and then utilizes this Lukacsian “transcendental homelessness” for a specifically political purpose of exposing and unraveling various larger forces at work in the political and social landscape of Sri Lanka—racial, ethnic, linguistic, legal, and sexual. Selvadurai thus engages in a literary map-making exercise, making possible the emergence of a textual space which vies with its cartographic counterpart and official channels of history for authenticity.

Keywords: Deleuzian “nomad thought,” Lukacsian “transcendental homelessness,” literary cartography, textual space, genre, bildungsroman, school story, focalization, Jamesonian “cognitive mapping”

The spatial study of the novel *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai, published in 1994, that this paper aims to conduct follows a largely bifurcated pattern. The first portion of the paper is aimed at delineating the host of places and spaces found within the novel, analyzing their intersectional relationship with each other which has a tremendously formative influence on the individuality of the protagonist Arjun Chelvaratnam (lovingly known as Arjie in the novel) and his characterization in the novel. This portion of the paper will rely heavily on Gilles Deleuze’s theory of nomadology, which he developed in collaboration with Felix Guattari. We will seek to establish how Arjie embodies the Deleuzian “nomad thought” which allows him to navigate between various physical, metaphorical, and conceptual spaces and categories, with little to no success in the project of assimilation. We will also comment on how Arjie’s own lack of a fixed space is a direct consequence of his inhabiting multiple spaces at the same time, which mirrors the ontological condition of this novel itself, which also cohabits so many generic geographies that it runs the risk of becoming a non-genre. Read this way the mish-mash of spaces, both on Arjie’s level and the generic level, serves to exemplify the notion of thrownness of Martin Heidegger who states in *Being and Time* that “the ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence” (qtd. in Tally Jr. 65), wherein Dasein represents the condition of being in the world itself. However, this perceived Lukacsian “transcendental homelessness,” again at both the individual and generic levels, does not degenerate into an apolitical hopelessness or helplessness. In fact, this positioning at the outside, or forever-in-betweenness allows Arjie and the novel to be transgressive and occupy an agential vantage point. This links up the first portion with the second portion of the paper which specifically

deals with how the private space of Arjie gets intertwined with the public sphere, with the latter constantly impinging upon the former in various ways through racial discrimination, gendered expectations, and ethnic violence. In this latter portion of the paper, we have argued for an expressly political positioning of the author Shyam Selvadurai, very much engaged with the pressing cultural contemporary scenario of Sri Lanka and actively involved in the process of observing, interpreting, and representing this scenario for his readers. Selvadurai thus engages in a literary map-making exercise, which results in Sri Lanka emerging as a textual space, an “imagined space,” thus leading to the generation of an alternative discourse to the dubious claims forwarded in the official channels of history of the nation. Robert T. Tally Jr. in his work *Spatiality* describes this exercise in the following terms:

(L)iterature ... functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live ... Literature provides a way of mapping the spaces encountered or imagined in the author’s experience ... the stories frequently perform the function of maps. (2)

As hinted above, this literary cartography of Sri Lanka happens through the narrative forces aimed at characterization of Arjie, thus the exercise and its results seem only incidental and secondary to the demands of the genres of bildungsroman, children’s story, and school story, all of which energies are harnessed towards Arjie, the protagonist. So the personal space of the young boy becomes a medium to explore the public space that implicates the whole of Sri Lanka, a process that is symptomatic of the outer world impinging upon the inner and the inescapability of this process. This narrative stance of focalization on an individual for exploration of larger forces at work, which is not unlike Frederic Jameson’s practice of “cognitive mapping,” “which would allow the individual subject to locate itself and to represent a seemingly unrepresentable social totality” (Tally Jr. 155), links up well with Ricardo Padron’s assertion of superiority of literary cartography over geographical cartography:

By telling stories that take place in them, or by sculpting characters associated with them, (literary texts) give those places life and meaning. Indeed, any iconographic maps of the worlds...might even miss the point, by reducing their rich engagement with space and place to the fixity of a cartographic image.” (Tally Jr. 3)

The novelistic discourse of Selvadurai's work is largely dependent upon the multiplicity of spatial locations emerging and intersecting with each other, so much so that the whole spatial structure of the novel seems to derive its thrust from the seemingly binary oppositional relationship these spaces share with each other, lending a very complex spatial arrangement to the novel. The most fundamental spaces in so far as Arjie's character development is concerned are the Physical Spaces--School (Victorian Academy), Family Home, and Paradise Beach Resort; Metaphorical Spaces--Childhood and Innocence, Adulthood and Common-Sense; Conceptual Spaces--Heterosexuality and Homosexuality, Masculinity and Femininity; Fictional Spaces--game of bride-ride, Henry Newbolt's poems. It could be argued that the Metaphorical or Conceptual Spaces that have been pointed out have the potential of being as fictive, performative, voyeuristic, and exhibitionistic as the game of bride-ride, which allows Arjie to "leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, and more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve" (Selvadurai 4-5). However the intention of this paper is not to obfuscate categorization and deconstruct the exclusivity of compartments but to facilitate this very categorization of spatialities to understand how they contribute to the process of meaning-making.

The physical spaces, the most visible and obvious sites operating according to the notions of middle class respectability which becomes a necessary precondition for a nationalist and patriotic agenda, are the first spaces where Arjie undergoes the process of seclusion, exclusion, and alienation from the majoritarian discourse, thereby making possible his emergence as the "impossible subject" of the nation, as Gayatri Gopinath in her book *Impossible Diasporas: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* puts it. However this process of exclusion is accompanied by a sense of empowerment as well, because these sites inhere potentialities of transgression as well. It is in the family home where Arjie explores his transgender, and possibly transvestite, desires, when playing the game of bride-ride. The space of school serves the purpose of ironic commentary on the masculinization agenda of Arjie's father because it is here that Arjie meets with Shehan and embarks upon his sexual exploration. The spaces of the school and family home get intertwined when Arjie's first same-sex encounter receives its expression in the latter space, with a person who distinctively belongs to the former, Shehan. What is telling is that this first act of sexual encounter takes place at the margins of the family home, "a neglected space ... that very

alveoli of domestic non-space” (239) in Tariq Jazeel’s words. This symbolic ousting of forbidden taboo desires is replicated in Arjie’s father’s Paradise Beach Resort, where the process of solicitation and pandering happens out on the beach, which Appa willingly turns a blind eye to. Crucially for Arjie, he witnesses his father’s hypocrisy and realizes the transgressive potential that is immanent in every space, no matter how sacred and sacrosanct they are upheld to be. As Jazeel points out in “Because Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, Race, and the Geographies of Difference in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*”:

Two familiar middle-class Sri Lankan spaces--the family home and the school ... these everyday geographies regulate and normalize carnal desire in a society which still operates anti-homosexual legislation. It also suggests how the erosion of the meanings of these familiar spaces is a tactic central to the main protagonist’s sexual liberation. (231)

Arjie, the precocious young boy, is more than adept at this task--“erosion of the meanings”--as we see that through his ingenuity and imaginativeness he is always able to discover “some new way to enliven (a well-loved fairy story), some new twist to the plot of a familiar tale” (Selvadurai 4). His creative imaginativeness then assumes the shape of a very credible threat to the prescribed meanings given by the chauvinist, sexist, masculinist ideology to the space of the backyard of family home, an arena reserved only for girls. The complementary space to this is the field in front of the house, where boys play cricket. The implications for mobility, or the lack of it, in these complementary yin-yang spaces is too obvious to be commented upon. What is interesting is how Arjie de-territorializes and reterritorializes these strictly regimented Cartesian spaces, until Tanuja “Her Fatness” arrives on the scene and reclaims the feminine territory from Arjie. Tanuja, recently returned from the West, espouses the no-nonsense, unimaginative heteronormativity, another conceptual space which Arjie has to negotiate with. On a formal level, the novel also breaks away from a utopian, idealistic tone with imminent arrival of Tanuja. Arjie observes, right before Tanuja enters onto the scene that “the remembered innocence of childhood ... is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them ... (t)hose Sundays, when I was seven, marked the beginning of my exile from the world I loved” (5). This wistful, nostalgic tone taken right before Tanuja, who stands in for the hetero-norm, enters, is indicative of the troubled waters this novelistic ship is about to chart into now. With Tanuja’s arrival, Arjie’s difference from the norm will be exacerbated even further and he must now navigate these

geographies of differences between Heterosexuality and Homosexuality, Masculinity and Femininity which will take him away from the “safe harbor of childhood towards the precarious waters of adult life” (5). In fact, Tanuja’s arrival makes Arjie embark upon the process of learning the codes of this adult world which revolve around the opposition between forces of Secularism and Fundamentalism, Socialism and Neoliberalism, Tamilian and Sinhalese languages, which process will ultimately act as a catalyst for his initiation into this world and the concomitant rejection of those aspects of this adult world which do not fit in well with his own ontology of difference. In an exemplary case of his deification of this difference, Arjie rejects both Lokubandara, the stand-in for nationalist Sinhalese fundamentalist sentiments as well as Black Tie, the Williamsian “residual” of colonial secularist thought, who is the lesser evil of the two and the only choice for Tamilians in the microscopic world of Victorian Academy. But Arjie realizes that:

The taken-for-granted microgeographical theatres of everyday life constitute crucial technologies that attempt to discipline his body, to regulate sexual desires, to safeguard heteronormative masculinity, thus producing in this case a boy who feels “funny.” (Jazeel 234)

Arjie is the “funny” one in the family—“the ambiguity of the word “funny” disorients Arjie’s sense of meaning and comprehension. When Arjie hears the word uttered it is inflected with ridicule and his parents react with shame and disgust” (Jayawickrama 121). The idea of fun or laughter being the subversive other that destabilizes the existing hierarchies makes our protagonist the inhabitant of the psychological space of the “Other,” where, to appropriate W.E.B. Du Bois’ postcolonial terminology, he embodies “double consciousness”—(a) his emergent/latent same sex desires, and (b) the shame that he feels is associated with the taboo. At the beginning of his process of learning the codes of the adult world, Arjie is as much a product of the masculinist patriarchal ideology as he is a victim of it. He is unable to imagine his mother as anything other than a goddess and imagines only the sentimental, mawkish, feminized responses from Radha Aunty in a courtship. The shame and guilt that he feels at “betraying” his family members after his sexual encounter with Shehan are indicative of the fact that initially, Arjie is both an insider as well as an outsider, both a partaker of and a conscientious objector to the geopolitics of Sri Lankan society. However, *Funny Boy* is the tale of Arjie’s quest to unlearn whatever he has learned about sexuality and gender roles. Soon, “guilt and fear fade and it becomes clear that this was a necessary unsettling of the trust

and respectability invested in the home-space, a subversion of the impossible demands that domestic patriarchy and gender expectations make of Arjie” (Jazeel 240). Arjie has to inhabit, investigate, and then reject multiple local and localized spaces which resemble Foucauldian capillaries of power which enable the power relations of the hegemonic order to be suffused throughout the social space rather than just at the nation-state level, which is immediately visible. These localized spaces serve as microscopic renditions of the same hegemon, power-structure, and ideological relations as the macroscopic spaces, “revealing how the nation’s political rift is similar to its social upheavals” (Lesk 31). Arjie’s “persistent ‘disidentification’ with such topographies, spatialities, and their political goals ... (are) ... crucial to the re-articulation of democratic contestation” (Jazeel 246). But disidentification can come only after identification and Arjie’s subversive treatment and negotiation of his psychological of “Other” and numerous other conceptual, metaphorical, symbolic, and physical spaces that police his “transgressive otherness” becomes crucial for the ultimate coming-of-age.

Arjie, in this process, becomes the Deleuzian nomad, inhabiting multiple spaces at a time, which resembles Selvadurai's own position as a Sri Lankan diasporic writer, writing in exile from Canada, after receiving his training in North American academia, writing about Sri Lanka. The problem of neatly categorizing his "hyphenated identity ..., an in-betweenness" (Bakshi 13) empowers Selvadurai to transcend and challenge generic limitations as well, resulting in a nomadic work of art. Kaustav Bakshi in "Funny Boy and the Pleasure of Breaking Rules: Bending Genre and Gender in ‘The Best School of All’” convincingly argues that Selvadurai's text derives its disruptive potential from the "rule-breaking that takes place not only at the narrative, but also at the generic level" (13). Bakshi applauds Selvadurai for his successful "queering a traditionally masculinist genre of the English canon" (3). In a similar argument about genre of novel, Katherine Bell in her essay "Breaking the Narrative Ties that Bind in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*" speaks about how this novel departs from the classic bildungsroman, which depends upon the soul-nation allegory--"to come to age means to work on inner development so that *vernunft*--the spirit of the private self--might fuse with the evolving socio-political body" (259). If "the trajectory of the Bildungsroman joins the singular protagonist to the collective cultural movement" (Bell 271), the obviousness of the failure at such integration of Arjie with the nation's destiny foregoes any commentary whatsoever. What is important however is that Arjie takes a conscious decision to not

emulate the alternative to this national spirit either --nation-space as conceived by the LTTE revolutionaries who would willingly support Black Tie's secular agenda-, the Tamilian zeitgeist, when in a representative space of school, the microcosmic spatial reflection of political turbulence in Sri Lanka, Arjie refuses the chance to embrace the opportunity of "representability," wherein "the value of the youth lies" (Bell 259) in a classic bildungsroman, the opportunity afforded to him by Black Tie. The resulting novel thus shuttles between various generic geographies--school story, counter-bildungsroman, novel, collection of short stories, diary entries etc. This novel is the generic equivalent of both Arjie and Selvadurai, the Deleuzian nomads, who traverse various and vast fields for fun. The result is a "disruptive queer narrative that effectively transcribes the homoerotic onto a site of approved homosociality ... Selvadurai's revisiting of the English school story invests the genre with a disruptive potential unknown to its original form" (Bakshi 1).

The various frameworks and their attendant spaces that the novel wittingly or unwittingly investigates--the linguistic, the legal, the economic, the racial, the communal--all serve to highlight a highly regularized, deeply divisive, and politically turbulent Sri Lanka, which rightly becomes equated in the mind of our innocent protagonist with the ruling dispensation. The disturbing trend is that this ruling dispensation does not even make an attempt to mask its discriminatory practices--the revision of the Constitution by the Sri Lankan government in 1972 to preserve the imagined privileges of Sinhalese majority and its religion Buddhism through state protection being emblematic of its unabashed racism and communalism. Sri Lanka thus emerges as a deeply fraught place, inhabited by opposing extremist camps and those caught in the crossfire. Selvadurai's literary mapping project is expressly concerned with delineating the national contours of Sri Lanka and he highlights the discriminatory aspects which effectively contribute to the socio-political reality of the country. However, Selvadurai's intention is also to map the psychological terrain of his child protagonist and there the questions of gender, sexuality, even genre become as important, if not more, as the larger reality, so much so that the latter often appears merely incidental than rigorously maintained. Emily S. Davis in "The Betrayals of Neo-Liberalism in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*" quotes the novelist at length:

I felt I couldn't get into the novel, when told through the child's perspective, the sophisticated explanation of what is going on, how the "liberalization" of the economy played into communal tension, how everything was being taken from the

poor, with the government's consequent need for scapegoating the minorities ... It wasn't possible to bring that in through Arjie's consciousness." (217)

The impossibility of a direct sophisticated exploration results largely from the generic constraints. Therefore all these concerns are merely suggested than delved into in detail. However it is in its suggestiveness, evocativeness, and deceptive simplicity where the force of the argument gains its clarity. In the narrative map-making of *Funny Boy*, the perceived innocence of Arjie serves as a literary tool to bring out the geographical divisions of Sri Lanka on the basis of ethnicity which leads to a "territorialized geography," the uneven terrain of Sri Lankan political sphere inhabited by conniving, politicking, populist, murderous leaders, qualities which bring out Arjie's innocence in sharp relief.

During the course of the novel, Arjie experiences what Tally Jr. refers to a "cartographic anxiety, or spatial perplexity that appears to be part of our fundamental being-in-the-world" (1). To overcome this spatial disorientation, a marker or a sign like that of "You Are Here" in a map is most useful. This "sign," in the case of Arjie is his queer identity which acts as both a map to navigate his surroundings as well as his own forever ontological position. Queerness then acts as both the symptom of his outsider status as well as the key (the map) that explains to him the whats and whys of his existence. Queerness is both his map as well as the key through which he understands and makes sense of this map; "queerness then becomes a path of political resistance against heteronormativity and refusing to engage in traditional essentialist identity politics" (Aute 1). Moving very close to R. Raj Rao's assertion that "gay fiction needs to be mapped differently, with sexuality rather than nationality, race, or gender as the determinants of identity, so that if a writer is gay it does not matter that he comes from the developed or developing world, or is white or black" (118), our constant harping upon Arjie's queer identity is aimed towards understanding his subject-position as a strategic essentialist position, to appropriate Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak's postcolonial phrase.

Colombo, the geospace, is the cartographic equivalent of Arjie's location. But this statement refuses to shed any considerable light when compared with the novel's unraveling of Colombo as an organism, a textual space which showcases the conventional attitudes of patriarchy, sexism, ethnic violence, and homophobia, exposing the geospace for what it truly is, in all its complexity. This information the cartographic entity refuses (or is unable) to divulge and appears to be closer to the official history of Colombo and by extension Sri Lanka, which cannot accept this reality. As opposed to that, the textual Colombo in *Funny*

Boy reveals a fictive reality of a society laden with various social ills and appears closer to the truth. The irony and hypocrisy of labeling Arjie and Shehan the "ills and burdens of society" is all too evident in this non-propagandistic, unfiltered, de-sanitized vision of Colombo. This spatial reconstruction then vies with official history for authenticity. Literary spatiality thus lends itself to re-writing of history--a New Historicist endeavor. The "black-dots" on the pages of *Funny Boy* thus produce a highly charged, pulsating, threatening, volatile, destabilizing space that possesses the power to give the lie to history. Thus, Selvadurai is able to offer a literary space that questions itself--"by reappropriating the genre he shows how postcolonial nation *ought* to be imagined--by acknowledging differences, sexual or ethnic, and not in monolithic homogeneous terms" (Bakshi 13).

What we have attempted here looks like Bertrand Westphal's preferred mode of Geocriticism which "attempts to pry criticism loose from an egocentrism, with respect to either the writer or the reader" (Tally Jr. 142). We have been more concerned with the author's apprehension and arrangement of various spaces throughout the novel, to reveal the political, economic, and highly gendered structuring of Sri Lankan society. However, the aim is not to see whether Selvadurai achieves or what he sets out to do--gauging that and assessing a work on the basis of that is not only impossible but also undesirable, even a fallacy for some--but the final effect of the novel in its unwitting or deliberate spatial analysis; what Sri Lanka looks like after reading the novel, to ponder on that question has been our endeavor--a highly repressed, striated (both in commonplace sense of "divisive" as well as a highly specialized meaning the word has in Geophilosophy), discriminatory, sexist, neo-liberalist, capitalist world order. In this world order, Arjie initially functions as the epitome of both "nomadic thought" as well as "state philosophy." To quote Robert Tally Jr. at length:

Deleuze distinguishes between nomads, who are understood as such because of their border crossings or re-crossings, but also because of their conceptual demolishing of the boundary lines themselves, and the state and "state philosophy," which are defined in terms of sedentary ordering, spatial measurement, the segmenting of the rank and file, and a conceptual gridding that attempts to assign stable places. In their occupation of space, their deconstruction of boundaries, and movement across surfaces Deleuze's nomads continually map and remap, altering spaces even as they traverse them. They are, in Deleuze's language, forces of de-territorialization,

unsettling to a greater or lesser extent the metric ordering of space that is subject to the power of the state." (136)

As we have seen, in the years growing up, Arjie inhabits both the thought-spaces, but only to later negotiate himself out completely of the limiting state philosophy, which ends in a poignant realization that he is forever going to be outside and never reconcile with his family members, who, after their own respective processes of negotiation, have re-acquired the state thought-space. Arjie's own map-making and its negotiation is representative of him moving towards the "smooth space" of a nomad, his own smoothening out of the striations, so to speak. However, as a word of caution against liberation that apparently comes in the wake of acquiring smooth space, Deleuze and Guattari state that the "smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries" (qtd. in Tally Jr. 138). Arjie's struggle then is more of a political re-alignment than a romantic acceptance of his queer identity in a vacuum.

The genre of bildungsroman itself is appropriated for a "smooth" spatial philosophical argument, which makes it transgressive and thus a counter-bildungsroman. "This concept of space allows for a more dynamic or transgressive movement that (this novel) explores in its frequently problematic representations of space, in which the lines between fictional and real spaces are constantly crossed and re-crossed" (Tally Jr. 141). What we have in the end is a complex matrix of Edward Soja's "real," "imagined," and "real-and-imagined spaces" (qtd. in Tally Jr. 146).

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Academia as a Site of Feminist Heterotopia in Carolyn Heilbrun's *Death in a Tenured Position*

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I believe that women have long searched, and continue to search, for an identity "other" than their own. Caught in the convention of their sex, they have sought an escape from gender.

--Carolyn Heilbrun *Writing a Woman's Life* 111

Abstract: This paper attempts to study Carolyn Heilbrun's *Death in a Tenured Position* as a text where academia has been depicted as a site to script feminist heterotopia,¹ an enigmatic space which is considered as a gender diluted space by Janet Mandelbaum, the protagonist of the novel. She tries to visualize the university as a place where a counter discourse of identity can be constructed. The paper would bring forth Carolyn Heilbrun's work as a bewildering welter of discourses that work towards changing our perception regarding identity formation.

Space is a language that can be employed to articulate social relationships. "Every language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space; and every discourse is emitted from a space" (Lefebvre 132). The paper further explores the characters in their struggle to negotiate their subjectivity as the novel deals with the negotiation of boundaries and the meaning of heterotopia. Janet in the novel tries to develop a strategy that may ensure a secure zone, for the formation of her subjective identity. Because subjectivity is formed within power relations and through discourses, these heterotopias hold the possibility for re-imagining subjectivity. I argue that Carolyn Heilbrun's politics of appropriation and transformation allows her to confront tradition, leading to breaking away from stereotypes. Her narrative works as a site of mediation, a mode of inquiry, a place to negotiate a number of poststructuralist theories and to combine them imaginatively in a fictional narrative. Carolyn Heilbrun's heterotopia of illusion creates a space of illusion that exposes every real space. The University of Harvard paradoxically, symbolizes both, the most rigidly entrenched

patriarchal institutions and also a context in which feminist political interventions might take hold, a kind of feminist heterotopia as imagined by Janet Mandelbaum, the first fictional woman professor of Harvard. My paper examines feminist resistance to prescriptive bodily policies and practices and further helps in visualizing heterotopic spaces in which new possibilities can arise--“other space”-- that disrupts the hegemonic status quo and allows for alternatives.

Key words: Feminism, heterotopia, academia, identity formation

Women still represent a minority in the higher echelons of universities and scientific institutions; this fictional work represents strategies used to keep women out. Historically the main strategy was to refuse to admit women. This refusal was accompanied by discourses devaluing women’s intellectual capacities, while stressing their domestic and motherly duties, and by the actual burdening of women with these duties. When women succeeded in entering universities, subsequent strategies have been appropriated by men including sexual harassment, anti-feminist intellectual harassment, ostracism and ridicule. The novel deals with academia which is dominated by men and how the men who are at the helm of affairs in academia are motivated by a wish to defend specific interests and privileges to keep women out of higher positions in universities.

The analysis is concerned with how the writer deals with stereotypical assumptions, gender identity and power inequality, and how the protagonist copes with socially determined traditional roles. The study attempts to verify whether her choice results in the articulation of an alternative discourse. Further it is probed that by challenging traditional representations of women, Carolyn Heilbrun may be offering a reconstruction of existing social constructs.

According to Judith Butler “Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘woman,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (*Gender Trouble 2*). Here Janet could not escape the patriarchal meta narrative which allows a little space to women to give them a sense of emancipation but at the same time does not allow them total assertion. It is merely an eye wash to show that much is being done to increase the representation of women in academia. Janet finds herself implicated in the very system which she wishes to free of the sexist bias.

In 1978 Harvard, the idea of women professors was still something to be viewed with, if not utter revulsion, but at least with significant apprehension. It was a time when “women’s studies” was considered a fad and an unnecessary program. As Sheila Reinharz notes:

During the so-called first wave of the women’s movement in the US . . . women struggled for the right to be educated. In the second wave, women strove for additional goals related to education: the right to criticise the accepted body of knowledge, the right to create knowledge, and the right to be educators and educational administrators. (10–11)

Harvard’s all men committee strategically hires Janet Mandelbaum, who also disdains such things as “women’s studies” and who aspires only to succeed on merit. At misogynistic Harvard, though, to gain success simply on merit, one must first be a man. Janet faces harassment for having entered Harvard which was monopolised by men. Janet thus, finds herself ostracized, misrepresented, caricatured and ridiculed. Soon, she finds herself drugged and left in the women’s room, with a sister from the commune, Luellen May. Her reputation suffers due to this embarrassingly contrived incident. Kate Fansler, a professor from New York, is asked to help out Janet, and Kate agrees; she secures a position as a Fellow and begins to consider the reason behind the attempt to discredit Janet. Soon Janet is found dead, and the police arrest Moon; Janet’s ex-husband, whom Kate believes to be innocent. Kate then turns to a lawyer to help her friend while she investigates the death. Kate Fansler’s investigation eventually proves that the death is a suicide precipitated in part by Janet’s disappointment at not being taken seriously as an intellectual, but as some-one who represents women; ‘a sort of token.’ The novel highlights how “a token woman is reluctantly included in a male community” (Heilbrun 990). Harvard’s perpetual misogyny is exposed and provoked by the direct intervention of Kate Fransler.

Kate suspects the entire Harvard faculty is guilty of murdering its first tenured woman professor in order to “scotch the whole scheme” of female faculty (106). The blame for Janet’s suicide falls firmly on male dominated Harvard itself. As Clarkville confesses, “I do think we all behaved badly, very badly indeed. But we aren’t used to dealing with women as colleagues” (Cross 140). And Kate through her investigation of the murder came to the conclusion--“We all conspired in it. We isolated her, we gave her no community. Only death welcomed her” (Cross 158).

The novel exploits a university context or space in an attempt to fathom the intersection of the female mind and the female body, and, in the process, to develop a critique of the misogyny endemic within social institutions as spaces. For Janet Mandelbaum, her body signifies sexual difference which becomes a hindrance and a cause of discrimination against her intellectual freedom. “From the time of Aristotle, woman has been deemed inferior to man, identified as body (her genitals turned inside out), her soul debatably non-existent, and her “deliberative faculty” declared to be “without authority” (Agonito 54).

The constitutive forces outside, force Janet to loathe her female body. The insistence in an academic context on women’s bodies suggests that the body is profoundly inescapable, untranscendable of the inferiorization that is forcibly attached to it even in the loftiest of contexts:

The contrast of mind and body, of academy and “real life,” represents a standoff between feminism, in theory, that is, feminism as an idealized, abstracted, often times academic pursuit and feminism in practice, which involves difficult demands of the body, of the daily degradations and humiliations that put theory to the test, find it wanting, and foregrounds the work needed to be done to fine-tune its generalizing assumptions. (Dever 185)

Janet’s situation in Harvard typifies to the atmosphere of ridicule, contempt and sexual reductionism. “The instances of harassment do not have to be physical in order to do harm. Sexual remarks and misogynist comments, coupled with social ostracism and marginalization, represent an assault on the integrity and self-esteem of women, challenging her capacity to perform her job effectively, undermining her ability to develop any sustained sense of professional competence, and draining her creative energy in the endless need to invent stratagems of self-protection” (Kolodny 17).

In the novel Janet Madelbaun’s career is stunted by the male dominance in academia. The atmosphere of covert and overt hostility towards her makes her unable to act in Harvard on her own terms. Harvard’s English Department emerges even more powerfully as the emblem of patriarchal privilege rather than a heterotopia as imagined by Janet. The men in academia feel that women have invaded a male territory and appropriated male prerogatives. It echoes the anti-feminist discourse characteristic of the backlash in their behaviour towards women.

They create a highly hostile environment, in which women educators feel unwelcome in academia.

Janet did work towards a change of gender norms but failed. Janet stood for queer; at odd with the normal, the legitimate, and the dominant. She tried to rise above the confines of identity and reinvent herself on her own terms. Janet's non-conformation to the radical feminist movement was seen as a threat to the feminist movement. She is detested by the women of the commune. Janet is unable to comprehend the reality of her own existence: that she must seek to establish her identity in the hyphenated space between feminists and patriarchs. Her self-actualization beyond the binaries becomes a cause of trouble. Having resisted or rejected the roles and expectations of a hegemonic male culture, Janet finds herself between, neither altogether here nor there, not one kind of person or another. Rather than viewing such liminality as negative, Heilbrun sees it as positive, offering the possibility of self-creation. Liminality is thus closely allied with feminism, broadly defined, in the sense that it permits creativity on both personal and professional levels.

The university, paradoxically, symbolizes both the most rigidly entrenched patriarchal institutions and also a context in which feminist political interventions might take hold. In this it stands somewhat optimistically for the potential of feminism to transform the world by active participation in the academia. It has been suggested through the belated regret of the male professors who sort of precipitated the suicide of Janet by their behavior towards women in academia.

As fictional text, this novel clearly has much at stake in underscoring the importance of fictional and literary works to a larger feminist project. It is hinted and implied in the text that institutions like Harvard can become the sites upon which the semiotic war of alternative images would take place and newer meanings would be disseminated. Harvard is viewed as a heterotopia by Janet where she could escape the fate of her gender. Heterotopia is a concept in human geography elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. Janet's death sort of paves the way for future developments in institutions of higher education.

The novel also asks certain pertinent questions as to whether the entry of women in public spaces signifies gender equality. The architectural exclusion of women from Harvard only underscores a more widespread pattern of exclusion justified by the generally accepted belief that women are lesser intellectuals than men. As long as the public sphere continues to use sexualized notions projecting the two genders as unequal, mere entering the public spaces by women would not signify gender equality. Universities, like Harvard are sites of socialization where the traditional values of gender are stored and imparted. As such, these institutions can be viewed as arenas from which the solutions to gender related conflicts could be found. There are still strong gender divisions within established professions and within the academy, with men continuing to occupy powerful decision-making positions. The death of Janet rustles Harvard to challenge the male monopoly of knowledge and exclusion of women from both the production of knowledge and positions of power. Women within institutions of higher learning can help in developing an oppositional discourse within academia. The “other place” created by feminist resistance provides fertile soil for engaging in practices of freedom and re-imagining female subjectivity. Academic institutions do have a significant role in regulating power to shape how people and culture think about women and gender systems. Universities can serve as a potential site for development of knowledge to be disseminated in the society; for which women should be built into the foundational assumptions of universities and not just be treated as token additions.

It is important to recognize that the episodes that have been described in the novel represent part of a strategy to keep women out of Academia or from power positions within it. The analysis of the position of women in academia, along with social and political pressures has led to new laws and other social measures to make the environment for women in academia more conducive and inclusive. Women have struggled to win the right not only to know but also to produce legitimized knowledge and, within universities, to pass on this knowledge to the younger generation. Their struggle to be insiders and the results of this struggle have been made possible by the presence of a strong feminist movement outside academia, and by the political, ethical and intellectual stimulation it has provided. As is forcefully summarized by the Task Force on the Status of Women in Academe of the American Psychological Association: “It should be understood that the aim is not simply to help women succeed in obsolete patriarchal institutions but rather to reconstruct those institutions” (Kite et al. 1080).

Thus, academia becomes a heterotopia, a counter site, a place that does exist and is formed in the very founding of a society, it is a place where a variety of other sites can be represented, contested and inverted (Foucault 24). Carolyn Heilbrun is uncompromising in holding up a mirror to the position of women in a university that treats them as a gender secondary to that of the males. More practically, Heilbrun has made visible these strategies of discrimination. If we cannot acknowledge conflict and imperfections, the ideologies that inform our practices can go unscrutinized even in the loftiest of contexts like Harvard.

Notes

1. Heterotopia is a concept in human geography elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. These are spaces of *otherness*, which are irrelevant, that are simultaneously physical and mental, such as the space of a phone call or the moment when you see yourself in the mirror.

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Configuring the Spatial in Anita Desai's Novels: A Study Through Imagery

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Abstract: In a literary text, place plays an organic role that defines and becomes an ontological determinant of the characters. Anita Desai has frequently treated natural landscape as a scenological extension of the characters' psyche. The "sepulchral silence" pervades the pages echoing the character's psychology vis-à-vis nature. She has acknowledged the importance of nature in her fiction. She said in an interview that natural objects are of primary importance to her. Dr. Sandhyarani Das avers, "Nature in Anita Desai's fiction plays an important role in shaping the spirits of the protagonists" (206).

In addition Desai draws her characters using images and symbols to foreground the character traits of her protagonists. Visual images, sounds, smells, and textures of familiar places are her material. Also use of images such as houses, trees, animals, etc. constitute a vital part of her narrative strategy. One of the most important images, in several of her novels, is drawn from the world of flora and fauna: as Maya is shown to love flowers and fruits, grass and the trees; in *Fire on the Mountain*, the barren, deserted landscape of Kasauli is symbolic of Nanda Kaul's lonely and "pared" existence. Neeru Tandon calls Desai "A High Priest of Nature" and asserts "the nature and the natural environment are the material on which she weaves her tragic tales" (172). This paper attempts an analysis of nature and literature through a study of the images used in Anita Desai's novels.

Keywords: House, Place, Storm, Image, Symbol

.....fiction depends for its life on place.
--Eudora Welty

In a literary text, place plays an organic role that defines and becomes an ontological determinant of the characters. Anita Desai has frequently treated natural landscape as a scenological extension of the characters' psyche. The "sepulchral silence" pervades the pages echoing the character's psychology vis-à-vis nature. She has acknowledged the importance of nature in her fiction. She said in an interview that natural objects are of primary importance

to her. Dr. Sandhyarani Das avers, “Nature in Anita Desai’s fiction plays an important role in shaping the spirits of the protagonists” (206). Desai’s novels are an expression of her private vision. Her preoccupations as a novelist, made it possible for her to give a new turn to the Indian novel in English, an interiority comparable to the Modernist novel as developed in the continent by authors who influenced her most—Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Marcel Proust. Anita Desai’s distinctively individual achievement is the novel of consciousness, the psychological novel, which is, according to her, the natural expression of woman’s vision.

As she observes in “The Indian Writer’s Problems,” writing for her “is not an act of deliberation, reason and choice, it is rather a matter of instinct, silence and waiting” (14). The creative act is for her “a secret one” and “to make it public, to scrutinize it in the cold light of reason, is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder” (12). Anita Desai’s “poetics of the novel” is organist, romantic-symbolist in nature and for her “it is the images that matter, the symbol, the myth, the feat of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them” (14). The central concern of Anita Desai as a novelist is the exploration of the woman’s consciousness in its conflict with the traditional, patriarchal family and social set up. She is directly concerned with the effect of such an environment on the feminine consciousness rather than an analysis of its causes or remedy. The latter is indirectly suggested by her portrayal of the woman’s consciousness in stress.

As in a poetic psychological novel, characters are drawn using imagery and symbols, analysis of leit-motifs, images and symbols used in the narrative have been done to foreground the character-traits of the protagonists. The novels use symbols like the house, the mountain, and quoted poems. The house, considered as the abode of peace, love, safety and nurture takes on fatalistic hues in these novels.

In addition Desai draws her characters using images and symbols to foreground the character traits of her protagonists. Visual images, sounds, smells, and textures of familiar places are her material. Also use of images such as houses, trees, animals, etc. constitutes a vital part of her narrative strategy. One of the most important images, in several of her novels is drawn from the world of flora and fauna: as Maya is shown to love flower and fruits, grass and the trees; in *Fire on the Mountain*, the barren, deserted landscape of Kasauli is symbolic of Nanda Kaul’s lonely and “pared” existence. Neeru Tandon calls Desai “A High Priest of

Nature” and asserts, “the nature and the natural environment are the material on which she weaves her tragic tales” (172). This paper attempts an analysis of nature and literature through a study of the images used in Anita Desai’s novels.

Place/Space

Place (space), as Cheryll Glotfelty and Fromm say, is the redemptive force (xviii-ix) of life. Eudora Welty once observed, “The truth is, fiction depends for its life on place” (Bradbury 8). Place/space is valued as an intrinsic aspect of literature or any cultural endeavour (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii-ix). Space becomes an ontological determinant in shaping up the personae of a character. The frequently delineated space is—house. House--the symbol of safety, security, and also a sense of belonging becomes the centre of activity of all Desai characters.

Maya, the central character of Desai’s first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, is a homing pigeon, who does not want to abandon her duty and place as a wife, but her mind keeps flying back frequently to her childhood home with her father. In contrast to the aristocratic grandeur of her childhood home, the atmosphere of her husband’s home is marked by banality and insensitivity.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the central character Sita escapes to rediscover herself in the pristine beauty of her childhood home on an island. Desai shows how internal peace can be achieved through optimal living in harmony with nature. Sita, the central character has a unitive experience--a total integration of mind, body and soul when she plays with mud which enables her to rise above her alienated self. The house on the island in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is the focal point of Sita’s consciousness and also serves as the objective correlative of the growth of her psyche. When she arrives on the island, the house was pitch-dark, but in the penultimate stage, when she accepts the reality of life and existence, she sees the “window pane of the house on the knoll lit by the setting sun to a mysterious brilliance...” (152). Thus the house as a symbol stands for the illumination that has come to Sita when she acknowledges the reality of life and the value of pleasure and pain with equanimity and peace.

Clear Light of Day, one of Anita Desai's most loved novels, has "place" as its central focus. *Clear Light of Day* is the story of Bim, one of the four Das children of Old Delhi. Though as children Bim and Raja, her brother, had promised to be together always, Raja and Tara left to find their own niche leaving the retarded Baba in her care. They are only occasional visitors in her house. This has created a deep gash in her psyche and has sapped her strength to life. She has not moved nor grown but stays in the same old house. Bim's dusty, dirty, crumbling house stands for her cluttered thinking and stilted growth. Like the house, she is fixed, unchanging and decaying through years of neglect. In *Clear Light of Day* the house is made the central symbol of the story. Bim's attachment to her brothers and sister and later her grouse against them moves around the house. Like the house, Bim's garden is also in a state of total dereliction. The wilted rose plants, the dusty bougainvillea, the overgrown hedge, all become objective correlatives of Bim's listlessness and apathy. This effect is reiterated through the geographical parallelism of Old Delhi: the city that "does not change. It only decays," (5) aptly presents the "atrophied, or calcified"(149) state of a once bright, dynamic girl.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, through the character of Nanda Kaul, Desai presents the traumatised psyche of an aged widow. She has now withdrawn to Carignano, a dry, dreary house in the foothills of Kasauli. The description of the vegetative world of Carignano mirrors Nanda's existence:

She had drifted about the garden... she revelled in its barrenness, its emptiness. (33)

Thus the dreary house and the untended garden in its barrenness stand for Nanda's barren existence. The word "revelled" reveals her unwillingness to change. The house, considered as the abode of peace, love, safety and nurture takes on fatalistic hues in this novel.

This house of Nanda is not a "home." It is a place to which both Nanda and Raka have been banished. The arrival of Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, completes the picture of the deserted and dilapidated house. Each of them has erected a smoke-screen to hide herself from the outer world. Raka is interested in the charred houses on the knoll, Nanda wants to maintain the sparseness of Carignano, and Ila Das wants Nanda's company that would provide succour to her dismal existence, by reminding her of her glorious past. Thus the difference between their professed need for a shelter and the reality brings out the pathos of

their lives. Raka, the quiet child of *Fire on the Mountain*, recovers from the harrowing experiences of her home in the soothing lap of nature.

Storm

The emotional upheaval of almost all the characters finds a reflection in the dust storm. The reference to dust storm, prior to unravelling of some mystery or confusion, finds a place in all the previous novels. In *Cry, the Peacock*, the storm unhinges Maya's last remnants of lucidity; in *Fire on the Mountain* the dust storm precedes the breakdown of Nanda's self-delusion. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the experience with the stormy rainy season washes away the vestiges of Sita's self-doubt and makes her determined to say the big "No." Finally in *Clear Light of Day*, the dust storm raging outside finds a parallel in Bim's violent eruption of rage. The storm thus becomes a symbol of Bim's inner turmoil that forces her to accost her "life-lie."

Symbols

Mrs. Desai uses leit-motifs, symbols, images and hallucinating vision and dreams to probe and unravel the secret recess of the central consciousness. She uses literal, metaphorical and symbolical images. Her characters seem to think in images that articulate their estranged sensibility and reflect their mental isolation. The central symbol of Maya's self-narrative is the cry of the peacock. This is related to Maya's frustrated passion. Sita's physical features especially the presentation of her eyes play a pivotal role in the delineation of her character. There have been several references to Sita's beauty and her brilliant eyes:

He saw her eyes start from her head so exaggeratedly that he was made to see their immense size and extraordinary brilliance. (17)

If the eyes of a person are a window to his/her soul, Sita's brilliant eyes would stand for her extraordinary intelligence and sensitivity. But, despite the brilliance of her eyes, the same are opaque and blind to the vision of truth and reality:

The woman disregarded its [pond] filth, its solid green layer of germs and disease, and thought beautiful for there were women closely wrapped in saris of scarlet and crimson on the stone steps . . . (23)

The image of the pond underlines the irony in the perceptions of Sita and Moses. Moses, living on the island, thinks it dirty and sees only the scum, while Sita sees only the colourful women and not the pond full of slime and disease. This selective vision and its attendant incapability to comprehend differences are poetically represented through the image of the house:

So they walked towards the sky which was a vast pink Japanese lantern swinging low over the sea in the great mass of surrounding darkness . . . Here she halted for the house was pitch dark. (26)

Sita's consciousness is foregrounded through geographical contiguity. Her house, the supposed place for her regeneration being in darkness prophesies the failure of her endeavour. The metaphor of the Japanese lantern underlines, however, a little ray of hope. As S. Rimmon-Kenan observes: "Landscape can be analogous not only to a character trait but also to a passing mood" (Kenan 70). Thus, the sky as vast pink Japanese lantern and the pitch-dark house reflect Sita's confusion at the moment of her arrival on the island. But gradually the house would become the hermitage (*ashrama*) of her *sadhana* for redemption and transformation. The hermitage of life (*Jiban ashrama*), her home on the stormy island is symbolically dark at the beginning but Sita's life in that home would lead her to the ultimate vision of light--a perfect understanding of her experiences and the resultant wisdom. The island house as the locale of her penance is set in contrast with the "other house" where she lived on the mainland that was darkened for her by her experience of pervasive violence and her sense of alienation from the members of her family.

The use of animal and nature imagery bestows realism on the depiction of the inner world of the characters. The theme of Maya's passionate longing for love that is thwarted time and again by Gautama provides the dominant leit-motif in the design of the novel. The mating cry of the peacock reverberates throughout the novel mirroring Maya's desperate yearning for love. When Maya hears the peacock's cry, she recollects the albino astrologer's explanation that the peacocks fight furiously before mating. Knowing well they would die before the end of monsoon, they indulge in love as they love life. Maya, thus, finds her life to reflect that of the peacock. Her basic emotion is that of yearning, expectation, a search for love and living--the personal, the indefinable needs to be satiated by the husband, without which she feels her life would be as doomed as the peacocks.

Nanda's thoughts regarding Raka, vivify Raka's physical features as much as they throw light on Nanda's astute observation and astringent humour. Nanda's musings over Raka begin with her name. "Raka meant the moon, but this child was not round-faced, calm or radiant . . . she looked like one of those dark crickets . . . or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs (43).

The trials and tribulations of Sita's life are delineated through the symbol of the voyage. Ensnared among three voyages, the story takes the shape of a spiritual journey leading to psychic regeneration and brings to the mind D. H. Lawrence's *The Woman Who Rode Away*. Sita also goes through both physical and emotional turmoil before her complete regeneration. Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* is averse to human relationships. Neither relationship nor responsibility engages her. So when her great-granddaughter Raka is sent to Kasauli to recoup from typhoid, she feels disturbed and annoyed. The novel charts out Nanda's growth: her change of heart from aversion of responsibility, to grudging involvement, to admiration and then attachment for Raka. But soon after she grows attached to Raka she thinks of her as a "demon" (70), "the elusive fish, the golden catch" (108). It underscores the sea-change in her attitude towards Raka. Her eyes are also "extravagantly large and somewhat bulging" (43) like that of a fly. She compares Raka to a "mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" (44). All these images bring out not only Raka's emaciated looks but also Nanda's irritation with this fresh burden on her.

In probing the consciousness of her heroes and heroines, Mrs. Desai is very much influenced by the practices of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. Like her predecessors, Mrs. Desai is writing poetic-psychological novels. Since Maya is not a rebel against patriarchy and male chauvinism but a conformist who looks upon a loving and happy family as the mainstay of a woman's life, there is no question of the novel adumbrating Feminist rhetoric. Maya's tragedy is wrought by the failure of her marital life with Gautama and it is Gautama who is squarely to be blamed for her insanity and death as is alleged by Maya herself.

In the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai again raises the question of domestic values as against existential angst. The house also serves as the objective correlative of her psychic growth. When she arrives in the island the house was pitch-dark, but in the penultimate stage, when she accepts the reality of life and existence, she sees the "window

pane of the house on the knoll lit by the setting sun to a mysterious brilliance . . .” (152). Thus the house as a symbol stands for the illumination that has come to Sita when she acknowledges the reality of life and the value of pleasure and pain with equanimity and peace of mind. The use of animal and nature imagery bestows realism to the depiction of the inner world of the characters.

In the character of Nanda Kaul, Anita Desai has again succeeded in bringing out the untold agonies and trauma of a woman’s life. The symbols, the images, the thought presentation all bear proof of Nanda’s barren existence as opposed to her busy past life. Cheated by the husband and deserted by the children, she suffers ignominy of her lonely existence. Her forced exile takes away the remnant of self-respect. She shuns human company and weaves a world of fantasy around her to sustain her crumbling ego. But her life changes in relation to her attitude towards Raka which forces her to go through the cleansing fire of self-analysis that purges off all her anger, affectations and agony.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that all of Anita Desai’s previous works lead to and culminate in *Clear Light of Day* where the themes of the preceding three novels converge into a final statement as is often observed by critics. “Anita Desai seems to have asked her readers to read the novel in the entire perspective of her work as it has evolved in time” (Sharma 130). The contrast between Bim’s alert mind and her slovenly manner, her independent spirit and obsession to cling on to the past, confuses Tara. The description of the surrounding reinforces the impression of Bim’s overall lackadaisical attitude. This self-deception is a manifestation of her psychic state which is symbolically represented through her shabby, neglected house. The representation of the house stands as a key character indicator. Like the house, Bim’s garden is also in a state of total dereliction. The wilted rose plants, the dusty bougainvillea, the overgrown hedge, all become objective correlative of Bim’s listlessness and apathy. This effect is reiterated through the geographical parallelism of Old Delhi: the city that “does not change. It only decays” (5) aptly presents the “atrophied, or calcified”(149) state of a once bright, dynamic girl.

Bim despite her feelings and failings displays her capacity to overcome her restrictive situation in life through abundant love and intelligence. Thus the deft handling of symbols and images helps Anita Desai in her quest for an ideal woman: a woman who is strong, intelligent, independent, affectionate, and protective as the personae of Bim.

Joseph Conrad commenting on the novelist's art in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* makes a characteristic observation:

... it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance: it is only through unremitting care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the common place surface of words (70)

Thus, through the vivid play of words, images and symbols, Desai brings in the plasticity that encapsulates her ideal woman and her robust optimism.

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Space and Gender Politics: A Re-Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Abstract: The role of space and gender has been an important theme in recent academic debates. Both concepts are based on relation and demarcation. Who is kept in and who kept out of certain spaces reflects the norms in a particular society. Spaces are now seen as ordered systems in cultures that are based on the politics of power and control. Status and gender are played out through spatial and physical space and are constantly contested and restructured in day-to-day life. Space does not imply only territorial demarcations but also includes spaces in relationships and plays a crucial role in the construction of hierarchies and exclusions. Space is not merely a passive backdrop but space itself creates meaning and can be seen as contributing to the dynamics of a narrative.

With the help of Michel Foucault and Edward Soja's tenets on space, power and social justice, this paper closely examines *The Scarlet Letter* to trace the genderisation of spaces in the narrative, problematizing the limits and contradictions of the ideology of space constructed in the text in light of the above.

Keywords: Space politics, Gender, Relationships, Power play, Thirdspace, Heterotopia

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is set in the seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay Colony in New England where society was patriarchal and harshly Puritan. Though the women were strong and tough, unlike the genteel English women of the times, they lived within the constraints of prescribed gender roles. Intelligent and dissenting women like Anne Hutchinson and the "witches" of Salem were seen as a threat to the established social order and were either banished from the Colony or executed. In such a society, we see Hester Prynne, at the centre of attention, as she has recently given birth to a baby girl out of wedlock, and whose father's name she refuses to disclose. Her husband had not been heard of for many months and was considered lost at sea. As punishment for her "sin," Hester is first awarded a prison sentence and then banished from the city limits. It is in this context that the paper examines the space, literal and otherwise, from which she is banished and the space she then inhabits and how these space demarcations impact her life.

The role of space and gender has been an important topic in recent academic debates. Both concepts are based on relation and demarcation. Who is kept in and who kept out of certain spaces reflects the norms in a particular society. Spaces are now seen as ordered systems in cultures that are based on the politics of power and control. Status and gender are played out through spatial and physical space and are constantly contested and restructured in day-to-day life. Space does not imply only territorial demarcations but also includes spaces in relationships and plays a crucial role in the construction of hierarchies and exclusions. Space is not merely a passive backdrop but space itself creates meaning and can be seen as contributing to the dynamics of a narrative.

With the help of Edward Soja's theory of Thirdspace, and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which reflect on the politics of space, power and social justice, the paper closely examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* to trace the othering and genderisation of spaces in the narrative, problematizing the limits and contradictions of the ideology of space constructed in the text. In doing this, my aim is to indulge in a nuanced re-evaluation of the ways in which the early American settlers affected the use of physical space to ostracise Hester Prynne and Hawthorne's attempts to subvert it.

What is the Thirdspace? From the spatial trialectics established by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, Soja developed a theory of Thirdspace: "I define Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality" (Soja 57). Thirdspace is a transcendent concept that is constantly expanding to include "an-Other," thus enabling the contestation and re-negotiation of boundaries and cultural identity. Foucault uses the term "heterotopia" to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye. In general, a heterotopia is a physical representation or approximation of a utopia, or a parallel space (such as a prison) that contains undesirable bodies to make a real utopian space possible.

The Scarlet Letter is a text that readily lends itself to a spatial reading as the story revolves majorly around the prison, the marketplace and the forest, the place of banishment of Hester Prynne from the city in addition to other punishments. The Puritan elders send Hester to the prison while she awaits her sentence. Foucault states that prisons, mental institutions and

even schools are such types of heterotopias that break the subject through his reconstitution, his “amendment” and “proper” disciplining. They are measures of disciplining, controlling and punishing of the different and deviant. Hester’s crime for which she is being punished is her expression of her sexuality, the worst possible crime for a woman to commit in a patriarchal society. Feminist writers from as early on as Mary Wollstonecraft have lamented women’s lack of control over their own bodies and sexuality. Feminists have debated on the regulation, manipulation, control and agency that women are subjected to, from external as well as internal sources with regards to their embodiment. The female body thus becomes the site for gender politics. Feminist campaigns against the double standard of sexual morality have, since, challenged the patriarchal definitions of the natural. They have represented a redefinition of male sexuality as political rather than natural. In the late 60s Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* argued that sexual politics determines the power relations between men and women, a relationship of domination and subordination. According to Seemanthini Niranjana, “Whether it be the sexualisation of female bodies through bodily and cultural practices, or the gender asymmetries in accessing resources and power, the matrix of spatialization opens up a major route for gender analysis” (116).

Hester’s body, thus, becomes the space, literally and figuratively for the propagation of the Puritan morality with all its double standards. We see her for the first time when she emerges from the prison and it is interesting to note that Hester, far from being disciplined and broken, to the consternation of the gathered crowd, comes out of the prison, “a figure of perfect elegance” (45). At the beginning of the narrative, we see “A throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, ... assembled in front of a wooden edifice,” (40) which we get to know is the prison. “Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders . . .” (43). And as Hester emerges from the prison, she is described as:

And never had Hester Prynne appeared more lady-like, in the antique interpretation of this term, than as she issued from the prison. Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. (45-46)

Though it is also stated that to a discerning observer, “there was something exquisitely painful in it” (46). The Puritans were deeply religious and their sense of sin, morality and

guilt, the major themes of the novel, were determined by the church. The townspeople are worried that Hester's sin has brought disrepute to their church. It is through religious tenets that women are hegemonised. Women are constrained in a marginal position through the sanction of religion. Religion, along with culture, has always been the instrument through which patriarchal practices are given credibility and reinforced. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth" (de Beauvoir 31). Codes of religious morality and sin too are biased against women.

Hester and her child are seen as embodiments of sin and on her body she must bear the burden of her punishment, the letter "A." In the manner of her embroidering the letter "A" on her bosom too, we see Hester subverting the meaning of punishment. Meant to be a token of her shame, and instead of concealing it as expected, she:

with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbors. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter "A." It was so artistically done, and with so much felicity and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore. (45)

Appreciating her skill with the needle, but denouncing her spirit, one of the women in the crowd remarks, "but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it! Why gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?" So we see how her dress too becomes a space for her quiet defiance: "Her attire, which, indeed, she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity" (46). The harsh words of the women are indicative of the internalisation of the biased gender norms by the Puritan women, who are reinforcing the biased space allocated to women in the Colony.

We may interpret the prison-space as a place of play of two types of heterotopias, the heterotopia of deviation and the heterotopia of purification. According to Foucault, heterotopias exhibit dual meanings or layers of meaning. We may therefore see the prison as a thirdspace where the hegemonic authority of the city fathers is inverted by Hester into a

space for gaining inner strength, resolve, and quiet defiance. So we see how a woman who has transgressed societal norms of morality, has invited harsh punishment to teach her and others a lesson, but manages to use the punishment itself as a site of resistance, the thirdspace. The thirdspace is always open to interpretation, always flexible, vibrant, controversial and moreover radically open. It is grounded in the post modern thought of seeing a conclusion as never being final but instead as a starting point for further exploration. In the light of this argument we may understand the prison space as a complex space open to multiple interpretations where Hester undoubtedly suffers, is isolated from society but also finds refuge from the “agony from every footstep of those that thronged to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon” (47). On the scaffold in the market place, the place appointed for her punishment, she is up for scrutiny whereas the prison offers her the sanctuary from the harsh public gaze. In a time when a woman should be seen “only in the quiet gleam of the fireside, in the happy shadow of a home, or beneath a matronly veil, at church,” (54) it was perhaps much easier for Hester to bear the prison-space than the market-space.

Interestingly, it is the marketplace, a typically male space in accordance with the male/female, outside/inside binary, where a large part of the action in the story plays out. Paradoxically, this masculine space does not serve as an empowering space for Hester; rather it serves as the space for her public shaming. The Massachusetts Bay Colony is itself a space where race and gender politics play out. Not only are the women in a disadvantaged space, the natives too are repeatedly referred to as the savages and are otherised and marginalised.

After completing her prison sentence, Hester decides to settle down in the forest, having been ostracised from the “limits of the Puritan settlement.” She begins to live in a small thatched cottage built and abandoned by an earlier settler. The forest too serves as an important metaphor of space in juxtaposition to the settlement. We may view it as a thirdspace, literally as a physical space but also as a space for contestation, an alternate space where the rules of city are not in force. Thirdspace, according to Soja is a way of “thinking about and interpreting socially produced space,” where the spatiality of our lives, our human geography, has the same scope and significance as the social and historical dimensions. The forest is a space that does not lie within the socio-cultural domain of the city fathers. Like the prison, it serves as Hester’s site of resistance and a space for her redemption. If the city is the patriarchal space, Hester makes the forest-space her own, where she and her daughter live by

their own rules. In the novel, the forest is often referred to as dark, mysterious and wild and now with Hester living there, it is even more so: “In this lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the license of the magistrates, who still kept an inquisitorial watch over her, Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot.”

Thus, far away from the eyes of the people, Hester creates a parallel utopia for herself and her child. The forest is seen as a dark, mysterious place by the people, where few venture, other than Hester and her daughter, Pearl. Hester exercises her own judgement in disciplining her daughter. She “early sought to impose a tender but strict control over the infant immortality that was committed to her charge” but Pearl seems to have a mind of her own: “After testing both smiles and frowns, and proving that neither mode of treatment possessed any calculable influence, Hester was ultimately compelled to stand aside, and permit the child to be swayed by her own impulses. Physical compulsion or restraint was effectual, of course, while it lasted” (77). Thus partly guided by Hester and partly by her own wilful nature, Pearl grows up a defiant and wilful child, not subdued by the patriarchal norms of the city. But seeing Pearl’s intelligent and assertive nature, Hester worries and doubts if she is human: “It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child” (77). This goes to show that a young girl, growing up to be independent, intelligent and assertive is seen as an aberration, as society, especially in those times, moulded young girls into being much less independent, assertive and intelligent. And much like Hester hoping Pearl’s nature and behaviour is not born out of sin, society too has viewed thinking, intelligent females as embodiments of sin, immoral or insane. There are repeated references to Pearl’s intelligence (82, 89) and to her being like an elf or devilish, reinforcing this idea. Pearl’s unfettered upbringing and her aggressiveness in the face of the hostility from society she grew up with, makes Hester exclaim, “O Father in Heaven . . . what is this being which I have brought into the world!” (81).

The attire too can serve as a space for political positioning. In dressing Pearl too, Hester in a departure from the city norm, makes beautiful, elaborately embroidered dresses in red colour for her daughter: “Her mother, in contriving the child’s garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold thread (85). In

addition to the style of her upbringing, the Governor and other ministers do not approve of the way Hester dresses her child. They wish to take Pearl away from Hester so that she has a more “conventional” upbringing. Addressing Hester, the Governor says, “Speak thou, the child’s own mother! Were it not, thinkest thou, for thy little one’s temporal and eternal welfare, that she be taken out of thy charge, and clad soberly, and disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth?” (93). In Pearl’s vivaciousness, too, Mr. Wilson, the pastor, sees something amiss, “The little baggage hath witchcraft in her, I profess. She needs no old woman’s broomstick to fly withal! (98).

Society attempts to confine women to the domestic sphere is an attempt not only to spatial control, but through that, a social control on identity (Foucault). Transgressions are viewed as sinful, dark and mysterious, as they are outside the realm of control. Viewed thus, the forest-space in *The Scarlet Letter* too assumes the aspects of the dark and mysterious. Interestingly, another frequent visitor to the forest, but in the dark of night, is the witch, the old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate. Single women, independent women and women who dare to overstep patriarchal norms, have often been labelled witches. Such women are believed to have supernatural powers and Mistress Hibbins is seen flying on her broom in the night, headed for the forest. A few years later, she is executed as a witch. The forest also harbours elves and gnomes in addition to the birds and animals. It is therefore a space which is mysterious, yet the benevolent pastoral. The contradictions are evident in little Pearl too, who growing up in the forest, exhibits traits of the devil and the pious. The play of light and shadow in the forest also indicates the dualities inherent therein.

In the city, the places and spaces of power are all occupied by men. When Hester is standing on the scaffold, we see “the solemn presence of men no less dignified than the Governor and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town; all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting house, looking down upon the platform” on which she stood (48). No place/space of power is allocated to the women who are relegated to the margins. There is no woman of authority or eminence in the novel. It is these patriarchs that sit in judgement on the townspeople: “Thus it was with the men of rank, on whom their eminent position imposed the guardianship of the public morals” (138).

Another subversion of gender norms is seen in Dimmesdale’s character in contrast to Hester. As an inversion of the masculinity that ought to be inherent in a man of the times, Dimmesdale is depicted as weak and cowardly, and Hester is depicted as strong and brave in

the face of their joint crime. While she has no choice but to own her sin and confront it boldly, Dimmesdale cannot gather the courage to own his sin publicly. He gets up on the scaffold only in the dead of night when nobody can see him: “He had been driven hither by the impulse of that Remorse which dogged him everywhere, and whose own sister and closely linked companion was that Cowardice which invariably drew him back with her tremulous gripe . . .” (126). Hester, seeing the clergyman suffer with his guilt and tormented by Chillingworth, resolves to help him: “She decided, moreover, that he had a right to her utmost aid. Little accustomed, in her long seclusion from society, to measure her ideas of right and wrong by any standard external to herself, Hester saw—or seemed to see—that there lay a responsibility upon her in reference to the clergyman which she owed to no other, nor to the whole world besides” (135).

After seven long years of “blameless purity of her life,” in which Hester sought no favours for herself; rather was ever ready “to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty,” and was so helpful and sympathetic to all who needed help, that “many people refused to interpret the scarlet ‘A’ by its original signification. They said that it meant ‘Able’; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (136-37). Thus from a position and place of a sinner, Hester has with her womanly strength of character, acquired the position and place of “sacredness which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril.” The “A” on her bosom now had the “the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom” (138).

Living alone in the forest, fending for her child and herself, Hester becomes self-sufficient, and carves an independent space for herself, rare for a woman of the times: “Standing alone in the world—alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected—alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable—she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world’s law was no law for her mind” (139). Thus the banishment to the forest becomes a liberation from the sexist laws of the city. No doubt Hester had to pay a heavy price for it, but she has acquired a heterotopic space, where she has cast away the chains that bind women. And “Providence, in the person of this little girl, had assigned to Hester’s charge the germ and blossom of womanhood, to be cherished and developed amid a host of difficulties” (140). In fact we have the narrator give almost a radical feminist sermon, through Hester’s thoughts, on the space women occupied in society:

The child's own nature had something wrong in it which continually betokened that she had been born amiss—the effluence of her mother's lawless passion—and often impelled Hester to ask, in bitterness of heart, whether it were for ill or good that the poor little creature had been born at all.

Indeed the same dark question often rose into her mind with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. . . . She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. (141)

Hawthorne's revisionary urge to accord women a more fair place in society is clearly seen an attempt at setting the record straight, as he carries the guilt of his forefathers, one of whom was the judge at the Salem witch trials and was the only one who did not repent his actions.

Through this paper, I have tried to re-read *The Scarlet Letter* with the help of spatial concepts that show us other ways of understanding how spatio-temporal gender politics plays out in society. In *The Scarlet Letter* the play of spatio-temporal patterns can be seen as biased, gendered and othering but the same spaces are heterotopic and spaces that have complex layers of meaning. These spaces can also be seen as thirdspaces, where subversions and negotiations take place, and are another way of delving into the layers of meaning of relationships and how they work to change the space dynamics of the characters.

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Problematizing Nostalgia: A Study of Selected Short Stories on Bengal Partition

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Abstract: Nostalgia in its myriad forms runs through a number of short stories on Bengal Partition. In stories like Amar Mitra's "Wild Goose Country," Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's "Acharya Kriplani Colony" and Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House," nostalgia acquires complex overtones that lead to a renewed understanding of the concept of nostalgia itself. Wedded with identity crisis, the problematics of uprooting and the issue of resettlement, nostalgia gets a nuanced treatment in these stories. Here we encounter the problematics of memory leading to dehistoricization as the stories emphasize how the overwhelming push of nostalgia substitutes with its essentializing tactics the dynamic reality of post partition life causing a rupture between the protagonist's static vision of past, one she continually juxtaposes next to the reality of the everyday, and the actual reality of the world that is. The hypothesis of the paper is that nostalgia, a leitmotif in stories of Bengal partition, has several ramifications. The nostalgia for a lost space can be both romantic and painful, can be an anchor for the self as well as troubled with the recognition of violence. The paper seeks to read stories of Bengal Partition with a view to understanding their treatment of nostalgia. It attempts to see how nostalgia leads to dehistoricization and an ineradicable connection with a violent past. How migration and memory affect the identity of a subject such that the present is always gazed at through the lens of the past.

Keywords: Partition, Bengal Partition. Nostalgia, Short Stories

Whatever surrounded me

Wreckage

Arrows and spears

Home and hearth

Everything trembled in the direction of the west

Memory seemed like a long traveling assemblage

Broken chest lying under a mango tree

In a middle of their stride from one foot to another all became homeless.
 (“Punarbashan” [“Rehabilitation”], Shankha Ghosh; my trans.)

The Partition of India in 1947 was a watershed that rewrote the historical heritage of the Indian subcontinent. Although the muted severity and fewer instances of actual acts of violence make the episode of Bengal Partition very different from the Partition in Punjab, the trauma and the disillusionment, the effects of rumor on human psyche and the experiences of displacement and resettlement are points common to both chapters of the Partition episode in 1947. Historical documentation of the actual causes of Bengal Partition mention the riots in 1946 in Noakhali and Tripura and communal tension between Hindus and Muslims as important factors. The creative discourse of short fiction, which is the subject of the present paper, explores the unique experiences of the people who were physically affected by the Bengal Partition. These stories enjoy an indeterminate position between fiction and non-fiction and document the historical peculiarity of mass displacement and provide a distinct slant on the overall subject of Partition. In other words, the short stories on Bengal Partition problematize the moment of historical rupture from myriad points of view and in doing so recognize the distance between the mythical nationalist history of India and the actual fragmented reality of its displaced human subjects.

In contrast to the leitmotif of graphic violence in stories of Partition on the western front, creative short fiction on Bengal Partition revolves around the subject of migration. If incidents of embodied gender violence and psycho-somatic trauma crystallize the Partition experience in Punjab as documented by the narratives of Saadat Hasan Manto (“Open It,” “Cold Meat”), Intizaar Husain (“City of Sorrow,” “An Unwritten Epic”) and Khuswant Singh (*Train to Pakistan*), the migratory experiences of people from East Bengal who arrived in West Bengal and in various parts of India on foot, on trains, aboard boats and steamers, with little or no belongings, with or without family members, laden with physical and mental wounds is the subject of Bengali literature on Partition. In Amiya Bhusan Majumdar’s novel *Nirbas (Exile)* we read about dirty bundles, blackened utensils, rope-tied and entangled sets of frayed and faded bedclothes and mats carried by “sick, unfed, unwashed multitude of putrid smelling masses.” We read about the stream of rootless refugees in Narayan Sanyal’s *Balmik*. “People walked on, their bodies touching one another, the extensive railway line is burdened by weight of the swarming crowd. People pushed and jostled— it seemed that the

buzzing multitude thronging the few miles were one giant cobra whose serpentine body writhed along relentlessly! It seemed people had no separate entity,” (qtd. in Sikdar 35). These creative episodes crystallize the immediacy of displacement and the vicissitudes that the rootless Bengali refugees experienced leading ultimately to dystopic futures where the utopia of nostalgia becomes the keynote of their lives.

In the context of Bengal Partition, nostalgia functions within the spatial-temporal constraints of refugee life and registers an imaginative utopia that is problematized in a series of Bengali short stories. Stories like Amar Mitra’s “Wild Goose Country,” Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay’s “Acharya Kriplani Colony” and Dibyendu Palit’s “Alam’s Own House” deal with the problematics of nostalgia. Here nostalgia gets a nuanced treatment in that the allure of a utopic lost home has nothing in common with the reality of the everyday. In these stories and in others dwelling on the theme of nostalgia and displacement, we encounter the problematics of memory leading to dehistoricization. They point out how the overwhelming kinetic push of nostalgia substitutes with its essentializing tactics the dynamic reality of post partition life resulting in a rupture between the protagonist’s static vision of past, one she continually juxtaposes next to the reality of the everyday, and the actual reality of the world that is.

In the introduction to the book *The Future of Nostalgia*, the author Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as “a longing for a lost home that no longer exists or has ever existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.” Coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer, nostalgia was once commonly held as a disease of the displaced. Shorn of its medical history as a disease the symptoms of which could be soothed by “Leeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium” and the Alps (Boym 4), nostalgia has now become the ailment of the avant-garde reflectively reminisced in popular culture. A striking example of reflective nostalgia would be Mohini in Mahasweta Devi’s *Kagabagagitika* who wants to convey the East Bengal to her present locality. She would plant the same shrubs, worship the goddess Lakshmi like before and drink from a bell metal glass like she used to. Amar Mitra’s story “Dam Bandha” (“Suffocation”) Prabhamayee recalls her days in East Bengal. She listens to the news of her lost country on the transistor radio and even keeps tracks of new roads that operate in her erstwhile land. The smell of the river seems to permeate through the walls of her home. If she chances to hear the accent of Khulna, she gets startled. The reflective nostalgics are “amateurs of time,” “epicures of duration” who derive

sensorial delight in temporal movement immeasurable by “clocks and calendars” (Nabokov Vladimir, “On Time and Its Texture,” in *Strong Opinions*). These examples necessarily draw a picture of nostalgia as a longing for a lost home. In all these stories the characters conspicuously strive to obliterate the present. As memories of halcyon past life, real or imagined, compete with an actual post-partition reconstruction of life, the nostalgic subject is distracted from the present and ends up considering it as discordant against the homogeneous fragments of village life lost for good. Hence nostalgia is a utopic illusion of a reality that never was and what the stories of Bengal Partition analyzed in the paper do is read the destabilizing effect of nostalgia in the lives of the refugees. The status of a nostalgic as indulging in mythic reality has significant implication in the narrative resolution of the stories henceforth analyzed and suggests how an illusory construction of non-reality can have lasting impact in the material reality of the present.

In Bihutibhusan Bandyopadhyay’s “Acharya Kriplani Colony” the writer plays around the quintessential obsession of refugees with the setting up of a home. With emotionally charged images of verdant shrubbery, extensive fields, delicious food, sunshine, and the general warmth of the lost home rife in their minds, the refugees inevitably searched for the halcyon peace in the present displaced state of exile. In “Refugees: One Memory and Locality” by Manas Ray published in *Refugees in West Bengal*, a collection of essays edited by Pradip Basu, the writer speaking about Netaji Colony, says, “In the beginning the people tried to recreate their *desh bari* in Netaji Nagar; the landscape of Netaji Nagar was the landscape of nostalgia.” The protagonist in Bandyopadhyay’s story chances upon a newspaper advertisement for a plot of land that spells his utopic vision of nostalgic idealization. The “Acharya Kriplani Colony” is advertised as “being built on the vast and adjoining land of a certain station, only a few miles away from Kolkata, amidst beautiful natural surroundings. The clear and holy waters of the Jahnvi River flow past its southernmost point...” (240). Rachel Weber in her paper “Re (creating) the Home: Women’s Role in the Development of Refugee Colonies in South Calcutta” has focused on how the buildings in the colonies “emphasize the village-like ambience” (195-210). The romantic portrayal of the Promised Land of Acharya Kriplani Colony here reeks with a similar earthy romanticism of a utopic past and acts as an objective correlative to the protagonist’s yearning for building a home. The emphasis on water and extensive land in the advertisement must be noted. The fixation with flowing water is a leitmotif in refugee testimonials. Jayanti Basu in her book

Reconstructing Bengal Partition asks a refugee respondent what he remembered most when thinking about the past. “I remember water. Everywhere there was water” (31). Another respondent too spoke on the same lines when asked a similar question, “It was a land of rivulets and lakes. The jute plants were tall as full-grown men, but water flowed above them.” The nostalgic *idée fixe* with water would after Jungian psychoanalysis be related to “birth ideations, as water is the archetype of birth.” Otto Rank might associate this obsession to the pre-birth security in the mother’s womb surrounded by amniotic fluid (Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*). In the end, the metaphor of flowing water and extensive premises with all modern amenities sounded too attractive a proposition to the protagonist to be missed and therefore he registered. When he ultimately visits the land, owned by a doctor with an unenviable medical practice, he discovers the advertisement was an eloquent panegyric, an ironic compliment to the material reality of the swamp land that Archarya Kriplani colony actually encompassed. “The roads were damp and muddy. There were cowsheds and cattle grazing grounds everywhere. A foul smell filled the air, and mosquitoes buzzed all around ... A mile away, by the side of the road next to a forest, I saw a metal hoarding which displayed in bold letters the words—“Acharya Kriplani Colony” (245). Struck with amazement, the protagonist realized how in juxtaposition with the material reality of the actual swamp land as unenviable as the medical prospect of its owner, the metaphorical panorama of the advertisement stood unnervingly in his mind. Bibhutibhusan here captures the anxiety of refugee relocation that made them easy prey to exploiters at the time of partition. He also points out how the profiteers used the idealized nostalgic perception of past life in a lost homeland with the prospect of a second homecoming to woo their customers. The doctor waves a wad of receipts in the narrator’s face to show him how profitable the prospect of establishing the colony has been for him. It is only the narrator who realizes that the promise of the primordial stability of the past is paradoxical in the swampy marshland setting of the colony. The advertised rural setting that is an ideal and an idyll is eventually contrasted with the reality of the overcrowded city bereft of greenery wherein the refugees are forced to survive on railway platforms and in congested colonies. Bibhutibhusan points out that the idea of a second home-coming is a generic dream that can never be fulfilled because, ultimately, a lost home defies spatial transference into a reconstructed present. Therefore, any relation, except imaginary, between one’s former and latter home is conspicuous by its absence.

Joseph Brodsky, a quintessential artist of exile, while reflecting on home wrote “Calling home? Home? Where you are never returning. You might as well call Ancient Greece or Biblical Judea” (38) suggesting the idea of home with all its warm domesticity as unstable. One might preserve the tectonic quality of the home’s architecture, but once one leaves the abode behind one becomes a perpetual foreigner in one’s own land. In Dibyendu Palit’s “Alam’s Own House,” the protagonist cannot transplant his rootless cosmopolitanism, his estranged consciousness on his erstwhile home. ““Like everything else there, there’s also a time frame for returning. And once the point is past, there’s a feeling that it’s not going to happen” (453). Palit here ironically commemorates Alam’s homecoming to Kolkata which becomes a reverse mimesis of celebratory homecomings in popular culture. After a private exchange of property during the Partition, Alam’s father had left his family home to Anantashekhhar and migrated to Dhaka. Alam stayed back with Anantashekhhar’s family to finish his studies and during that time became particularly attached to his daughter Raka. Although Alam eventually migrated to Dhaka after his father’s death, he regularly exchanged letters with Raka. Raka gradually became the root of his longing for home, the *nostos* to his *algia*. Alam felt that if “her anatomy could have been analyzed, instead of her body, arms, legs and head, he would have seen graceful doors windows, stairs and attics!” (468). To the romantic Alam, a journey back to Kolkata three years after he left it for Dhaka to attend a conference on friendship between divided nations therefore seemed incomplete without a visit to his natal home and a meeting with Raka. The journey back home is flooded with memories and saturated with nostalgia. Kolkata with its familiar localities of Park Circus, Maniktala, Narkeldanga, the *Kathchampa* (Plumria) tree at the gate of Alam’s old house, the picture of Gandhiji in the old living room and the oil painting of the Battle of Plassey conspicuous by its absence all bear the imprints of Alam’s nostalgia, only the spiritual foundation of his home has wandered. As soon as Alam enters his old home and senses Raka’s absence, he understands that his home has become an alternative space where he lives in an impersonal guest bedroom. Alam never meets Raka during his visit. A letter from her informs her of “a resistance” in her that prevents her from following her heart and has made her run away to Delhi during Alam’s visit. The letter becomes a souvenir of the fragmented love life of Alam and Raka. He yearns for a precarious domesticity in Raka’s home reminiscent of his pre-emigration pedestrian past and finds cynicism instead. “Certain lands are meant for certain roots only” (453). Alam realizes he has become deracinated. At the end of the story Alam recognizes that despite a shared culture and a memory of a shared home, he

and Raka have become citizens of different nation-states whose difference instead of unity is reiterated in the organized seminar on amity between divided nations. The non-meeting of Raka and Alam symbolizes the intimacy of two nations chipped by estrangement. Palit's story deals with the indecisive syntax of Alam's nostalgia. In the end, however, Alam finally outgrows the imagined domesticity of his home and realizes his own house has now become an estranged cultural space that resists absorption into an unremembered past when Alam assumed that he and Raka had no barriers between them because they had shared a home.

In Alam's case, border crossing has unequivocally become a "transformative experience" (Boym 330) that grafted his status as an exile. In Amar Mitra's story "Wild-Goose Country," set on the Hili border of West Dinajpur in 1996, it is the reality of borders symbolized by the barbed wire fence India has decided to put up to define the border with Bangladesh that is tinged with nostalgia. The author here has wished to convey the futility of national borders as political divisions and in his critique has used the symbol of a lone goose, separated from its flock, unable to control the "vertigo of fate" (Boym 280). Michiel Baud and William Van Schendel in their study of borderlands, use the term "border" for the "political divides that were the result of state building" (214) point out how "all over the world borders became crucial elements in the new, increasingly global system of states" (214). They argued that "from the perspective of national centers of authority, the border between countries is a sharp line, an impenetrable barrier" (216) but from the perspective of the border "borderlands are broad scenes of interactions" (216) between people on both sides of the border. Just like in Taswi's "The Wagah Canal," ("Wagah ki Nehar") where we observe an unanticipated union of divided communities at a market place, the borderland in the Hili area too has a life of its own where communal markers are conspicuous by their absence. In the pedestrian reality of their lives there "was no sign of ... the border ... there was just a sea of people who has swallowed up all the marks which demarcated one country from another" (294). People with a house on the opposite site of the border come to mow grass to the other side, sugary treats are sold and smuggling is an unequivocal reality here. These complex network borderland transactions may have led to political histrionics culminating in the decision to erect a barbed wire fence to keep trespassers or "infiltrators" at bay. It is only the wild geese in the sky that they cannot trap. The birds that Mazrul sees are a leitmotif in the story signifying his nostalgia for a lost homeland. "On tremulous wings, these flew across from the east towards the north-west" (579). Subir thinks they are war planes but Mazarul is sure that they are

geese. He himself is akin to the lone goose that had presumably strayed away from its flock staggering across the sky. Partition has divided the families of Mazirul, Aloka and Subir. Two of Mazarul's uncles left with their families in 1953 and yet when Mazarul meets Amal Bhattacharya, who has stayed on in Bangladesh, memories of his family, his beautiful aunt and his cousin all flood back. He yearns for news about them and makes frantic enquiries about their whereabouts to Amal who is their acquaintance. In his urge to walk back in time and transcend the reality of Partition, Mazarul grips the barbed wire that cuts through his skin leaving bloody patches testifying to his failed attempt to infiltrate the past. As Aloka, Subir and Amal try to release his grip on the wire they realize that despite the enchantment of nostalgia, restoring a lost home is impossible. The border has indeed trapped these people and have transformed their identities. Like the flock of wild geese that has drifted away to oblivion leaving behind the straggling lone goose, Mazarul too with his hypertrophied sense of the past is left trailing in disenchantment. He refuses to cross the border, the presence of which has already denied the very possibility of homecoming. Partition, in the end, he realizes is break in destiny, it is symbolized by barbed wires cutting through one's flesh.

Conclusion

A study of the architectonics of the world of nostalgia creatively problematized by the writers of the short stories studied for the paper reveals that far from being a reflective vision of the past, nostalgia in the refugee community of Bengal supervened with their Post-Partition future public and private experiences. Each story read in the paper suggests that despite the cartographic negotiation of national borders that caused the refugees of Bengal Partition to leave their home and hearth, the frontiers of the mind failed to mark territories between their past life and their present life such that an *idée fixe* with the vocabulary of the past engendered a perpetual discrepancy between the lost home and a reconstructed second-hand home. Nostalgia, the stories seem to suggest, is not a simple backward vision, but a complex phenomenon of a mind preoccupied with prefabricated visions of perfection that the nostalgic perpetually strives to realize in the present. The stories underline the failure of such an attempt of subverting chronology as neither Alam, seeking a revival of his romantic relation with Raka, nor the protagonist of Bibhutibhusan's story seeking a home that is an embodiment of his past domestic space, nor for that matter, the central character in Palit's story remembering his old relations and wishing to walk backward into their lives that he vacated after the Partition, are successful in their attempts. They are left with the realization

that nostalgic vision is essentially lateral; it can never be a parameter to the construction of reality. Nostalgia may give us the freedom to pick and choose the narratives of the past, build us a Potemkin village of sorts, but a home once lost can never reconstructed despite a paranoiac resolve to perform that feat.

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That 'Indian' Girl Strolling on the Streets of Europe: Conjecturing and Decoding the *Flaneuse* in Vikas Bahl's *Queen*

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Abstract: Globalization has only lately expanded itself by making the supposed “third world countries” a part of it, something which is basically an aftermath of colonialism. The post-postmodern world in which we live, has time and again proven that our ethnic and cultural identities are always in a state of flux. With the rapid global exchange, migration and tourism giving rise to hybrid and diasporic cultural identities, it wouldn't be eccentric to see a South Asian woman on the streets of a European city, closely gazing and being gazed at by the men and women who don't look/speak/dress like her. And if we are to look at this from a third-world feminist perspective, deciphering of identities becomes even more convoluted. This paper would attempt to conjecture and decode the character of Rani (played by Kangana Ranaut) as a *flaneuse*, the female street stroller who transcends from the inner space of home/*ghar* to the outer space of the world/*bahir* (literally because she goes to a foreign/Western land), in Vikas Bahl's film, *Queen* (2014). The paper would argue how the film uses the metaphor of *flanerie* as a foundation of self-discovery for this naive middle class Indian girl, who before this of course, had never stepped out of home without her younger brother, and during the course of the film, very ironically to her Indian persona, transforms into a *flaneuse*.

Keywords: *Flaneuse*, *Flaneur*, Indian feminism, Third-world feminism, Tourism, Hybridity, Diaspora, Postcoloniality, Postmodernism, Globalization

Strolling as a concept has to be age-old, because walking is the first thing that a human or any creature for that matter learns. With the coming of the urban modernity of the nineteenth century, the practice of sauntering had got a sassy new name, *flanerie/flaneur* that was introduced by Charles Baudelaire, and had originated in France. For Baudelaire, certainly, *flanerie*, the act of strolling on the streets, was a way of encountering the vitality of the city; it was a way of reading and understanding the urban space. The *flaneur's* activity was/is mainly wandering, watching around, witnessing and observing modernity from a critical point of view. The metropolis then became a space where intellectuals, poets, and artists (all of them male) would meet with their prototype, in an attempt to interact and exchange impetus. It was

also occupied by nomads, madmen and prostitutes, but no “chaste” woman made an appearance in public on the streets of a European city. This concept hence had a gendered social type. It was assumed that only men enjoyed the freedom to roam around the streets of a European city. However, recent scholarship has introduced the concept of the “invisible *flanuese*” (Janet Wolff), the female onlooker, who was very much there but either got unnoticed, erased or was self-consciously hidden from the public gaze.

Entering *bahir*, or the public space, symbolically gives meaning to the lives of those walking the streets, exchanging glances as well as feeling powerful for being able to transcend the boundaries of *ghar* or the inner space, if we look at the concept of *flaneur* from an Indian perspective, as pointed out by Partha Chatterjee in the essay, “The Nation and its Women.” He asserts:

The world (*bahir*) is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home (*ghar*) in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world and woman is its representation. (120)

Many if not all women in India, have always been asked to look, dress and behave in a certain way, without really being asked for their opinion in the matters that fundamentally concern “them” in the first place. Many of them are forbidden to step outside their homes all by themselves, without being guarded by a husband/father/brother figure that would “protect” them from the impure and unchaste energies of the public space. This public space is still considered dangerous for women in many Indian communities and they would want their women to stay in the confined spaces of home; however the practice is changing, even when it's not a massive change. The world was considered a dangerous place for women back in the day in the West as well and I would like to quote Ranjani Mazumdar in the support of this. She declares:

Elizabeth Wilson has shown how in much of European urban writing, women’s presence in the city was seen as a source of both pleasure and danger. This dual-edged relationship produced an anxiety wherein the lure of the city was not only seen as dangerous for women, but women’s very presence seemed to make the city a dangerous place. The public-private divide intensified during the industrial period, leading to tremendous anxiety about women’s presence in the streets. (80)

The female stroller was associated with danger and pleasure in the West in the past, and her taking to the streets is still considered taboo in the third world countries, which also charts out the huge difference between the East and the West, something on which I would shed more light in a while. Talking about the presence of a female stroller in recent Indian cinema, I would say that she has always had a mysterious (not dangerous) back story that would make her the subject of the Indian diaspora, as someone who is always on the move, transcending and transgressing boundaries of conformities, nations, race and gender. Vidya Balan in Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* (2012) for instance plays a pregnant woman who is Indian, London-returned and in search of her missing husband. Anurag Kashyap's *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010) similarly narrates the life of Ruth (Kalki Koechlin), a British Indian, who roams on the streets of Mumbai in search of her Indian father she has only heard of. There are also other films that are not as dark as the aforementioned films, like Homi Adjanian's *Cocktail* (2012) and Shashanka Ghosh's *Veere Di Wedding* (2018), both of which deal with female bonding and women strolling the urban streets of the world together. There are also films like Bahl's *Queen* and Gauri Shinde's *English Vinglish* (2012), which stand out and become mouthpieces of female liberation.

Cultural and ethnic ambiguity has started to intertwine with the representations of Indian women on celluloid, and Bahl's *Queen* (2014) is just another example, and the best of the abovementioned pack. It is rather fascinating that in *Queen*, an Indian girl is presented as wandering and reconnoitering the streets of Paris, from where the very concept of *flaneur* has originated. This speaks volumes about the fluidity of culture, culminating towards the idea that people from different parts of the world would always be on the move exploring spaces that are new to them, no matter what culture/country they originally belong to. It showcases that ethnicities are ambiguous and flexible as people do not stay in one place forever. They move and travel as much as they can in their lifetimes, and their interaction with different people across the world is nothing but a global culture exchange, which Rani (Kangana Ranaut) also endorses in the film, because she carries her national identity with pride wherever she goes and whenever she meets new people.

Queen amalgamates concepts as diverse as postmodernism, feminism, postcolonialism and hybridity so subtly and seamlessly, that spectators never realize they are watching a film that has a deeper meaning associated with what it furnishes with on the surface. The film ends up breaking many stereotypes, and it does so during the course of the film so that the spectator

can let go of them along with its protagonist, Rani, a homely Punjabi girl from Rajouri Garden (an urbanized, but middle class locality of Delhi, India that mostly has a Punjabi population), who slowly and steadily adjusts herself to the streets of Paris and Amsterdam. The story begins when just two days before her wedding, Rani is dumped by Vijay (Rajkumar Rao), her London returned/based fiancé, who after a long courtship with her, stops finding her suitable for himself. Heartbroken, Rani decides to go on her honeymoon alone, to explore the cities of Paris and Amsterdam, and in the process, ends up exploring herself. Towards the end of the film, Vijay proposes to her again, something he is propelled to do after gazing at the never-seen-before avatar of hers, when she accidentally shares her changing-room selfie with him. The photograph brings Vijay to the streets of Amsterdam from London and he chases Rani again, just the way he used to chase her back on the streets of Delhi. He starts to believe that she has changed and is no more a *behanji* (slang used for simple and plain-looking women who are looked down upon by men in Northern India), which is why she becomes suitable for him, again.

The moment Rani steps out of her home, and literally the country, we assume that she would become the exotic *flâneuse*, the never-seen-before prototype strolling on the European streets ready for the gaze of the occident, the men and women. Bahl however subverts this idea by making her very much a part of the European culture, without really othering her just because she is an Indian woman. It would have been exciting if Bahl had chosen a dusky actor in place of the *gori-chitti* (“fair-skinned” in Punjabi) Ranaut. He instead chooses a dusky actress, Lisa Haydon to play another significant role in the film, who is everything that Rani is not. Her character’s name is Vijaylakshmi, shortened as Vijay, the same name as Rani’s ex-fiancé. She is half Indian, half French-Spanish, who Rani first meets when she is having sex with a stranger. Vijaylakshmi introduces Rani to the streets of Paris, before her stint of walking alone on the streets goes so erratic that she decides to go back to India at one point.

Rani wears her innate naivety like armor against the pitfalls that she faces on her incredible voyage of discovery through Paris, the city of love, and Amsterdam, a below-the-sea-level megalopolis where she finds herself and a lot more than she could have haggled for, including her first kiss with a handsome Italian restaurateur. As Rani who always belonged to *ghar*, comes in contact with the enormous, shady world of *bahir*, she makes mistakes as frequently as she makes friends. In exchange, she gets a whole new world for herself. In an isolated Paris street, she fends off a thug and is thrilled to narrate the incident to random

strangers outside a Parisian club. Relentlessly dependent on a much younger brother, Rani for the first time learns to live life on her own, and on the streets, bars, and hotels of Paris and Amsterdam, she finally discovers her potential to be on her own. Before parting ways with Vijaylakshmi, in all her innocence, she advises her not to sleep with all and sundry. She interestingly gets to know widely “different” people, from different cultures, with different interests; people she had never imagined existed. While in Amsterdam, she meets all manner of new people and automatically connects with them. These include a Pakistani pole-dancer (Rukhsar/Roxette), a graffiti artist, a Black French musician, and a tsunami victim (the last three being men and her roommates in Amsterdam).

Queen makes a feminist statement, but it does not put up the “ism” at its core for display like a conspicuous banner. It slams female stereotypes and challenges the notions society holds about women. The entire film is from Rani’s perspective, rejecting the male gaze. At no point in the film are the female characters judged or objectified; the innumerable roles are in fact celebrated. Somewhere between love, Rani also discovers the distinct and ambiguous meaning of identity while she is on the move. The film then becomes progressive in many ways, including the fact that it celebrates singlehood over marriage, and the happy ending is arrived when Rani learns to count the blessings of being single, and rejects marriage in favour of singlehood. *Queen* also mocks the West Delhi bourgeoisie and their way of life: the kitty parties and the salons, the afternoon naps and shopping, the meaningless lives that many women embrace. The film celebrates freedom of being a part of the larger world, of accepting everyone, away from the restrictions of a secure home and a normative life. Even the soundtrack of the film supports the theme of female liberation. The song “Jugni” for instance celebrates Rani’s liberation, as she symbolically breaks the fetters of conformity, patriarchy and established constructions. The song stays true to the Punjabi folk legend of *jugni* (Punjabi term for “a female firefly”) and makes Rani, the perfect fit for it, as the *jugni* is supposed to wander, witness, observe, and comment, things that Rani learns to perform while she is transforming herself into a *flaneuse*. As Kaustav Bakshi points out, it’s not without reason, therefore, that on the film’s poster the word “Queen” appears in rainbow, possibly colouring Rani’s “queerness”—queerness in the sense that she would finally be able to break free of the established constructions within which life is usually lived, by maneuvering, walking, crossing and transgressing the boundaries of conformities both literally and symbolically, making her a perfect *flaneuse* in the process. Rani could have gone into depression, could

have become a psycho, or could have become a man-hater; in bygone days any of these would have been her fate, had the groom walked out of the marriage only two days before the planned date (Bakshi). Typically traditional, timid, passive, and protective of her chastity, Rani surprises everyone by announcing that she would in any case, go for her honeymoon in Paris, a city she had always wanted to visit. As Rani's worldview expands, she slowly understands that what she had been lamenting all this while, could have cut her wings off forever, which is possibly why she thanks Vijay for calling off their wedding. She would have never been able to discover the potential of finding herself if Vijay had married her. The appallingly shy Rani, who does not let go of her old cardigan even in bridal finery, steps out in a graceful summer dress, and rejects a seemingly contrite fiancé in favour of a rock show. Rani arrives, finally. Once she lets go of the old cardigan, the winter of her life comes to a "symbolic end" (Bakshi).

In the past, many women were the objects of the *flâneur's* gaze while today, many of them are the subjects, the actresses of *flanerie*, due to their economic independence, the transformation of the cultural model and of lifestyles. New York is one of the more illustrative cities for investigating *flâneuse*, the best example of which could be the comedy series *Sex and the City* (created by Darren Star), where the female protagonists challenged classical stereotype of the male *flâneur* by taking on to the streets, and celebrating singlehood in many ways. Commenting on the gaze with which a woman on screen is looked at, Laura Mulvey says:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, and their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (62)

For Mulvey, cinema duplicates the role of the spectator, constructing idealized onscreen images for him/her to identify with and aspire to. She argues that a cinematic text is systematically patriarchal, where men are active, independent and in control of their fate, while the role of women is merely to satisfy the male gaze of the cine goer, and eventually to be possessed by him and the male co-actor she is paired with on screen. This is something

that is debunked in *Queen*, where it is the female protagonist who is looking at things, and the spectator who may be a man or a woman, has to witness the adventures through her eyes, as well as the eye of the camera, that could be synonymous with the spectator himself/herself. *Queen* then furnishes its spectators with the third eye, who become *flaneurs* themselves whenever they look at the screen. Through this third eye, the spectators are able to witness the borderline between the West and the East, the orient and the occident, and the self and the other. Through looking at this intersection of the contrasting religions, ethnicities, and languages, the spectator is able to see that on the edges of this binary, rests a culture that has been hybridized. It sketches a portrait of absolute strength through Rani, Vijaylakshmi and Rukhsar, who assimilate into the world around them without losing or debasing the blood from which they were raised. The women carry their histories and language with them, in fragments, like afterthoughts at the end of sentences.

The female body is intentionally put on display throughout the film, depicting the realities of urban life, while the male body is being looked at in an attempt to invert the gaze. The women become objects of male gaze (primarily), something I would like to call the “public” gaze in case of this film at least, because Rani is also looked at by other Indian women, and she looks at other men and women as well. For instance, when Rani goes to meet her aunt who stays in Paris, she is looked at by her with pity, even if it is phony and she doesn’t really mean anything she says. Her purpose is rather to prove to Rani and Vijaylakshmi, how fluently she can speak the *firang* (a word used for white people and culture, mainly in North India) French; however, in an amusing scene, we witness how she struggles and can barely speak it. Even in the final scene, Vijay’s mother glances at Rani’s body, complimenting her on her “modern”/“straight-haired” look.

Bahl also plays with the stereotypes in the film using tools of gaze, be it virtual in the case of spectators looking at the screen while Rani Skypes with her family back in India, or the act of gazing at the “other” when Rani screams with fear after looking at her Black French roommate for the first time. Bahl reveals her inherent racism with him while reinforcing other stereotypes we’ve inherited including Vijaylakshmi’s dangerously alluring dusky sexuality versus Rani’s fair-skinned chastity. The only difference is that he confronts our perceptions with humour. Rani’s middle-aged father tucks in his potbelly while the overweight younger brother gazes at Vijaylakshmi’s breasts as she bends into the frame while Rani Skypes with the family. Both the “men” lose interest when she exits the screen. The scene visibly and

consciously ruptures our hypocrisy with a smart candour. These touches, plus the strict dodging of any romantic liaison, even with the Italian restaurateur who persists in calling Rani “pretty lady,” make *Queen* the trendsetter of unconventional feminism.

Throughout the film, Bahl's aim is to expose the patriarchal Indian society that casts women according to its standards, and they happily accept roles assigned to them without even realizing that they are being subjected to various kinds of inequalities just because they are women. When Bahl wrote the script of the film, he based Rani's character on the people he had observed while growing up in Delhi. Commenting on the film, Bahl during one of the interviews said, “I know, life for girls is planned out for them by their families. They lose their own perspective on life and they are okay with that.” In a setting where as a girl crosses the age of twenty, her family gets busy to get her “settled,” she never plans anything by herself, unless as in this case of Rani, marriage plans go cockeyed. Thus the script was developed so that in the first half, Rani gets over Vijay while she is meeting new people on the foreign streets, and in the second, she gets over herself. There are a couple of other instances in the film that very subtly depict how women like Rani become victims of patriarchy in India. The film has an interior monologue shown through flashback scenes, something that is presented as a stark contrast to the life that Rani is living on the streets of Europe as a *flaneuse*. One such instance shown in the flashback is when she is scolded by Vijay for dancing at a wedding, even when she declares that she loves to dance. The scene is crosscut to the present, where Rani is seen drinking and dancing her heart out in a Parisian club with her hair open, without really caring about the “society.” The West then becomes a sort of savior of the East that apparently suppresses and curtails the freedom of its women. While going back to her hotel room from the club in the cab, Rani says that girls are not allowed to do anything in India, not even burp in public, to which Vijaylakshmi responds that they can do anything they want in Paris, something that again charts out the massive difference between the East and the West. The fact that Rani endorses that she is Indian wherever she goes and communicates in Hindi even when others cannot, speaks volumes about how the film celebrates nationalism, even when we are simultaneously witnessing the innumerable trials and tribulations faced by her daily in her very own country.

To sum up, Rani, cannot as Chandra Talpade Mohanty would say, “represent” all the women of India because of its complex ethnic and cultural diversity, however, can still manage to give voice to many of them, who are always guarded by a male figure (a relatively younger

brother in this case) whenever they step out of *ghar*, to the *bahir*. The roving, hippie culture that Rani witnesses and embraces in the cities of Paris and Amsterdam is what makes her the perfect example of an Indian *flaneuse* on the European streets. After all, traveling and meeting new people is what makes our life what it is. The journey motif then becomes symbolic of the transformation of our protagonist, charting out that it is the edges of the *ghar* and *bahir* where her life rests primarily and not inside or outside of it. In the beginning while she is on the streets of Paris all by herself, she is exploring the urban space without any purpose. She becomes the stranger who moves through the public space with her loneliness. While a *flaneur* is supposed to be a native that becomes a foreigner, *Queen*, however inverts this relationship as Rani becomes a tourist who settles with her newly acquired alienated identity as an observer. Her purposeless strolling on the streets of Paris is a counter-narrative to the Indian heroine who before this was seen on the marvelous European locales, only singing and dancing in the presence of a man. As Rani moves to Amsterdam, and shares her room with three men, her wandering finds a meaning, as it becomes a well-defined intercession and concoction of global identities on a foreign land. Rani clings to the ideal figure of a *flaneur/flaneuse* who touches the urban spaces and leaves, without making an effort to establish permanent relationships, as her larger aim is to discover herself by discovering the unknown people and the unknown streets. She is able to be singled out from the crowd and create an independent identity of her own, by ironically becoming a part of the crowd, proving the dual role of both “self” and “other” on her own. It is Rani, the *flaneuse* who guides and leads her three male roommates to the sex shop where Rukhsar works as Roxette. It is her who drives them back home when they are drunk, while she was ridiculed by her ex-fiance for her poor driving skills back in India. Just like Bahl’s *Queen*, Shinde’s *English Vinglish* is another cinematic text that showcases a female protagonist wandering on the streets of the United States, in order to learn the colonial language. In both these films, the female protagonist is positioned on the edge of new opportunities. They are the onlookers and witnesses of urban modernity, both of them not having a major purpose to roam on the streets, but a very strong intent to do so. And this intent is nothing but a figurative extension of the presence of Indian women on the streets of the world, to meet their other female halves lost in the process of conforming to the ideal roles.

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Re-Visiting Exile in Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Srikanta*

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Abstract: Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) was one of the most read and loved Bengali novelists who wrote about the socio-cultural issues plaguing turn-of-the-century Bengal. *Srikanta* is considered an autobiographical novel and is divided into four parts. The protagonist Srikanta travels to Burma in the second part of the novel. The present paper would study this 'Exile' to Burma and Srikanta's experience of a cosmopolitan society. During the nineteenth century, Burma was a land of opportunity for Indians and many undertook this perilous journey for financial betterment. Life in Burma was a cultural shock for Indians and meant a break from their inherited mores and values. The land of Burma was not an exclusive space reserved for the high castes and men alone. The nostalgia for their hitherto static identity of caste was challenged and modified according to the living conditions in Burma. This migration led to the adoption of new cultural values; both good and bad by the Indians. Burma symbolized a space of equality and liberty. The displacement of Indians to Burma shattered their comfort zone and threatened the secure identity they had enjoyed in the motherland. Basic human nature is tested in Burma and the barriers that divide Indians are demolished at the onset of the journey itself. The memories of old identities fade away, new relations are formed, governed by new values and their individual achievements determine the place they occupy in a modern society. Like the modern day globalization, colonialism created hybrid identities. Srikanta's experience in Burma portrays the effects of this displacement on human behaviour. This paper will study how human identity shifts and adjusts as a result of migration, as narrated by Chatterjee's *Srikanta*.

Keywords: Migration, Cosmopolitan Culture, Alienation, Adaptation, New Identity

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Srikanta* (1916-1933) is considered an autobiographical novel and is episodic in nature. The novel is divided into four parts and the present research paper studies the second part of the novel titled 'Exile.' The paper studies the experiences of the protagonist Srikanta in an alien culture when he travels to Burma in search of a livelihood and his realization of the fluidity of inherited cultural values.

The journey to Burma symbolizes the rite of passage which displaces the travellers from their comfort zone and introduces them to a cosmopolitan culture. The Indians travelling to Burma are stripped of their status and the categories of caste, class and religion are demolished on the ship itself.

The sea voyage to Burma exposes Srikanta to the grim reality and pitiable condition of his fellow beings. People from all over India travel in jam packed conditions to earn their livelihood. The description of passengers boarding the ship is very symbolic: “As the train was entering the station, I had observed herd upon herd of motley-covered animals packed between the road and the jetty. Coming closer I recognized them for what they were--not animals but men, women and children who had spent the night in the cold and the fog in the hope of securing some space to sit on the boat that was to carry them across the black water. I had a reservation for the deck but my heart quaked at the thought of forcing my way through this turbulent sea of humanity to the entrance of the jetty” (332). Burma was a land of financial opportunity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and many people undertook the perilous journey for the betterment of their lives. But the humans have been reduced to animals in their attempt to travel to Burma for a better life. The racial humiliation and the horrendous conditions they face on the ship test the limit of their physical and mental ability.

The identity of the Indians travelling to Burma is defined by their caste and religion. The caste hierarchy forms an integral part of life in India and the passengers set up their luggage on the ship and are seated in a compartmentalized manner. The interaction with fellow passengers is also governed by barriers of caste, religion, language and region. But distinctions of caste, region, and language are washed away when a storm ravages the whole compartmentalized seating arrangements and the passengers fall upon each other:

In *Srikanta*, there is a description of the sea voyage from Calcutta to Rangoon. The passengers of the lower class were all Indians and as the voyage commenced the people belonging to different parts of the country and of different religions and linguistic groups kept themselves separated from one another. In a sense they looked like a miniature India but in mid voyage a severe storm gave them a big jolt and enough rollings. As a result artificial barriers were broken and the people got mingled with each other. This description is very much symbolic and represents the liberal ideas of Sarat Chandra as well as his love for national unity. (Biswas 263)

The journey and the storm are symbolic of the imminent changes that the immigrants would witness in a new country. The migration to a cosmopolitan country has begun already and old identities are under threat.

Srikanta witnesses another aspect of Indian identity on the ship. At the time of the writing of this novel, India was a colonized country. According to Ashish Nandy, “The Raj saw Indians as crypto-barbarians who needed to further civilize themselves. It saw British rule as an agent of progress and as a mission. Many Indians in turn saw their salvation in becoming more like the British, in friendship or in enmity (7). On the ship Srikanta witnesses a British officer beating up Indian sailors. When the doctor of the ship who is Indian protests against such harassment and threatens to complain to the Captain, he realises that the sailors have actually accepted such treatment as normal:

Looking in the direction of the pointing finger, I saw the men who had been kicked only a few moments before peeping from behind some barrels and grinning from ear to ear. The Englishman laughed again and, wagging his thumbs in front of the doctor’s face, walked away swelled with triumph. I glanced at Doctor Babu. Anger, revulsion, humiliation and despair struggled against each other on his face. He walked rapidly up to the men and said harshly, “What are you grinning at, you rascals?” At this, the good measure of self-respect returned to our countrymen. They stopped laughing and advancing aggressively, spoke as if in one voice, “Who are *you* to call us rascals? Are we your servants that we have to take your permission before we laugh? (345)

The behaviour of the sailors shows that they have internalized their colonial status to an extent that they can take a beating from an Englishman but will confront an Indian who stands up for them. They question the authority and diminish the stature of an educated Indian even when he fights for their cause. They feel proud to align with the British rather than with their own countrymen.

On the ship Srikanta witnesses an inter-caste relationship between Nanda Mistri and Tagar, which is representative of many relationships he will witness in Burma. They live a cat and dog life and Tagar does not accept Nanda as her husband because he is a Shudra:

So what if we have lived together for twenty years? Does that make us man and wife? Since when has the daughter of a Boston-born been the wife of a Shudra? Have I

ever let you enter my kitchen or touch my food? Not even my sworn enemy can say that of me. Tagar Boshtomi would rather die than besmirch the caste she was born into; and Tagar rolled her eyes at me in pride and triumph at her illustrious birth. All the way back to my tin-trunk, I couldn't stop laughing at the Vaishnavi's logic. But immediately afterwards, I reminded myself that Tagar was, after all, a foolish illiterate woman. There were many educated and respectable men in the cities and villages of Bengal who fell back on a similar logic when faced with the prospect of losing caste. But males--no matter what they do or say--are protected from mockery in our society. We laugh at women--never at men. (335)

This episode of the journey of exile touches upon two very important issues: caste and status of women. In Burma women enjoyed freedom which Indian women did not enjoy at that time. The relationship of Tagar and Nanda can survive blissfully in Burma only. Their inter-caste relation may lead to personal fights but there is no fear of social ostracism. The inter-caste relation could thrive in Burma as there is no concept of caste in Burma.

The migration to a different country provides not just financial opportunities but also changes the identity of the people. The traditional identities no longer work and money is the most important social marker. The displacement meant for financial gain sometimes leads to permanent settlement and the new place creates new identities. Srikanta's first few days in Burma show him the after effects of the journey which bring about changes in the behaviour and attitude of the people once they start living in Burma. "The concentrated essence of India--the India of religious, communal, linguistic, provincial and customary difference--sets out on the voyage. Before the voyage is over, all this has changed. The artificial barriers that the travellers have set up are smashed beyond repair. The storm has smashed through their former prejudices and at least as long as they live in Burma, the old social beliefs have little hold on them" (Kabir 22). Srikanta's stay at a hotel in Burma shows him the change in his countrymen with their stay in Burma. It reveals a liberal side of his countrymen who have been freed from their orthodoxy and have discarded caste prejudices:

It was by living among them that I first learned that what we call samskar is not founded upon rock and can easily be shed. Two English words 'instinct' and 'prejudice' together make up the full meaning of the word samskar. One is not the other--that of course is obvious. That the strongest of our samskars--the caste bias--is not instinctive and can easily be overcome, was revealed to me that very first day at

Da Thakur's hotel. I was amazed at the discovery. I realized that many of us, who wear the shackles of caste imposed upon us through centuries of mandatory compartmentalization, happily, even proudly, in the conviction that we are upholding and handing down to posterity worthwhile systems of thought and action, discard them with the greatest ease the moment we enter an area where they have no relevance ... It was obvious that their brief exposure to a foreign country and culture was sufficient to successfully wipe away the generations of conditioning with which they had gone. (350-52)

These words show the effect that a change of place has on the inherited identity of a person. In Burma, the living space is marked by freedom from social prejudices. People are not judged by their caste status and their hard work is appreciated. And thus, the immigrants from India also adapt to the new social environment and forge friendships with people outside of their limited zone. The Indians who have left their roots to earn a living in Burma have in the process given up shackles of an orthodox life. They have accepted and befriended their fellow beings irrespective of their caste. Srikanta witnesses the inter-caste friendships in Burma and applauds the positive change. Here the Indians are not threatened by social ostracism and the concepts of purity and pollution do not hinder their social interactions. Srikanta witnesses how a group of Indians maintain their friendship with a man who lied about his caste in order to save him from guilt:

The man went his way leaving me wondering at the psyche of the expatriate Hindu. How could a land like ours, in which even the educated upper class devoted itself almost exclusively to seeking out the weaknesses of others, produce men like Karmakar and his fellows--men who were liberal enough to forgive an errant colleague for robbing them of their caste, and sensitive enough to empathize with his shame and sorrow? The secret lay, no doubt, in their movement away from the stagnant cesspools of their native villages and their efforts to build a future in a land where caste is unknown. Mental mobility is the natural sequel of physical mobility and together they could be the making of our people. (353)

This change in the outlook of the expatriates shows that orthodox rules are not eternal and mental mobility is possible in the right social and cultural conditions. According to Shibdas Ghosh, "Sarat Chandra wanted to rouse a strong urge for social revolution by generating pain, anguish and a feeling of want in the minds of the readers--leading to a yearning for higher

values of life. He did not deceive himself, nor did he confuse others with hollow and tall talks of social revolution” (284). In Burma, all Indians are outsiders and this displacement creates an ambivalent attitude towards their fellow beings. New friendships are formed based on memories of the homeland. The agony resulting from migration demolishes the artificial barriers of caste and makes them realize the value of human friendships in a foreign land.

Money in Burma is the source of power and the concept of a combined hand reflects the power of money in a foreign land and again symbolizes the flexible nature of caste:

Combined hands are men who combine cooking and serving food with every other kind of menial chore. They are generally found among Brahmins from northern India who, though rabidly caste-conscious in their native village, display a remarkable flexibility in Burma. For an extra rupee or two the purest of pure Dwivedi and Chaturvedi cooks will undertake to clean dirty utensils, wipe floors, prepare hookahs and polish the shoes of their low-caste masters, for if there is one thing they cannot resist, it is the lure of filthy lucre. For them money is the most potent of purifying agents. (378)

By equating money with a purifying agent, Chatterjee is sarcastically attacking the whole concept of purity and pollution of the caste system. In a country where the identity of a Brahmin does not guarantee a position of power, the said identity can be forgotten to achieve financial goals. As Sara Mills asserts, “A Foucauldian analysis focuses more on the way that power is dispersed throughout a society in all kinds of relationships, events and activities; focusing on contingent factors enables us to examine the way that power operates” (52). The Brahmins occupy the highest position in the caste hierarchy but the greed for money makes them do the chores they will not do in a million years in their native country. They relinquish their inherited power in a land where only money guarantees power in the social arena.

The position of women in Burma is also very different from that in India. The independence of Burmese women is not seen as positive by the Indian men and they see Burmese women as unchaste. Hence, the Burmese women do not deserve the same respect. Srikanta witnesses this moral hypocrisy when he sees a young Bengali man shamelessly abandoning his Burmese wife and children and planning a return to India as a pious Hindu. His brother supports his decision and his logic is as demented as his deceit:

“Burmese women are filthy, casteless whores. She’ll catch another man before the boat leaves the harbour. The sluts eat neppi and stink to high heaven. They are not like our women, moshai. Young men must sow their wild oats. Which son of a bastard doesn’t? My brother’s case is a little more complicated than normal, I admit it. But must he be made to sacrifice his future for a trifling error committed in the heat of youth? Does he not have a country and a family? Is it not more important that he returns to them, marries, begets children and becomes a respectable member of society? People get away with far more serious offenses. Some men I know have even eaten fowl when they were young and headstrong. With age and wisdom they have admitted their folly. We, as older men, should forgive and forget. Therein lies our greatness.” I was so taken aback by his assumption that eating fowl was a more serious offence than exploiting an innocent girl’s love and then abandoning her, that I was rendered speechless. (367)

The total disregard for the Burmese woman is symbolic of the patriarchal mindset that sees a woman as a disposable entity. The man praises Indian women but rejects his brother’s Burmese wife because of her cultural difference. The caste prejudices make the choice easier and guilt free. When his wife comes to say goodbye relying on his false promise of return, he mocks her in his native language and insults her loyalty in front of a crowd. Srikanta is filled with anger and sorrow at his crude display and sees this act of deceit as a result of his orthodox upbringing. Along with all the positive effects this culture which allows the migrants freedom to forge new identities also highlights the depravity of human nature:

Such dissolution of social beliefs and customs may lead to an utter anarchy of individualism. With many of the emigrants, this was actually the case. They discarded the patterns of social behaviour to which they were accustomed at home, but built up in its place no new uniformity of conduct. The result was a relapse to a social atmosphere in which selfishness and sensual pleasure were the dominant elements. Libertinism and sexual promiscuity of every type was the order rather than the exception. Double standards of life and morality were maintained side by side. The emigrant looked forward to the day when he would return home and resume the social conventions he had left behind. In the meantime his only objective was pleasure unhampered by any moral considerations. In *Srikanta*, Chatterjee paints a scathing picture of such moral hypocrisy. (Kabir 23)

The cultural gap and patriarchal orthodoxy combine to negate the exploitation of the Burmese woman and the young man easily chooses the protection of his own social status.

The narrative of Abhaya and Rohini restores our faith in relationships surviving in an open environment. Srikanta had met Abhaya on the ship and she was going to Burma to look for her husband with Rohini, a man from her village. Rohini and his love for Abhaya symbolizes the presence of true love within the patriarchal web of male privilege and a cosmopolitan culture. Rohini is a stark contrast to the young man who abandoned his Burmese wife. Rohini directs his energies to taking care of Abhaya beyond his means. When Srikanta visits them, he witnesses a lovers' quarrel between them and Abhaya asks him to look out for her husband.

Abhaya's estranged husband is a male chauvinist and is undeserving of a woman like Abhaya. Srikanta meets Abhaya's husband a little later as an accused in a theft case. He is repulsed by the man and sees a shocking contrast in the personalities of the estranged husband and wife: "I had been reared in a tradition that exhorted a woman to revere her husband as her God. But, try as I would, I couldn't bear to think of Abhaya in connection with this animal. Abhaya, whatever she may have done, was sensitive and refined and this creature looked and behaved like a buffalo that had strayed in from some tropical swamp of innermost Burma" (359). He proves his description true when he lies about his wife Abhaya and accuses her of adultery. Srikanta is disgusted with his lies and asks him to get a letter from Abhaya of his innocence and he might be able to retain his job. His hypocrisy is revealed when he changes his verdict about Abhaya the next time he meets Srikanta and agrees to reinstate Abhaya as his wife.

Rohini symbolizes the face of true love and when Srikanta visits him to check on him, he is pained to see his pitiable condition: "A machine needs fuel, I thought sadly. It cannot run on water. I repeated my offer of taking him to Da Thakur's hotel but he refused. I realized that he couldn't bear the thought of breaking up the household he and Abhaya had built together. Not that he cherished any hope of things ever being as they had been. He stayed on only for the sake of the memories that breathed all around him for they, alone, could sustain him and keep him whole--painful though they were. To leave these protecting walls would be, for him, equal to embracing annihilation" (365). Rohini's refusal to go to a hotel symbolizes his yearning for memories that he and Abhaya had created. This house was made into a home by them and he cannot bear to lose this identity and displace himself further. Unlike Abhaya's

husband, it is Rohini who had given Abhaya the honour and prestige of a wife and is unwilling to break away from the remnants of their domestic bliss. When Srikanta visits Rohini's house again after a few days, it is Abhaya who opens the door. Abhaya has broken away from her wedded husband and has come back to the man she loves. Srikanta is shocked by this change and is about to leave when he realizes his mistake of judging Abhaya: "I cannot leave Abhaya--not this way. I have no right to humiliate her. So many do's and don'ts are ingrained in us from childhood. What are they truly worth? Who has the right to sit on judgement over another human being? Not I certainly. Not you. Not even God" (370). Srikanta had seen the incompatibility between Abhaya and her brutish husband and stays back to show respect to Abhaya and her decision.

"Abhaya represents the forces of instinct and revolt by completely breaking away from the influence of the dead past. She embodies the spirit of freedom against social conventions" (Madan 40). She blames it on her traditional upbringing and shows him the wounds rewarded to her by her husband for her wifely devotion. She had been treated like a disposable thing but she refused to be disposed off like garbage. She has rejected her hollow social status of a wife and has come back to the man who treats her like a wife deserves to be treated. Srikanta agrees to her decision of leaving such a brutish man and yet ends his approval with a "but" that shows his patriarchal doubt about her action. Abhaya is a personification of an intelligent and bold woman and she dismantles this 'but' with fierce logic:

That is just what I want you to explain--that 'but' which stands in the way of all rational thinking. May my husband live happily with his Burmese wife. I grudge him nothing. Only one question, Srikanta Babu! Do vedic mantras have the power to command a wife's loyalty, even after her husband has stripped her of all her rights and drives her away by brute force into the streets? Rights and duties are inextricably linked, Srikanta Babu. There can be no question of one without the other. My husband took the marriage vows, as I did, but they have played no part in shaping his needs and desires. They are no more to him than a piece of rhetoric, uttered in an idle moment, to be blown away at will. Yet these same vows bind me to him with iron fetters simply because I'm a woman. You said you did not blame me for coming away and added a 'but.' Were you trying to tell me that it is my duty to atone for my husband's sins by voluntarily embracing a death-in-life? Why? Because once, long ago when I was still a child, I had involuntarily pronounced some words of which I

knew not the meaning? Are those words, uttered in ignorance, all that is true and meaningful in my life? And the terrible injustices and affliction that has been heaped on my head--are they of no consequences? I am deprived of my rights as a wife and a mother. I am denied my legitimate place in society. Love, laughter and joy are not for me. Simply because I had the misfortune of being chained in a wedlock to a selfish, brutal, loathsome creature? And am I to be denied my womanhood because such an animal would have none of me? In no society other than the Hindu is the woman so crushed and crippled. (372)

Abhaya is unapologetic about her decision and blames the society for its unjust and unequal rules. "In his novels, Sarat Chandra demonstrates that the norms of sexual morality cannot be applied to every situation: an extra-marital relationship may be more gratifying than marriage while an incompatible marriage may oblige a woman to disregard her *pativrata*. In *Srikanta*, Abhaya leaves her cruel and depraved husband to live with a man who loves and needs her, boldly declaring that their relationship is in accordance with the principles of truth and humanity" (Sogani 98). Abhaya challenges the varying rules of sexual morality prescribed for men and women and claims freedom from a claustrophobic marriage. She asserts her right to be happy in marriage and questions the judgemental male gaze of *Srikanta*. She wants to restore the balance between rights and duties and contests her husband's right over her in the absence of him fulfilling his duty:

Abhaya could take that decision and resolved to make a meaningful beginning out of their dismal existence in an unfamiliar locale. The unfamiliar surroundings are clearly a metaphor for the setting up of a new life, unbounded by the familiar social inhibitions; here Abhaya could truly seek out a new identity. (Mukhia 95)

The space and location of an individual creates his/her identity defined by social and cultural factors. Chatterjee displays the dynamic nature of caste and personal identities which are otherwise rigid in their native location. Thus, this 'exile' to Burma opens new avenues for Indians to earn their livelihood but also expects them to leave their past behind and embrace the new culture with an open mind. The embracing of a new identity symbolizes the ambiguity inherent in social identities and how displacement challenges the orthodox values to destabilize power structures.

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From the 'Real' to the 'Hyperreal': A Study of the Postmodern and Dystopian Cityscape in Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* and Prayaag Akbar's *Leila*

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Abstract: “The City is a state of mind”, says Robert Park (1). But cities are both abstract concepts and real places with their own specific cartographic and historical realities, their peculiar socio-cultural dispositions and social relations of production. The city therefore, found its place in the “utopian and urbanistic discourses,” where it was the vision of the ideal, the fantastic that was turned into rational blueprints which could be actualized. The city was thus envisioned as Michael de Certeau puts it, “un espace proper” (1984), the ideal space of clean environment, proper amenities and therapeutic benevolence. However, this vision of the ideal city differed much from the real cartographic modern city, as it bowed down to the excessive expectations and needs of its populace. The present postmodern city is however, a space of contradiction and chaos. It is this postmodern city or “the postmodern urban landscape” (1992) as Sharon Zukin names it, which is a central motif in recent Indian novels in English.

Most of the cosmopolitan cities in India such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai were erstwhile colonial cities which grew into globalised metropolises over the years. In the present day, they have become sites of contestations, fraught with growing urban violence, security concerns and struggles over its resources especially clean air and water. It is this fragmentation, and chaos that finds centre stage in recent post-millennial Indian novels in English. The paper attempts to trace this representation of the city in two recent Indian English novels, Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (2007) and Prayaag Akbar's *Leila* (2017). While Joshi traces the history of two Indian cities, Calcutta and Delhi from the colonial era to a futuristic hyper-real time, carefully following their evolution over the various socio-cultural time periods, Akbar's *Leila* speaks of a fictionalized city set in an indefinite future that builds on the fear, and general chaos that is a precondition of Indian cities nowadays. The paper would stress on the lived experience of contemporary Indian cities, seeking theoretical support from urban theories and then discuss the representation of the Indian city in fiction in the light of the political and social realities of contemporary India.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Urbanism, Exclusion, *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh*, *Leila*

Introduction

In most of the nationalistic imagination and rhetoric predominant in the colonial and the newly independent India, the nation has always been seen as one composed entirely of villages. National leaders like Gandhi imbued them with much utopian promise, viewing them as the source of Indian pride and authentic culture as opposed to the city, which was largely associated with the vice and squalor of western civilization. The city was, therefore, a more recent phenomenon that gained importance only in the 1980s as a marginalized category of analysis (Prakash 2002). Post 1990s, the liberalization moment of Indian economy, cities have assumed more complex categories of analysis, shaped as they are by networks of migration, marginalization, exchange of capital and people, spatial segregation as a result of transnationalism and globalization (Ong and Nonini 1997; Caldeira 2000). As a result of this, cities have become vital centres of industry, production and knowledge generation. Postcolonial cities carry an extra burden in this increasingly globalised world as they “exists as a conjunctural space that produces a critical combination of historical events, material bodies, structural forces, and representational economies which propel new constellations of domination and resistance, centres and peripheries and the formation of new political subjects” (Varma 1). In order to fulfill the growing requirements of the ever-increasing political subjects of cities, popular Indian politics promises to transform them into “world cities” with superior infrastructure, roads, flyovers, etc. These transformations are in a bid to “dislocate them from their national location and inser[t] them into the grid of the global economy” (Nigam 73). But in doing so, cities are reduced to fragmented and divisive structures that operate through binaries of the rich/poor and formal/informal economy. This is a reality not only for the modern Indian city but a reality for the nation at large. Cities are more crucial, as they expose the cracks in the purported monolithic structure of the nation, as they easily reveal the major problems plaguing the nation such as over-population, caste-class atrocities and environmental degradation. Cities are further robbed of their utopian potential by the divisive politics practiced by the rise of the Hindu nationalism and the demands of corporate capital and free market. Indian cities are therefore highly divisive spaces practicing a politics of exclusion (Kuldova and Varghese 3) alienating a vast majority of its socially and economically marginalized population in order to create a world-class living experience which only the rich few can afford.

While the early colonial and post-colonial Indian writing in English located the struggles and identity formation of the Indian subject in small towns and cities, such as R.K Narayan's *Malgudi Days* (1943) and U.R Ananthamurthy's *Bharathipura* (1973) this soon changed in the post-Rushdie fiction after the 1980s. In fact Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) showed how the project of modernity had terribly failed in India in tandem with the rise of newer forms of hybrid, cosmopolitan and multicultural identities. Following this, the nation's new-found political prominence at the global level along with the rise of a consumer driven economy, meant the creation of a New India which functioned on the aspirations and desires of a new emerging middle class. Parallel to the doctrines of India Shining and India Rising (two of the several popular rhetoric employed by the political parties to capture the public imagination and electoral support at the turn of the new century), we also find the emergence of a dark India plagued by corruption, violence, poverty, sexual degradation and despair.

While both shades of the city have inspired filmmakers, authors and critics alike over the centuries, the new socio-cultural and spatial changes affecting the nature and the experience of living in the cities, can be summed up in what Sharon Zukin calls the "postmodern urban landscape" (1992). In this postmodern landscape, older forms of spatial organization and identities, consumption of space and time have been broken down and reconstructed in newer ways. The older arrangements of economic systems, cultural institutions have given way to newer forms of cultural appropriation and visual consumption. Thus, most of the depictions of the city in recent post-millennial Indian English fiction, no longer see the cities simply as visible entities with their fixed social realities, but build upon these lived experiences to dream of futuristic cities of spectacle and simulation, creating a hyper-real world of techno-scientific progress and ease of living. The postmodern city hence depicted is always in a state of flux; irreverent and chaotic as it consistently breaks older forms to imagine new experiences of living. While the early city was a discrete socio-economic, geographical and political unit distinct from the rural space, the contemporary metropolis is less of an actual city and more of an image drawing its meaning from various mediums of communication and varied cultural forms. Representations of the city in literature, film and advertising has exposed us to a city not geographical but immaterial, cinematic, almost a hyper-space, reminding one of Baudrillard's dictum that soon this endless flow of simulation would overwhelm the distinction between the real and the imaginary (148). Another dimension to

this is added by Sharon Zukin who also states how, “[s]pace both initiates and imitates this ambiguity. The specific locales of the modern city are transformed into postmodern liminal spaces, both slipping and mediating between nature and artifice, public use and private value, global market and local place”(222).

“The city is a state of mind,” says Robert Park (1). But cities are no more abstract concepts than they are real entities with their own historical context, geographical features, spatial and social dispositions, linguistic variety, economy etc. Each city has its own specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, governmental practices and forms of communication. At the same time, all cities that we experience on a daily basis are copies of what Ihab Hassan calls “immaterial cities” (1994), which comprise the actual ideas or the ideals on which modern cities were based. But cities are not simply made by architects and builders, they are also envisioned and represented by authors and filmmakers, and assume an “imagined environment of its own” (Burgin 48). Cities envisioned the original utopian promise which motivated urban planners and architects in attempting to include all the diversity and dynamism of urban life in a single space, into the “un espace propre,” a clean slate (Certeau 1984), an ideal space of clean environment, proper amenities and therapeutic benevolence. However, this vision of the ideal city differed much from the real cartographic modern city, as it bowed down to the excessive expectations and needs of its populace.

The paper attempts to trace this very nature of the Indian city as a new kind of neoliberal utopia which rose in the aftermath of the post millennium moment in two relatively recent Indian novels in English. Both the novels in the context of this paper, Ruchir Joshi’s *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* and Prayaag Akbar’s *Leila* have generated widespread critical and popular interest in their ability to imagine possible future(s) of India plagued by both external and internal crises. Separated by a span of ten years in their publication, they reveal the same chaos and violence that is symptomatic of Indian cities in current times.

The Last Jet-Engine Laugh: The Post-Colonial City as a Site of Violence and Contradiction

Ruchir Joshi’s debut novel *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* is often hailed as one of the most original specimens of science fiction and fantasy fiction in recent Indian English Literature. What Joshi achieves in the novel is a mean feat; not only does he record the political and

social evolution of some of the major cities of India like Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta from the 1930s to 2030s, he also speaks about the experience of living in some of the world's major urban centers, in a turbulent future torn apart by wars over water, excessive population, security threats, glaring economic inequities and ecological degradation. Of these urban centres, it is Calcutta that has captured the imagination of Joshi and that of his protagonist Paresh Bhatt who returns back to his childhood city to spend his last days. Thus the Calcutta that Joshi imagines in the novel straddles all the three kinds of urban spaces imaginable, i.e. the real city, the surreal city and the hyper-real city. Calcutta is a real city with its own cartographic realities and historical context while in Paresh's description of the city in the 2030s, it is also a surreal city where diverse elements are mixed and hybridized with no regard for their historical context where signs of Bengali ethos like Boroline or the Durga Puja are appropriated by Japanese corporations. Similarly, it also becomes a hyper-real city in the future dependent on empty signs and visual consumption for its meaning especially in the way Para visualizes the city in her Megalopolis 3000 game. In addition to Calcutta, Joshi also gives a telling description of war over drinking water between the urban gangs of different residential colonies (or gated communities) in the streets of contemporary Delhi to highlight the urban violence and politics of exclusion endemic to the present post-colonial urban condition.

Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, is one of the oldest and prominent metropolitan centres of India, enjoying a position of supremacy in Indian politics and economy since the colonial times. But the infrastructure and the urban culture of the city have received numerous blows over the years, such as the violence in the aftermath of the Bengal partition of 1947, decline of the jute industry, the advent of the Bangladeshi refugees who poured into the city at various intervals between the 1940s and 1970s and the Naxalite violence of 1970s. In fact, spatial crisis and the lack of civic amenities has been a major experience of city life in Calcutta. Thousands of displaced families queuing up for drinking water, living in makeshift settlements in the urban fringes were a common site in the city. Despite being the capital of British India, Calcutta is a major instance of colonial apathy regarding matters of civic amenities. Mukherjee notes how in colonial Calcutta, networks of underground tunnels and drains were built only to service the white town (290). This spatial crisis and complete breakdown of civic amenities is also witnessed by Mahadev Bhatt, Paresh's father when he arrives in the city for the first time. This crisis, in fact, remains even in the future, as Paresh

indicates that the urban fringes of Behala and Jadavpur are still swarming with the ever expanding population in the Calcutta of 2030s.

While Calcutta has had a long history of representation, both literal and cinematic, in the works of authors writing in English and regional languages, the ethos of the city, its turmoil and anxieties has been captured with much élan in the works of filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen. Joshi, too seems to be influenced by such filmmakers in presenting a truly postmodern city which can only be seen in montages, and single screen shots and never in its complete glory. Calcutta's condition in the colonial period, its experience of violence and corruption in the postcolonial world and its difficulties with overpopulation and lack of resources in the future, the city in the narrative is definitely shown to be in a state of flux. Besides this, the multiple strands of narratives in the single novel bear allegiance to a defining feature of postmodernism which Lyotard calls, "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). Joshi's Calcutta is, therefore, born of a certain interaction of time and place, where the space itself is bound by certain historical temporalities and yet is out of the time. Paresh's futuristic Calcutta is marked by hordes of people travelling in overcrowded copters, of people consuming polluted water or purchasing drinking water from Japanese corporations, of nations embittered in war over the planet's dwindling water resources. In fact, much of the descriptions of the city through the eyes of the different characters are as much visual impressions as much as products of their memories and associations. The Calcutta of 2030 is a highly speculative one, similar to an alternative science fiction world where human life depends on technology for its survival. The world portrayed is a post-nuclear holocaust world with some of its major cities destroyed and nations at war using more advanced military technology and robotics.

Besides Calcutta, Joshi also gives a present example of urban violence in the streets of Delhi where rival gangs from some of Delhi's most posh colonies clash and kill each other over everyday things like drinking water. This is just an example of the growing militarization of urban spaces in India in the name of security measures. Gone are the days of relying on simple watchmen, gated enclaves as posh Delhi employs advanced security measures like private security personnel, CCTVs, retina scans and identification papers, instances of what Stephen Graham calls "military urbanism" (xiii-xiv). Here the dystopian vision of postcolonial urban centers segregated into privatized spaces and guarded by private armies is yet another symptom of the neoliberal urban city. This is a central motif of Akbar's

imagination of the future cityscape of *Leila*, which is discussed at great length in the next section of the paper.

***Leila*: Discussing the Possible Future(s) of the Indian Urbanscape**

Leila, Prayaag Akbar's debut novel is yet another speculative attempt at discussing the dystopian turn that India is veered towards in the future. The unnamed city space where the tragic incidents surrounding Shalini and her long lost daughter Leila unfold is terrifying in its palpable reality. Here the city space in the undefined future is divided not according to religion but according to communities based on class and caste, where laws regarding purity reign supreme. This city is a city of walls, where the urbanscape is littered with walls to keep the pure inside and the poor, dirt and environmental pollution outside. Divided into six sectors or zones, it is symptomatic of the many unnamed Indian cities where housing and residential permits are granted on the basis of one's community and the food one consumes.

In fact, the idea of exclusion that the citizens practice in the fictional city is inspired by the upsurge in demand for luxury living spaces defined by class-caste and economic affiliations amongst the upwardly mobile elite in recent times. In fact, these neoliberal living spaces further exacerbate the division inherent in the Indian psyche. Kuldova cites several real-life examples of such enclaves such as Gulistaan Golf View Heights for the elite Muslim brotherhood or the Brahmins only luxury community, the Vedic Village (42-43). Their advertisements promise a "gated romance" (Brosius 2009) of luxury, convenience and safety in an enclosed enclave flanked by its own army of guards and their security systems, gyms, golf courses, servant quarters etc. These are symptomatic of contemporary neoliberal India as they consist of both modernity and tradition, using futuristic technology and modern building materials and yet respectful of their conservative ideas of tradition and purity. The utopian desire of the elite in Akbar's city resonates to the traditional utopia of *Ram Rajya* in the Hindu thought system albeit suited to the present day realities of peaceful coexistence. Thus, though Akbar's city is governed by Hindu elites, it has space for all other religions and caste sub-groups. This is not a surprise for Indian readers as the rise of Hindu Nationalism has seen an equal preoccupation with tradition and cultural superiority and fears of the religious and caste "Other."

In Akbar's future city, a general state of decay and filth prevails in the city as each community collects its own taxes for its own upkeep, while the areas outside fester in urban

waste and filth through which the slum people wade through for things to sell. Outside the walls, there is a complete civic breakdown, as the rich avoid the roads, instead travelling by the flyovers. The air outside is sooty and heavy with the dust from construction of more walls and more flyovers. Akbar's description of the city can easily be the description of any modern Indian city with "its dense growing pile of trash covering half the street"(7) with festering eels, thick trickles of fluid bulging polythene packets breeched at the gut, oozing"(7). The city assumes a hyper-real quality in its depiction of a very grim landscape cut across by "silent grey walls and between them the flyroads thrumming with headlights," like an "enormous maze" (64).

The unnamed city described in *Leila* could easily be either Delhi or Bombay, the two most important seats of power in postcolonial India. But in Akbar's description of a city where what matters most is the purity of its citizens, where militant Hindu nationalism rules through its informal army, where migrants are looked down upon and transgressions of caste and religion are punished brutally, one is reminded of Bombay and the strong hold which certain political parties with fanatic religious views enjoy over the city.

Bombay which was established by the Portuguese and later won over by the British was an important port city in colonial India. As job opportunities opened up in the cotton mills, hordes of migrants from the hinterlands of Maharashtra and other parts of India moved in to the city and gave the city its cosmopolitan identity. Later events, like the establishment of the Indian film industry gave Mumbai a sort of a utopian halo, where almost all dreams of prosperity and popularity could be achieved. But in the late 1980s and 90s, events of religious intolerance like the Babri Masjid demolition initiated much uproar and caused religious riots across the city. This was the beginning of what cultural critics like Appadurai call Bombay's "decosmopolitanism" (627) and Varma calls Bombay's increasing "provincialization" (66). As a response, militant political parties like the Shiv Sena grew stronger, amassing vote banks and popular support while propagating a more parochial and orthodox idea of the city space pure of race, completely sanitized of the migrant, dalit and other lower caste population on whose menial labour the city functioned. The Shiv Sena's doctrine of regional and linguistic chauvinism, its exclusionary understanding of the urban identity, violently obliterating the socially and economically inferior others, is similar to what the ruling elite and their informal army, the Repeaters practice in the novel. The Repeaters, i.e. groups of unruly young and middle-aged men who serve as a moral police in this dystopian world, may

be seen as a manifestation of the postcolonial dream that believes that success in big cities may also come from performance of crime. These people receive their support from the capitalists and governing elites of the city, and though they are nothing more than mere instruments, they are essential to the functioning of the bureaucracy and economy of the nation. In a way, they become larger than life figures, unveiling the corruption and inequalities within the Indian society.

Secondly, the city's twin faces of exploitation and emancipation as it deals with both social and spatial crisis has been well documented in both cinematic and literal representations. Nowhere is the ambivalent nature of urbanity, where the grandeur of global capitalism coexists with the poverty, alienation and exclusion of its urban poor experienced more strongly than in Mumbai. This dual world, "has become a dominant visual trope to describe life in the city" (Majumdar 112) where the rich exist within their communities enjoying their pure air and water, commuting in their own spaces while the outside world inhabited by the slum people and those outside the community brave the urban squalor and degraded environment of the city. In Bombay (Mumbai or Bombay? They seem to be used interchangeably) as in its literary counterpart, discourses of ethnic and economic exclusivity decree an iron tight compartmentalization of the society. But what matters more is the opulence and consumptive desire of the rich in the novel, which the ruling Councilmen promote through a precarious balance between Hindu nationalism and consumer capitalism. The Repeaters, therefore, embody the violent assertive local masculinity which is fundamental for maintaining this traditional order amidst the modernized economic elite of the city. *Leila* therefore, becomes another attempt, albeit literary to combat the rise of Hindu nationalism for territorial and cultural supremacy. But things were not always the same in the city. In a separate incident, Shalini remembers the past where regulations on food and community were absent and the city was much greener and healthy to live in. What matters here, is the reason behind the sudden social and spatial restructuring that the city underwent without any hint of communal violence and de-industrialization.

Anxieties over space and property and mistrust and intolerance towards the unknown Other, make *Leila* the worst kind of dystopia possible. The fear of pollution through contact with the Other, (both the economic and social) reign so supreme that the entire population wears threads of different colours like a "civic insignia of occupancy" (Appadurai 36) for employment and mobility in these high rise spaces. Each of the community heads encourage

their residents to employ servants etc. from their own communities, often subjecting them to humiliating body checks and thorough strip search for entry. Akbar's city therefore operates on a curious arrangement between the rich who willingly practice "a politics of evasion and amnesia" (Mishra 109) and the council who runs the bureaucracy with a strong hold. This tacit arrangement between the rich and political regime is nothing new in India, where the rich have withdrawn into their "virtual city" (Mazumdar 110) or "privatopias" (1) as Gyan Prakash calls them, occupying a "privatized and depoliticized subjectivity" (1) in order to escape the violence and anarchy outside. The narrator, Shalini, too enjoys a similar position of power and ease before she is hurtled down the social scale and experiences the privations and humiliations of the lower classes herself.

For Kuldova, the Indian urban luxotopia is unique in itself because:

On the outside it [appears to be] global and modern, with its emphasis on technology and sleek design but on the inside, at its very core, is traditionalist and neo-feudal and it is this core that provides it with assumed strength and superiority. (5)

In this traditional core of the interior of the luxotopia, as Kuldova argues, Indianness is related with femininity while the muscular smooth surface of the high rise city correlates with the masculine. This is also seen in the novel, where despite technological progress of the cities, female lives and sexualities are kept under control as it is they who are the repositories of purity of the entire nation.

Somewhere Akbar's unnamed city seems to be a utopian realization of the Hindu right's vision of a modern global city with all amenities and yet careful in its homage and adherence to strict rules of purity of identity. However this global city with its clean air and water is not meant for all, but only for the rich who could afford it. This resonates with the real experience of living in Bombay, whereas Hansen states political forces wished to "remove all signs of the poor and the plebian from Bombay ... all who were seen as encroaching on the comfort and physical security of the middle class (211).

The future which Akbar speaks of is one of violent urbanization which aims at purifying the city of the disposable bodies of the poor, pollution, noise etc. In fact advance technology such as Aerodome and Pureseal is available to provide clean pure air within the walls and to keep the polluted air out, operating on the same principle of expulsion. This results in increasing

temperatures outside the enclaves which makes it difficult for the urban poor to survive. The idea of exclusion is also seen in the security of these compounds as they rely on the gate as a kind of separation and only carefully screened bodies can enter these luxury compounds for their jobs.

Conclusion

Both the novels under the purview of this paper portray essentially dystopian worlds where the authors build upon the real and fictional histories of urban planning and socio-cultural development of the cities in order to demystify and understand the urban space. This is a common theme in most postmodern literature and films, as they have responded to the forces of late capitalism and have engaged in an active restructuring of the urban space. It is interesting to observe that most of the post-millennial narratives, both cinematic and otherwise have located their utopias as well as dystopias in the same cityscape. This is because the experience of living in the neoliberal city expresses the anxieties and desires of a large section of the population. However it should be noted that such utopian visions are achieved at a huge human and environmental cost as a considerable portion of the urban poor is displaced and lands are cleared for short-sighted developmental goals. Presently, cities have become neoliberal utopias, as a response to the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian economy marked by the rising inequality and exclusion of a large section of people from the limitless potential and possibilities of future India. In addition to this, the cities that come up in such narratives are also essentially those of crisis and are pertinent to the present political climate of India as they discuss issues of spatial segregation and politics over consumption of contraband foods. Indian cities are also spaces of social contradiction because questions of ownership and control over urban spaces and the struggles between classes are essential to understand and define urban spaces. While cities initially had a utopian promise, late twentieth century fiction has long moved away from it, seeing them as spaces of poverty, crime and alienation. Postmodern depictions of the city have included a critique of the failure of cities to respond to the changing nature of capitalism. However in India especially, it is still imbued with utopian promise as most political campaigns since the 2000s in India, have expressed a utopian desire of seeing India as a modern, aesthetically promising, technologically smooth space for economic and living purposes. Such campaigns promisingly named India Shining and India Rising, have actually taken one particular group into consideration--the upwardly mobile young middle-class population with a penchant for high-

class aspirations and consumption habits guided by the corporate elites while excluding those without economic means from the utopian promises in future India. As India approaches a future marked by promises and potentialities, its urban centers are a good place to mark the changes that the nation has undergone in the process.

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(Re) Creating Eden: Ecology and War in Romesh Gunsekera's *Heaven's Edge*

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Abstract: Romesh Gunsekera's third novel, *Heaven's Edge*, which was published in 2002 is set on an anonymous, apocalyptic and dystopic island that has been completely devastated by war and nuclear missiles. In this dystopian world he places Marc, who returns to the island, which is his ancestral homeland and where he hopes to create his Eden but soon he meets Uva, a self-proclaimed ecowarrior and falls in love with her. By keeping the island unnamed, Gunsekera suggests that the island could be any colonized and war-stricken island like Sri Lanka or Mauritius or Fiji or Papua New Guinea. Civil wars and nuclear warfare have ripped off these islands of their original identities, natural ecosystems and biodiversities leaving behind a shadow of the original paradisiacal surroundings. The novel is interspersed with images of utopian longings and settings. Although Marc, at the end of the novel, builds a sanctuary, he kills Uva in the process of safeguarding it. My paper originates from the text's incessant engagement with violence and the need to destroy in order to preserve. My paper will attempt to focus on whether Eden can be regained or innocence achieved after the apocalypse or whether utopia can only be achieved at the cost of violence and bloodshed. My paper will also address the issues of environmental degradation that are inextricably ingrained in the narrative and the novelist's longing for a world that would be devoid of violence.

Keywords: Anonymous, Apocalypse, Utopia, Dystopia, Eden, Environmental Degradation

In this article I deal with Romesh Gunsekera's third novel, *Heaven's Edge*, which was published in 2002. This novel is set in an anonymous island that has been completely devastated by war. I will try to examine Gunsekera's engagement with ecological issues in the context of war and, in so doing, will also critically examine the validity of the solution offered to ecological problems by one of the major characters at the end of the novel.

Heaven's Edge shows the narrator Marc's desire for an imaginary homeland that is now totally steeped in violence and wars. In this novel the novelist, preferring anonymity has set the novel in an unnamed, apocalyptic island in the Indian Ocean and presents a dystopic

fantasy. In this dystopian world he places Marc, who returns to get connected with (the memories of his father who had died here), and, instead, finds Uva, an eco-warrior, who he falls in love with.

By keeping the island unnamed, Gunsekera suggests that the island could be any colonized and war-stricken island like Sri Lanka or Mauritius or Fiji or Papua New Guinea. Civil wars and nuclear warfare have ripped off these islands of their original identities, natural ecosystems and biodiversities leaving behind a shadow of the original paradisiacal surroundings. Marc, at the end of the novel, builds a sanctuary which meets with imminent destruction. This could be interpreted as showing the despair of the novelist for the lack of any kind of paradisiacal redemption. But this sense of despair does not stop the writer from producing a resistance against the forces that work to destroy nature. Gunsekera, throughout the novel, drops hints on creating a utopic world again which would be devoid of any wars and bloodshed and would be respectful towards the natural surroundings. Marc and Uva are also very critical of the environmental policies of the political parties which are working for the benefit of the multinationals. But although Uva is the daughter of the soil, Marc is more of an exotic tourist rather than a sensitive environmentalist who fails to respect nature for itself initially. At the end of the novel, however, Marc too learns to respect nature and there is a considerable change in his attitude towards nature.

Initially though, Marc's gaze on the island is a typical tourist's gaze. He says:

I was keen to explore it, imagining that perhaps there I might discover the hidden charm of a long-suffering but colorful land. (9)

Marc wants to experience the island as an "exotic spectacle" (Huggan xi) and the island comes as a relief from the monotonous din and bustle of London, to which he was accustomed. Marc soon finds an erotic object against the backdrop of the exotic island with the appearance of Uva. Marc meets Uva while she is releasing a few emerald doves into the wild. Uva, a self-proclaimed eco-warrior, is devotedly committed towards saving her farm and the island from any further ecological destruction. In fact, in the very first conversation between Marc and Uva, the readers find a glimpse of the environmental destruction caused by the war. When Marc exclaims that he has heard that there were birds all over the island, Uva replies:

That was before war changed our nature here . . . Now you have to search hard to find anything beautiful. (14)

The exotic exploits of Marc end up in his meeting Uva and falling in love with her. But from the onset, as said already, there is a stark difference between Marc's perspectives on nature and those of Uva's. For Marc, exoticism culminates in eroticism and he is found busy in satiating his physical desires being quite oblivious of the fact that Uva is more engrossed in saving her island rather than dreaming of a happy conjugal life with Marc:

Then, unable to stop, I kissed her. I could only think of touching her lips. Supplanting that air warmed by her breath with the lightest brush of my thinnest skin. Nothing else. (28)

Marc was actually smitten by the dream of finding heaven on the island as his grandfather had described and, therefore, according to him "Anything was possible. . .about an island of dreams" (12). However, his convictions and beliefs that he would find the paradisiacal Eden he had been searching for are challenged by the actual realities of the war-torn island.

The diasporic protagonist's search for an Eden is challenged by the realities of the disintegrated island and his search for a utopic paradise meets with failure. Huggan in his *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) says that the majority of tourists cannot bear with an excess of otherness:

They [the tourists] need to travel in an environment 'bubble' [Cohen], which gives them a vicarious encounter with the Other, yet at a safe distance, with all the security of the familiar around them. So, it is the task of the industry image-makers to create a place which is exotic but not alien, exciting yet not frightening, different but where they speak your language, so that fun and relaxation, untroubled by the concerns of the real world, are possible. Such a space, of course, requires sweeping most of social reality under the carpet.

In the novel too, the Western gaze that is quite apparent in Marc's attitude towards the island is contested and challenged by Uva's commitment towards her island. Marc feels that his search for his Eden is complete since he has found Uva but Uva is in no mood to allow his romantic dreams to overshadow her environmental concerns. Even when she is locked in a

romantic situation with Marc, she does not forget her commitment of turning her dream into reality and says:

There will be birds everywhere—my mother’s emerald doves at least—and clouds of butterflies like flowers in the air. We will each have a garden of our own.” (39)

Marc, however, fails to understand the urgency of the situation Uva is trapped in. Although he keeps getting flashbacks of how his father and grandfather had described the island as an Eden, as a paradise, yet he fails to reconcile the present war-despoiled scenes of the same island with the descriptions of it that he had heard. He is vehemently chided by Uva when he says that he has found his Eden, implying that he is satisfied with the woman beside him and less bothered about the ravages of war on the island. Uva tells him:

“What? You think that just because we can jiggle our hips together everything is all right? . . . Just think about my muddy little hut you like so much to wallow in. . . If we think this is the best we can do then we will have become just like them: forgetting pain and remembering nothing.” (39)

However Marc seems disinterested in getting practically involved with Uva’s problems. Although he is aware of the surroundings around him, he prefers to remain quite unconcerned about it. He keeps himself at a safe distance both from Uva’s dreams and the destruction on the island :

I know how bad it is. I wanted to say I was sorry that I could not feel her pain, or anybody else’s. (27)

Gunsekera, thus, constantly draws the readers’ attention to the clash of superfluous interests between Marc and Uva and Uva’s consistent contestations of Marc’s romanticism. By this, Gunsekera questions the stereotypical Western exotic gaze on nature. The dystopic colour of the novel definitely provides Gunsekera the opportunity to construct a dilapidated and threatened Eden as well as offer a counter argument that critiques the Western tourist’s gaze.

Marc’s inability to understand or react to the horrors of environmental destruction that the island is subjected to and his inability to comprehend his own lend an exoticized and eroticised colour to the narrative and the island. There is an instance in the narrative where

Marc informs Uva that Nirali has been appointed as the new night guard for the hotel. While Uva becomes anxious hearing this and expresses her fear that Nirali might not be able to save himself from the military inscription, Marc seems unconcerned about this development. All he can think of is “. . .what would happen if I kissed her?” (28). Thus, it can be safely foreseen that Marc’s energies will be dissipated in the end.

After Uva is taken away by the guerilla forces, Marc embarks on a quest to find her. There are moments when Marc thinks that Uva is dead and he has lost her forever. At these moments, his grief is driven by the regret that he can no more unite with her, he can no more possess her, “I felt sure Uva was dead. I wanted to plunge into her darkest, thickest jungle to die too and rot; to fertilise her wretched earth if nothing else” (185). Then, as if in a desperate attempt to obtain her, he decides to create a garden for her:

A garden husbanded for her: full of flowering bushes, arboreal vines, thick yellow-bordered, succulent leaves. (193)

Although by the end of the novel, Marc has developed a will to conserve nature and grow his own garden, yet it is not purely a conservationist strategy that instigates him to take up such noble deeds. Rather, his sense of despair, his sense of the loss of Uva and of her touch, act as the driving force behind this:

I wanted space and order, light and colour. I wanted the place teeming with a hundred different types of birds, of bees, of squirrels. I wanted them all to come, drawn by a lodge stone of passion and the heady, overpowering scent of a garden in the middle of a jungle; to bring Uva with them, and if she could not come here, I wanted the garden to become her. (193)

While Marc tries to develop and cultivate ways which might take him closer to the either missing or dead Uva, he has this peculiar desire of “taming” the plot of land (192). He even alludes to the “ambitious agriculturalists” who have inspired him to tame the “wild.” Gunasekera takes a sly dig at what the scientific revolution has done to the world. Here we find a reductionist characteristic at play. In this connection, I quote Vandana Shiva, an eminent ecofeminist who in her book *Staying Alive* explains this “reductionist” trait:

I characterise modern western patriarchy’s special epistemological tradition of the “scientific revolution” as “reductionist” because it reduced the capacity of

humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing, and it reduced the capacity of nature to creatively regenerate and renew itself by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter. (21)

Marc, who arrived as almost a quasi-tourist, at the end of the novel, decides to take the responsibility of taming the land and domesticating the wild. He starts tampering with nature's own regenerative capacity by behaving as one who is driven by his desire to possess the wild, the untamed.

Marc's desire of possessing Uva is also not free from the gender bias. Uva is named probably after the Uva province of Sri Lanka, which is home to the Gal Oya National Park and the Yala National Park. The etymological meaning of the name is associated with a grape, and is also linked with the remains of a seed. Uva here is the symbol of creation and growth. She is, to argue after Shiva, the saviour of "Prakriti" (Shiva 37). Shiva alludes to Maria Mies and says that women "not only collected and consumed what grew in nature but *they made things grow*" (38). Uva is a perfect example of this. Uva, who proclaims herself to be an eco-warrior, is the daughter of an ornithologist, or simply a person who "looked everywhere for the bird of paradise" (30). She has experienced the havoc wrecked by nuclear warfare and civil wars. She has seen people and nature suffering. Just like a mother who always nourishes her child back to a healthy life after prolonged illness, Uva is bent on cultivating and protecting her farm, concealed away from the eyes of the military diktats, and on producing her own garden. Marc, who has arrived on the island to find his own Eden, on the contrary, becomes a colonizer. Colonizers, all over the world, have penetrated nature with violence and have subjugated the native population. Marc, too, does the same. Instead of building a better Eden or understanding Uva's desires of saving her environment, he becomes a colonizer with his typical exotic Western tourist gaze and dreams of taming the wild and building a garden (which would become Uva, according to him) so that he could possess Uva. Thus Marc is the "Purusha" (Shiva 37) or the masculine principle who wants to disrupt "Prakriti's" uninterrupted or spontaneous free play or "lila" (Shiva 38). Although ontologically, no dichotomy exists between man and nature and since growth is the trait of "Prakriti", nature has been conceived of as an inviolable entity. But the difference lies in the Cartesian concept where nature and man are treated as separate entities thus allowing man to subjugate and violate nature according to his free will. When Marc dreams of making a garden full of flowers, butterflies and birds, he knows that he can control the growth of the flowers and the

plants and be in possession of them. Ironically, though Marc is well aware of the island's colonial history and the ecological devastation caused due to the short-sighted conservational policies of the political parties, he seems to be unaware of the reductionist attitude which he himself is showing. Gunesequera could have shown the development of an environmental consciousness in Marc by bringing him in touch with the female eco-warrior. Instead Gunesequera never fails to show how Marc keeps himself attached and yet detached from the environmental concerns of Uva by only emphasizing how Marc's erotic impulses increase with each passing day. Therefore, nature or "Prakriti" remains a gendered entity, exoticized, eroticized, but never quite respected the way it should be. In fact, the very idea of taming the plot of land is replete with Marc's imperial drive.

There is, however, a moment, rather an epiphanic moment, for Marc that deserves a special mention. A meeting with a wounded monkey awakens in him the latent compassion that Uva had tried to arouse in him much earlier in the novel. Quite abruptly and unpredictably he "felt a bond" (186) with the monkey and, emphatically rejecting the Darwinian theory, states:

Evolution was not the survival of the fittest. Our evolution must come from the survival of the weak, retrieved against the odds, I realised. It must matter, otherwise why would I care anymore? (186)

Although Marc recalls that "it is sometimes kinder to kill" (186) yet he "couldn't" (186). He knows he has to help the wounded and helpless animal. He realizes that he has to "value life over death" (186). This episode marks the beginning of a new attitude in Marc: he suddenly realizes the deep love and affection he has for Uva and it is not just the "random firing of some scattered neurons" (186). The wounded monkey exposes Marc to the inner and the spiritual realm. Marc understands the interrelationships between humans and its natural surroundings. After this, his love for Uva finds a new direction and a new meaning.

Marc is finally able to set his "priorities clear" (187). He feels the need to help the victims of war and also save nature from further degradation. He dreams of building a sanctuary at Samandia for such victims. Just as Mister Salgado dreams of building a sea sanctuary in *Reef*, Marc wishes to convert his dreams into reality and he starts working on it. However, this epiphanic realization that transforms him into an eco-warrior from just a detached tourist who cannot feel anybody's pains meets with failure at the end of the novel. The sanctuary he has

built out of compassion for the war-torn victims and for bleeding nature, leads him to the final horror of his life when he kills Uva while safeguarding it:

I gripped the gun hard. . . I squeezed the trigger instead and worked the bolt again and again. She leapt on the last man with her butterfly knife opening in one hand and a sun-stained machete in the other, swinging low and unremitting between the hail of my bullets. She slew him as she fell. (234)

The garden full of flowers that had been created for her now stands marked by her death, her tragic end. In the concluding lines, as Marc finds Uva dead, he acknowledges that they had created a futile as well as frail and a vulnerable world:

Then the whole sky darkened as a legion of trident bats, disturbed from their brooding trees by the gunshots, took to the newly burnt air, drawing a broken eclipse over another fragile world for ever altered; riven. (234)

Just as the natural world around Marc lies defeated and destroyed by the forces of war, his little Eden which he had created with Uva stands destroyed. It is ironic, however, since the sanctuary had been created in a desperate attempt to get closer to the then missing Uva. But even after Marc successfully reunites with his lost love, the same sanctuary becomes the cause of her death.

Although Gunsekera leaves the island unnamed, yet it has similarities with Sri Lanka. Minoli Salgado writes in *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*:

The unnamed island of the novel both is and not Sri Lanka, its allegorical connection to the nation disturbed by the social and cultural disembedding that situates it as an imagined territory of desire ruptured by the anonymous forces of guerrilla warfare and the state control that have divided the land into zones of surveillance, resistance and subversion. (161)

Gunsekera, actually, shows how we always remain connected with our pasts and cannot shirk them off. Here the tale is that of a fallen Eden that has to be restored and cared for. The novel sometimes, though, inclines towards the use of preachy lines echoing deep ecological and wilderness rhetorics. The imagined conversation between Marc and his father, Eldon, attests to this view. While Marc accuses his father of being a destroyer as he was associated

with the military forces, his father defies and refutes his son's accusations and teaches him the importance of saving this Eden from becoming a fallen paradise and says:

"I came to save what I found here, before it was all squandered away . . . No they must not flood the valleys . . . No, they must not destroy the forests, these animals must live too. No, no more plantations of tea. Go for bio-diversity. No, no more history. No more insane blood foolery. No more war to end war."
(originally in italics) (177)

Thus, after this conversation and after his desperate attempts to find Uva fail, Marc decides to embark on the journey of making his own Eden, the Eden he had come in search of. After he finally finds Uva, both of them lovingly build a world to call their own. But ultimately, this world too appears to be too fragile to endure the violent forces of war. Gunsekera's tragic view of love and life breaks the vision of a perfect utopia by bringing about a tragic end to Uva's life. He reminds us, tragically enough, that there is no way in which today's generation can escape the violence inflicted on them by the military diktats or the political parties.

With the tragic end imposed on both Uva and Marc's fragile world, Gunsekera upholds his sense of loss and the impossibility of creating a utopia. But there is another interesting point that needs to be noted. Throughout the novel we find brute force being exercised by those in power to curb any voice of resistance. But Marc, who, by the end of the novel, becomes a sensitive eco-warrior, resorts to violence to save his garden too. Is it a call for eco-terrorism at the edge? Well, I believe it to be so. Eco-terrorism can be defined as the use of violence by radical environmentalists to protect nature or animals from physical attacks or harassment. Before Marc finally shoots the captain (and also Uva in the process), he had seen the violence that had been inflicted by the uniformed diktats on the monkey. The monkey's head had been severed and it had been brutally butchered. Donald R. Liddick in his book *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Rights Movement* claims:

Unfortunately, the position that environmental and animal rights activists should be "kind, compassionate, and caring with other people" has ostensibly fallen out of favor with some radicals. Animal rights terrorists in particular have become more radical and violent in recent years, targeting people for harassment and physical attacks. (2)

But what is eco-terrorism and how did the word even come into being? I quote from Daniel M Schwatz's article "Environmental Terrorism: Analyzing the Concept":

Following the launch of the Gulf War Coalition air campaign in January 1991, Iraqi forces intentionally caused two enormous oil spills in the Gulf waters. Two weeks later Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein ordered the detonation of an estimated 1250 oil wells. Nearly 600 oil wells were engulfed in flames, spewing out thick billows of smoke that "turned midday into midnight in Kuwait" (Popkin 23). These events spawned international outrage and prompted the Administration of US President George Bush to accuse Iraq of "environmental terrorism" (Newsweek, 4 February 1991: 36; New York Times, 26 January 1991a: 1-4). Subsequently, the term "environmental terrorism" has been adopted into North American society.

Terrorism of any kind poses serious threats to the lives of living species and the human society at large. In this context, what Miroslav Mares says in his *Environmental Radicalism and Extremism in Post communist Europe* could be very important:

Extremists often use terrorist methods. Terrorism might be defined as the excessive violent pursuit of interests with the primary goal of seriously threatening the broader public rather than hitting only at primary targets (victims) of attacks . . . Excessive violent pursuit of environmentalist issues with the primary goal of seriously threatening broader groups of people (mostly the enemies of environmentalists, such as owners of various companies, all vivisectionists, and state officials) by means of attacks on property or the health or lives of primary targets, can be called environmental terrorism or eco-terrorism.

Eco-terrorism is thus just another offshoot of violence. Violence is the hallmark of war and destruction and to end violence one cannot possibly impose violence of some other form. I would like to quote from Mares again to explain the tactics used by the eco-terrorists:

The most common tactic of eco-terrorists is monkey wrenching, which threatens mostly the economy, with no damage to the health or lives of human

beings or animals. However, some environmentalists carry out terrorist attacks against human beings as well.

It is then quite clear that eco-terrorism cannot be a proper solution to ecological problems since eco-terrorism itself promotes violence and destruction.

Throughout the novel we find a war-despoiled island that has been erased of its natural ornaments due to civil wars and nuclear warfare. But towards the end Gunsekera brings in the frightening aspect of eco-terrorism to end the environmental degradation when Marc finds the monkey (he had saved) murdered:

Only then did I see the other soldiers in the hollow beyond. Their hands were red with the blood of the monkey they had butchered between them. They had stuck its head on a pole and set fire to its tail. They had come to take everything. The captain saw me and began to shout, raising his arms. (234)

The scene undoubtedly is terrifying. But what Marc does next is also terrifying:

I gripped the gun hard. Forgive, forget, I once might have said, flee if we must –but I squeezed the trigger instead and worked the bolt again and again. Gunfire stuttered in my hands killing the captain first and then two more . . . (234)

Marc, who landed on the island as a quasi-tourist and ultimately grew into a sensible environmentalist, at the end, does not hesitate from using violence to save the sanctuary he has created and also to avenge the death of the monkey that had sparked off an epiphanic realization in his soul. But is this a sensible solution? Keeping in mind the loss eco-terrorism has caused in the past years, the solution seems to be brutal. I would quote from another article “Environmental Extremists and the Eco-Terrorism Movement” by Chad Nilson and Tod Burke to support my take:

In the United States, between 1980 and 1999, eco-terrorists committed at least 100 acts of destruction, causing approximately \$42.8 million in damages. In western states alone, between 1995 and 1999, eco-terrorists committed acts totaling \$28.8 million in damages. Eco-terrorist acts, although varying in both

degree of risk to human life and total damages, all significantly impact human use of natural resources.

On December 31, 1999, Michigan State University's agriculture building was set ablaze causing \$1 million in damages . . . On July 17, 1997, in Olympia, Washington, an Earth First! protesting the cutting of timber along a roadway, cut hydraulic hoses and threw cement blocks into the blades of a tree cutting machine, causing \$380,000 in damage. On July 21, 1997, the Animal Liberation Front claimed responsibility for the arson of a slaughter plant in Redmond, Oregon, causing \$1 million in damages.

The instances cited above precisely capture the terror that accompanies eco-terrorism and shows why terrorism of any kind is not a desired solution to any kind of problem.

In *Heaven's Edge*, Gunesequera, probably, is hinting at an inevitable apocalypse that is on its way in leading the earth towards absolute destruction. But, again, this could be Gunesequera's ironic take on the present state of the environment as well. With the growing prominence of ecological terrorism in the world, such a portrayal could be a subtle warning about the use of violence as a means of ecological preservation and protection. It perhaps suggests that resorting to violence in order to save the natural environment to maintain the ecological equilibrium could be suicidal. Although Gunesequera ends his novel on a tragic note showing that violence might only beget violence, yet he does not fail to raise the awareness of the readers regarding their responsibility towards environment. The portrayal of the war-torn anonymous island could be the picture of any country two hundred years from now. By portraying such a dystopic image of an island, Gunesequera is definitely appealing to the readers to respect the non-human environment and let it live in peace.

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