SIDDHANTA

The Conclusions

Vol - III

Myths Revisited and Retold

Editors

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Siddhanta
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Editors Speak

Myth is an integrant facet of human culture, the study of which is of great importance in individual societies and human culture as a whole. A derivative of the Greek word 'mythos', the word myth has a range of meanings from 'word' and 'saying' and 'story' to 'fiction'. Unquestionably then myth is essentially a story or a tale which may be read as a symbolic narrative wherein each myth presents itself as an authoritative factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. Myths deal with the origin of the world, the end or a paradisiacal state and generally narrate all that people are unable to see for themselves. Examples may be traced to 'The Illiad' and 'Odyssey' by Homer in the ancient world, 'The Nibelungenlied' in the medieval world, and the Serbo-Croatian epic poetry recorded in the 1930's. Among the many non-European examples are the Indian Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Tibetan Gesar Epic.

Interest in myth was greatly initiated by the German Friedrich von Schelling who in the philosophy of mythology argued that myth is a form of expression characteristic of a particular stage in human development through which humans imagine the Absolute. Scholarly interest in myth continued in the 20th century aroused by the theories of Sigmund Freud the most significant being 'the Oedipal complex'.

Philosophers, linguists, critics, semioticians, theoreticians alike have all wrestled with the discourse of myth from their own trajectories. Yet these varied perspectives of mythical narrative centre round some seminal concepts like representation, power dynamics, linguistic concepts like signifiers and signifieds etc. Going by Barthesian perspective in his seminal work *Mythologies*, almost every event of our lives, ranging from the spectacle of a wrestling match to reading an advertising on packaged food, from the face of Greta

Garbo to the soap powders and detergents, can be viewed and interpreted from the mythical lens. For Barthes, commodities also become the signifiers of myths of nationality, for instance, red wine is associated with Frenchness, Panzani products with Italianness, Tata products with Indianness etc. Jean Baudrillard, in his celebrated work *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, has even gone to the extent of viewing journalists and advertisers as "mythic operators", whose sole concern is to sell a news event or even a product as drama, as fiction. The application of mythic codes and technical manipulation of the medium transforms all significations into consumerable products. Thus, mass media manipulates the real event by the processes of filtration and fragmentation, thereby reworking the event into a conglomeration of finite signs, analogous to the finished products of industrial production. In the process, what people today consume, in the words of Daniel Boorstin, is only pseudo-event or pseudo-reality. The postmodern and poststructuralist critics and theoreticians even consider consumption as a mythic event.

In more recent times, Feminist Revisionist Mythology have attempted to engage critical re readings of myth to interpret the voices of unheard women writers and characters who have been lost or ignored by the male point of view and thus uncovering a female tradition of writing. Again, Rousseau's use of the twin myths of 'The Golden Ages' and 'The Natural Man/ Noble Savage' as problematized by critic Jonathan Bate in his work "The Song of the Earth" has come to occupy an important aspect in the Ecocritical discourse that seeks to improve mankind's relation with the natural world. The present volume of *Siddhant* seeks to look at these perspectives of myth as represented in literary narratives and visual culture, as well as uncovering stories of myth and retelling them from a new perspective.

Akash Borchetia's "The Function of Myth in Indigenous Knowledge with Special Reference to Assamese Oral Literature" draws references from Assamese oral literature and seeks to examine the role myth play in the indigenous knowledge systems. The paper seeks to look at myth as a subcomponent aiding in the process of understanding and communication of ideas and knowledge in an

indigenous community. It also highlights the function of myth as a method that provides resistance to the hegemonic discourses and safeguards indigenous knowledge. The writer applies theoretical perspectives in reading *Bihunaam*, *Daakor Bachan*, Dhaai Naam, *Maniram Dewanor Geet* and other oral literature of Assam.

Anansha Borthakur's article "Queer Identities in Indian Myths: Reviewing it through the 'LGBT' Lens" analyses the presence of various queer identities in Indian Myths through some selected stories. An attempt has been made to look into the misconceptions and taboos that are prevalent towards these communities in present day Indian Society.

Ashmita Bora in her article, "The Art of Myth Making: An Analytical Reading of Ted Hughes' Crow Poems" emphasizes the poet's obsession with myths and how he internalizes the primitive traditions and way of life as an antithesis to modern civilization by an analysis of the Crow Poems. The inversion of various primitive, Biblical and contemporary myths has also been dealt with.

Bhaswati Goswami's article "Re-Mythologizing the Chinese-American Experience: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Myths in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*" attempts to read how Tan has deconstructed and reconstructed popular Chinese myths to reflect the Chinese-American ideology. The paper focusses on how the author draws attention to the subjugation of women as hyphenated objects through re-writing the existing myths in Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

Bonjyotshna Saikia and Kaustov Pronob Borthakur in their joint paper titled ""Let me take my Brother Home": Antigone/ Aneeka in Kamila Shamsie's" *Home Fire* talks about the use of the myth of Antigone to understand the workings of the British Government in the post 9/11 era and the paper uses the frame of Lau and Mendes' re-orientalism theory , illustrating the motif of political maneuvers and perpetuation of power disparity post 9/11.

Prof. Dwijen Sharma's "The Politics of Retelling Myths" attempts to explore the politics of retelling myths by examining a few Indian English fiction. The paper argues that the retelling of myths has certain ideological functions that underscore the social and cultural context of India in the 21st century. The article explores retelling of

myths from feminist perspective, subaltern perspective, cultural value system, and nationalist perspective with the avowed aim of telling multiple stories from different positions.

In her paper titled "Reconstruction of Lucie as Nymph in Milan Kundera's *The Joke*: A Critical Reading" Gautami Bharali attempts to read the character of Lucie as a reconstruction of the myth of the 'Nymph' and to analyse the function of the myth in the context of the text.

Juriti Gowami and Dr Lakhipriya Gogoi's paper titled "Juxtaposing Myth and Reality: An Ecogothic Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" makes an attempt to read indigenous myths as a tenable means of rethinking and resolving environmental as well as political anxieties. Emphasizing on the myth of Bonbibi that functions as a vital force for the people living in the Tide country, the paper seeks to look the forest as a gothic, uncanny space that serve both as shelter as well as a sinister space.

"Disobedient Tales: A Study of the Mother and the Monster Archetypes in Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*" by Kalyan Deori studies the use of mythic elements in the novel *A Monster Calls* (2011) by Patrick Ness, with illustrations by Jim Kay, especially with the story's use of mythical archetypes and how it subverts the archetypes and put forward a more personal and psychological story about love and death. The paper too looks at how using the motifs of myth and fairy tales, Ness achieves in telling a fantastical and personal story of a mother and son, processing grief, and the power of myth and fairy tales hold in our imagination and its healing capabilities.

"*Josonar Jhitas*: Retrieving History from Silence" by Dr. Madhuleema Chaliha is an attempt to read Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Josonar Jhitas* as a mythical narrative of the colonial period in Assam. Through the application of mythical parameters, the author leaves the message that the chief protagonist, Durgi Bhumij, a martyr of national movement should always be re-membered, re-visited and re-read, and never be silenced in ignominy in any civilised record of historiography. Notwithstanding the arguable consideration that absoluteness of myths is non-functional in postmodern fictions, the myths in *Josonar Jhitas* in their fragmented usage, work wonder in retrieving history from silence.

Dr Nandini Choudhury's article "The 'Noble Savage' Myth in Wordsworth's Ecocritical Ideology: A Select Study" is an attempt to read William Wordsworth's ecocritical ideology by an appropriation of the 'noble savage' myth. In the selected poems taken for study an attempt has been made to look at how the myth of the noble savage may serve as an alternative to preservationist ecological practices.

In "Reflections and Retelling: Selections from "The Book of Assembly Hall" and "The Book of Effort" in The Mahabharata" Pranami Bania Looks at the Mahabharata as a floating epic and its symbolic relevance in Indian culture and society.

"Breaking the Binary of 'Good Woman' and 'Bad Woman' through Feminist Revision of Shurpanakha's Character in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*" by Priyanka Bharali is a reworking of the binaries labelled against Surparnakha's character in traditional reading of the epics. The paper looks into Kavita Kane's attempt to challenge the Ramayana's explicit dharmic formulations of the binary of 'good woman' and 'bad woman'. While the original epic presented a singular perspective for Surpanakha's character by labeling her as an immoral, unvirtuous and contemptible woman, Kane's alternative retelling gives another new perspective by portraying her as a bold and independent woman who wants to assert her individuality, fights for her own rights and take her own independent decisions.

In her article "Arthur Miller and the Salem Witches: A Study of his Re-imagining the Hysterical Episode as Part of the American Myth in his play, *The Crucible*" Priyanka Bharali discusses the retelling of one of the devastating episodes of American myth i.e., the Salem Witch trials and the ruthless political and social dynamics that worked upon the people.

Raginee Mahanta's article "Comprehending Narrative Restructuring of Myth: A Study of Dan Brown's *Inferno*" is a study of how myth and narrative have been employed to present a story of mankind's imminent inroads into Hell. She tries to establish that the novel *Inferno* merges both narrative and fiction to recreate a new and reversed "Inferno" of Dante.

"The Myth of "Hustle Culture": A Study of Satoshi Kon's *Paranoia Agent*" by Reetuparna Dey focuses on the modern

Japanese culture of taking the myth of hustle culture to the very extreme. "Karoshi" or "work to death" is a phenomenon that has plagued Japan since the mid 50s. The author analyses this aspect of work addiction through the lens of myth creation in the urban sense. For this purpose, an anime series created by the late auteur, Satoshi Kon, titled *Paranoia Agent* (2004), is critically studied.

Dr. Saba Anish in her write up "Consumer Culture Myths: An Advertising Saga" makes an effort to establish the fact that the consumer culture today is packed with a number of myths, which when critically analysed can be traced back to advertising cult. Advertising has almost normalized the myths associated with the trends of consumption, so much so that the myths have become the very essence of consumer culture. She has applied the theoretical framework of gaze and Jean Baudrillard's critical perspectives on consumption to study advertising codes that have led to the naturalization of the cultural.

"Alternative Myths and the Questions of Caste and Gender: A Study of Meena Kandasamy's Poetry" by Saswati Kashyap studies the poetry of Meena Kandasamy to investigate how she uses Hindu religious myths to challenge the power narratives of caste and gender and offer alternative narratives from a feminist and anti-caste lens. She argues that the very idea of the Dalit identity comes from mythology and to break away from this mythological framework, poets like Kandasamy write their own myths.

"Writing Counter Hegemonies Through Myth: Karnad and the Reworking of *Yayati*" by Dr. Saurav Sengupta posits Karnad's retelling the story of Yayati to comment on the various social and political hierarchies in India - patriarchy, the marginalization of woman, as also the existence of caste and class divides. In the process, Karnad, not only questions the assumptive frameworks on which these divisions were based but also comments on their exploitative denials of human freedom using humour, satire. This paper too argues that Karnad uses a subversive politics to undermine hierarchies and his politics of narration is an important addition to Anglophone writings in English.

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Contents

The Function of Myth in Indigenous Knowledge with Special Reference to Assamese Oral Literature

Akash Borchetia

The term myth is derivative of the Greek word *mythos* which signifies any story or plot irrespective of its truthfulness. Different philosophers and scholars in their respective fields use the term myth in different ways. Plato denounces myth as the mystification of reality and a baseless story that encourages the practice of deception. German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's conception of myth differs heavily from Plato as he opines that myth represent a kind of higher form of knowledge which is accessible only to the wise (Chakraborty 18). He also believes that myths function as a vehicle that transports an esoteric system of values from the intellectually superior to the inferior. Schopenhauer's theorization is interesting simply because it associates myth with knowledge. In Foucauldian sense, all forms of knowledge are historically contingent and cannot be dissociated from the dynamics of power. The workings of power are responsible for the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Therefore, the politics of power/ knowledge and its engendered disparity is apparent in the very discussion of what should be counted as knowledge in the contemporary intellectual praxis. An outcome of this problem is the devaluation and usurpation of the indigenous knowledge systems by the colonial epistemologies.

Indigenous people are the people who are the earliest known inhabitants of a geographical area or their descendants who share collective ancestral ties to the land and natural resources of that area. In their "introduction" to *Indigenous Knowledge in Global Contexts*, George J Sefa Dei, et.al note that "indigenous knowledge can be conceptualized as a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate people's way of living and making sense of their world" (3). Indigenous knowledge systems of a local society encompass a wide range of perceptions and experiences of its members of universal phenomena occurring in their immediate environment and also the social, cultural and economic practices of the people. Indigenous knowledge systems are the outcome of centuries of experiences acquired by the indigenous people which are gradually developed into a spectrum of skills, information and technology to enhance their lives. Indigenous knowledge is largely oral, passed on to the next generation by people who has acquired it from their elders. Myths and legends constitute a crucial part of the indigenous communities and their systems of knowledge. Apart from being a catalyst in the formation of the socio-cultural identity of the indigenous communities, myth also represents the integrating values surrounding which indigenous societies are organized. Indigenous knowledge systems involve the deliberate construction and utilization of myth to suit some of their specific purposes. Myth still facilitates a mode of narrative resistance for the indigenous people in the face of the hegemonic approach of colonial epistemologies and western discourses. This paper draws references from Assamese oral literature and seeks to examine the role myth play in the indigenous knowledge systems.

The place of myth is central to oral literature. Oral literature is the repository of knowledge, critical thoughts, experiences and wisdom for non-literate societies. Oral literature has no texts, which necessitates its reliance on memory. Therefore oral tradition favors thoughts which are particularly memorable. This aspect brings oral literature closer to myth which acts as mnemonic aid for the preservation of traditional thoughts and knowledge. Assamese oral literature includes traditional legends, tales, ballads, songs, proverbs and riddles tinctured with mythical or semi mythical elements that reflect the essence of Assamese culture and the knowledge that Assamese people have gathered from their centuries old interaction with nature and the social environment of Assam. A close examination of Assamese oral literature reveals the fact that a large part of it encapsulates Assamese indigenous knowledge in the form of mythical or semi mythical narratives. Oral literature throws ample light into the ways in which indigenous people understand arts and culture, religion and science. It also reflects the unique lifestyle of indigenous people unknown to the western discourses of coexisting with nature while maintaining ecological balance and integrity. This paper is divided into two parts. The first part seeks to look at myth as a subcomponent aiding in the process of understanding and communication of ideas and knowledge in an indigenous community. The second part highlights the function of myth as a method that provides resistance to the hegemonic discourses and safeguards indigenous knowledge. Although some myths and superstitions have been inflicting serious harm to the indigenous societies, myths also continue to capture and keep alive the residual ethno-cultural and historical elements of indigenous societies. This paper studies the constructive function of myths in how the indigenous people trace out their ways of survival and understanding of the world, notwithstanding the stigmatization of the "superstitious indigenous".

Myth as a Subcomponent

A subcomponent is a minor component of something that combines with other to form a larger part. Myth is an integral element of indigenous epistemologies. As a subcomponent, myth undertakes

a symbolic function. Schelling opined that the figures of mythology are but the universe intuited in the form of the particular (Altman 163). In a mythical figure the ideal and the real coincide. According to Schelling, symbol is a synthesis of type and allegory as it represents the general through the particular and also particular through the general. Therefore, symbolic thinking alludes to mythical thinking. In indigenous knowledge systems myths are subcomponents which operate as important symbols that help people understand and communicate new ideas. Myths which are particular to an indigenous society embody that society's cultural ideals and gives expression to commonly felt emotions. The function of myth in the indigenous epistemologies can be better validated as symbolic rather than purely empirical. Myths and mythical narratives are inextricably woven into the fabric of Assamese oral literature. Myths occupy an important place in the artistic and cultural expressions of the Assamese people. There are mythical figures pertaining to religion as well as myths in the form of agnostic false beliefs which pervade Assamese oral tradition and operate in accordance with the indigenous ways of life. Assamese oral literature incorporates mythical figures and narratives that often reflect people's knowledge of nature, culture, religion, ecology, agriculture etc.

Indigenous people are the guardians of some of the precious natural resources of the earth including many of the earth's biodiversity hotspots. Their traditions and belief systems allow them to regard nature with deep respect. Their belief systems sustain their ecological knowledge which conforms to the modern ideas of nature preservation and sustainable development. Myth which comprises a large part of their traditions and belief systems ensures the sustenance and transmission of these beliefs. If looked closely, in indigenous people's perspective towards nature a paradoxical process of homogenization and deification can be noticed. Their attribution of humane qualities to nature and at the same deifying and revering the nature is nothing but a technique of using myth to preserve the very sources of nature on which their life is dependent. An instance of this can be found in a *Bihunaam* or a Bihu song where the river

Brahmaputra which is considered as the lifeline of Assam has been personified and venerated.

> *Brahmaputrar parore*   *Barhamthuri ejupi*
> *Aminu khori lura thai*
> *Brahmaputra debota*   *utuw*ai *niniba*
> *Tamul di matuta nai*

Paraphrase in English -The Barhamthuri tree by the river Brahmaputra, our place of collecting firewood, O the river God of Brahmaputra don't sweep us away, as we have none who would offer prayers to you for our protection.

Such acts of personifying and mythologizing of natural elements lay stress on the indigenous people's reverence and regard for nature and careful usage of natural resources which is a distinctive trait of indigenous societies. Brahmaputra *debota* or the God of river Brahmaputra symbolizes the deep regard that Assamese people have towards the river. Contemplation of the river Brahmaputra as *debota* or angel is reflective of the ecological knowledge of the indigenous people that nature is important for life and therefore it should be respected, protected and used in a sustainable method. In Assamese folktales also, such instances can be noticed. The myth of *Bordoisila*, the spirit goddess of wind and rain highlight the aesthetic and artistic imagination in which indigenous people of Assam are well versed in. In that myth also the appreciation of nature in a symbolic feminine form find expression. *Bordoisila* is believed to be a young married woman who visits her maternal place during the oncoming of spring. On her way to her maternal place, she destroys literally everything on her path as she is in hurry to reach her mother's house. *Bordoisila* marks the arrival of *Bihu* in Assam. The mythical figure of *Bordoisila* can be thought of as a reminder of the concept of ecofeminism popularized by critics such as Vandana Shiva. Ecofeminism holds the view that women are inextricably connected to nature and the debasement of nature is similar to the debasement of women. The myth of *Bordoisila* is also an example of myths which provide a way of knowing realities which are not empirically observable for the indigenous people.

Oral traditions develop their own creation myths which are symbolic narratives functioning as an answer to how the world began and how human beings first came into it. Creation Myths seeks to answer the most profound human questions concerning the purpose of life and existence and try to organize the way human beings perceive and understand the world. Assamese oral literature contains creation myths in the form of folktales which tries to explain the cosmological events and how different elements of nature came into being. Different versions of creation myths have been historically circulating among the different ethnic communities of Assam which are related with their social systems, customs and traditions. A major role that these myths play in indigenous society is in conveying moral lessons and giving a general explanation of cosmological and historical events to which people can collectively subscribe. The knowledge that creation myths impart to the indigenous people is not empirically justifiable but its relevancy depends upon the community participation and a collective reaction that it facilitates which somehow keeps the community together.

In indigenous societies, learning is considered as a wholesome process which embraces every aspect of life. In oral epistemologies, oral narratives, fables, riddles and proverbs functioned as instructional tools for learning. According to Walter J Ong, "proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in intellectual combat: utterance of one proverb or riddle challenges the hearers to top it with a more apposite or a contradictory one" (Ong 43). Riddles and proverbs keep knowledge in circulation and foster its memorization which is necessary for the society's survival. In Assamese oral literature proverbs and riddles operate within a seemingly mythical framework. Some of the popular proverbs of Assamese oral tradition involves deliberate mythologisation such as–

Matir tolor boga burhi, xaaj pindhe kuri kuri

Paraphrase in English - The old white women of underground who wears multi layered dress.

Such riddles invite the listener to immediately imagine a mythical figure and struggle to uncover the mystery while at the same time unconsciously overlook its symbolic function in indigenous epistemologies. Many popular proverbs in Assamese oral literature are overlaid with myth to felicitate didactic teaching to maintain moral codes and conducts in the society.

An important figure in the Assamese oral literature whose proverbial sayings would be central to the understanding of the indigenous knowledge of Assam is *Daak*. The term *Daak* literally means "voice", but the origin and history of *Daak*, who is believed to be a wise person is ambiguous. Daak is a mythical figure in Assamese folklore, the one who imparts wisdom to people about experiencing everyday reality. The sayings of *Daak,* known as *Daakor Bachan*, are extraordinary literary resources which includes valuable information spanning a wide range of subjects like agriculture, medicine, architecture, civic behaviour and law, food, weather etc. It is widely held that–

> *Daakor Bachan, Bedor Bani*
> *Tak xokoluwe loba mani*

Paraphrase in English- Sayings of *Daak* are as indisputable as the teachings of the vedas, everyone should agree with them and follow them.

Generations of indigenous Assamese people have been guided by the knowledge imparted by *Daak*. In one verse of *Daak*, it is said–

> *Ghonai Ghonai diba ali, porbototu ruba xali.*

Paraphrase in English - If you put embankments at close interval, you will be able to grow Sali rice even on hilltops.

It is interesting to note how this centuries old rhyming stanza refers to water management through the construction of embankments. *Daakor Bachans* were an outcome of a careful study of nature and life.

Indigenous knowledge of art and culture finds expression in Assamese folk songs like *Biya naam* (wedding songs), *Bihu naam* (Bihu songs), *Dhaai naam* (lullabies) etc. where myth functions as

an important ingredient. In most of these songs myths and mythical figures intermingle with factuality to create a cultural mosaic highlighting the richness and beauty of indigenous life. In *Biya Naam* references are often made to Lord Rama and Sita who are thought of as an ideal pair. In *Dhaai Naam* mothers use lullabies as a method of instruction. The mythical character of *Kankhowa*, or the ear eating monster is a character featuring in those lullabies. These lullabies transport the small children to a different world where reality is subservient to magic, and susceptible to all sorts of miracle. These songs provide solace and comfort to the weeping child. They reflect Assamese women's understanding of child psychology and their discovery of own psychopathy from the experiences of ages to console and take care of their children.

Myth as a Method of Resistance

The organizing principles of Indigenous societies has always been counterhegemonic in nature. The indigenous oral narratives reinforce the existence of indigenous ontology and resists oppositional paradigms. The advent of colonialism resulted in the epistemological clash between indigenous and western discourses where myth played a crucial role. In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes "where there is power there is resistance and yet or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power*"* (Taylor 37). According to Foucault, power is not one dimensional. Colonized or marginalized groups also possess discursive agency and the power of resistance. Myth fostered a kind of sanctification that protected indigenous knowledge from the polemics of colonialism. Myths defended not only indigenous knowledge but the organizing principles of indigenous societies by being a supporting element in the counter-narrative to colonialism.

Indigenous people are conservative about their knowledge systems and inhibit intellectual experimentation as their knowledge systems pass down over centuries. As Walter J. Ong says- "Knowledge is hard to come by and precious, and society regards highly those wise old men and women who specialize in conserving it" (41). The underlying mythical framework of most of the oral

narratives acted as a support base for indigenous people to express their response to the immediate reality which sometimes remain ungraspable and to be skeptical about epistemologies which are alien to them. In Assamese folklore, the mythical figure of *Burha Dangoriya,* the wise old man, much revered, who inhabits in big ancient trees function as a symbolic custodian of traditional knowledge. *Burha Dangoriya* wears spotless white dress and a magnificent turban on his head. He is generally benevolent and protects his admirers but if offended, can cause serious troubles. These kinds of myths exemplify the indigenous people's appreciation for those who are orally literate and holds the potential to keep the tradition alive. According to critic Jogesh Das*, "*a section of Kacharis offers puja to a *Gajai Dangoriya* who is the God of knowledge" (47). The deification of wise old man figures like *Burha Dangoriya* and attribution to them of the power of causing destruction in case of necessity can be thought of as a cautionary sign created by the indigenous to cast aside colonial discursive practices.

Myth often features in the common everyday expressions of the indigenous people. Their art of storytelling also enacts deliberate utilization of myths for both response and resistance. In a form of Assamese oral songs, known as *Maniram Dewanor Geet*, we see the utilization of myth by the indigenous people to express their empathy for the Assamese patriot Maniram Dewan and voice against colonial violence. Maniram Dewan was an Assamese elite who revolted against the British rule in Assam and was thrown into gallows. Folk songs known as *Maniram Dewanor Geet* were composed in memory of Maniram Dewan through which people of Assam expressed their grief over his death and also their resentment against the act of his killing by the colonizers. In *Maniram Dewanor Geet,* myth and factuality intermingle to form a strong case against colonialism. An instance of the use of myth can be noticed in the lines–

> *Sompawoti Gabhorur Xendur Mose Khale*
> *Ghone Xuhat lore*
> *Kauriye Romoliyai Fesai Kuruliyai*
> *Xopunot Agdaat xore*

Paraphrase in English- The vermillion mark of Sompawoti Gabhoru has been rubbed out.

The right hand shakes frequently
The crow caws, the owl hoots
Front teeth fall out in dreams

The sounds of crow and owl is thought of as an ill omen implicating the disaster awaiting Maniram Dewan. Similarly, the falling of the front teeth is also considered in the song as an ominous sign at the onset of the advent of colonialism to Assam. Such myths embedded in superstition are although usually dismissed as harmful, their function was somehow deep rooted in traditional life as they provided a powerful medium to express thoughts and emotions which were inexpressible through ordinary language.

In his essay "Literature and Society" Ngugi Wa Thiongo writes about the colonial mechanism of controlling the indigenous people's cultural environment through the use of colonial education, songs, literature, religion and some other forms of cultural and artistic expression. Simultaneously colonizers employed the strategy of creating the myth of the native by depicting the native in negative light in contrast to the idyllic, nearly perfect colonizer. In *The Myth of the Lazy Native,* S.H. Alatas says colonialism "portrayed negative image of the natives and their society to justify and rationalize European conquest and domination of the area" (2). The colonial production of myth of the native validated the colonial hypothesis that colonized subjects need to be westernized. The colonial implementation of myth on the colonized subjects consequently received resistance from the indigenous myth aiding and assisting indigenous life. According to Mahia Maurial "process of resistance of indigenous people against the western conquerors have subsequently occurred. Resistance against academic knowledge is a part of a larger resistance to western civilization. This is expressed through myths" (67). In some of the Assamese folk songs including some *Bihu naam*, *Saraswati,* the goddess of knowledge is often invoked. Mythical figures like *Daak* and *Burha Dangoriya* also reflect the indigenous people's concern for knowledge with runs counter to the western idea of 'ignorant

native'. In the book *Nudes from Nowhere*: *Utopian Sexual Landscape*, Darby Lewes points to the colonial ideology that depicted "Eastern men as paragons of effeminacy and self- indulgence; Eastern women as immoral, sexually insatiable courtesans" (110). In contrast to such representation, indigenous epistemology relies on myth to define itself and cling to its own sense of culture and civilization. Indigenous knowledge includes myths that stands in stark contrast to the representation of women as immoral and sexually insatiable. One example of this can be the Assamese mythical figure *Lokhimi*. Though the name being synonymous to the Hindu Goddess of wealth, the goddess is more associated with agricultural prosperity than material wealth in Assamese tradition. The goddess *Lokhimi* is a popular goddess occupying a central position in the cultural beliefs and practices of the Assamese agrarian society.

Myth is an integral part of every culture which plays a role in protecting and representing that culture's signifying characteristics. In indigenous epistemology myth fulfill the important function of expressing, enhancing and codifying beliefs. Myth is not a story transfixed in a distant past but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times and continuing ever since to exert its influence on world and human lives. Myth has been instrumental in indigenous society's definition and knowledge of the self and the world. It also functions as a way of sharing powerful thoughts and ideas in oral form and safeguards indigenous knowledge from probable epistemological and discursive elements coming from outside. Despite of western conceptualization and dismissal of the indigenous culture's mythical framework as essentially superstitious, the function of myth cannot be undermined as far as indigenous knowledge is concerned because it supports and sustains a rich tapestry of values, aesthetics, arts, cultural and ecological knowledge constituting a way of life.

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Queer Identities in Indian Myths: Reviewing it Through the LGBT Lens

Anansha Borthakur

Introduction

'Queer' is not a contemporary theory. It has been existing from the very ancient times when there weren't many of these 'sexual and gender orientation terms' available to help the people identify themselves and club them into communities as they are doing it today. Even today, for many people, the term 'Queer' especially refers to embracing the notion of being outside of conventional wisdom and embracing one's true authentic self. But in general, 'Queer' is used "as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies" (Jagose 1). The queer theory challenges the notion that gender is an integral aspect of who we are and attempts an analysis of how sexual identities and behaviors are socially produced.

According to the *Vedas* (4000 CE- 3000 CE), two different sexes are categorized for human beings- 'Purusha'(male) and 'Prakriti'(female), but also recognizes the presence of another sex

called the 'Tritiya Prakriti' or the third gender. Sanskrit, one of the oldest languages of the world mentions about four gender states- 'Punglinga' (Masculine), 'Streelinga' (Feminine), 'Klibalinga' (Neutral), and 'Ubhayalinga' (Common). There are 50 such words describing the existence of a non-heterosexual gender, written in different languages from ancient India, whose references are still found in the four *Vedas, Itihaasa, Puranas* of the Hindus, as well as in Jain Agamas and Buddhist Pitakas. It is well known that gender fluidity and homosexuality have historically existed in the Indian subcontinent. India has a long history of being associated with queerness, whether it is through mythology, the Kamasutra, or a variety of regional folktales. Indian mythology has addressed the issue of queer as an essential component of the life cycle where role acting or sex exchange is a frequent and acceptable idea.

"Over the years, the representation of queerness in Indian literary texts has acquired a space of its own; a "unique" space. By "uniqueness" it is desired to draw attention towards the peripheral status that has been tagged with queerness; it is something that lies beyond the already drawn, easily understandable, universally acknowledged and intellectually (or morally) approved territory of the society" (Sanyal and Maitri 15). From Narada-smriti to Manu-smriti, there has been a considerable visibility of people belonging to the LGBT+ spectrum, revealing that the ancient Indian society supported heterosexuality, and has also given space to the LGBT community. This paper analyses the presence of queer identities in the Indian myths and questions how it has lost their existence throughout history. In order to do so, various categories of stories have been selected. Simultaneously, it also looks into the reasons and solutions for the prevalent misconceptions about the LGBT community in the 21st century Indian society. The present study is qualitative in nature and the methodology used is as per the MLA 8th edition style sheet. A wide range of data is collected through the critical reading of various articles, journals, books, and blogs related to this topic. Interviews of various historians and mythologists (available online) have been also consulted during the time of data collection.

His/ Her Story and The Indian Myths

The Mahabharata is one of the most prominent epics of ancient India that came into existence between 300 BCE and 300 CE. The epic narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins- the Kauravas and the Pandavas in the famous war of Kurukshetra. Shikhandi - the eldest daughter of King Drupad is known to be one of the most prominent characters in the *Mahabharata,* as his arrival changed the entire scenario of the Kurukshetra war. Born as Shikhandini, he was believed to be the reincarnation of Amba. The story of Shikhandi proceeds as he requests Sthunakarna to lend his 'manhood' for one night. This made Kubera, the king of 'yaksha' very furious as such requests were not permitted before. But, when Shikhandi came back to return Sthunakrna his 'borrowed organ', King Kubera was pleased with his integrity. As a result, Kubera blessed Shikhandi and allowed him to use the organ as long as he lives. In the Kurukshetra war, Bhisma was assigned to be the army general from the Kauravas side. On the other hand, the Pandavas knew it was impossible to kill Bhisma as he was the most skilled warrior of the time. Therefore, on the tenth day, Lord Krishna plotted the idea to use Shikandi as a weapon to kill Bhisma. As destiny commands, Bhisma's reason for death was to be neither man nor woman. When Shikhandi appeared before the general, thinking him to be a woman from his physical appearance, Bhisma lowered his bow and Arjuna grabbing that opportunity killed him.

> Shikhandhini, who became Shikhandi is what modern queer vocabulary would call a female-to-male transsexual, as her body goes through a very specific change genitally. But re-tellers avoid detail and tend to portray him/her either as a eunuch (castrated male), a male-to-female transsexual (a man who rejects his male biology), a male-to-female transgender (a man who wears women's clothes as he feels like a woman), an intersexed hermaphrodite, or simply a man who was a woman (Amba) in his past life. It reveals a patriarchal bias even in the queer space. (Alisha 155)

Arjuna, the third brother of the Pandavas, started his gender exchange journey when he visited the court of Indra. When Arjuna came to obtain his weapons from Indra, he saw Urvashi- the celestial dancer at the palace. Urvashi is attracted toward Arjun, and in desire and love she reaches his residence in the twilight. Arjuna politely rejects her request, enraging her to curse him. She cursed him to become a eunuch for a period of one year. Arjuna took this curse as an opportunity to camouflage his identity during his final year in exile. After changing his gender, he took the name of Brihandala and entered the court of King Virat as a performing artist. "In Padma Purana, it is mentioned that Arjuna was transformed into a lady so that he is able to attend Lord Krishna's mystical dance in which only ladies were allowed to participate in" (Neeraj and Muraleedharan 9132). "Eunuchs were accepted and even revered by the common folk. They were important and trusted caretakers of the harems of the kings, as we can see in warrior Arjuna's case" (Vuppu 1).

In Mahabharta, one of the most important aspects was the friendship between Arjuna and Krishna. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in their book *Same-sex love in India* mentions that often Krishna and Arjuna are referred to as 'the two Krishnas' who reflect a bond of friendship that can go beyond marriage and procreation. "Krishna clearly states that Arjuna is more important to him than wives, children or kinsmen- there can be many spouses and sons but there is only one Arjuna, without whom he cannot live" (Dasgupta 652). Krishna's reiteration of his inseparability with Arjuna depicts how the same-sex relationship in ancient India was given the name of a divine form of friendship.

Prince Aravan was the son of Arjuna by his serpent wife Uloopi. In the Kurukshetra war, the God of sacrifice asks for a divine soul that would ensure victory to the Pandavas. Aravan decided to volunteer himself for the cause. But his spinsterhood became a barrier to losing his life. As no woman came forward to marry a man who is doomed to die the very next day, the Pandavas sought help from Krishna. On request, Krishna converted himself into a beautiful lady called Mohini. Krishna as Mohini married Aravan and spent their

first wedding night together. After he was sacrificed, Krishna mohini mourned as a loyal widow for her husband.

Every year, near Pondicherry in the village of Koovagam the story of Aravan is enacted. Aravan is linked with the village deity, Koothandavar who is associated with Shiva. A giant image of Koothandavar is taken into the procession before it is taken apart indicating his sacrifice. The war is one of the outcomes of Krishna's manipulation so that the blood of the wicked king falls on the ground and is consumed by the earth-goddess Kali. The Aravanis or the wives of Aravan are transgendered but are not obliged to castrate themselves. The word Thiru-nangai meaning "Sir-lady" or "Mr.-lady" is associated with transgenders." (Alisha 156)

Mohini which means enchantress is the female version of Lord Vishnu. Vishnu took the form of Mohini to accomplish the task that he couldn't achieve in his male form. The most famous tale of Mohini is her union with Shiva. According to the *Bhagavata Purana,* during the *Samudra Manthan*, Mohini deceived the Asuras by acquiring the 'Amrit' from them and giving it to the Devas to make them immortal. The incident overwhelmed Lord Shiva so much that he immediately went to meet her along with his wife Parvati. Shiva saw the beauty of Mohini and was overcome by lust. He pursued Mohini, leaving behind his wife Parvati. A result of this violent coupling leads to the birth of Ayyappa. "The ambiguity in gender here acts as the agency through which same-sex desire between the two gods could be realized. Shiva is not deceived or unaware of Mohini's true gender but knowingly desires and pursues her" (Dasgupta 655).

This is not the only instance where Lord Shiva has displayed gender and sexual fluidity. According to Sindura Vuppu, Ardhanarishvara is a mix of Shiva and his wife Parvati. The form has both male and female elements divided equally, therefore creating a genderless deity. To demonstrate how the inner masculine and feminine can coexist and come together, Parvati wanted their physical forms to be linked literally to share Shiva's experiences. This non-binary form is still one of the strongest symbols that convey androgyny from ancient myths.

Bahuchara Mata is often regarded as the Patron goddess of *Hijras.* According to the facts, this goddess is prayed to and invoked among most of the Hijra community, especially during a Castration ritual called 'Nirvana'. Many stories connect Bahuchara Mata to castration or other bodily sexual transformations, sometimes as a result of her casting curses upon men. From one of the oral tellings, when Bahuchara Mata was traveling with her sisters in a caravan, a bandit by the name of Bapiya allegedly tried to rape her. She attempted to scare the bandit away by chopping off her breast. The deity used no force to subdue the bandit. She also insisted that he dress and act like a woman to atone for his bad behavior. Another myth concerns, when a king pleaded Bahuchara for a son. Bahuchara consented, but the prince became impotent as an adult. One night, the prince had a dream in which Bahuchara told him to remove his genitalia, dress as a woman, and serve her. "Bahuchara is believed to continue to identify impotent men and command them to do the same. If they refuse, she punishes them for their next seven incarnations with the curse of impotency. This myth is the origin of the cult of Bahuchara Mata, whose devotees are required to self-castrate and remain celibate" (Sanyal and Maitri 19). The story of Bahuchara Mata influenced the trans community so much that they have dedicated a temple in her name in the Mehsana district of Gujarat.

The Hindu deity Lord Rama had to spend 14 years in the wilderness after being exiled from his realm, according to the *Ramayana*, which is praised for the relevance of its characters. Famous mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik mentions in one of his interviews that - when Lord Rama was returning to Ayodhya from the forest, he saw some *Hijras* sitting outside the gate of Ayodhya. To his question as to why they were sitting outside instead of being in, they replied that when he was left them 14 years ago, the entire kingdom started following him. Lord Rama turned and asked every man and woman to go home. Unfortunately, he did not mention the members of the 3rd gender. Therefore, the entire community kept waiting outside with the hope that when Lord Rama returned, he might take them back into the city. "Lord Rama was greatly moved

by their love and loyalty and sanctioned them the power to confer a blessing on auspicious occasions like marriage, childbirth, and inaugural functions" (Srinivasan et.al. 2).

According to the *Girdhar Ramayana ,* there is mention of the transgender community in the monkey kingdom. As narrated, Monkey king Vriksharaja one day accidentally falls into the water and takes the form of a lady. Indra saw her and immediately sought to fulfill his desires with her. As a consequence of their union, King Vali was born. Similarly, the union of Surya and Vriksharaja gave birth to Sugriva, which is another important tale from the *Ramayana.*

In addition to these allusions, other LGBTQ characters are frequently mentioned in Indian astrology tales. One well-known illustration of such a narrative is BudhGraha (the mercury). He was brought up by Tara and Sage Brihaspati. Brihaspathy learned that the infant was the illegitimate son of Tara and Chandra (the moon god). Brihaspathy cursed the child, saying that he or she would not be either male or female. On the other hand, when Shiva cursed King Suduma, he transformed into a woman called Ila. Ila loses the recollection of being the other gender after switching sexes. She marries BudhaGraha during one of these times. Even though Budha is aware of Ila's gender reversal, he chooses not to inform the 'male' Ila, who is still ignorant of his life as a woman. The only time they cohabitate as husband and wife are when Ila is a woman. Hence, as Devdutt Pattnaik claims, the entire Chandravansh Clan was born out of the transgender union.

All these stories suggest that there is a clear acceptance of the LGBT community in Indian myths and ancient folklore. In carvings on the exterior walls of ancient Hindu temples, such as those in Khajuraho, sexual actions are depicted. Some of these scenes feature same-sex sexuality; examples include a woman touching another woman while having sex with another woman, a male receiving fellatio from another man, etc. Furthermore, a sculpture of two ladies having oral intercourse may be seen at the Rajarani Tempe in Bhuvaneshwar, Odisha. Examples like these may be found all over the Indian subcontinent, clearly indicating that same-sex partnerships have existed since very early times.

'Queering' in India Today

Indian society was clear about its past. Therefore, it is of no surprise that 'Homophobia' was popularized and initiated in Indian society through colonialization. For ages, the LGBT community has endured discrimination, torture, and execution in various regions of Europe. The East India Company was officially dissolved in 1857, marking the bloody end of medieval India. For same-sex love, that end was signaled by the 1861 law that criminalized homosexuality which resulted in legal execution. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was created in 1860 and was implemented in 1861. This code makes explicit use of terms like "unnatural" and "order of nature." According to Judeo-Christian ideology, any sexual behaviors that were not intended to produce children were considered "unnatural" and "against the order of nature." This law remained in India till 2018, even though homosexuality between consenting adults was decriminalized in England in 1967. The Supreme Court of India made history in 2018 by striking down this section of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), that criminalized same-sex relationships and had a negative impact on the LGBT community in addition to being out of date morally. The Supreme Court's ruling was made with the intention of granting homosexual persons the freedom to live with dignity, free from the stigmas associated with their sexual orientation, in complete freedom, and on an equal footing with all other citizens of the nation.

However, there are many issues and concerns that the people of these communities are still facing. LGBT people encounter numerous forms of marginalization, including sexism, poverty, child abuse, molestation, family abuse, and homophobia or transphobia, all of which have a detrimental effect on mental health. LGBT persons are frequently barred from a variety of support systems, including their own families and basic necessities like sanitation, education, and access to justice and legal services. According to the 2018 LGBTQ report 30% of LGBT youth had experienced physical violence at the hands of family members due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Following these mistreatments, they decide to leave their families, which causes them to become homeless and illiterate. They are forced to do anything to survive when they are deprived of a family, money, or education.

Indian society has come across a wide range of queer identities and cross-dressers from its myths and epics. Still, a queer subject has always been and still is looked down upon. Misconceptions such as all LGBT people are subjected to HIV/ AIDS, that they are child-abductors and molesters, being trans is a psychological disorder, etc. are still prevalent in this society. Hence, retelling and narrating past myths can abolish these stereotypical and sexist values.

Conclusion

Although the LGBT community has existed in civilized societies for all of recorded history, it was purposefully excluded from the mainstream. Even in this evolved post-humanist period, the community still faces a variety of complex problems. Their physicality and the portrayals of it are frequently mocked and subverted. While the community has seen many forms of empowerment over the past few decades, we cannot conclude that society as a whole has adopted a queer-friendly environment. The recognized morality code of Indian society is the fundamental cause of discrimination toward LGBTQ+ people. Hence, an altered form of people's mentality is much needed to remove this sort of discrimination. The first stage is sexual education in schools and at home. A youngster must feel comfortable talking to his or her parents or teachers about any sexual issues they may be having, including their sexual preferences. Moreover, legal and social help is much needed to understand the issues of these people.

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The Art of Myth Making : An Analytical Reading of Ted Hughes' Crow Poems

Ashmita Bora

Introduction

Myths have existed in every culture since the beginning of time but have no substantial evidence to make them factual or real hence they could be called fictional at best but they are usually aimed at imparting moral and religious lessons. Although the word myth has its root in the Greek word 'mythos', which basically translates into 'story', there is no precise definition of what it entails (William 12) "A purpose of myth is, as Doty has noted, to "provide symbolic representations of cultural priorities, beliefs and prejudices." ...Myth is, indeed, an "ideology in narrative form" (Kapell, 219).

Hughes placed himself in the midst of Western Christian civilisation and launched an attack on the prevalent myths not only altering various Biblical stories but also creating his own mythology. He also revised certain primitive myths especially through the use of Trickster mythology. His disgust at western modern civilisation and

western education was at the root of this. He used archetypal myths and also created his own myths in his writings.

Myth making and Crow poems

Ted Hughes extended his mythical imagination to the reimagining of animalistic myths as could be seen in the case of the poetry volume, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow* (1970) where Biblical Creation myth is replaced by Hughes own. The mythic crow takes after the trickster figure of the raven in North American Indian myths. Hirschberg writes, "In folk mythology the crow is an animal figure predominantly associated with the twin motifs of death and guilt, a stark figure who embodies boldness, intelligence, adaptability to change and a twisted vitality" (126). Such description is significant in Hughes' portrayal as the crow goes through a series of changes, meditations and modifications.

Ted Hughes Crow poems are an amalgamation of many myths, from primitive to Biblical to Greek and Roman myths and they have given way to Hughes' Crow mythology. Crow is the Trickster figure of primitive tales and ancient mythologies according to Hughes himself and the poems have been framed on the pattern of the Bible, from Genesis (beginning of the world) to Apocalypse (the end). There is a game portrayed, played by two characters, God and crow. Crow is God's creation and God seeks to annihilate him but is unsuccessful. At times the crow is almost synonymous with Lucifer, the fallen angel or who is commonly called Satan. Ted Hughes has gone on record describing a story behind the origin of his idea for the crow poems:

Having created the world. God has a recurring nightmare. A huge hand comes from deep space, takes him by throat, half throttles him, drags him through space, ploughs the earth with him then throws him back to heaven in a cold sweat. God cannot imagine what in his own created universe can have such power over him. And repeated attempts to make the nightmare show itself fail until God finally manages to make it speak. But its voice simply mocks God and his creation, particularly Man, who has completely mismanaged his gifts and destroyed himself and the world. And God does not seem to be

able to do anything about it. He becomes engaged and challenges the nightmare to prove what it is saying. In reply, the nightmare simply points to the man in the gates of heaven, who has come to ask God to take life back. The nightmare is jubilant and God mortified. So God challenges the nightmare to do better and this is exactly what the nightmare has been waiting for. It plunges down into matter and creates Crow. God puts Crow through all kinds of ordeals involving his annihilation, dismemberment or transformation, but Crow survives them all. Meanwhile, he interferes in God's activities, sometimes trying to learn or help, at other times openly opposing God's will. (Interview with Ekbert Faas, London Magazine, 1971)

Analysis

Beginning with the inversion of the Biblical myth of creation of the universe in the Genesis with God's words "let there be light", the poem "Two Legends" reverses the creation to a black universe and the coming of the crow who emerges from darkness and void. In this state of utter darkness, "Black the liver, black the lungs / …black was the blood, / black was the bowels there is no capacity to absorb light" (Hughes 13).

A similar trajectory is followed in the poem "Lineage" where we find the the reversal of the Christian myth that depicts logo centrism with the words of God "In the beginning was the word replaced by "In the beginning was Scream". The plan of God in the Genesis is denied in Hughes poem as here God is not the creator of the world anymore. God comes only after the coming of Mother Mary and God could create nothing. Here, the supreme nature of God is denied as he is present as an incapable and almost nearly impotent character with no potential of begetting anything. However, out of this nothingness itself emerged Crow screaming for blood.

In "A Childish Prank", the well-known Biblical creation myth is turned into a satire where Hughes' Crow as the trickster figure becomes the harbinger of all evil. After creating the lifeless bodies of man and woman, that is, Adam and Eve, God snoozes off while wondering what to do with them. Here Crow is equated with Satan,

perhaps even worse. He comes, bites the worm (Lucifer or Satan in Bible) and splits it into two. Then very shrewdly he stuffs half of the worm in man and the other half in women. The worm has an instant urge to become whole again and this caused man and women to get introduced to lust which ends in them having intercourse thus causing their fall from paradise. "Man awoke being dragged across the grass, / Woman awoke to saw him coming. / Neither knew what happened" (Hughes 19).

Again the image of God as omnipotent is destroyed in his incapacity to give life to the two bodies while Crow seizes the opportunity and causes mayhem. The crow is therefore, portrayed as superior to God.

In "Crow's First Lesson" Christian creation myth is inversed as God tries to teach Crow to talk but is not successful in making him say the word "love". However, in the process crow ends up creating a number of beings which is naturally God's work. The life force of which crow becomes capable of is significant as he replaces God as the supreme creator. Not only that, crow also unknowingly unleashes the desire for lust in human beings while god could only helplessly watch and weep. Crow's retching is symbolic of the call for sexual action between man and woman, "And Crow retched again, before God could stop him. / And woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened. / The two struggled together on the grass" (Hughes 20).

In the poem "Theology", Ted Hughes sets out to deconstruct prevalent myths of Christianity. The poem deals with the myth of Adam and Eve in paradise, the Genesis myth where Eve is shamed because of her temptation by the serpent and Adam is the remarkable hero who accepts God's punishment of banishment for the sake of a life with Eve but contrary to the Bible myth, Hughes distorts the story and reverses the serpent's role in seducing Eve. He calls the biblical plot as "corruption of facts" thus, rendering it a baseless story. In his version the serpent is innocent, Adam is the main culprit and God is the helpless spectator, the ruler who has lost his command over his creation. His version goes like:

> Adam ate the apple.
> Eve ate Adam.
> The serpent ate Eve
> This is the dark intestine. (Hughes 161)

Similarly, in "Apple Tragedy", the Biblical fall of man and loss of paradise is reversed as God is shown as the villain and corruptor and the serpent as the creator. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden is a consequence of God who brings the apple to Adam, Eve and the serpent which leads subsequently to the loss of Paradise and at which God says, "I am well pleased" (Hughes 78).

"Crow's Fall" where crow attacks the sun poignantly alludes to the Greek Myth of Icarus where Icarus and his father, Daedalus were imprisoned on an island by King Minos. Daedalus designed wax wings and Icarus wanted to try them on. Despite several warnings from his father Icarus flew too close to the sun and as a result his wings melt and he falls in the river to die. It is a study of hubris and overconfidence and similarly, crow who was white as it flies towards the sun is in turn charred in his bid to overcome the sun's brightness. "But the sun brightened— / It brightened, and Crow returned charred black" (Hughes 36).

In "Crow and Mama", Crow's efforts to escape its mother is reflective of the Oedipal tendency of mothers with their male child and the subsequent moving away of child away from mothers is how the phallus tries to castrate itself. "When he stopped she closed on him like a books / On a bookmark, he had to get going" (Hughes 5).

The mother's suffocating love and adoration is akin to the Greek myth of Oedipus where he ends up marrying his mother unknowingly and gets her pregnant. Crow here however tries to escape from his mother but at the end finds himself stuck under her buttocks.

In "Song for A Phallus", the Oedipus myth is reiterated but the version is turned on its head by Hughes. As a deviation from the Oedipal myth of Sophocles, here Crow escapes when his father tries to kill him. He does not commit patricide like Sophocles' Oedipus but he on the other hand commits matricide trying to know the mystery of afterlife but only realises after splitting his mother's womb that he is the foetus he had split.

"He split his mammy like a melon… / He found himself curled up inside / As if he had never been born" (Hughes 75-77).

Conclusion

Ted Hughes' resort to myth is often times seen as the result of his growing bitterness towards the emerging modern civilisation with its lack of meaning and his complete distaste towards modern education of which he was of the notion that it does not further the imaginative and creative faculties of individuals. To provide a solution to this problem which according to him threatened the future of coming generations, he called for a recourse to ancient and traditional mythology rich in imagery, symbolism, storytelling and imagination. To enrich the faculties of the mind, to lift the mind out of the stupor of everyday business, elements like myth, magic and multi-dimensional realities become vital. Therefore, in his capacity as a mythic poet, Hughes, "wrote to liberate and to heal the soul, the body, the mind, the community and the world" (Gifford 68). Hughes' Crow mythology can be therefore, seen as a purgatory exercise through which he seeks to combat the sickness of modern western civilisation by inversing the commonly held Christian beliefs which he not only confronted but also questioned and dissected by his alternative as well as personal mythological creations to the pre-existing myths.

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Re-Mythologizing the Chinese-American Experience: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Myths in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

Bhaswati Goswami

Introduction

The definition of myth has changed over time. The word "myth" is a derivative of the Greek word "mythos" which means "any story or plot, whether true or invented" (Abrams & Harpham 230). As myths only contain supernatural or fantastical events, they are often considered as synonymous to falsehood or fabrication. The reason behind this is that the existential thirst of human beings in the bygone era was mostly quenched through mythology. For instance, thousands of years ago, when people were unable to comprehend the concept of electrical energy, they chose to believe in a supreme force which has the authority over the whole universe. Therefore, across different cultures, we can find instances of a supreme being who can control electricity. In Norse Mythology, there is a God of Thunder called Thor, who can control lightning, thunder, storms etc., whereas, in

Hindu Mythology, it is Lord Indra who is associated with sky, weather, thunder etc. In his paper "The Structural Study of Myth", the author Claude Levi-Strauss suggested that the myths from different cultures from all over the word seem similar. By showcasing the structural units of a myth, Strauss argues that the astounding similarity of the myths across cultures is due to their structural resemblance.

According to Abrams' and Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, mythology is: a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives (230) Since time immemorial, human beings have been dependent on mythology to seek answers of their existential questions regarding life, death, origin of the universe etc. The answers to these questions vary from culture to culture, which, in turn, stand as a mirror to the values and traditions of that particular society. For instance, Hindu mythology preaches the concept of reincarnation, whereas Christian mythology propagates the concept of Heaven and Hell. Thus, the contradictory answers to the same ontological queries across different cultures can be observed. With the advent of science and technology as well as the gradual changes in social morality, ideological notions etc. transformed certain mythologies obsolete. For instance, Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution as mentioned in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859) generated uncertainty regarding the previously accepted beliefs in relation to the origin of human beings, the existence of Earth etc. Its influence can even be noticed in the literary works of that age as well. For instance, Tennyson's "In Memoriam" echoes the concept of natural selection which is explained by Darwin in his work. Thus, the unquestioned devotion on the credibility of myths slowly began to decline, and rather than considering mythological tales as factual narratives, the study of deeper meanings behind the myths began. However, even with the expansion of scientific discoveries and inventions, the need to re-assert cultural identities through storytelling persisted. In an interview

with Joseph Campbell, Bill Moyers states: "Myths are stories of our search through ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story, to understand our story" (*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*). It can be argued that over time, when the existing myths become inadequate in reinforcing the identity of a cultural group, there arises a need for re-inventing a mythology of their own.

The portrayal of Chinese immigrant women in American fiction was always stereotypical in nature. These stereotypes resulted in either reducing them to aggressive, opportunistic, predatory hyper-sexual beings who use their feminine guiles, or as quiet, submissive, and subservient to male ego. Being a writer of hyphenated identity, Amy Tan was fully aware of these stereotypical representations of Chinese-American women in mainstream American fiction. In order to represent the ethos of the Chinese-American women, Amy Tan has incorporated certain myths in her novel *The Joy Luck Club*. These myths are neither quintessentially Chinese nor American. Re-asserting the cultural identity of the Chinese immigrant community requires not favouring or rejecting either of the opposing traditions. Therefore, in this process of re-mythologizing the Chinese-American experience as counter-narratives to the otherwise stereotypical representations of the Chinese immigrants, Tan has appropriated Chinese myths, folklores, beliefs, rituals in the American context. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan has portrayed the generational, cultural, and linguistic conflicts between the mothers and the daughters. To represent these tales of their personal histories, along with the allegorical myths, Tan has also adopted the Chinese talk story tradition. Through these tales, the mothers are able to communicate with their daughter without being misunderstood and can re-attain their lost voices. Although the daughters in this novel do not initially recognize the significance of storytelling, gradually, as adults, they come to terms with their Chinese-American identity. These tales challenge the patriarchal Chinese myths and traditional American stereotypical representation of the Chinese immigrants. In this novel, Tan has deconstructed and reconstructed popular Chinese myths to reflect

the Chinese-American ideology. This study aims to analyze how Tan has called attention to the subjugation of women as hyphenated objects through re-writing the existing myths in her novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

Analysis

In her seminal work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Institution* (1976), the author Adrienne Rich comments on the absence of mother-daughter subjectivities in mythological literature: "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother daughter passion and rapture" (237). The story of Demeter and Persephone in Greek Mythology is perhaps the most well-known instance of mother-daughter relationship. Echoing Rich's view, Marianne Hirsch has also talked about the importance of mother-daughter subjectivities in her work *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*: The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voices of mothers as well as that of the daughters…. Only in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield multiple female consciousness can we begin to envision ways to "live afresh".

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* mainly centers around the lives of the Chinese immigrant women in America who are compelled to persevere identity conflict as they consistently vacillate between two cultures while faintly attempting at assimilating in the host culture. Even Tan's own childhood and adolescence was filled with bicultural tensions as the contrast between her parents' mingling with the Californian Chinese community and their aspirations for their children to attain a certain level of Americanization to almost completely assimilate with the host culture. Thus, Tan had a difficult relationship with her mother due to the inter-generational, inter-cultural, and linguistic gap between them. Thereby, *The Joy Luck Club* is semi-

autobiographical in nature as Tan has poured various personal details in this novel. The conflict between the first and the second generation of Chinese-American women is also one of the central motifs in this novel. Tan has especially concentrated on portraying maternal subjectivity in this novel as there are hardly any male protagonists here. Thus, the perspective of the immigrant women, who are otherwise silent under the patriarchal society of China as well as America, is portrayed by Tan in this literary work.

There are four pairs of mothers and daughters residing in San Francisco neighbourhood in *The Joy Luck Club*. The mother-daughter dyads in this novel are: Suyuan Woo/ Jing Mei Woo, An-Mei Hsu/ Rose Hsu Jordan, Lindo Jong/ Waverly Jong, and Ying-Ying St. Clair/ Lena St. Clair. The novel is divided into four sections: Feathers from a Thousand Li Away, Twenty-Six Malignant Gates, American Translation, and Queen Mother of the Western Skies. Tan has begun each section with a parable/fable relating to the theme of the section. These parables/fables are re-narrativized in accordance with the conditions of the Chinese-Americans in a bicultural society. Elements of both the Chinese culture and American circumstances are permeated in these parables to suit the narrative.

The four tales of the first section are narrated by Jing Mei Woo, An-Mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-Ying St. Clair. The fable at the beginning of this section is about an old lady who is remembering her swan which she brought from Shanghai to America. As boasted by the vendor, the creature was actually a duck once, who aspired to become a goose by stretching its neck, and now it has become too beautiful to eat. On her journey to America, she told the swan regarding her expectations such as having a daughter just like her, who will not be looked down by others, who would be too full to have any sorrow, and who would only speak perfect American English. She also stated that she would gift the swan to her daughter as it is a creature which became more than what was hoped for. However, on reaching the new country, the immigration officials seized her belongings along with the swan, and at the end, only a feather of the swan remained with her. The woman had a daughter who grew up

speaking perfect English as it was expected and "drank more coca-cola than sorrow" (5). The woman always wanted to give the single swan feather to her daughter and tell her that although the swan feather might look worthless, it comes from very far away, and it carries all her good intentions. She has grown old now and she is waiting for the day when she can say this to her daughter in perfect American English.

This fable reflects the personal experiences of the first generation of Chinese immigrant mothers in America as well as in China. Expectation of a better life in a new country is the dream of almost every immigrant and this aspect can be witnessed in this fable as well. Through this fable, Tan has also called attention to the suffering of the women under the patriarchal society in China, and it is depicted through the characters' tales as well. Tan writes: "In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch" (6). One of the mothers, Ying-Ying St. Clair, had a difficult relationship with her husband back in China and she aborted her baby as she found out that her husband was having an affair. The inter-generational, inter-cultural, and linguistic gap between the two generations of Chinese-American women is also presented in the parable. The woman expected her daughter to have a better life in America, to speak perfect American English, and to live without sorrow. Although the daughter rose to her expectations, her personal relationship with the daughter grew weary as she could not speak English properly. This is witnessed in few of the mother daughter dyads as well. For example, Jing Mei Woo had trouble in communicating with her mother Suyuan Woo as she could not understand some specific Chinese phrases used by her mother: She said the two soups were almost the same, chabudwo. Or maybe she said butong, not the same thing at all. It was one of those Chinese expressions that means the better half of mixed intentions. I can never remember things I didn't understand in the first place (7). The communication gap between the mother-daughter dyads also leads to the cultural gap between the two generations as the mothers are unable to transmit their cultural heritage

to their daughters and they are unable to understand the "American behaviours" of their daughters due to their "Chinese ways".

Another myth or parable in the novel which addresses the issue of communication gap is the tale at the beginning of the second section titled "Twenty Six Malignant Gates". The tale is about a mother who tells her daughter not to ride her bicycle around the corner of the road as she would not be able to see her if the latter falls down. When the daughter asks her mother how she knows that she will fall, the mother explains to her that it is written in a book titled "Twenty Six Malignant Gates". As the daughter doubts her mother, she asks her to show her the book, to which the mother replies that as the words are written in Chinese, she would not be able to understand it. The daughter ignores the mother's advice, rides her bicycle, and falls down around the corner. This myth also highlights the lack of communication between the two generations of Chinese-American women. The mother tries to warn the daughter not to make the same mistakes like her, but, the daughter rebels against her mother due to the language barrier and cultural differences. In almost all the mother-daughter dyads in this novel, the clash between the first and the second generation of Chinese-American women is noticed as there is a constant conflict between American individualism and Confucian ways of thinking.

The clash between the two generations of Chinese-American women is also observed in the third section titled "American Translation". The myth at the beginning of this section is about a mother visiting her daughter who is startled by looking at a mirror near her daughter's bed. The daughter notices nothing wrong in that, but, the mother comments that her happiness would "bounce back and turn the opposite way" if she keeps a mirror at the foot of the bed (142). After that she puts another mirror over the headboard. The daughter asks her mother the reason behind her action, to which, the mother replies that her luck would be multiplied by that as she will see her future grandchild there. Out of curiosity, the daughter looks through the mirror and is startled to see her own reflection looking back at her.

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The generational gap between the mother and the daughter is witnessed in this myth as the daughter's expensive purchases does not mean anything to the mother and the daughter's skeptical mind cannot understand the mother's Chinese ways of thinking. Again, a daughter looking at her reflection in the mirror is a metaphorical way of her need to properly understand herself. The following stories in this section are narrated by the daughters where they have expressed their inability to understand their mother's advice regarding their life choices. For instance, in the story "Rice Husband", Lena St. Clair acknowledges that her mother predicted that she would have a bad marriage as she did not finish her rice bowls when she was a child. In another story, Ying-Ying St. Clair reveals that she wants Lena to have a mind of her own and not to accept everything that is offered to her. However, Lena is able to understand her mother's advice much later in life when Ying-Ying visits her. After that, Lena is able to comprehend bad signs or omen on her own.

In contrast to the other myths which only dealt with the gaps between the two generations of Chinese-American women, the last myth in the section titled "Queen Mother of the Western Skies" deals with the notion of re-connection and the quest for happiness. The myth alludes to the original Taoist myth about the Guardian of immortality, Queen Mother of the West, which is stylized by Tan as Queen Mother of Western Skies. In this tale, a grandmother wonders what lesson she should teach her grandchild because like her, she was also innocent once. She remembers that she taught her daughter to throw away her innocence. However, now she has realized that she was wrong. After that, she teases her grandchild by calling her "Syi Wang Mu, Queen Mother of the Western Skies" and tells her: "…you must teach my daughter this same lesson. How to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever" (214-215).

According to Taoist mythology, as mentioned in an online Encyclopedia, Queen Mother of the West, Xi Wang Mu, spelt different in Tan's version, is "believed to have held the secret of the elixir of immortality, which she made available to the suppliants in the form of a potion".[1] Tan's renarrativization of this myth may be understood as

the mothers' longing to pass down their survivalist mentality to their daughters to lead a long and happy life, which is similar to Xi Wang Mu passing down her elixir of immortality to the earthly beings.

Conclusion

Regarding Tan's use of myths in this novel, it can be argued that her deconstruction of misogynist notions in Chinese myths offers a novel critical, feminist perspective. As the characters in these myths are female figures as well, it provides a unique voice to the mother-daughter dyads which are otherwise narrated through the male gaze. This is probably also the reason behind the absence of significant male characters throughout the novel. In almost all the novels of Amy Tan provide a space for the women to voice their opinions which are otherwise silenced. Regarding the significance of women voicing their opinions through writing, Helen Cixous notes in *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976): "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing… Woman must put herself into text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (875). The Chinese-American women characters in Tan's novels fight back patriarchal notions as well as racial stereotypes which are forced upon them. Therefore, by deconstructing the existing myths and reconstructing novel myths suitable to depict the life experiences of the Chinese immigrant women, Tan has added to the genre of feminist revisionist mythology.

Endnote

1. For more information on Queen Mother of the West, please visit https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/xi-wang-mu

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"Let me take my brother home": Antigone / Aneeka in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

Bonjyotshna Saikia
Kaustov Pronob Borthakur

The reflection of myth in literature is not a new phenomenon. The narration of ancient myths in literature of the contemporary world highlights the deep-rooted connection that is still relevant in today's time. The popularity of myth is another factor that adds to the modern day appeal. Many modern writers adapt, allude, and incorporate various mythologies to highlight the relevance of universal themes and dilemmas. Mark E. Workman's "The Role of Mythology in Modern Literature" highlights the role of myths in popularising modern literature. Workman's emphasis on a certain piece of work which transcends time and boundary and how modern works of literature envelops traces of mythology should be broken down to establish a solid understanding of the impact mythology has on modern literature.

A significant increase in contemporary reworking of classical tragedy is evident throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century.

Loredana Salis has emphasized on the re-workings of the plays by Sophocles and Euripides and the influence of myths of Medea, Antigone and Oedipus to have carve modern literature (85). Salis argues that postcolonial use of ancient tragedy enables the persistent use of Athenian drama as "a way of coming to terms with a troubled past and unstable present" (Salis 86). The use of ancient myths is crucial to highlight the role played by those silenced by authority. Sophocles's play *Antigone* is one such use of myth to explain the postcolonial underpinnings of contemporary world. Kamila Shamsie's use of the myth of Antigone is crucial to understand the workings of the British government in the post 9/11 era. The situation of British Muslim, an umbrella term that covers the Muslim citizens residing in Britain, is explored through the characters of the orphans, Isma, her twin siblings Aneeka and Parvaiz. It is also in congruence with the character of Karamat Lone, a Muslim Home Secretary in Britain, whose life entangles with the orphans and takes a drastic turn.

The myth of *Antigone* has appealed to many writers to depict the colonial connection, and also to describe the current situation of the world. Shamsie, in an interview, talks about her decision to rework the myth of Antigone. It was in fact meant to be a play, which eventually turned out as *Home Fire.* Just like Antigone's refusal to accept Creon's rule: "I will bury my brother, 'and if I die for it, what happiness! Convicted of reverence — I shall be content…we have only a little time to please the living/ but all eternity to love the dead", (Trans. Watling 128) Aneeka refuses to Karamat Lone's edict, which reflects her absolute refusal of the imposed rule of the state.

The radical rejection of authority is characteristic of Aneeka, which is evident since the beginning of the story. When Isma is off to Massachusetts for her Ph.D., she is interrogated at the London airport. It is Aneeka who prepares questions for Isma, and makes her practice. Even while dealing with her sister Isma, Aneeka never fails to question what she thinks is incorrect. The refusal to accept what her sister provides, or even the refusal to accept her brother's burial at Pakistan reflects the strong personality of Aneeka. Just as Antigone feels that

she belongs to dead, Aneeka imagines her dead brother's abode as her own.

This paper is an attempt to read how Kamila Shamsie uses the myth of Antigone to depict the conditions of British Muslims in a post 9/11 world. In an article published in *The Hindu,* Clair Chambers reflects on how this novel asks an important question: "can the oppressor listen?". The epigraph of the novel is from Seamus Heaney's 2004 translation of Socrates' lines: "The ones we love…are enemies of the state". This sets the tone of the novel which signals a post 9/11 world. Chambers adds that Shamsie gives "fresh layers in her reconsideration of the classic play. Exploring the issue of European Muslims joining ISIS and on return being denied citizenship, she poses questions about assimilation, difference, and justice" (Chambers 2017).

The story is set in five places — London, Amherst, Istanbul, Syria, and Karachi. Each chapter is told from the perspective of a major character. The first chapter is narrated by Isma, the oldest Pasha sibling in her late 20s; the second chapter is narrated by Eammon, the son of Home Secretary Karamat Lone; Aneeka's twin Parvaiz narrates his liaison with radical groups and how he ended up in their media cell unit; Aneeka Pasha tells the reader about her life, and her siblings; the last chapter is narrated by the British Muslim Home Secretary Karamat Lone. Every character goes through a crisis and their attempt to solve the same is emphasised in the story.

In their article on how 9/11 shaped the postcolonial woman, Lau and Mendes (2021) engages new Orientalist representations of the Western discourse. They emphasize on the political narratives of the War on Terror, making the identity of British Muslim a complicated phenomenon: "these artificial binaries were constructed through new forms of Orientalist discourse, for example, through discursive practices that draw attention to the terrorist's use of invisibility — the threat lurking behind individuals with specific racial signifiers that justify the perpetuation of binary thinking" (Lau & Mendes 55).

Lau and Mendes's re-orientalism theory exhibits the underlying imbalances of power and the operation of politics post 9/11. This is

applied both to the Asians and the Westerners. Re-orientalism presents an effective ontological structure to investigate how the East recapitulates with the West in increasingly self-aware, multi-layered ways, constantly negotiating positions of power and influence. This theory takes as starting point the fact that the "Orient" increasingly represents itself, rather than undergoes representation by the "West". Lau defines re-orientalism as "the perpetuation of Orientalism in the arena of contemporary South Asian literature in English: no longer an Orientalism propagated by Occidentals, but ironically enough, by Orientals, albeit by diasporic Orientals"; she asserts that re-orientalism "dominates and, to a significant extent, distorts the representation of the Orient, seizing voice and platform, and once again consigning the Oriental within the Orient to a position of 'the Other'" (Lau 571). The theorisation of re-orientalism extends earlier assumptions developed within postcolonial literary studies by investigating how "cultural producer with eastern affiliations come to terms with an Orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether" (Lau and Mendes 1).

The alternative of a postcolonial adaptation that caters to the Western canon as a case study is pivotal to understand the re-orientalism discourse. Shamsie's use of Western frames for reference bespeaks of the re-oriental method that she applies to her novel. The choice of the Greek myth which is so prominent in the Western canon refers to Shamsie's willingness to address the Western audience on their own terms. In so doing, what Shamsie does is noteworthy as she appeals to the Western readers and places them in a position where they question about the Orientalized "folk devils" post 9/11. These "folk devils", a prominent Western discourse in fact hints at the dangers that the Western society faces through the amalgamation of foreigners or strangers. This in turn nurtures the deep-seated panic among them, and results in the increased surveillance and state intrusion. This kind of anti-immigrant mindset impacts the Muslim communities, and especially the Muslim male, which places them in a space of Orientalist, which implies their position in stark contrast to the West.

Surveillance is what in fact kick-start the novel, when the readers are confronted with Isma and her airport interrogations :

> She had expected the interrogation, but not the hours of waiting that would precede it, nor that it would feel so humiliating to have the contents of her suitcase inspected. She'd made sure not to pack anything that would invite comment or questions —no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her area of academic interest —but even so, the officer took hold of every item of Isma's clothing. (Shamsie 9)

The interrogation makes Isma feel humiliated, even though she was aware of the same. Aneeka, her younger sister has made her practice the interrogation ahead at home. Aneeka, according to Isma, "knew everything about her rights and nothing about the fragility of her place in the world" (11). But it turns out it is Aneeka who knows her place and fights for it. Aneeka is the Antigone in *Home Fire*, as Shamsie adopts Sophocles's play; the readers can trace similarity between the characters where young women place themselves at great risk by daring to physically present themselves in hostile territory to demand the return of their brothers' bodies. The fact that *Home Fire* is a modern adaptation of a Greek tragedy is noted by A. C. Mendes, when she quotes Peter Ho Davies in describing the novel as "shrewdly subversive move to tell this immigrant story via a tale so central to the Western canon"; Shamsie reimagines *Antigone* in a new context of transmission and reception (qtd. in Mendes 01). They are aware of the dangers imposed upon their brothers by the state. The brothers of both Antigone and Aneek have been typecast as terrorists and hence the state dishonours their death. The burial of the death is an important rite to be performed.

According to Ruman, "*Antigone* is a passionate tragedy of conflicts and sufferings" (1). The burial of the brothers, be it Polynieces or Parvaiz, showcases the two conflicts on both sides of the law. In the play, the refrain of two laws runs in parallel: for Creon, reason and civic order are of the utmost importance, whereas for Antigone, it is faith and emotion which she held above all. A similar develop-

ment can be traced in case of Aneeka and Karamat Lone respectively. Kitto in his *Form and Meaning in Drama* opines that the Greek play *Antigone* is a series of conflicts, both personal and Divine. In this case, the Greek burial is crucial to understand as this forms the backdrop of the play. The burial and the aftermath shape the narrative trajectory of the play. However, if we look at Shamsie's novel, we can see that the burial of Aneeka's brother forms only a part of the play. The actions within the novel culminate throughout, drawing the characters closer towards the climax.

The background of *Antigone* is the Theban legend of war between the two sons of Oedipus. While Eteocles was the King of Thebes, Polyneices challenged the throne. The two brothers killed each other during the course of the war. The throne then goes to Creon who declares that Polyneices, being a traitor, should not be given a proper burial, whereas, Eteocles was given a full and honourable funeral. Greek literature shows ample narratives regarding burial or mistreatment of the dead. The worst kind of indignity is not being able to get buried after death. The popular Greek belief of the unrest of the soul in Hades until the body is buried is ingrained in the psyche of the people which makes burial an integral part of the process of death. In the play, the ruling king Creon forbids Polyneices's burial and anyone who tries to perform proper funeral rites will be killed by public stoning.

The similarity of the play and novel is evident through the first instance in Ismene and Antigone's attitude towards their brother Polyneices's proclamation. When Antigone asks for Ismene's help to bury their brother, Ismene refuses, to which Antigone replies: "And now you can prove what you are: A true sister, or a traitor to your family" (Sophocles, Prologue 27) This can also be seen when Aneeka questions Isma regarding her loyalties. The ideological conflict between the sisters is evident when one of them decides to disobey the law set by the state.

In a similar line of development as Sophocles's *Antigone* the novel also follows the lives of the sister's perseverance against the state authorities. Sophocles, in *Antigone*, tells how Antigone, rebel-

ling against Creon's decree, contrived secretly to perform the burial rites for her brother. For this Creon had her placed alive in a stone tomb, although she was to marry his son Haemon. There she hanged herself, and Haemon stabbed himself beside her body. The story was related in the lost poem of the Epic Thebaïs. Creon is an example of a tragic hero in Sophocles's play *Antigone* because he makes an error of judgment due to his excessive pride. Creon goes through peripeteia when he realizes that things are not turning out the way he expected. Finally, he has anagnorisis that made him realize the error of his judgement. The play embellishes the opposing conflicts between Antigone who stands for the value of family, and Creon who stands for the values of the state. Post-independent Pakistani novels depict diverse themes, both socially and culturally. The writers portray fluid boundaries with assimilation evident in their lives as well. But beneath the smooth surface, there lies deep underlying currents as with their British Muslim identity.

Home is a primary trope in the novel. The title alludes to the First World War song "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and indicates a deep connection to the conflict of the present to the past. The lyricist Ivor Novello urges the women folk to carry on with their lives and keep their homes inspite of the fear for their men. The sense of the war is communicated by Shamsie through her portrayal of jihad, securitisation, and torture. Shamsie has invoked the Great War in her earlier novel *A God in Every Stone*. Home has different meanings for the different characters; for Isma, home is her parental house in Wembley. For Eammon, home is a posh apartment in Notting Hill, paid by his affluent parents. But Isma's sense of home changes when she reaches America and rents a studio apartment which has "no demands" (Shamsie 28). Karamat Lone escapes his paternal home which constantly reminds him of his impoverish past, however, it is also important to note that he keep a trace of his old life through his study, as his son notes: "He entered the house and made his way to his father's basement office, a room that lacks his mother's signature spare style and featured instead dark wood and solid lamps and windowlessness. Those years of nocturnal study had left their mark

— Karamat Lone was at his most productive when there was no glimmer of natural sunlight" (Shamsie 76).

This passage reflects the underlying trace of Karamat's paternal home which he tries to escape, but nevertheless keeps a part to himself. On the other hand, for Parvaiz, his home is where his twin Aneeka lives. However, he is confronted with a quandary masculinity when he visits Farooq's hypermasculine flat:

> The furnishings consisted of three mattresses piled on top of one another and pushed against a wall and two green plastic chairs, which faced a flat-screen TV hooked up to a video game console…A pinching bag hung from a thick bolt in the ceiling, an ironing board served as makeshift table for a lamp and a pair of boxing gloves. The windows of the flat thrown open to allow in the sunshine of the unseasonably warm day and the chicken-grease-scented air…Squares of sunlight fell like epaulets on his chiseled shoulders. (101)

This is in stark contrast to his house at Wembley, where he is the only male, and works according to his sisters. Parvaiz becomes radicalized and eventually vanishes into the headlines in Raqqa. This is evident when Aneeka, like Antigone, comes out into the dangerous spaces configured by terrorism and conflict. Because of the action of a male family member, Sophocles's and Shamsie's Antigones decide they must step out of the privacy of home spaces into public arenas to challenge authorities and embroil themselves in protests which are not only deeply personal, but political.

Thus, we witness how Shamsie by re-appropriating the Antigone myth, tries to dismantle the extremely bigoted socio-cultural trappings codified in the form of prejudices and stereotypes that manifest both materially and discursively. Shamsie re-imagines the postcolonial Muslim woman and succeeds in imparting a sense of agency to Aneeka, her act of defiance against the state and her venturing out into the more "male" gendered spaces can also be seen as the re-affirmation of a new Muslim "woman" identity that is not just circumscribed within the confines of the exotic home. De-

stigmatization of the Muslim spaces is also something that Shamsie manages to achieve by her politics of representation. *Antigone* serves as a myth that facilitates in unraveling the complex machinations of the postcolonial Muslim world, so often maligned by the Western media and Western texts.

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■ ■ ■

The Politics of Retelling Myths

Prof. Dwijen Sharma

Myths have been a part of our everyday life since time immemorial, a *tour de force* of our thoughts, beliefs and expressions. Mack Scharer considers myths as "fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend" (Scharer 29). Thus, myths are stories that we create to explain and understand the natural phenomena, our place in the universe, and the origin and values of our culture. In this context, Kirk states, "myths are on the one hand good stories, on the other hand bearers of important messages about life in general and life within society in particular" (Kirk 28-29). Myths, thus, not only explain the inexplicable and textualize happenings, but also instill moral values. For instance, the classical Indian myths are at the foundation of Indian thought. The myths of ancient India played a significant role in implanting the ideas of our culture and moral values in us. However, as these myths are passed on to us through oral narratives or written stories, they have been fashioned and refashioned over many generations. As Gilbert Highet states, "For

century after century men have been re-telling the Greek myths…
seeking different beauties and values in them" (Highet 99). What
Highet states about the Greek myths, similar endeavours have also
been made through the retellings of the ancient Indian myths.

In this article, an attempt is made to understand the ideological
functioning of the retelling of myths through an exploration of the
recently published Indian English fiction. The objective therefore is
to examine the politics of retelling of myths so as to expose the society
in which we are living. Myth, according to Cavendish, is a "serious
insights into reality" (Cavendish 8). It presupposes that myths are
the symbols of processes in the world around us or in our psyche.
Therefore, myths are considered by the psychologists as "expressions
of permanent but unacknowledged psychical attitudes and forces"
(Highet 102). So, psychologists including Freud and Jung believe
myths to be the symbols of the desires and passions, which exist in
all human beings. For instance, Ravana's abduction of Sita, or disrobing
of Draupadi in Mahabharata or the refusal of Duryodhana to give
even an inch of land to Pandavas are myths which keep persistently
recurring throughout human history, and are constantly being
refashioned. Such myths are called by Jung as 'archetypes of the
collective unconscious.' Even Claude Lévi-Strauss considers myths
as the "governing thought structures of collective human existence"
(qtd. in Mikics 195). Thus, myths continue to live in the form of
primordial structure in human consciousness.

However, myths, in the primordial society, are always associated
with the belief system. Once they get delinked from it, they are
expected to die. But, myths have 'afterlives', they continue to live
even after they lose their connections with beliefs. The myths assume,
according to Frye, literary forms once they get disconnected from
their belief system on account of their own inherent literary structure.
Thus, Frye states, "literature is a reconstructed mythology, with its
structural principles derived from those of myth" (Frye 1961:605).
Further, Frye considers literature as 'conscious mythology' that
constructs a world of its own and which reveals the signs and
symptoms of the real world in which we live (Frye 1957:120-122).

Thus, literature fills the verbal universe with an objective to "recast renovate myths so that they would not be out of step with our changing realities" (Singh and Jaidev 3).

In the retelling of a myth, the authors not only attempt to make it more pleasurable, but also "recraft(ing) their tales in order to elicit deeper truths from the material and/ or correct mistakes in the earlier tradition" (Porter 2). However, the earlier tradition "is regarded in its own milieu as authoritative, but whose truth is not literal, historical or scientific" (Cavendish 9). In his book, *Mythologies* (1972), Roland Barthes seems to have explained what Cavendish in the above stated statement tried to convey. He considers myths as the ideological forms that perpetuate their schema of eternal, timeless and natural, while exercising power in the society. Further, for Barthes, myth also constrains such ideological visions of the world into specific and local. With these double functions, myth enables an ideological inversion of the society (Barthes 142). Therefore, in every act of retelling of myth there is ideological investment, which tries to expose the assumptions behind the myth. In fact, no version of a myth can be considered as authentic and/ or original. In every act of retelling, a myth is subject to critical revision and reinterpretation. As a matter of fact, this activity of retelling is intensified by post-structural thought in its quest for multiple meanings and fluidity. Further, it is often seen in the modern times that the retellings of ancient Indian texts are attempted from the point of view of the marginalised, neglected and voiceless characters. Thus, retellings contribute in finding a distinct voice and alternative perspective. Moreover, as Divakaruni states, "Retellings are very important because they make us realize that the epics relate to our time just as much as earlier eras. When we retell intelligently, the readers will see the connection between the themes of the epic and their own lives" (qtd. in Mehrotra : 2020).

In the contemporary times, there has been intensification in retelling of myths in Indian literature through the feminist lens. However, in ancient Indian literature, the figures of Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, and Uruvi – all embodiments of women with their beauty and flaws were invented by men. Here comes the question of

representation, particularly the debate concerning the representation of women by men. It is loaded with gender politics as often feminists argue that woman's agency and power are always kept in abeyance by the society relegating them to a state of passivity. In this context Rey Chow states, "In men's act of representation women are often used as symbols for meanings men want to convey … have all along been *objectified* as the very devices of representation, as the signs that bear specific moral or artistic significance in a world created by men" (Chow 39). In her essay, "Unearthing the Goddess Within," Christine C Keating states, "Words, our primary agent of expression, signify a discourse that has been established by a patriarchic myth" (*Women's Studies Journal*). For instance, Valmiki, in Ramayana, created Sita, the devout wife of Rama, as a submissive, virtuous, dutiful and self-sacrificing woman, who having followed Rama into exile maintained steadfast purity even in Ravana's backyard. She is considered in the Indian society as the ultimate standard of a virtuous and dutiful wife. In this context, Uma Chakravarti states, "…the legend of Sita represents chastity, purity, and a singular faithfulness which was not destroyed by Rama's slights or even his ultimate rejection… Valmiki's Ramayana…was a potent instrument for propagating the twin notions that women are the property of men and that sexual fidelity for women was life's major virtue" (Chakravarty 70-71). Interestingly, most versions of Ramayana exclude the episode where Sita had to undergo horrific chastity test by walking over the blazing fire. Is this the treatment given by the Ideal man to his pious and dutiful consort? Referring to this, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon argue that the adaptation of the epic by Doordarshan in the 1980s led to the normalization of "violence against women in India – whether physical, sexual or emotional" (Menon & Bhasin 138). Nevertheless, in the re-telecast of Ramayana during the recent Covid induced lockdown, the epic serial sets off a serious debate on the issues of gender and religion on social media. Have we failed to retell or adapt popular myths to the modern social and cultural contexts?

In the contemporary time, however, the retelling of stories from Ramayana is being done from Sita's perspective. For instance,

Saraswati Nagpal's graphic novel, *Among these are Sita: Daughter of the Earth* (2011), Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013), and Amish Tripathi's *Sita: The Warrior of Mithila* (2017) are retellings from Sita's point of view. Nagpal essays Sita as a powerful character with an active agency, who represents her own subjectivity. On the other hand, Pattanaik's Sita is a symbol of honour, fidelity and self-image. Further, Tripathi's Sita is an abandoned child adopted by philosopher king Janaka of Mithila, who later became a wise administrator and strategist.

Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* (2014) is a retelling of Ramayana from the viewpoint of Urmila, Lakshmana's wife and she also happened to be the younger sister of Sita. Though she is one of the strong characters in Valmiki's Ramayana having accepted the responsibility of the family after Lakshmana left with Rama and Sita for exile, yet she has no voice. Kane in her novel gives voice to this marginalized character and thereby adds a new perspective of reading the epic text. In *Lanka's Princess* (2017), Kane retells the story from Ramayana from the perspective of Surpanakha, Ravana's neglected sister. Kane through this novel questions whether women like Suparnakha are perpetrators or mere victims of certain incidents. Further, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a retelling of the Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view. *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2014) by Kavita Kane is a retelling of Mahabharata from the perspective of a neglected character, Uruvi, the second wife of Karna. In this novel, Uruvi has been given the voice and she tries to win back her husband, Karna from evil Duryodhana, particularly after the scene of disrobing Draupadi in which the righteous Karna transgresses the limits of decency for the sake of loyalty towards Duryodhana.

In the novels mentioned above, stories from both the Indian epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata are retold from the feminist perspective to find an alternative version of reality. In these retellings, there involved a re-reading of the epics through a process of 'dispersal and refraction' and also through a consequent act of 'revisionist myth making.' In this context, Alicia Ostriker defines 'revisionist myth

making' as any "figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture…will be appropriated for altered ends,… ultimately making cultural change possible" (Ostriker 72). However, any kind of revisionist myth making challenges the hegemonic narratives with a purpose of "revaluing the experiences of marginalized people" thus giving voice to the voiceless and a consequent structuring of new identity (Beena 13). In case of feminist myth revision, the ideological implications of myths are reinterpreted from the woman's point of view. While women's experience are reconfigured and reinterpreted, the patriarchal narratives are demythologized. However, as Ostriker observes, "the patriarchal ideological context of the mythic past cannot be altered; it can at best be questioned and ironically exposed" (Ostriker 71) to unravel what is, in the words of Susan Sellers "suppressed, repressed and latent" (Sellers 29). Further, through the novel, *The Girl Who Chose* (2016), Devdutt Pattanaik attempts to quell the debate regarding the celebration of violence against woman in Ramayana. By retelling the myths from the viewpoint of a girl, Pattanaik underscores that Ramayana is full of empathy and love, and has no place for violence against women or marginalized characters. In fact, he observes that "Ram is the one who is trapped in Ayodhya, as he's born into a royal family as the eldest son and has to follow orders… Sita, the daughter of earth, is free and makes choices" (qtd. in Mehrotra: 2020).

During the Indian freedom movement, the retelling of myths played a significant role, particularly in imagining the Indian nation, *akhand Bharat* with a distinct culture, history and identity. Many of the myths were appropriated in the nationalist discourse to counter the western hegemonic discourse that constructed a fractured nation with inferior and incapable people. Nonetheless, stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas were retold to construct a pan Indian culture and to create a sense of unity among the people of diverse nationalities, languages and cultures. Such was the effect of retelling stories of mythical figures like Sri Krishna, Rama, among many others that people began to imagine the notable freedom fighters as the reincarnation of such mythical figures of ancient India. For

instance, in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the *Harikatha* that is recited in the evening in the premises of the temple, where villagers throng to listen, began to incorporate the life accounts of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi, thereby, is imagined as Hari (God). Thus, people began to have faith and trust in Gandhi's endeavours towards India's freedom. So, through the retelling of myths, a cultural bond was enacted to cement the ties among diverse population across different caste, class and religion. Further, by retelling the myths from the perspective of the marginalized, whether in terms of caste or gender, the divine and the human are brought in same plane breaking the walls of their separate compartments. For instance, in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, which comprises *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) *and The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), Shiva is shown to belong to a tribal community who attained Godliness through his works. On the other hand, both Ganesh and Kali are shown to be outcasts, whom Sati brings back to the mainstream fold. In this context, Balaswamy states, "The ruling elite have used community/ society, gender and caste/ race, to expropriate, eclipse and wholly eradicate the value and spirit for which these non-elites fought existential battles" (Balaswamy 1). Thus, Amish Tripathi not only resurrected the lower castes and women by mainstreaming them, but also gave them voices. Such retellings of myths help in mobilizing people of all castes and tribes. Similarly, Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) is a retelling of Ramayana from the perspective of the vanquished Ravana; and *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* (2013) is a retelling of Mahabharata from the point of view of Duryodhana. Thus, both the villains are recast to understand the undertone of the vanquished. Thus, Neelakantan creates a 'horizontal fuzzy space' to accommodate people of all hues. In fact, all such retellings of myths subvert all kinds of hegemonic narratives, be it the superiority of colonizer or the dominant cultural groups within the colonized society. Therefore, retellings of myths worked in mobilizing people of diverse background towards a collective will to fight for India's freedom.

The retelling of myths provides the children a window to the past. As most of the Indian stories meant for children are serious and didactic, the Indian children find attraction in western storybooks. Therefore, their understanding of Indian culture is mediated through western epistemology. However, Anand Neelakantan has come out with a book titled, *The Very, Extremely, Most Naughty Asura: Tales for Kids* (2020), a retelling of mythological stories from Puranas and other sources. In these stories, the element of fear factor that constitutes the *Asuras* is suspended, making the *Asura* kids as funny, mischievous and naughty. For instance, Bhasma, the trouble maker in the village, is shown as clumsy; Atapi and Vatapi as voracious eaters; Kundakka and Mandakka, the twins, dislike school. While discussing the necessity of such retellings for children, Neelakantan states, "Traditional Indian folk arts are meant for entertainment. They are never preachy or judgmental. Making asuras dark and evil is a recent phenomenon" (qtd. in Mehrotra : 2020). In fact, the richness of the Indian Puranic stories, which would have contributed to the understanding of Indian value system, need to be disseminated among the children. In this context, Pillai observes that such retellings "accommodate or appreciate inclusiveness. Such work in children's literature will ensure the reception of the pluralities of human existence, conditions such as racial, cultural and social factors. The young minds that engage with the retellings learn to critique the existing mainstream structures" (qtd. in Mehrotra : 2020). As in the Indian system of thought, there exist no binaries, all elements, whether good or bad, white or dark, virtue or vice exist together. Such education can be given to the children through retellings of myths.

Almost all the authors, who have been involved in retelling myths, challenge ideologies propagated by myths. Such ideologies are countered as the existing socio-cultural norms build new edifice either after dismantling the old or on top of it. It leads to a revision in myths, which Harris and Platzner consider as "barometers of cultural change" (922). The retelling of myths is an index of the changing socio-political concerns of the society. Thus, the rewritings of the Ramayana or Mahabharata in different Indian languages should not be construed as 'translations,' rather retellings in consonance with

the regional ethos. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "The epics in India do not belong to the past alone — they are also part of the contemporary consciousness" (Mukherjee 603). Myths of both Ramayana and Mahabharata have significant effect on the Indian society and culture. In everyday lives, often people draw ideas from these epics to settle either their individual or social problems. Further, the mythical characters in these epics function as a touchstone in Indian society for everything people do. Therefore, it would not be misplaced to say that the events and characters of these epics, to a large extent, structure the Indian consciousness. As the events in Ramayana and Mahabharata are considered to have taken place in two different *yugs* (epochs), the major mythical characters also seem to have reincarnated in the succeeding epoch with features and characteristics befitting the epoch. For instance, Rama reincarnates as Sri Krishna in *treta yug* to solve the problems plaguing the people of the country. Such a myth, as has been created by the narrative, affects the governing ideology of the society. However, the contemporary time marks a departure, demarking old myths and creating new culture by 'demythologizing' the narrative through a process of rereading and retelling. As Dipesh Chakrabarty reflects, "In postmodernism the authors see the possibility of multiple narratives and multiple ways of crafting these narratives" (Chakrabarty 99). For instance, the present-day writers have 'demythologized' Ramayana, making its perspective dialogic and contemporary. In this context, A.K. Ramanujan mentions that the number of Râmâyana is based on the number of forms of Rama in terms of regional belief, culture, ethnicity and language. Ramanujan, thus, observes, "The story may be the same in two telling, but the discourse may be vastly different. Even the structure and sequence of events may be the same, but the style, details, tone and texture – and therefore the import – may be vastly different" (Ramanujan 134). Therefore, in any retellings of myths, there is a revisionist working behind the scene, exploring multiple voices and perspective in these myths. The contemporary celebration of retellings of myths or multiplicity of narrative is envisaged towards the creation of a society, where multiple and even contradictory ideologies, truths, agencies and powers would co-exist, and where every person

irrespective of his/ her caste, class, religion, creed and colour would have the freedom to tell his/her story(ies).

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■ ■ ■

Reconstruction of Lucie as Nymph in Milan Kundera's *The Joke* : A Critical Reading

Gautami Bharali

Milan Kundera's first novel *The Joke* tells the readers a love story which draws attention only when the readers keep aside the tendency to read the text just as a critique of Communism. There is no doubt that the text is loaded with so many nerve-racking details of political happenings in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet Occupation and this also forms the strong argument to invite a political reading of the text. The novel itself is a witness to the political turmoil as it was banned and withdrawn from the market in Czechoslovakia for a period of time because it presents something opposite to the official ideology of the state. However, amidst all these facts, we cannot miss out the point that, at the same time, the novel is also enriched with a passionate love story which should not be ignored on the basis of a generalising political analysis of the text. In fact, Kundera himself seems to be irritated with the repetitive emphasis on the political aspect of the novel as he reacts against it: "Spare me your Stalinism, please. *The*

Joke is a love story" (Banerjee 8). This is the love story of Ludvik and Lucie. These two lovers as presented in the novel belong to two different worlds. Ludvik is from the 'world' that gets an overt depiction in the novel with all its political turbulences while Lucie's world unfolds itself gradually and serves as an antithesis to the former one. Lucie's world is rather mythical and her character indeed finds resemblance with the 'Nymph' in Greek mythology. This paper is an attempt to look at the character of Lucie as a reconstruction of the myth of 'Nymph' and to analyse the function of this myth in the context of the novel.

In Greek mythology, 'nymphs' are described as "vague beings, young and beautiful, fond of music and dancing, long lived but not immortal, usually gentle, occasionally formidable" (Howatson 400). The vagueness in Lucie's nature manifests itself at different levels and it is deliberately enhanced with a "void created in the narrative by the suspension of knowledge about Lucie" (Banerjee 10). Though Ludvik passionately loved her he could never figure out what was actually in her mind. Their love story did not come to a happy ending. In spite of his strong desire to have Lucie both physically and mentally for the rest of his life, he failed to do so as he himself reveals: "And yet all I needed in order to possess the body I so desperately desired was one simple thing: to understand her, to know her, to love her not only for what she was to me but for everything in her that did not immediately concern me, for what she was in and to herself. I had been unable to do that and so had hurt myself and her" (Kundera 251).

What Lucie wanted from him and from their relationship always remained unclear to Ludvik. She never confided to him certain mysteries of her life. Even Kostka later confirms Ludvik's sheer inability to understand the actual 'need' of Lucie: "Yes, Ludvik, she needed forgiveness, she needed the mysterious purification that to you is unfamiliar and incomprehensible" (Kundera 234). Lucie, the myth, thus always remained shrouded in mystery for Ludvik. However, the vagueness of Lucie also becomes literal in sense when she appears for the next time in the novel after her break-up with Ludvik. As

their relation came to an end, Lucie fled to some remote village in Western Bohemia. In that village she used to live in an abandoned cottage and roamed the wilderness just like a nymph. For the village children who had their own imaginary stories about her, she was "the wild girl, wandering along the hilltops singing, her hair flowing free" (Kundera 217). There were multiple stories about her among the village people but no one had any clear idea about her until the Chairman of the District National Committee and the Director of the state farm in search of some abandoned cottages for accommodations for farm labourers eventually discovered her in one of those abandoned huts. Afterwards she was sent to the village farm which is again an idyllic set-up— a suitable shelter for a nymph.

Nymphs are believed to have remarkable connection with nature and its objects. Their existence is inseparable from the natural objects they are associated with. Lucie expressed her love for Ludvik with a floral tribute. At first place Ludvik felt embarrassed when she offered him a bunch of flowers in front of his other male companions. He could not understand why she did the act that was supposed to be done by a boy. However, gradually he too accepted it as normal, drawing the conclusion that Lucie might think of flowers as "a form of speech; not in the sense of heavy handed conventional flower symbolism, but in a sense still more archaic, more nebulous, more instinctive, prelinguistic" (Kundera 79). Again, when Ludvik visited Lucie for the first time in her place she decorated the whole room with flowers and ferns that so much resembles the mythic world of a nymph. She was standing "amidst all the solemn greenery" (Kundera 90), waiting for Ludvik.

A hierarchical division among the female goddesses on the basis of the divine power and beauty they possess can be seen in mythology. The nymphs are often referred to as minor deities. The very powerful major goddesses like Athena are equally famous for their "severe beauty" while there can be seen a softness in the depiction of the nymphs. The serenity in their composure is matched by the gentleness of their nature (Howatson 84). The nymphs are unique in their own way. Their beauty lies in their ordinariness also. They might be so

many in numbers but each one of them stands out as unique. The vastness of number does not reduce the attractiveness of the nymphs. Now if we see Lucie as a reconstruction of a nymph, her ordinariness is also highlighted as extraordinary. When Ludvik saw Lucie for the first time he could not take his eyes off her not because she was beautiful but because of her unique ordinariness. It is this sober aspect of appearance of the nymphs that attracts the viewer just as it attracted Ludvik: "True, later it was this very ordinariness that touched and attracted me, but how was it she caught my eye and stopped me in my tracks the first time I saw her? Hadn't I seen enough ordinary girls in the streets of Ostrava? Or was her ordinariness so extraordinary?" (Kundera 65). The love of the nymphs for music can also be traced in Lucie's love for rhythm and rhyme of the poems that Ludvik used to recite to her. Besides, she also possessed the power to 'heal' Ludvik as he expresses: "Lucie had the magical power (no one after her has ever had it) to bypass the circuit breaker and rid me of the burden of my shyness. In her presence I could dare everything: sincerity, emotion, pathos" (Kundera 74).

Myth has always a religious aspect associated with it. It is very much rooted in the religious faith and practices of a nation. Theorists like James Frazer who have extensively worked in the field of mythology also assert the affinity between myth and religious rituals. Mythical stories give shape to the religious beliefs which are otherwise difficult to be comprehended. In mythology the religious beliefs of a nation are presented in form of narratives that eventually come as religious revelations to the people. That is why Ludvik compares Lucie's advent to his life as a religious revelation: "Lucie had revealed herself to me the way religious truth reveals itself" (Kundera 66).

When we try to look at Lucie as nymph, we find a special connection between her story and the myth of Daphne. In Greek mythology Daphne is depicted as the nymph who "rejected the love of the god Apollo and fled from him, praying to the river-god for deliverance; she was thereupon changed into a laurel tree" (Howatson 184). The story of Daphne and Apollo has appeal to artists as well as the writers who come up with their own interpretations. Daphne's

story is one of those famous transformation myths where we can notice the curious shift in identity. Just as Daphne was chased by Apollo, Lucie too was forced by Ludvik to have physical relation with him. To escape the lustful approach of Apollo, Daphne fled from him and was transformed into a tree thus changing her identity. Lucie too resisted against having sexual relation with Ludvik. Finally, their relation came to an end as Ludvik could not hide his frustration and told Lucie to leave him for good. Thereafter, she moved to Bohemia and met Kostka in the state farm where she worked. In the myth Daphne prayed to her father, river god Peneus to transform her into a tree while it was Kostka in Lucie's story who showed her the way of transformation. He trained her to follow the path of spirituality and showed her how she could achieve salvation by offering herself to the God. She gained her confidence back with the assistance of Kostka and eventually revealed to him two secrets of her life. One is that she was gang-raped by a group of six boys as a part of initiation. They were later arrested against the charge of stealing and she was thrown out of her own house and was sent to a reformatory for one year. From there she went to the suburb of Ostrava where she worked in a factory. The second secret of her life is that while she was in Ostrava she was again arrested, this time for stealing flowers from cemetery.

After knowing about this tragic past of Lucie, Kostka helped her to come out of her trauma. As the reading of the text reveals she had not only overcome her fear of physical proximity with the opposite gender but also approached Kostka for a love affair. Ludvik, however, knew nothing of this 'transformed' Lucie. Only after fifteen years, Ludvik accidentally met Lucie in a barbershop recommended by his friend Kostka. Lucie worked there as a barber and it was she who shaved the face of Ludvik. She showed no sign of recognizing him though he could recognize her by her eyes. However, she again became a stranger for him when he listened to her voice in a casual conversation with other customers as "it sounded detached, devoid of anxiety, almost coarse" (Kundera 10). Besides this, Ludvik could not even retain Lucie in his memory because he had remembered

her for fifteen years in the 'wrong' way. He interpreted Lucie's resistance against physical intimacy with him as her excessive defence of her virginity whereas she was not a virgin and her resistance was the expression of her trauma of being gang-raped. Ludvik came to know about this tragic part of Lucie's life from Kostka which brought this realization to him: "Lucie, the goddess of mists, had first deprived me of herself, then yesterday turned my carefully calculated revenge to nothing, and soon after transformed even my memories of herself into something hopelessly ridiculous, into a grotesque mistake: what Kostka told me testifies that all those years I had in fact remembered another woman, because I never knew who Lucie was" (Kundera 250).

As we delve deep into the character of Lucie we can explore that she usually remained withdrawn from her immediate environment. This withdrawal seen in the nature of Lucie is placed as antithetical to the restlessness of Ludvik which he himself can realize: "Yes, it must have been Lucie's singular slowness that fascinated me, a slowness radiating a resigned consciousness that there was nowhere to hurry to and that it was useless to reach impatiently toward anything" (Kundera 65). The slowness in Lucie and in her world also serves as an opposite force to the fast moving Communist Revolution in Czechoslovakia. The revolution was going too fast and with it the anxiety of the people was also soaring high. The active participant, Pavel was too busy in asserting the superiority of the revolution; Kostka, the believer in Christianity, was in search of an alternative to Communism; Jeroslav was restless about defending the folk culture and tradition against the aggression of the new ideology brought in by the revolution while Ludvik was engaged in plotting revenge against the revolutionists who had wronged him. When all these turbulences were going on in the disturbed world of Ludvik, Lucie remained calm and composed in her detached and isolated world. Against the political tension that overpowers the life in the central Moravia, in the outskirts of Ostrava lies the "resigned consciousness" that no one is ever going to achieve anything from this power game (Kundera 65).

The place where Ludvik saw Lucie for the first time is located somewhere in the suburbs of Ostrava and it bears the relics of an "ancient village" (Kundera 64). The selection of the place seems to be a conscious decision of the author as he wants to revive the ancient world - the mythical world that belongs to the people of Czechoslovakia only. This revival gives some sort of exclusive belongingness to the people of the nation to their native land against the aggression of the outsiders like the Soviet Union. As Eric Csapo says "myths are the very expression and means of propagation of the collective consciousness. They justify and perpetuate the pattern of thought and behaviour which makes up the particular mentality of a given social group, and serve as a foundation and warrant for its customs and institutions" (189-190).

Kundera seems to have a clear intention behind presenting the character of Lucie with all its mythical elements. Living under a regressive Communist regime, he might search for an alternate world which he can depict as an opposite to the former one. Lucie's life has become a kind of a refuge for Ludvik. The tranquillity of Lucie's world cannot be found in the world of Ludvik that is full of political trials and turmoil. Ludvik became fed up with the reality of his own world and tried to come out of it which was possible only in the company of Lucie as he says: "All I needed was to feel her close to me, feel the warm circumference of her life, a life in which there was no room for questions of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, political vigilance and the class struggle, controversies over the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, politics with its strategy and tactics" (Kundera 71). In association with the 'myth' called Lucie, Ludvik tries to add some meaning to his own life because "myth is the socially significant product of humanity's irrepressible urge to construct meanings" (Hendy 333). After being thrown out both from the university and the Party, Ludvik faced severe identity crisis and he felt the urgency to find a new meaning of his life which he finally found in his relation with Lucie. Lucie, the myth, is the timeless narrative that will never lose meaning.

Lucie's existence is beyond history. She is a myth and "the work of myth is not confined to prehistory; it will never be quite done so long as dread of our thrownness torments us, which is to say that it will be as endless as it is without beginning" (Hendy 322). Ludvik did not want to perish under the wheel of history, especially the history of Communism in Czechoslovakia. Once he too wanted to stand near the wheel of history as an ambitious youth and he considered it a higher privilege. However, things did not go according to his expectation. He was deprived of his desired career and his life trajectory finally made him land in the world of Lucie. He saw Lucie as someone who could liberate him from the trap of history: "she knew nothing of history, she lived beneath the great and contemporary concerns; she lived for her small and eternal concerns. And suddenly I'd been liberated; Lucie had come to take me off to her gray paradise" (Kundera 72). Since history ceased to have meaning in his life, he wanted to be independent of it. That is why he held the hand of Lucie - the myth. She is his "gray usherette" (Kundera 72). She showed him the way out of history which had lost meaning to Ludvik.

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Juxtaposing Myth and Reality: An Ecogothic Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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The uncanny, as theorized by Freud, refers to the idea of perception where a space can generate the feeling of both familiarity and strangeness –a simultaneous sense of "home" and "not home". The Sundarbans too offer this sense of being safe and threatening, a place of fear and desire. Describing the ancient history of the Sundarbans Kanai remarks that although almost every island in the Tide country was once inhabited, no one can find a trace of it as the mangroves of the forest "do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts"(50). This indicates the "unhomely" aspect of the space. It is at once home for the people and also so ruthlessly inhospitable that the history of the place is one that is haunted by the ghosts who inhabited the island.

In the novel, the uncanny space of the Sundarbans is skillfully portrayed through an overlapping narrative of Nirmal's past memories,

Priyali's present scientific exploration, Kanai's practical observation and Fokir's primitive mythical intuition. Piyali is a young marine biologist who travels to these mysterious islands of the Sundarbans in search of a rare river Dolphin, Orcaella brevirostris. She meets Kanai, a translator and a businessman, who is also visiting the Sundarbans to meet his aunt Nilima, a social worker who resides in the Sundarbans. Kanai and Piyali part their ways on the port of Canning after a short conversation on the train. Piyali goes on to start her journey in search of the dolphins and Kanai meets his aunt who hands him over a diary left by her dead husband and Kanai's uncle Nirmal. However, after having a bitter experience on the boat with two forest guards where she gets thrown into the crocodile infested water, Piyali meets Fokir, an illiterate fisherman who later becomes her guide. Soon after their meeting they feel a strong attraction towards each other in spite of having different approaches to life. A purely instinctive Fokir helps Piyali in navigating the uncanny forest and the mysterious sea in search of the dolphins. Kanai, on the other hand, goes through the pages of his uncle's notebook and discovers the brutality of the Morichjhapi massacre as described by him. Piya meets Kanai again when she goes to his aunt's house for shelter and uses his skill as a translator in order to communicate with Fokir. The adventure that follows forms the rest of the story where the two outsiders Kanai and Piyali encounters the uncertain terrain of the Sundarbans in its most horrific yet enchanting ways. The seemingly unconnected storylines of the characters are brought together by the space of the forest where memory, myth, reality and scientific knowledge are all merged together to form an understanding of the threats and uncertainties of the Sundarbans. The horror and fear for the mysterious space of the Sundarbans, therefore, calls for an ecogothic reading of the text for further understanding the ways of negotiating the environmental anxieties that result in greater political debates.

The theorizing of ecogothic can be traced back to Estok's 'Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia' and Hillard's '"Deep into that Darkness Peering": An Essay on Gothic Nature', each published in subsequent editions of

the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* in 2009. As a theory ecocriticism tries to explore the representation of nature in literature and in doing so investigates the relationship of human beings with the non-human world. However, Ecocriticism, according to Estok, has limited its focus only to the constructive, positive side of nature and has failed to acknowledge the sinister aspects of it. Arguing for the inclusion of a certain kind of ambivalence in ecocriticism Estok brings out an understanding of 'ecophobia', a hatred for nature that result in the frightening association of human beings with the non human world.Hillard, however suggests that this hatred can be read as a fear of the natural world that terrorizes human beings. He brings in the gothic as a tool and a lens to deconstruct our understanding of nature. But the term Ecogothic was introduced much later and more explicitly in *Ecogothic* edited by Smith and Hughes. This collection of articles also highlights the lack of interrogation with the nature's dark part in the ecocritical readings. 'Repositioning the ecological beyond the Wordsworthian tradition' these critics tried to establish a framework that is more in tune with the unsettling elements of nature (Smith and Hughes 3). Although fear for unsettling nature is predominant in the discussion of ecogothic the terms eco-gothic and eco-horror cannot be used interchangeably in this discussion. These two words denote different meanings when it is read in the context of literature. While eco-horror refers to nature as a "monstrous and dangerous" being; eco-gothic acknowledges that while nature "certainly indicates fear, (it) also signifies desire" (Parker 36). Although the definition of ecogothic is still emerging, it can be seen as mode of looking where gothic elements intersects with environmental ethics in literature. Elizabeth Parker writes, "ecogothic is a flavoured mode through which we can examine our darker, more complicated cultural representations of the nonhuman world which are all the more relevant in times of ecological crisis" (36). Ecogothic, therefore, enables a reading of indigenous myths and legends that are essentially our ways of negotiating the methods of survival amidst the mysterious and inexplicable forces of nature. For instance, the myth of Bonbibi that

this paper attempts to analyze is ultimately a narrative of reconciling the fear and reverence that the people of Sundarbans have towards nature.

In "Religion, Nature, and Life in the Sundarbans", Sufia M. Uddin talks about the ritualized aspects of the Bonbibi myth and the meanings generated by them. "The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide"" by Pramod K. Nayar offers a deep understanding of the uncanny nature of the tide country that remains scary and mysterious until and unless one participates in this hostile terrain. In "Novel Vision: Seeing the Sunderbans through Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide"", Laura A.White attempts to show the area through different perspective in order to generate knowledge that enables a displacement of the conventional ways of seeing the human and nonhuman relationship.. "Fear and Ethics in the Sundarbans: Anthropology in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide" by Alessandro Vescovi offers a reading of the text through an anthropological point of view and states that the myth of Bonbibi has successfully rendered the inhabitants aware of the dynamics of greed and fear and established a survival ethic that is not recognizable for the outsiders. In **"Exploring the Bond between Man and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*"**, Swagatalakshmi Basu attempts to read the novel from an ecocritical point of view where she formulates that fear towards nature is inherent in the myth of Bonbibi and it works not as a deterrent but as a protection for the residents of Sundarbans. It is an interesting way of interpreting fear in the context of Sundarbans where the rituals and stories enable the inhabitants to live in the islands with fear as a survival technique. However, while survival amidst nature is made possible by such myths; their significance remains unintelligible to the outside world.

Postcolonial modernity has twisted the issues of environmental sensibilities forcing the human being at the centre of both preservation and destruction of nature. While the ecosystem of the country is threatened by various modern projects of progress; it is also sought to be preserved by the same sensibilities of the policy makers. These

conflicts often result in dislocation of countless people turning them into refugees, the people without home. Commenting on this, Arundhati Roy writes, "the millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees in an unacknowledged war" (65).The Morichjhapi massacre marks one of the most controversial yet silenced past of Bengal's history. It is a saga of inhuman and inexplicable violence meted out to the refugee lower caste population that settled in a small island called Morichjhapi in Sundarbans. Amitav Ghosh uses this incident as a political backdrop of the novel reflecting on the pain caused by dispossession and dislocation of countless people. This paper argues that this violence committed against the refugees of the Sundarbans rises from a lack of knowledge regarding the survival ethics generated by the myths and legends of the locality.

The Sundarbans is the largest mangrove forest in the world that stretches between the River Hooghly in the west of West Bengal and the River Meghna in the east, now in Bangladesh. Two- thirds (15,870 km2) of the delta lies in Bangladesh and one-third (9,630 km2) lies in India. The Sundarbans comprise of 102 islands, 54 of them inhabited and the rest covered by forest. The inhabitants of Sundarbans are forest workers and poachers, prawn seed collectors, and landowners (Jalais 2010, 31–33). Therefore, daily lives and activities of these people are highly dependent on the forest. These people have to enter the dark and terrifying terrain of the forest for their basic needs. However, a strong belief in the myth of Bonbibi reverberates throughout the religious groups residing in the island. For them the forest cannot be a called a forbidden space, nor is it a space where one can go indiscriminately. The forest functions as an integral part of the way they live. As noticed by Sufia M. Uddin,"It is not only a geographic sphere that is associated with life and death with its devastating cyclones, fertile land, and abundant natural resources, but it shapes individual and communal identity as well"(291). The people who live in the forest are guided by a sustainable approach that helps them secure their needs under the protection of Bonbibi. According to the myth, Bonbibi is the daughter of a Mecca-based fakir called Ibrahim. Ibrahim married Golalbibi as

his first wife was unable to bear children. However, in order to keep a promise of his first wife, Ibrahim abandoned the pregnant Golalbibi in a forest. She soon gave birth to two children – Bonbibi and Shah Jangali. She was unable to raise the two children in the forest and decided to abandon the girl. Fortunately, Bonbibi grew up after being raised up by a forest deer. Later, the family was reunited briefly. However, Bonbibi and her brother travelled to Medina to consult Fatima, a holy woman about their future. After hearing Bonbibi's story, she granted her the ability to save forest and people whenever they pursued for her assistance. Thus, Bonbibi and Shah Jangali travelled to India to become lords of the swampland, which was inhabited by a demon named Dakkhin Rai and his mother, Narayani, who attacked the twins. Bonbibi summoned Fatima, who rescued her and defeated Dakkhin Rai and Narayani. Bonbibi, on the other hand, decided to be generous and rule over only half of the land, leaving the rest to the demon. Therefore, whoever crosses to the other side, are in the danger of being attacked by the demon.

This fear of the forest that is haunted by the demon is a real one for the inhabitants of Sundarbans. This uncanny space, however, becomes familiar for them because of the deep rooted knowledge of the survival ethics in the Sundarbans. There is a fine line between necessity and greed drawn by this indigenous myth. The worshipers irrespective of their religion venerate the forest deity to escape from the frequent tiger attacks, flood and all kinds of natural calamity. The basic principle generated by the Bonbibi myth is one of coexistence with and sustainable dependence on nature. However, there exists a lacuna of knowledge regarding this ancient way of living with nature as expressed by Ghosh in an interview, "the Sunderbans is really a kind of area of darkness. People don't think of it, they don't write about it, they don't look at it" (58). This inability to look at this dark and mysterious land has caused a huge gap in understanding the potential of the land in bringing out new perspective to tackle environmental challenges. It is fundamentally a failure of seeing that land that has resulted in the Morichjhapi massacre. The death and destruction resulted from this incident far surpasses the horror of

this mysterious space. It is a repressed part of Indian history that reflects the failure of postcolonial India's recreation of its democratic identity. The historical background of the Morichjhapi massacre will indicate this struggle between repression and re-creation that haunts the political scenario of postcolonial India. Nayar notices that Morichjhapi's spectral refugee is emblematic of the inadequacy of the postcolonial state to provide a safe "home"(89). The refugees search for home is betrayed not only by the government policies, but also by the treacherous terrain of the Sundarbans. They are terrorized by the fear of eviction and the trauma of having to live in a place where their worth is far less than that of the animals. At one point, Kusum, Fokir's mother reflects this helplessness of living with the constant fear of dislocation, "the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policeman making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust" (HT 261). Their search for home results in a failure because the postcolonial nation addresses the issue of ecological balance from a reductionist point of view of preservation and destruction. The bonbibi myth, therefore, can be seen as a means through which such binary understanding of nature can be discarded. The Morichjhapi massacre is essentially and elimination of the destructive forces from nature in order to restore ecological balance. The ghosts of the forest, in this case, are not the mythical demons; rather they are the refugees.

Nayar states that the "Tide country's history is itself a history of ghosts and refugees seeking places to haunt and home in" (106). The dislocated people are the ones who are now haunting this space. However, these people are not merely the victims of ecological dislocation; they are also the marginalized part of the postcolonial nation who fails to rise up for their place in the history. After the division of Bengal in 1947 along communal lines many Hindu Bengalees fled East Pakistan and got settled in West Bengal. But the latter flow of lower caste "*Namasudra*" Hindus that came in a huge numbers couldn't be accommodated in Bengal. Those refugees were forcibly sent to Dandakaranya which was an inhospitable land

that didn't promise any future. When the Left Front came into power in 1977 the refugees were encouraged to settle in Bengal and accordingly the refugees started to arrive in Bengal in huge numbers in 1978. But the government changed its policy indicating that the refugees are a burden for India and its natural resources. Ross Mallick who has been actively researching and writing about the incident notes that the decision was not essentially a concern for the preservation of Sundarbans's ecology as much as it was derived from a fear that the increasing population of these lower caste people will have a significant impact on the political power dynamics (107). While most of the refugees were deported back to Dandakaranya some 40,000 refugees went south and settled in Marichjhapi, a protected place under Reserve Forest Act. The government considered that an unauthorized occupation of reserved forest land and it was followed by an economic blockade where police launches started patrolling the island and prevented the inhabitants from collecting food or water from the outside sources. The police opened fire on the settlers who were equipped only with traditional weapons. After the failure of economic blockade the government started forcible evacuation and the media houses were barred from entering the area. It has been alleged that the police launches dumped the dead bodies in water, while many others drowned while they were trying to flee.

Amitav Ghosh goes back to this poignant past of the country in an attempt to showcase the failure of not only the government policies, but also of the people in understanding the complex structure of Sundarban's ecosystem. However, his novel is not essentially a political commentary on the failed projects of nationalism and conservation programmes; rather it is a search for an alternative perspective to "re-position humans in relation to the nonhuman world" (White 515). In order to do so, Ghosh revisits the ancient myth of the Sundarbans that has unified different religious and minority groups throughout centuries by offering knowledge of the uncanny forest. He explores an understanding of the relationship between man and nature in a space that is not influenced by politics and policies external to the land.

Amitav Ghosh questions the modern approach to nature and complicates the relationship between man and nature by repeating the ancient myths and legends that sustain the ecological balance in Sundarbans. The uncanny nature of the space of the Sundarbans is heightened when the people in huge numbers arrive overnight and settle in the island of Morichjhapi. These people, much like the land itself, have a ghostly presence. In discussing the uncanny in Ghosh's narrative P.K Nayar point out that "the ghostly refugees are refused (home)lands in a land that is itself foundation less, shifting and unmapped. Like the land itself, which cannot be mapped or perceived clearly because it is constantly shifting and changing shape, the dispossessed cannot be mapped because they have no locus or locale: the tide country is at once home and not-home (105).

The Morichjhapi massacre therefore can be seen as a failure in understanding and negotiating this fear. This reflects that the inhabitants are protected by the fear only and until it is not a result of external source. The Morichjhapi massacre does not simply reflect inadequate and incompetent nature of government policies and environmental anxieties but also captures the fear of contamination of the land by the untouchables. The horror of the massacre has not been properly represented in the history of postcolonial India's narration of progress and prosperity. However, In Amitav Ghosh's writing an attempt to confront these dark realities of the nation within the space of an even darker physical world of the forest proves fruitful in bringing out the haunting presence of casteism that disrupts the construction of India's postcolonial identity under a unified umbrella of democracy. While modern state policies tend to follow the dominant ideologies of the country, indigenous myths generate a feeling of homogeneity that arises from an understanding of man-nature relationship rooted in the fear of environmental crisis.

"The uncanny, is a matter of perception and sensing" (Nayar 115). The Sundarbans and its complex ecosystem can be made canny only by adopting the perception that arises from its centuries old myths and legends. Therefore, the land shares a deep connection with the homeless refugees who makes this land home by

accumulating the ethical sensibilities of this space. These people who are dislocated from the land by state forces mirrors the continuously shifting land of the Sundarbans. As Pramod K. Nayar observes, "In the post colonial context, people have been alienated from the land they sought as home, they have been doubly dispossessed by state actions (first through war and then through evictions).The dispossessed are ghosts because they cannot lead an embodied existence anywhere… (106)". They flee from one place to another and are constantly refused shelter. It is only by acquisition of newer ways of seeing the myths as a tenable source of making the umhomely space of the forest a home can the modern state policies be ecofriendly.

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Disobedient Tales: A Study of the Mother and the Monster Archetypes in Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*

Kalyan Deori

Myth can be described as tales, fantastical in nature, describing the stories of conquest, bravery, and strength of exceptional men, against any kind of adversities. In ancient Greek, myth or "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether fact or fictional. But in its most common use, myths are part of a larger mythology of stories about monsters, gods, and men. These myths or stories were also used to educate about the virtue and vices of men and the history of humanity. They present a way of viewing the world, explaining the natural and unnatural before the age of reason came into existence.

Gert Malan states that mythical narratives evolve naturally as part of folklore and are not literary products of individuals. Folktales and myths include proverbial sayings, anecdotes, heroic legends, fairy tales and folksongs, transmitted from one generation of a culture to

the next developing new motifs and variants along the way reminiscent of stalactite formation. As such they become a part of society's 'symbolic universe' and without which no society can survive as it legitimizes and explains societal norms, institutions, and functions (Myth as metaphor 1).

In the present context myths are today viewed as stories or tales of established mythology, that be Norse, Greek, Roman, Hindu, African, Chinese, or Japanese folklore, that tells the tales of the distant past, and it's still lingering presence and beliefs in the present. The re-imagining of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian myths for a new generation of readers by Rick Riordan in his fantasy novels involving Percy Jackson and the Kane siblings, is an indication of the longevity of myths, their popularity. The popular superhero genre of comics and films also borrows from myths, from its characters to themes, like Superman, Thor, Loki, and even the word Titan too refers to Thanos, a villain in Marvel Comics and Marvel Cinematic Universe, is indicative of the influence of myth.

As myths and folktales are stories of good vs evil and adventure, its themes and motifs are similar and use similar archetypes. Archetype as mentioned in *Glossary of Literary Terms* (2012), can be defined as a narrative design, pattern of action, character types, themes and images which recur in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as myths, dreams, and even social rituals (14). Carl G. Jung used the term archetype to, "what he called 'primordial images,' the 'psychic residue' of repeated patterns of experience in our very ancient ancestors which, he maintained, in the collective unconscious of the human race and are expressed in myths, religions, dreams and private fantasies, as well as work of literature" (17). Northrop Frye on the other hand proposed that "the totality of literary works constitute a "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by human imagination so as to assimilate the alien and indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that satisfy enduring human desires and needs (17).

In most myths, the archetypes of the hero, the monster, the witch or evil queen, and the quest or call for adventure are used to establish a form of storytelling where the hero goes on a journey, defeats the villain, and saves the maiden and has a happy ending. In the present context and many retellings and re-imaginings, the authors use these archetypes and themes in different genres of stories and layer them with a new dimension, as Raymond Chandler did with his hardboiled detective Philip Marlowe, portraying him as a modern-day knight on a quest in an urban setting, especially in *The Big Sleep* (1939), using imagery of castles and knights in the opening of the novel, then subverting them through the narrative. Guillermo del Toro in his film *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) too utilises the archetypes of myth and folktales and blurs the line between fantasy and reality to tell the story of unspoken trauma due to the Spanish Civil War and fascism, providing a double narrative of death and rebirth of a young protagonist/ princess and a nation living through a conflict and revolution.

Patrick Ness in *A Monster Calls* (2009) uses the structure, imagery, archetypes, and themes found in fairy tales to tell the story of a young boy dealing with personal trauma. The text utilizes the archetypes of the mother and the monster; the mother figure of love and fertility and the monster, a grotesque figure of mystery and terror that brings destruction and blurs the two with a fantastical narrative to portray the complex emotions of a teenager and, portrays the troubling truth underneath the fantasy.

The novel with illustrations by Jim Kay, tells the story of a thirteen-year-old boy named Connor, who lives alone with his ailing mother in England. The story begins with a recurring nightmare that Connor has about a monster and his mother (Figure 1), and one night a monster visits him at home, out of a dream, from the nearby graveyard, transforming into a monster from the yew tree, and asks Connor for the truth as to why he called for him and if he does not, he will be eaten alive. The narrative then unpacks Connor's psychology and the truth that he hides.

Figure 1. from page 186-187 of A Monster Calls by
Patrick Ness, art by Jim Kay, 2011.

With the use of myth and fairy tale elements and how they are told and what they represent, the narrative presents Connor's life stuck in a limbo between two phases or spaces, childhood, and young adulthood or before his mother's diagnosis and after the diagnosis. The monster visits Connor after midnight and tells him stories of witches, selfish individuals, can be interpreted as a mother telling her child stories to help them sleep and each story helps Connor understand his feelings and position, and the truth behind his mother's lies.

In the first story, the monster tells Connor about the witch and the prince. Ness utilizing the archetype of the witch or evil queen and the benevolent prince plays with the reader's knowledge of these archetypes about the witch and the innocent prince and subverts the narrative by painting them in a different light. By making the witch queen an innocent victim and the prince a murderer, the monster and Ness asks the reader and Connor to look beyond the preconceived notions, urging in a way for Connor to open and look beyond his guilt and speak the hidden truth. The prince becoming a murderer by killing his beloved (Figure 2) and framing the witch queen, was an evil deed he had to commit to save his kingdom and people from doom, and

though the queen was a witch, she did not necessarily need to be burned for being a witch and punished for a crime she did not commit. So, the monster understanding the prince's plea and dilemma under the yew tree, helps him and saves the innocent, as he states to dissatisfied Connor, "Many things that are true feel like a cheat. Kingdoms get princes they deserve, farmer's daughters die for no reason, and sometimes witches merit saving. Quiet often, actually. You'd be surprised" (74).

Figure 2. from pages 70-71 of A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, art by Jim Kay, 2011.

With the second story of the well-loved parson and the bitter Apothecary, Ness plays with the theme or motif of good and evil in fairy tales and myth. Through the story, the monster presents two healers at odds with each other, and though paints the Apothecary as the bitter and greedy between the two, but subverts it by punishing the parson, as in the time of crisis, he acts out of selfishness and his hypocrisy is revealed. Ness by painting the parson as kind and soft-spoken, and the Apothecary as a bitter person who charges extra money even from the poor, plays with their images or archetypes and tricks Connor and the reader to see the Apothecary as the evil person and in need of punishment, but then alters it, but showing the parson hypocrisy and his lack of belief in his own beliefs and in the healing skills of the Apothecary.

The last story by the monster is more personal to Connor as it is about Connor himself, who has become an invisible person in school after the news regarding his mother's health is revealed to everyone. Everyone's sympathy infuriated him, and it felt like a never-ending cycle of distress. Connor becoming a victim of bullying and not resisting it also plays an important role in understanding his psychology and borrows from the myth and fairy tales the theme or motif of punishment. Connor wants to be punished but for what is unknown, after almost beating the bully to death or destroying his grandmother's room, he wishes for punishment. Like stories from myth and fairy tales, wrongdoings result in punishment, but it never arrives for him. Connor seeks punishment for his sins, the truth that the monster wants to know, and that Connor hides, that he wants his mother to die, he wants to end her suffering, and feels guilty for having those thoughts. He wants the cycle of pain to end, and knows that would mean his mother's death, because he knew the truth that his mother hides, that there is no cure and no new medicine to heal her.

The monster and the mother archetype in the most crucial one in the novel, as Connor's story, revolve around them, and Ness throughout the narrative uses the archetypes quite interchangeably and intricately. The monster in its illustration in Figure 3, is portrayed as a gigantic beast made of the bark of a yew tree and leaves, with thorny claw-like branches surrounding its gigantic body. Mary Aswell Doll talking about monsters in children's dreams states that, "when dreams of children contain a monster figure, something wonderfully big is shown about the unfamiliar psyche" and brings two worlds together, the familiar and unfamiliar (Monster in Children's Dream 99). So, the nightmare and the monster can be seen as Connor's psyche trying to negotiate with the unfamiliar world, and his bold behaviour towards it can be read as a teenage child trying to act like an adult, or as Doll states it indicates children's openness to the unfamiliar and otherness and see the humanity. The grotesque monster figure can also be interpreted as death, a motherly figure, god, or a guide into the unknown whose intention is to let Connor, let loose of the monster inside him, before it consumes him and eats him alive
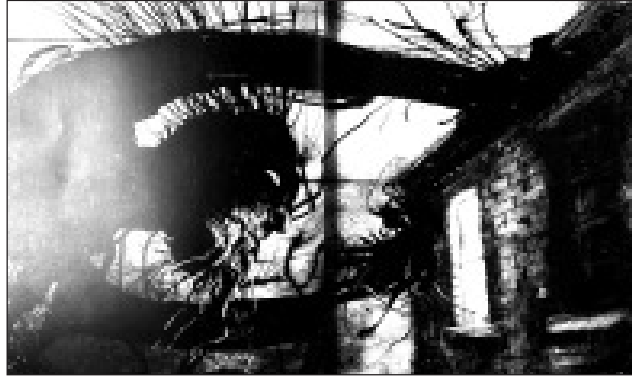
Figure 3. from p. 16-17 of A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, art by Jim Kay, 2011.

Ness with Jim Kay's illustration embodies the monster with a Titan-like presence, an ancient being of old, a child of the earth, or maybe something sinister. But through the narrative Ness juxtaposes the image and the words, thus blending both the archetype of the monster and the mother. The monster archetype is something grotesque and evil, while the mother archetype is generally associated with positivity, a guardian but has negative connotations. Jung in his *Four Archetypes* (2012) while talking about the mother archetype states that "the archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness…It can be attached to a rock, a cave, a tree, a spring, a deep well...", he further extends that all these symbols can have positive, favourable meaning or a negative, evil meaning (15). Evil symbols are the witch, the dragon, the grave, deep water, death, nightmares, and many more, and calls this duality of the mother figure as the "loving and the terrible mother" and associates Virgin Mary and goddess Kali with this archetype (15-16).

In the context of the novel, Ness uses this dual archetype of the mother with the monster and mashes both the archetypes together and creates a figure that is grotesque yet caring and acts like an adult figure and voice of a comforting mother, in absence of any

honest adult or mother figure in Connor's life. Ness's incorporation of myth and fairy tale elements in the story thus allows Connor's confrontation with the truth a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood (though still a teenager) and a safe space to understand his feelings and resolve his guilt. The fear of losing a loved one and wanting her to be free from pain pushes Connor into a world unknown to him without any guidance and will leave him in a world without his constant guardian, and that was the nightmare, that haunted him; him losing his mother, and that, he lets her go into the pit (Figure 4).

Figure 4. from p. 192-193 of A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, art by Jim Kay, 2011.

The monster thus can be read as the mother figure, the absent mother figure, from beyond the grave coming to save her son, who is lost, and whom she was not able to comfort and will die if he is consumed by that grief and helps him grief properly so that he could live. Ness establishes a connection between the mother and the yew tree in the graveyard, as she keeps on mentioning it to Connor and keeps gazing at it speaking to herself and saying, "There's that old yew tree," (17). The narrative, thus blurs the lines between fact and fantasy, as it never clarifies if the monster was real or just a figment of Connor's imagination, yet remnants of its presence can be found in the real world (Figure 5).
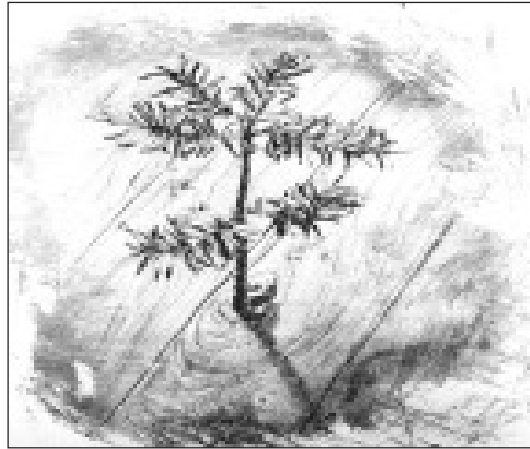
*Figure 5. from p. 75 of A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness,
art by Jim Kay, 2011.*

By blurring the lines between fact and fantasy and mashing together the mother and monster archetype, Ness allows the narrative to be about a young child trying to understand a world that is new to him, through a way or path that he is familiar with, through the stories that he has heard and read, probably with his mother, allowing the myths and fairy tales to be his navigating tools in a world he is unfamiliar with.

The archetypes and themes from myth though provide a familiarity, but it's the subversion of the established archetype, that gives dimension to the familiar images, opening it up to multiple interpretations, and providing a glimpse into the nature of myths and their influence and its everchanging meaning and interpretations. Myths and folk tales thus, still in a way talk about humanity and the human condition, its triumphs, and defeats in ways that are still universal yet personal, old tradition yet new in the words of the teller and to the listener.

Figures Appendix

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Josonar Jhitas : Retrieving History from Silence

Dr. Madhuleema Chaliha

Myth in literature has been considered as the driving tool, whenever used, for expanding and extending the concept that usually overwhelms the narrative, that builds up the inherent notion of it. Myths are basically considered to be the medium through which human wonder and thought about things can express themselves. Reaching the 'beyond' has been attempted by writers and philosophers, through antiquity, with the use of myths. The element of wonder and imagination carries with it the depth and grandeur of the context in which the myth is used.

> Human beings originally began philosophy, as they do now, because of wonder. … This is why the myth-lover is also a philosopher in his way, since myth is composed of wonders.
> (Aristotle 1995 [*Metaphysics* 982b])

Arupa Patangia Kalita's narrative *Josonar Jhitas* (scattered moonshine) is about the silenced history of a martyr who was a tea garden labourer and the 'companion' (mistress, kept woman, *rakhoni*

tiruta) of a British manager of a tea garden in Assam. The very beginning of *Josonar Jhitas* takes us to a realm that is reminiscent of the mindscapes created by Amitav Ghosh's novels, particularly, the Ibis trilogy. Hope of a better future drives these indentured labourers out of their location in Chottanagpur and similar areas. Initial hope, wonder and love gives way to the trauma of displacement and re-growth of their fractured selves within the newer terrain, but we can observe in these different chrono tropes, an irreversible transformation of the lives of these 'coolies' (as called by the sahibs) who nonetheless, ironically, carry within them a baggage of their earlier selves. Their collective memory of their earlier life enables them to keep their culture alive in the new place, just as they begin to gradually conform to the realities of the tea-garden workers' roles. Going back to their homes of the red clay becomes an impossibility, they soon realize. Assimilating with this new life takes them through unexpected new beginnings over which they do not have any control. And, as Patangia Kalita shows, the beginnings lead to even more unexpected ends for these particularly etched characters of the few uprooted women. They are made to grow and flourish, provide and nourish in liminal terrains over which they do not have any firm footing in spite of their apparent privileged status of being the favourites of the rulers, (they become tea garden managers'/ *bor sahab*'s 'chosen ones').

Published in March, 2022, *Josonar Jhitas* is a gripping tale of a loss we never have mourned. Durgi Bhumij, the charming female worker who travels to Assam as part of a 70 member group (which dwindles to 43 at the end of the journey that took away those many lives) spends her life, after becoming a widow, with Mr. Fraser, a white sahib who is the manager of the Atarikhat Tea Estate and stays in an out-house of the bungalow with some privileges of being his mistress. She bears him three children; two sons and a daughter and Arupa Kalita retrieves this story from near oblivion by recreating it in the novel form and representing her Durgi as the main character in this novel. The name of Durgi as a native freedom fighter existed in little known sources shared among a close few who had proximity

to her life. Patangia Kalita retraced those paths with the help of a few people about which she described in detail in her speech during the launch of the book. This name was deliberately attempted to be erased by the colonisers because of obvious reasons. Durgi's journey to Assam with her excellent archer husband Dasaru, his death, her life as the mistress of Mr. Fraser, his eventual separation from her, her life as the native fighter for freedom of her country, and the final gory, tragic death that befalls her — form the basic course of the narrative. This study aims to explore the use of myth by the writer while she recreates Durgi's life and the milieu.

The perseverant question about myth in postmodern time with postcolonial references has been its adherence to the Absolute in the traditional sense and its very incongruence to be so in the present contexts. Myth in *Josonar Jhitas* is many-layered and of diverse types too. This enhances the effective use of myths. This study explores those locations within the novel.

From the very beginning of the novel, we observe the use of myth in recreating the context of the plot. The first part of the story has a particular type of myth of invoking nature and its creations. The postcolonial discourse with its description of the inherent forays into the history of the colonised world finds its prominence in the second half of the narrative where the transition of British power is depicted - being strong and then of being weakened gradually in India. The two types of myths overlap at times as well as work independently to leave their desired imprints on the narrative. The story begins with the mention of *sing boga/ singha bugga/ sing buga* or the native god of the *Adivasi*s of the region of Azamgarh near Chotanagpur who is similar to the Sun God, the creator god. *Sing Boga* is invoked to draw a parallel to the condition of Durgi and Dasaru to the earliest creation of a man and a woman by this primal Adivasi God at the beginning of the 'world'. That the condition of the pair of travellers to Assam from their dear land and the earliest creations is a contrasting one, sets the tone of the narrative. The Creator had created them to live a fulfilled life, but the condition of Durgi and Dasaru is a desperate one in search of some hope that

they are clinging to in a world that is fast depriving them of their natural resources with the coming of the British and the latter's restrictive laws over their land and those very resources. Things, definitely were falling apart. So, *Sing Boga's* myth can be read like a foil used by the writer to highlight the present situation of the concerned duo. The pristine past is slipping away with the passage of time, along with that the carefree lives of these people who lived in close proximity with nature. That has changed too. The myth imparts a sense of innocuous beginning which becomes conspicuous by its absence as the story progresses and the concerns change. But that thread of innocence is present in the Adivasi girl till a much later period, till the time she believed her 'Bor Sahab' would come back for her, that he never would desert her like that, this thread originates in the purity of thought that was possible only with this connection to the world of a primal beginning, in the creations by the primal deity, *Sing Boga*, in this context. He is the harmless god who at times helped people from any evil.[1]

Durgi is named after Durga, the Hindu goddess of energy who slew the demon Mahisasura. Durgi was so named by her grandmother as she was born during Durga puja, the festival very dear to the Adivasis, and also because she was uncommonly beautiful for a member of her tribe and was likened to the goddess thus. The energy in her, her creative charms of drawing vivid murals on walls and singing and dancing from the repertoire of the folk forms that she carried with her along her journey, draws parallels to the greatly energetic goddess who is worshipped, invoked and prayed to by her devotees to grant them blessings of beauty, fame, knowledge and other qualities, etc. Durga is evoked through the narrative as Durgi casts her spell upon everyone with her finesse in whatever she takes up to do. Faithful to Dasaru all his life, the ideal homemaker Durgi later goes on to act as the 'grihalaksmi' and is able to run Mr. Fraser's household smoothly, to bring up her children with love (till it was possible for her to be with them). Then the inner strength of her, of goddess Durga, turns her into an indomitable rebel who fights for her country and finally sacrifices her life at the altar of nationhood by

fighting to the death for the liberty of her land. A silenced history follows but finally Durgi is retrieved from her muted nothingness by the author who completes her tale of valour and traces her to her living progeny, verily completing a task in itself. And thereby Durgi gets elevated to the status of the immortal, the 'Durga', the martyr. In all this, Durgi is reinstated, as her story is re-read as that of valour and not of ignominy, as of her being the postcolonial subject who deserves to be explored in her accurately deserved subjectivity and re-told in historiography. The name Durga serves as an archetypal myth in it (which was, however, Durgi's name since birth and not adopted for the narrative by the writer). It is the archetypal pattern that pervades any imposed superficial surface in the texture of any narrative.

The giant python that is killed by Dasaru, the champion archer, an event which is interpreted as the cause of his death, is also symbolic depiction of the myth of embedded nature that is disturbed by a section of the humans who are unable to cohabit peacefully with nature. Dasaru and Durgi were not a part of those who disturbed / defied nature, but they were used as the tools by the perpetrators. Dasaru died a gradual death as a result of the effect this act of violation of nature had on him. He changed soon after it as it took a heavy toll on his psychic well-being and his loving relationship with the beautiful Durgi also started to lose its lustre and it gradually evaporated into thin air much before Dasaru's tragic death, leaving Durgi shocked and heartbroken. The act of annihilation of the serpent is seen as an act that was scripted to highlight the sense of violation which is to mark the rise to power of the colonisers who could control the dynamics of power and crush the native/ nature lovers of the land as whimsically as they deemed it. The nature/ human equation is shown as a disrespectful one when it came to the colonising white sahibs all through the narrative while the same equation between the natives and their natural surrounding is shown as an enlightened one. Mr. Fraser's worst fears were exposed when he faced the animals. The same was shown with the earlier and the later sahibs who came to the tea garden.

Things change irreversibly after the killing of the serpent, as if a floodgate is opened through which the waves of change flow in to change Durgi's life by sweeping her off her feet along with those waves. The killed serpent is deeply etched in Durgi's psyche and she could feel it even on the last day of her life in the tea estate as she re-visited the places she used to go to as a newcomer, mostly with Dasaru during her first few days at the garden. The writer describes it as,

> As she came down the hillock running, she was gripped with the fear of the 'dumb' serpent which she felt was crying inside her…It cried like a human…Durgi was then the snake sitting on her eggs which were pulverized to a mess with the attack of spears. She now ran in search of *kalasadhu* towards his ashram *w*hich used to be under the olive tree. (407, 408)

She was killed the very next day. By revisiting the site of the snake being killed, and being revived of the sense it had created in her whole being at that time is a reminder to the reader of the significance of the elements of nature in the lives of these 'adivasis'…the 'primal inhabitants'. Dasaru felt deglorified of his expertise as an ace archer upon this act of his - of having had to kill the serpent he revered. Durgi too subconsciously carried in her the burden of this violation which emerged and forced itself upon her on her last visit to the site. She ran away from it to escape it…but we see the pattern that this revisitation and the revocation of the myth of the serpent created. It was like a foreboding to the event that followed — Durgi's death. She had to die just like Dasaru died, as the serpent was inside their psyche…It overlapped with her other acts but the writer expresses the reconnection with the serpent, "That serpent was chasing her. She was terrified…" (407)

This myth of the snake has been pervasive as we see also in the part where Durgi was opening the bag of old clothes that belonged to her once happy family…as she dragged the heavy bag through the floor a line could be seen drawn on the dusty floor, which looked very much like a huge snake to her (401). The event described at the

beginning of Durgi's life in the tea garden comes to a full cycle when it reappears at the fag end of her life at the same garden.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in *Myth as Technique* mentions some authors "…employ mythical parallels … to illuminate certain situations or characters" (The Twice Born Fiction 150) even when there is not full resemblance to an entire mythical reference in totality. The mention of Tusu devi and her mythical story too has its parallel to Durgi. She sings Tusu songs with her daughter Baby, which celebrate a glorified life that is sacrificed at the end. Tusu Devi's story has many versions where her self-sacrifice is seen as a positive act mostly. In the same context, Durgi's final martyrdom can also be considered a parallel to Tusu's sacrifice, though the latter can be assessed from feminist perspectives thus too:

> The lok kathas glorify the woman/ Tusu as the archetypical sacrificial creature, and young women hearing the tales are subtly conditioned by present day latent patriarchal structures to be always ready to offer up their lives to save community honour"(Bhattacharjee, Kuiry 312)

Here, though Durgi dies without any guilt in her mind, still we do find her violated of her basic will and a sense of having been exploited overwhelms her as she utters the words, spitting out Fraser's name, at Mem-bari towards the end of the story one day, "beimaan, faakia sahab (dishonest, liar) you cheated and betrayed me … and also took away my daughter to God knows where" (401).

Like Durga, she rises and prepares to vanquish her enemies by helping her countrymen who the sahibs have been oppressing. But she ends up losing her life in it. Her martyrdom does not end her as exactly as Durga [who had killed the 'asura' (demon) Mahisasura] but her sacrifice deifies her as the sacred one, the exalted 'martyr' nonetheless. The mistress of the sahib, the *raakhoni tiruta* is purged of all her sad/ inglorious past history by finally devoting herself to the cause of her land's liberty (the liberty, the freedom that she herself as a person had missed immensely on having had to leave the land of the red earth). The echoes of Tusu and Durga enrich Durgi in her fibre of an energetic, beautiful (and later on, a rebellious) character.

The second half of the narrative contains references to colonial myths, like the myth of the 'white man's burden' to civilise the 'savages'. Reminiscent of Orwell's sahib facing the ordeal of killing a tiger as described by George Orwell in 'Shooting a Tiger', Mr Fraser too had to act brave and not fail in facing the tiger that was wounded and seemed unconscious as he approached it in the narrative, but as it could have it the tiger attacked Mr.Fraser and he was seriously wounded. Durgi instantly involved herself in nursing and caring for him devotedly, but instead of being acknowledged for it, the white man could only vent out his frustrated feelings about her land and her people in despicable terms as he recovered. 'Uncivilised' was a word that was being uttered regularly then, felt Durgi. Just as they were very happy to see the tea estate yield good profit earlier and feel complacent about their success in being representative of that 'civilised' race which knew how to govern and rule over the less privileged that was, nonetheless, their 'burden'. The '*josona*', the moonshine, that the sahib exuded in his whiteness and in which Durgi had submerged herself in loving him now seemed alien to her; he had used and exploited her just as their race had been imperially conquering the 'world' with masks on. That he was not coming back was not revealed to Durgi, a truth that Bara Babu, Mr. Barua, was told. For all his considerations for Durgi, the land that he had procured for her future safety, for his concern of the two 'dubhasiya' sons' security for which they were branded on their forehead to segregate them from the natives, etc., the equation of Durgi's natural love for the sahib was not a balanced one from his side. It was an unequal one always. 'Civilisation' was only in Baby's singing of "Silent Night, Holy Night" and not in her learning of the rich repository of the *adivasi* folk songs from her resourceful mother. Nor would Mr. Fraser care as much to meet his ailing son Kush who died from the fatal disease, Cholera. He died without being visited by his father even once when he was unwell. In this, Durgi, Janki and Mangri (Maloti) Urang are not alienated from each other. They mostly lived and died in trauma. The myth of the 'better life' in Assam is a repeated trope used in the literature of the tea estate community to express the tragic aspects of the *adivasi* life as lived in the tea gardens in Assam.

('Chol gori….le jabe toke Assam', is a commonly heard version of that lie.) The lies, exploitation, oppression, the innocence, liveliness and the overwhelming resultant tragedy that the myth of a 'civilising' race carried with it are reflected in this narrative.

The two types of myth as well as the writer's use of magic realism takes over fully towards the end of the narrative where Durgi's narrator wishes to complete her tale by connecting Durgi's real story with her real family. And she does that by carrying over Durgi's mute history, finding it a voice…hands it over to the rightful progeny of that martyr who should be always re-membered, re-visited and re-read, and never be silenced in ignominy in any civilised record of historiography. Notwithstanding the arguable consideration that absoluteness of myths is non-functional in postmodern fictions, the myths in *Josonar Jhitas* in their fragmented usage, did their wonder in retrieving history from silence.

(All translations in the text are mine)

Endnote

1. The supreme, creator god of Sarnaism, worshiped in eastern India by the Munda and related peoples under different names.

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The 'Noble Savage' Myth in Wordsworth's Ecocritical Ideology : A Select Study

Dr. Nandini Choudhury

Ever since the publication of Jonathan's Bate's influential works, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000) scholars and environmentalists of the late 20th Century are beginning to recognize the crucial importance of the Romantic legacy in the Ecocritical discourse, and in particular that of William Wordsworth considered as the forerunner of the Romantic age. In his understanding of the ecosystem encompassing landscape, season, climate, weather, non-human entities and the healthy continuation of biotic and abiotic elements; in his persistent call for preservation of the environment and his love for the landscape, flora and fauna of the Lake District, William Wordsworth may be seen as one of the forerunners of the modern environmental movement. A poet who sought to represent the harsh realities of the degradation of the environment in the wake of sweeping changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution

,Wordsworth's discourses were essentially green as articulated by not only prominent critic Jonathan Bate but by a host of other contemporary critics including James C McKusick.

Ecocriticism may be defined as the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature in relation to the ecosystem. Ecocriticism examines the various ways in which literature treat the subject of nature and problematizes landscape and environment with special emphasis on season, climate, weather, region and a healthy continuation of biotic and abiotic elements. Moreover, it highlights a holistic approach to texts that examines the perceived relationship between man, nature, ecology and environment. Needless to say, given the precarious condition of the environment in the 20th century this approach to literature has become increasingly significant. Together with the other paradigms such as race, gender, class and identity as represented in literary texts, ecology or environment has gained much prominence in the back drop of the post colonial condition. Ecocriticism maintains that literature may be approached in a way that examines man as part of the ecosystem and explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between mankind and the environment in all areas of cultural production. At the same time, Ecocriticism seeks to give a voice to the ecological rights of nature so that a balanced ecosystem is maintained.

Wordsworth's Ecocritical ideology may be negotiated by some of the key theories of the present day Ecocritical Discourse which include (a) The Romantic Ecological theory with its emphasis on the Pastoral, the Economy of Nature and the Motif of Place Naming, (b) The Ecofeminist ideology, (c) Bioregionalism and (d) Ecotourism. At the same time, Wordsworth's ecocritical vision reveals a firm grounding in the eco philosophy of the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau wherein the Rousseavian ideas of freedom and liberty, 'primitive wilderness', 'rustic simplicity', 'pastoral and agrarian societies' and above all the myth of the 'Noble Savage/ 'Natural Man' find expression in Wordsworth's poetry. The present paper seeks to negotiate Wordsworth's ecocritical sensibility by articulating the myth of the 'Noble savage'/ 'Natural Man' by a reading of the

poems, "Michael", "The Female Vagrant" and "Home at Grasmere". The methodology of the paper is analytical and primary and secondary sources have been consulted.

The myth of the noble savage in literature as defined in Encyclopedia Britannica may be identified as an idealized concept of the uncivilized man, one who symbolizes the innate goodness of mankind, not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. (www.britannica.com). The origins of this concept may be traced to ancient Greece where Homer, Pliny and Xenophon idealized the Arcadians and other primitive groups as representing the essence of the noble savage. Later Roman writers such as Horace, Virgil and Ovid accorded such comparisons to the Scythians. In the 18th century, Rousseau is widely credited to have popularized the 'Noble Savage/ 'Natural Man' which may be read as a mythic personification of natural goodness by a romantic glorification of savage life. Among all the major political philosophers of the Enlightenment it is Rousseau who espoused the most sympathetic portrayal of the noble savage myth. Contrary to philosopher Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau argued that 'natural men' were inherently peaceful, embodying equality in what he calls the 'state of nature'. Rousseau's contention is that in addition to being socially egalitarian such people lived in harmony with the natural environment endorsing the ideals of liberty and equality in their dealings with not only the human kind but also with the environment.

The concept of the 'Noble Savage'/ 'Natural Man' has been comprehensively elaborated in the Second Discourse by Rousseau named as " Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men" (1755). The first part of the essay is devoted to an examination of mankind in the "first embryo of the Species" (2nd Discourse 39) called as the natural man or the 'noble savage' as he existed in the 'state of nature' while the second part of the essay deals with the reasons which brought about the disappearance of that figure to that of the capitalist and economic man. It is pertinent to discuss here the two principles of *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* as put forward by the philosopher in understanding the dispositions guiding

the natural man on one hand and the economic and social man on the other.

Rousseau defines *amour de soi* as the positive principle of self-preservation which makes one ardently interested in one's well-being. Pity is the driving principle of *amour de soi* that inspires in us a natural dislike to see any sentient being, especially our fellow humans suffer and perish (2nd Discourse). 35. Contrary to *amour de soi* is the principle of *amour-propre* which is regarded as the unnatural drive, that which is based on vanity and contempt on one hand and shame and envy on the other (2nd Discourse). 64

According to Rousseau, the principle of *amour de soi* was the dominant guiding force in the earliest stages of human development. In this state the only inequalities that existed between mankind were natural and physical such as the differences in health, age, bodily strength and qualities of mind and soul. He was unburdened by the weight of social interactions and lived contented in a state of solitude and independence. This man, "the first embryo of the species" (2nd Discourse 39) lived in a perfect natural state where "his desires do not go beyond his physical needs" (2nd Discourse 46) and his "modest needs" (2nd Discourse 46) were within reach. The most significant aspect of this period was that he considered himself as an integral part of the environment and his connection with the natural world was the strongest and most evident. In this state 'human nature' and 'organic nature' were practically identical because mankind co-existed in perfect symbiosis with the surrounding environment. This constitutes the basic temperament and disposition of the natural man or the noble savage.

This communion with nature was disrupted, the moment man started his engagement with the civil society which is the cradle and source of inequality and generates unnatural feelings such as "shame and envy" (2nd Discourse 64). This is when the force of *amour propre* started replacing the principle of *amour di soi*. As long as the civil interactions remained unsophisticated, human beings still managed to maintain a secure bond with their natural environment and preserve the original character of their 'human nature'. As

civilization and culture progressed in more advanced societies, man's bond with nature detiorated and human nature was compromised by corrupting external factors in the backdrop of urbanization, industrialization and mechanical advancement. Urbanized and mechanical societies gave shape to the 'social' and 'economic man' who driven by colonial hegemony and capitalists' notions, forgot his bonds with the land. Moreover the 'social 'and 'economic' man was no longer hesitant to compromise the fragile balance of the environment for his own selfish needs.

In essence then what Rousseau is attempting to say is that mankind's detachment from the state of nature occurred when *amour de soi* ceased to be the driving force and other unnatural impulses began to dominate his behaviour. Rousseau holds the institution of private property as responsible for sowing the genesis of vice and evil that sprang in civil societies which in turn brought about inequalities in the human society. In this connection, Peter Gay in the introduction to the '2nd Discourse' states that the Discourse may be read as one of the vehement critiques of the institution of private property which marked the emergence of the present fateful stage of the human condition (Gay 25). In one of the most memorable passages, Rousseau states that the moment the first person enclosed a plot of land and declared himself to be its proud possessor before his simple and gullible onlookers the foundations of the civil society was laid. Rousseau laments that had any one of the onlookers been prudent enough to protest this kind of declaration, human race would have been saved from so much of misery and devastation in the form of war and bloodshed. Rousseau forwards an important debate regarding preservation and protection of nature in the capitalist economy. He observes "You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one" (2nd Discourse 60), a precept that Mahatma Gandhi echoed much later in the 20th century. Rousseau's philosophy is reiterated by Gandhi when he said "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not everyone's greed" (Bakshi, Rajni "The relevance of Gandhi in the capitalism Debate")

In presenting the myth of the natural man, Rousseau thus prescribes a precept which may be held up as a model for modern societies to emulate at a crucial time when the very survival of the planet is at stake. A reading of Wordsworth's pastoral poems namely 'Michael', 'The Female Vagrant' and 'Home at Grasmere' clearly illustrate Wordsworth's debt to Rousseau's conceptualization of the myth of noble savage , in asserting that rural agrarian spaces serve as the ideal ground wherein the principle of *amour de soi* synonymous with the natural man/ noble savage thrives in contrast to civilized and urban societies that bred the unnatural human qualities such as *amour propre* that characterizes the economic and social man.

Wordsworth sings of the rustic folk and their narratives, celebrating their strong ties to the land and love for the natural elements, in a host of poems. In "Michael A Pastoral Poem", Wordsworth portrays the life of a shepherd, a representative inhabitant of the vale, his trials and tribulations, in the changing scenario of the rural landscape invaded by modernization and industrialization. "Michael A Pastoral Poem" is a pastoral tragedy different from the smooth and ideal life of the shepherd as idealized in classical poetry. Behind the poignantly pathetic but realistic description of the rustics represented by Michael, one finds Wordsworth's silken sympathy for rustics and peasants. Wordsworth celebrated the ideal English Shepherd, his struggles and toil in a world that was going through a drastic transformation because of the mechanized and industrial way of life. His life is referred to as 'a life of eager industry' (24), and Michael is one who has worked in his paternal lands toiling for more than seventy years thereby epitomizing the serene silence and beauty of pastoral landscape.

Goldsmith in his essay, 'Lyrical Ballads, 1800' observes that Wordsworth drew a faithful picture of the hard working 'statesmen', the independent proprietors of land , in "Michael" as they lived and toiled in a working landscape, while at the same time throwing light on their precarious financial condition at the turn of the century. (Goldsmith 213) Viewed from the standpoint of Rousseau's eco philosophy that tends to situate agrarian, pastoral, organic communities

as the valid ground for the positive human values such as love, patience and tolerance, "Michael" can be aptly situated as a pastoral poem. In Rousseau's perception as adumbrated in both the '1st Discourse' and the '2nd Discourse' rural and pastoral societies can nourish the positive value of *amour de soi* identified with the natural man as opposed to amour-propre, which is considered as the unnatural impulse of humankind. It is apt to situate in "Michael" the poet's belief that character is shaped by environment, and by the natural elements with which the shepherd is in constant touch. For instance, the poet says that the fields and hills that Michael trod 'were his living Being' (lines 75). In the course of the poem, the poet who is also the narrator, reveals that Michael's ability to sympathise with the natural world developed from 'the gentle agency/Of natural objects which led him 'to feel/For passions that were not [his] own (lines 29-31). He has imbibed a deep sense of paternal love from his parents which he showers on his son. The image of the 'sheepfold' in the poem also assumes great significance in asserting the inherent "moral disposition of rural life" (Goldsmith 213). When it is time for Luke to depart for the city, Michael informs his son that the sheepfold will serve as, "Thy anchor and thy shield" in the new, tumultuous life that he will face in the city (lines 418). In effect then, what is passed down from one generation to another is not mere material possessions such as the cottage, field or pasture, it is the moral capacity to work in the land which is in essence to work one's soul (Goldsmith 213-14).

The Poem, "The Female Vagrant" like "Michael", is set in a pastoral backdrop wherein the poet focuses not only on realistic rural life as it was actually lived in a working landscape in the 18th century but also throws sufficient insights about the ideal life lived in a rural community. The female vagrant who was a tiller of the land before she became a homeless wanderer strongly believed in sustainable agriculture and preservation of the traditional rural ways of life that is responsible for maintaining the fragile ecological balance. In the opening lines, of the poem Wordsworth records a description of the domesticated plants that grow in the protagonists' garden such as

"pease, and mint, and thyme," (lines 20) Moreover, she is also surrounded by a variety of tamed and wild animals including the frolicking sheep, whose fleece provides a commodity for the local market. Besides there were hens that provide eggs for daily sustenance and the wild swans that provide companion. The poet also narrates how she is accompanied by her faithful dog to the market, and here mention is made of their beehives, and a "red breast known for years" (lines 36) and their basic subsistence is carried out by her father by catching fish in the nearby lake. In essence then she and her father epitomize the values of the natural man or the 'noble savage' who live in perfect harmony with the environment.

McKusick contends that the poem throws valuable insight on rural life which is based on multiple modes of subsistence that includes vegetable gardening, poultry farming, sheep-raising, bee-keeping, and fishing. Such a mode of production based on a wide variety of crops which is rotated annually, along with fishing, livestock grazing, and the seasonal gathering of nuts, berries and firewood from the village common areas are seen as more sustainable and resilient than modern methods of agriculture which relies on cultivation of a single crop. Polyculture is hence seen as more sustainable than the modern day reliance on monoculture (McKusick, Green Writing 63). Dependence of monoculture in the modern times, as researchers contend upsets the natural balance of soils, too many same plant species erase the soil of its nutrients resulting in decreasing varieties of bacteria and microorganisms which further lead to the loss of fertility.

This kind of sustainable use of the land and method of cultivation of the female vagrant and her father is unable to withstand the capital intensive modes of production which was gradually taking over. The poet castigates and blames the changing conditions of the 18th century for the plight of such dispossessed, landless vagrants. For it was during this time that the capital intensive modes of production were gradually replacing traditional methods of subsistence of agriculture. Moreover, the common areas used by local farmers for grazing and gathering activities were being increasingly taken over for exclusive

private use by the enclosure process. Since the advent of the Napoleonic Wars in the 1790's, modern agricultural farming was becoming a financially appealing endeavour as a result of the increase in price of crops and 'new capital-intensive modes of production' made it easier to accelerate the growth of crops for the market place (McKusick 63-4).

In the poem, the poet depicts the wealthy landowners foraying into the countryside for investment purposes, buying land and erecting large structures that seem to invert the balance between man and nature established by rock to rock boundaries and less imposing cottages . When the vagrant's father refused the "proffered gold" (lines 46) from the wealthy merchant he fell into "cruel injuries" (lines 47) he is thwarted in his attempt to sell his crops at the market as well as denied access to the waters where he fished for livelihood. In a footnote, the poet explains that "several of the Lakes in the north of England are let out to several fisherman, in parcels marked out by imaginary lines drawn from rock to rock" (note 51).

However, in the new changing capitalist scenario these imaginary lines had no legal claims and the wealthy landowners taking advantage displaced the rural from their land and property. In the poem, the wealthy intruder ultimately evicts the father, daughter duo from their humble cottage and they are thrown into misery, suffering and death. It is possible to locate the 'social' and 'economic' man as gaining the upper hand and responsible for the eviction of the noble savage or natural Man as exemplified by such countless female vagrants of that time. In this connection it is worth mentioning McKusick's remark that Wordsworth, through his poems vehemently opposed the "development" and "improvement", of rural landscapes for such projects seem to compromise the fragile ecological frame work of the ecosystem. In "The Female Vagrant" he validates his stance as a "staunch defender of sustainable agricultural methods", and sought for the preservation of the open, scenic and wild areas, especially in the Lake District. In such concerns, Wordsworth shows himself to be true environmentalist foreshadowing some of the vital concerns of the present ecological movement (McKusick 65).

The poem, 'Home at Grasmere' is set in a similar rural, pastoral setting that explores in a broad sense the experience of the whole valley taken together, with its inhabitants both human and non-human ones. The poem begins with a prospect of the vale, with an unconditional eulogy of the serene environment as the guardian of his pure heart: "Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in; Now in the clear and open day I feel Your guardianship; I take it to my heart; Tis like the solemn shelter of the night" (lines 129-32). The inviolable relationship between man and environment is reinforced in the lines quoted above. Moreover, through these lines Wordsworth sanctifies the valley, the hills, lake , island and cottages and in return the valley offers its guardianship (Bate, Romantic Ecology 102) wherein a sense of complete unity is achieved 'Perfect contentment, Unity entire'(lines 170) echoing the bond that the natural man in his first stage of development shared with the natural environment.

The poet shows keen interest not only in the natural and cultural landscape of Grasmere village but also in the Human Ecology of the Lake District. McKusick's definition of 'human ecology' in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* as "…the study of the complex relationship between human communities and their dwelling places" can be fairly applied to the poem under discussion (McKusick 70).

"Home at Grasmere" is a long narrative poem that describes the arrival of Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy in the vale of Grasmere with the purpose of permanently settling in Dove Cottage. The poem reflects Grasmere as a happy dwelling place which is in perfect harmony with the natural world. The intensity of the brother-sister bond provides a stimulus to signify the closeness of the bond they seek to establish with the local village community on one hand and the larger non-human community of domestic and wild animals on the other. When the adult Wordsworth and his sister approach Grasmere in winter, the living landscape speak to them in many voices. The vivid description of "the naked trees", "icy brooks", "the sunbeam" signify Wordsworth's propensity for the natural world in which both the brother and sister roam as "wild wanderers" (Mckusick 71). In such descriptions it is possible to recall Rousseau's concept

of Wilderness ethics wherein the natural man or the noble savage guided by the principle of *amour de soi* lived in a state of co-existence with the natural world, without any need to dominate them preserving in the process the original character of their 'human nature'.

Wordsworth is predominantly concerned with the relationship between the village of Grasmere and its surrounding environment. He is happy to observe that the small landowners of the Lake District hold their farmlands as independent estates which they have inherited from their forefathers and as such they are free from debt, "He, happy man! Is master of the field, / and treads the mountain which his Fathers trod" (lines 382- 383). The poet thinks that the mountainous environment around Grasmere has served as good protection for its dwellers from the encroachments of the feudal oppressors. Wordsworth also states that the sense of family solidarity extends beyond humankind to their animal companions. "One family… human and brute" (lines 619-622). He notes the role played by the beasts of burden such as the 'horse' and the 'ass' and addresses the entire community of 'wild creatures' that are part of this abode such as blackbirds, thrushes, owls and eagles (lines 515-550). The villagers of Grasmere create an instinctive sense of kinship with these wild creatures. (McKusick 70-73)

Such a favourable picture of the social structure of Grasmere village as sketched by the poet is also interspersed with need for protection and concern for the environment and its entities which is revealed in the subsequent part of the poem. The poet notes with dismay the disappearance of "a lonely pair/ of milk white swans", (Lines 322) who were part of the Grasmere landscape. Wordsworth apprehends the worst, "the Dales men may have aimed the deadly tube" (Lines 352) and shot the innocent and harmless swans. He is shocked to feel how human beings are capable of betraying innocent creatures in the ideal community of Grasmere! The poet regrets that the future of mankind seems to be bleak and bare and he contends that the only way of healing the relationship between human community and the wild creatures that dwell within it is the power of "overflowing love/ not for the creature only but for all" (lines 286-7).

Such a feeling has to be extended beyond the limited affection for human beings alone; it has to encompass all living things that dwell in the entire regional ecosystem. This is the most significant environmental ethic propounded by Wordsworth through the poem, 'Home at Grasmere' (McKusick72-73).

The characters of Michael, the Female Vagrant and the villagers of Grasmere, reflect in essence the myth of the noble savage, the natural man who lived in harmony with the environment in a rustic and agrarian society. They are emblematic of the natural man whose lives are rooted to the soil, living in tandem with the various elements of the environment. Their way of life is suggestive of a strong bond with the natural environment preserving the original character of their 'human nature' in the process. Living at a time when industrialization and urbanization was making deep inroads into the rural way of life, symbolically represented by the tragic end of both Michael and the female vagrant Wordsworth raises a very pertinent issue regarding preservation of these farmlands and its dwellers.

When one considers the present ecological scenario, the scene is alarming to say the least. In the present times urban expansion and industrial development have destroyed agricultural lands, pastures and forests at an alarming rate. According to a report that appeared in the daily 'The Guardian' , in the last forty years, Earth has lost a third of its farmable land to human- caused erosion and pollution (Rogers). Soil is now blowing and washing away 100 times faster that it can form and without that soil humans will not be able to feed their growing population. The only way to avert this kind of disaster, according to researchers, is that governments will have to help farmers adopt sustainable agricultural practices such as rotating land use between crops and livestock. (Rogers) Only then there is hope for mankind's survival in this planet. Such environmental concerns are those already endorsed by the poet William Wordsworth way back in the 19th century, who in turn was greatly influenced by philosopher Rousseau. Its high time that mankind starts respecting, revering and preserving agricultural land for without proper preservationist practices the entire human race is staring at doom and extinction.

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Reflections and Retelling: Selections from "The Book of Assembly Hall" and "The Book of Effort" in The Mahabharata

Pranami Bania

Introduction

The Mahabharata is considered to be one of the greatest Indian epics. No doubt the Mahabharata was composed many thousand years ago but its relevance could not be ignored in the present time. Therefore, many critics regard the Mahabharata as a floating literature because it has been moving on from the ancient times to the modern. We cannot ignore the fact that this great epic has many values that it has been preaching to the people. Some values that are deep rooted in the epic are historical, philosophical and legendary. . C. R. Raja Gopalchari has rightly pointed out that "The Mahabharata belongs to the world and not only to India. To the people of India, this epic has been an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength" (Preface to the Mahabharata).[1]

One important characteristic of the epic is that the characters move with vitality of real life. The epic contains characters like Vishnu, Drona, Duryodhana, Pandavas, Draupadi, Gandhari, Dhritarashtra which are immortal figures that are symbolic of the Indian culture and society. The presence of divine Krishna, who gives a highly purposeful message in the whole epic also adds colour to the text. The epic discloses a rich and highly evolved society of the ancient times which greatly resembles the ancient Indian society. It throws an interesting light on the accepted code of conduct and honourable warfare that is popular among kshatriyas.

The story line

As far as the plot of the Mahabharata is concerned, it is a succession feud, Santanu begets three sons: and Devavrata becomes the legitimate heir to the throne. Santanu has two sons with Satyavati, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya which leads to the first round of complications in terms of succession. Devavrata, convinced by Satyavati and her father vows to give up his right to the throne . And above all, Devabrata was also asked not to bear any children so as to avoid clash with Satyavati's grandson for succession in the future. Devabarata kept these difficult vows and hence he is better known as 'Bhisma'. If we look at the next generation, we shall find that Chitrangada leaves no heirs, dying unmarried whereas Vichitravrya marries two sisters, Ambika and Ambalika, but dies childless. However, later both Ambika and Ambalika gave birth to two sons, the blind Dhritarashtra and Pandu. But Dhritrarastra's blindness excludes him from direct succession to the throne and this creates a second complication in the line of succession.

As a result, Pandu was crowned the king, but he couldn't continue his duty as he married Kunti and there were predictions that he would die if he continues to be the King. So, he resigned and went to the forest with Kunti. Kunti by using her divine intervention, gives birth to three sons, while Madri gave birth to another two and these five brothers are known as five Pandavas. After the death of Pandu, the Pandavas return to Hastinapur along with their mother Kunti. And their return could be taken as the third generation

complication in the line of succession. But, it was too late for the Pandavas to return to Hastinapur, as Duryodhana had already dreamt to be the king of Hastinapur. The result of this was the plan of Duryodhana to be the King of Hastinapur by hook or by crook. He along with Shakuni made grand plans to defeat and even kill the five Pandavas giving up the path of Dharma and righteousness. Shakuni instigated Duryodhana to convince the Pandavas, especially the eldest one Yudhisthira to play the game of dicing with the Kauravas. The game of dicing plays a significant role in determining the future course of action for both the Pandavas and the Kauravas . Losing everything in the game, the Pandavas were forced to leave Hastinapur and live in the forest for 12 years in exile and one year in incognito exile. The Pandavas returned to Hastinapur after their long stay in forest to demand their share in the kingdom. But, Dhritraras and Duryodhana did not like their comeback. This resulted in the gruesome battle of Kurukshetra. Both the [parties forge alliances and prepare for the battlefield. Krishna Vasudeva happens to be the mentor of Pandavas and Dhrishtadyumna of Panchala is their commander-in-chief. The battle was fought for eighteen days and Pandavas won the battle. Yudhisthira apathetically proclaims his victory with the ashwamedha ritual. The Pandavas and Draupadi proceed on their last journey to heaven, to be reunited with the Kauravas who they annihilated. The heir of Hastinapura was Parikshit, the son of Abhimanyu and Subhadra. From Parikshit, the story was retold by Janamejaya by Vaisampayana at the violent occasion of the snake sacrifice.

The Book of the Assembly Hall and the Game of Dicing

"The Book of the Assembly Hall" or the Sabha Parva is the second of the eighteen books of the great epic Mahabharata. It has 10 sub books and 81 chapters. The initial chapters of the book describe in detail the assembly hall and the palace built by Maya at Indraprastha. There are detailed discussions on the principles of good governance and administration necessary for a kingdom and its citizens to be prosperous, virtuous and happy. The middle part of the book discusses in detail the Rajasuya Yagna of Yudhisthira to expand the Pandavas kingdom. The last part of the book is important because

Yudhisthira gets tempted to play the game of dicing and leads to the loss of his kingdom and his brothers. As Van Buitenen has rightly observed that:

> The Assembly hall makes all that went before just a beginning. Those were the pages of childhood and adolescence, in which the influence of the elders was strong and decisive. Now (in book 2) the heroes are on their own and begin to act in their own right and natures are wilful". (Buitenen)[2]

During the rajasuya ceremony of Yudhisthira, Duryodhana was invited to Indraprastha. Duryodhana was awestruck by seeing the grandeur of the assembly hall. He inspected the hall along with Shakuni. The grand celebration of the Royal consecration was a grand affair, but Duryodhana was upset. Duryodhana said to Shakuni:

I saw the entire earth under Yudhisthira 's sway, conquered by the majesty of weapons of the great spirited white–horsed Arjuna. I saw that grand sacrifice of the Partha Uncle, grand as that of Sakra among the Immortals, Prince of great splendour. Rancour has filled me, and burning day and night I am drying up like a small pool in the hot season." (Sabha Parva, Mahabharata line 20).[3]

Duryodhana was filled with jealousy after seeing the prosperity of the Pandavas. Shakuni suggested before him that the Pandavas could only be defeated in the game of dicing. Duryodhana went to Dhritarashtra to seek permission to hold a game of dice between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Dhritarashtra initially disagreed but later he gave his consent to arrange a game of dice and invite the Pandavas for the same. Dhritrarastra said: "The Gods in heaven will surely lend us their grace. Holy or unholy, beneficent or maleficent, the family game of dicing shall proceed for certainly it is so destined" (Mahabharata line 55).[4]

Despite Dhritarashtra speaking against the game of dicing and telling it as gambling and also avoid it as far as possible. He even explained to Duryodhana that he is well equipped with a vast knowledge in warfare and science and also being cherished in the house. And the father told Duryodhana that since he got all the fortune

so why should he remain unhappy. But Duryodhana rejected the plea of her father rather he put forward many instances as to why he was unhappy after muting the Pandavas. Duryodhana was overwhelmed at the immense wealth and grandeur that the Pandavas gained within a short span of time. And he further told his father that he is filled with awe by seeing the prosperity of Pandavas. Duryodhana further explained that discontent is the root of fortune. That is why he wanted to be discontented. Duryodhana asked Dhristrarastra to agree and allow them for a family dicing game. And accordingly, Vidura was sent to invite the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhisthira for the game of dicing. Vidura invited Yudhisthira in this way—

> "Fore gathered there, Partha, with my brethren.
> And play and enjoy a family game
> We should be pleased if thou camest to join us,
> The Kurus are all assembled here." (Line 5)[5]

Yudhisthira asked about who will be gambling other than Duryodhana. Vidura was not happy with the game of dicing and he feels that it is likely to bring disaster but as he was ordered to invite him, he did so. He further informed that the king of Gandhara, Shakuni will also play for Duryodhana. Yudhisthira agreed to the proposal of Vidura and went to Hastinapura for the game.

Shakuni invited Yudhisthira for all games of dicing but Yudhisthira said that gaming is a trickery, an evil: there is no baronial prowess in it, nor steady policy . He further said that there is nothing to praise in dicing and he refers to Asita Devala saying that gambling is full of trickery and one should not involve in it. But Shakuni said that to win in dicing, one should be cunning as well as clever. Yudhisthira agreed to play the game and started his stake. Shakuni played for Duryodhana and within a very less time, he won the game. Yudhisthira put at stake all his wealth and prosperity, his brothers, himself and at last his wife Draupadi . Few people in the assembly hall were not in support of how the game was going on and Vidhura was one of them. Yudhisthira's fifteenth stake to the eighteenth stake were about his brothers - Nakul, Sahadev, Bhim, Arjuna and on the 19th stake, he

offered himself. In the 20ᵗʰ stake, Yudhisthira put at stake his wife Draupadi. This is one of the worst decisions taken by Yudhisthira as immediately after that Dusasana was asked to bring Panchali to the Assembly hall. Draupadi raised serious questions as to why she should be dragged to the assembly hall. She said

> "How dare you speak so, an usher, to me?
> What son of a king would hazard his wife?
> The King is befooled and crazed by the game?
> Was there nothing left for him to stake?" (Buitenen)[6]

Despite repeated rejections, Draupadi was dragged by Dusasana and was taken to the assembly hall. Draupadi prayed to Dushasana that the hall is full of men who are learned and they all are her Gurus for which she cannot stand in front of them. But Dusasana dragged Draupadi to the assembly hall. She became interested in all the wise men in the assembly hall. Vidura was the only person in the assembly hall who asked the learned men in the assembly hall whether the questions raised by Draupadi were right. Bhishma could not answer the questions raised by Draupadi. He commented that the course of law is sovereign and good spirited brahmins on earth fail to encompass it. Karna also led interesting comments in the Assembly hall. He opined that there are three persons who don't own property - a student, a slave, a dependent woman. And since Draupadi is the wife of slave, so she should immediately be the property of the owner i.e. Duryodhana.

Dhritarashtra at last announced that Draupadi can choose a boon. And accordingly she chooses the Pandavas. The game of dicing ends with Yudhisthira departing to Indraprastha with his brothers. The game of dicing, questions the system of Dharma and righteousness in our society. Draupadi's Vastra Haran and her questioning on the existence of law is another important part of the epic.

The Sequel to Dicing

This is another important episode in the Mahabharata where Duryodharna, Karna and Shakuni plot another conspiracy because they were not very satisfied with the Pandavas going away with so

much wealth. Duryodhana said that the game of dicing should be continued. There were protests from the elders of Kauravas and Gandhari but Dhritarashtra agreed to the constitution of the game.

As a result, Yudhisthira is recalled and he returns. Shakuni proposes as stake twelve years in the forest and one in open incognito. Shakuni commented:

> The old man has released your wealth and I praise him for it. But there is one more throw, a great prize, listen to me, bull of the Bharats! If we are defeated by you at the dicing, we shall go into the great forest for twelve years, clad in skins of the ruru deer, and live in disguise among people for a thirteenth year; but if found out, return to the forest for another twelve years. Or, if you are defeated by us, you must live in the forest for twelve years, together with Krisna, clothed in deerskins. When the thirteenth year is full, either the ones or the others must have their kingdom back, as in proper. With this resolve, Yudhisthira, roll out the dice and play another game with us, Bharata. (The Sequel to Mahabharata line 73)[7]

Yudhisthira bids farewell to the Kauravas and the Pandavas start their journey towards the forest. Vidura gave his blessings to the Pandavas. In the next few lines, Krishna takes leave from Kunti. She laments at the fate of the Pandavas and they depart.

After the departure of the Pandavas, the assembly hall received menacing portents. Vidura gives a detailed description about the manner in which Pandavas left the Kingdom. Narada is also seen to appear in the scene and he predicts the downfall of the Kauravas. Duryodhana conspires another plot to kill the Pandavas and Dhritarashtra supports him.

Sanjaya predicted that the destruction of Kauravas is inevitable. Dhritarashtra further blames those who brought Draupadi into the hall and describes the ill portents and he consults the gift of boons to Draupadi. The sequel to dicing ended with Dhritarashtra's "Therefore I have never wanted war with the Parthas, for I have always believed that the Pandavas are stronger than the Kurus..." (The Sequel to Dicing line 30)8

Thus we can say that the sequel to Dicing is a significant episode in the great epic because it decides the future course of action for both the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The appearance of menacing portents and the speech of Narada suggests that if the Path of Dharma is not followed, then the consequence will not be good.

The Temptation of Karna

This episode is another significant episode from the Udyoga Parva because it establishes Karna as an ideal hero.

In this scene Krishna reveals the truth that by rights Karna is Pandu's son. Karna is the premarital son of Kunti and that Pandavas will give him the recognition of being the eldest and also the rightful king to the throne. But Karna rejected the proposal by saying that Kunti had cast him out and he was brought up by Radha. He further said that he cannot fight against Duryodhana: he can't think of changing sides.

Yudhisthira bids the Kauravas farewell and the Pandavas start their journey. Krishna smiles at the rejection of Karna and predicts that the war will bring an end to the eon. Kunti approaches Karna and asks him to take sides with the Pandavas. But Karna rejected her by saying that she has deprived him of his dues as a kshatriya and it would be shameful to change sides now. Karna further promises that he will spare the Pandavas but will fight with Arjuna. This scene is significant because it lays interesting information like Revelation of a secret by Kunti, offering the kingdom to Karna and Karna's subsequent rejection.

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that the Mahabharata is a great Indian Epic,whose relevance could still be felt in the present time. Down the ages it will flow like a turbulent river carrying away the lessons on dharma, philosophy and worldly wisdom. Each episode of the great epic tells us tales of the ancient India, which has enriched our rich culture.

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■ ■ ■

Breaking the Binary of 'Good Woman' and 'Bad Woman' through Feminist Revision of Surpanakha's Character in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*

Priyanka Bharali

> *"What cannot be said above all must not be silenced but written."*
>
> (Derrida 2)

'Feminist Revision' of mythology is one of the major premises of feminist literary criticism which has been launched as an academic discipline in the early 1970s with the rise of the second wave of the feminist movement. Since the second half of the twentieth century, many feminist writers have started to ask "new questions of old texts" through their retellings (Tuttle184). Myth and mythological stories have always been interpreted from an androcentric[1] point of view where women have been given a secondary place only.

In India, the two great epics : The Ramayana and The Mahabharata have been considered as the great sources of

mythological stories. These two books are not only worshipped as religious texts, but also considered as social treatises that have set up the norms and values of the society, which have been followed by the Indian patriarchal society till today. In these two religious texts, women are either completely ignored or mostly seen as carriers of men's community values. According to Vinita Agrawal,

> The two major Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were written by men in the patriarchal system... Women were not allowed to read or hear the scriptures as per the rules across all classes of the society. This gave the men immense freedom where the women lost any chance to disagree to anything that was being addressed and thus, created enough monopoly to shape the mythological characters as per the will of the men. (Agrawal)

Thus, the scriptures perpetuated gender roles for women which women were unable to resist. Women were seen as the epitome of the Hindu ideal women as dictated by patriarchy. They were filled with loyalty for their husband's family even in the time of hardship.

While the name 'Sita' has been used to indicate ideal, good woman in Indian society, the name 'Surpanakha' is used as a 'cuss' word to refer to those women who do not fit into the typical definition of a 'good woman'. In order to secure cultural hegemony and establish the binary opposition of 'good woman' and 'bad woman' the male discourses of traditional Ramayana have "imposed patriarchal ideologies on women by constructing the 'Sita-Surpanakha' dichotomy" (De 2). As Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, asserts that 'gender' is a constructed identity, similarly, the concept 'good woman/ bad woman' is also constructed by the society. In her article, "The Good Woman vs The Bad Woman: A Brief History", Orpheus Sen defines the good woman - bad woman concept like this:

> The good is often associated with women who adhere to the norms set by the society, and are known as 'traditional' whereas the 'bad' is associated with women who defy the norms and attempt to rise against the popular familial

structure based on patriarchy…patriarchy wants women to be modern, yet follow the norms that are specified for them, with respect to their attires, education, marital practices, societal contribution, and sexuality. (Sen)

Thus, women are categorised into the binaries of good and bad in society which influences their attitude too. In Indian society, the idea that a woman is good or bad is mainly dependent on her sexual choice along with her behavior, dress code, etc. Women are always expected not to be open about their sexuality and those who do not adhere to this norm, are considered 'immoral' or 'impure' or 'fallen' women by the patriarchal society.

Surpanakha, Ravan's famous sister in Ramayana is one of those women who dared to go against the traditional norms by the open display of her sexual desire. Her character showed the traits of a 'modern courageous woman' in the epic age itself. But the dominated society of that time had limited her behavior by chopping off her nose. Pushpa Kurup writes about Surpanakha,

Surpanakha simply doesn't fit into the patriarchal mould. She's neither dependent nor demure, neither self-effacing nor altruistic, neither meek nor soft-spoken. On the contrary, she's independent, self-willed, bold, fearless and demanding. She sees even the best of men as her equals. Such qualities simply cannot be tolerated, even in a beautiful woman. If a plain or ugly woman shows such audacity she must be cut down to size. (Kurup)

However, different stories of Surpanakha have been passing down from generation to generation. Whether Surpanakha was ugly or beautiful, the story regarding her mutilation for her open sexual desire is still popular in the 21st-century Indian society which continues to dominate women based on those ancient notions. On one hand, she was punished for her courage to express her sexual desire to Ram; on the other hand, she was blamed as the perpetrator of the war between Ram and her brother Ravan. Mahitha Kasireddi comments that "the kind of punishment that was meted out to her

was typically casteist and patriarchal" and she was "a victim of the regressive Hindu social structure" (Kasireddi). Surpanakha is commonly perceived today as an ugly, untamed, brutal, brazen demon and is also called the 'Helen'[2] of Lanka.

However, in post-modern literature, Surpankaha's character has been presented in a completely new way by different mythological fiction writers. Through their retellings, the writers have distorted the long-established image of Surpanakha and given a new shape to her character. They have provided many interpretations by transforming Surpanakha's character from a 'demon' to a 'woman'. Anindita De notes,

> They have discovered many hidden shades of Surpanakha who is nothing but a fearsome demon in Valmiki Ramayana and also have questioned patriarchal prejudices through her eyes. In their retellings, she has been represented as a love-thirsty woman who has been mutilated by patriarchy for her bold expression of her erotic desires. (De 1)

Moreover, in her article, "The Untold Story of Surpanakha", Pallavi Thakur poses some very significant questions like, "what circumstances have made a person 'bad'? Why our sutras have no major description of Surpanakha?... Why don't we think that Rama and Lakshman were unfair to her and insulted her, causing the rage? Who is Surpanakha for you – a bratty woman or a liberated feminist of her times or a mere victim...?" (Thakur) and the post-modern feminist mythological fictions based on Surpanakha's character have given the space to the readers to think about those questions.

Kavita Kane is one of those post-modern feminist mythological fiction writers, who has given a new interpretation to Surpanakha's character in her novel *Lanka's Princess*. In one of her interviews, Kane expresses that in the novel, she has depicted Surpanakha as a woman whose story needs to be told. As Kane states, "In *Lanka's Princess*, I have humanised a demonised character, showing that Meenakshi just had shades of grey, and focused on how she became Surpanakha. I've fleshed out her character, through Ravan, Sita, Ram, and Lakshman" (qtd. in Kuenzang).

Kane attempts to reintroduce the bold Surpanakha in today's society in a new way so that modern women can rethink about her character from a different perspective. Kane has given a new dimension to this character by going deep into her psyche and portrays her as a victim more than a villain. Kane challenges the conventional vilification of Surpanakha through her novel. Kane introduces Surpanakha by her real name as Meenakshi whose eyes are "as golden and graceful as a fish's" (5). She was born to Vishravas, a rishi belonging to the Pulastya clan, and Keikesi belonging to a demon clan, and thus their children carried the blood of both rishi and demon clans. From the beginning of the novel, Surpanakha is shown as bold, but a neglected child first for 'being a girl' and then for 'showing manlike traits being a girl'. Right from her childhood, she was shamed because of her gender, body, colour, choice, and desire. Her mother Kaikesi was disappointed when she heard that she gave birth to a girl child. Kane describes her reaction: "It was a daughter, not a son, her heart sank, her aspirations drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears" (1). Keikesi wanted a son, but later she would not want her daughter to behave like a son. From her birth, emphasis is given to the physical aspects of Surpanakha. According to her mother, she is 'quite ugly', 'scrawny' and 'darker' (3). On the very first day of her birth, Keikesi was worried thinking about her marriage: "How is this dark monkey going to bring us good fortune? No one will ever marry her" (3).

In the novel, Kavita Kane has described Meenakshi alias Surpanakha's entire life journey from her childhood to her adulthood and beyond. She has brought out all the issues that have contributed to Meenakshi's transformation from a love-thirsty girl to a rebellious woman later in her life. Growing up in the shadow of her three brothers, who were destined to win wars, fame, and prestige; Meenakshi's life was filled with misery, hatred, and revenge. Kane focuses on the emotions and pain Surpanakha goes through in the novel. Since her childhood, she is neglected by both her parents. While Ravan was her mother's favorite, Vibhishan was her father's. Only Kumbhakarna, her middle brother, was close to her. However,

out of all the miseries and struggles, she rose to fight for her rights. Kane's Surpanakha is not a meek, feeble woman. She has subverted the conventional societal construct of determining a woman biologically, which is considered as the ideal feminine role of bearing children. Her boldness can be seen when she fights with some boys to protect her brother Vibhishan. In a society, usually, it is accepted that a brother can save his sister since his sister as a girl is always weak, but in Surpanakha's case, it is a girl who has saved her brother: "I saved Vibhishan." (5). But, instead of praising her for her courage, her mother taunted her for fighting with boys being a girl: "Vibhishan is a boy and he's older to you. He doesn't need your protection" (5). Kane has described another incident when Surpanakha fought with her elder brother Ravan as he killed her pet. Her mother again took Ravan's side and condemned her for not behaving like a girl: "Why can you not behave like a girl? Always fighting and squabbling, hitting boys, and throwing stones. And scratching the eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha, that's the right name for you, you monster!" (9). After hearing her mother's blatant words, Surpanakha screeched out of anger and pain. She echoes the voice of a fearless, self-defensive independent woman when she replies to her mother: "Yes, I am a monster! If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these (her nails)!! I am Surpanakha!" (9).

Kavita Kane goes deep into Surpanakha's psyche and narrates the events that impact her character transformation. From the beginning of the novel to the end, she goes through many mental, emotional, physical, and social violations that transform her from the innocent, beautiful, love-thirsty Meenakshi to Surpanakha, an evil woman 'as hard as nails' who uses her long, sharp nails to protect herself. Her inferiority complex because of her dark skin grows with time. She becomes more alienated from her own family members. She grows resentment towards them. Kane has captured all those moments in an engaging manner in the novel.

The incident that had brought most defining transformation to Surpanakha's character is the killing of her husband by her brother Ravana. This incident drives her mad and heightens her fury for her

brother. Surpanakha believed that it is only her husband who truly loved her. She completely devoted her body and soul to Vidyujiva. Ravan was initially against the marriage between Surpanakha and Vidyujiva. Ravan doubted that Vidyujiva did not love Surpanakha; he was just using her to usurp Ravan from his throne. But Ravan had to agree to their marriage when Surpanakha blackmailed him that she will tell Mandodari (Ravan's wife) about how Ravan raped Rambha, the daughter-in-law of Kuber when he raided and conquered Lanka. Here, Surpanakha has threatened the male-dominated world by blackmailing Ravan. Anita Sing asserts that "society practices double standards - men can express their sexual desires. It is considered normal and natural but for women, it is profane, immoral, and transgressive behavior that is to be kept in check and control" (Sing 167). In mythological stories, a man could have many wives, but a woman could marry one man only. Even after their husband's death, women were not allowed to enter into second marriage. But in her novel, Kane through Surpanakha questions the double standards practice of the society. Moreover, Surpanakha was married to a man whom she loved. At that time, it was very unusual for a woman to marry whom she loved. Therefore, her mother says, "You are marrying the man you love. It's a privilege few have." (128). However, Surpanakha had to fight with everyone in her family to get that 'privilege'. Kavita Kane has clearly expressed Surpanakha's thought: "I had to fight for it… I had to fight for him, for our lives, for us both" (128). Kane further writes: "Her mother had not approved of her choice either, but not that Meenakshi cared for her opinion" (128). Meenakshi did not care for either her brother or mother's opinions and got married to Vidyujiva. However, after few years of their marriage, Ravan killed Vidyujiva on a battlefield. Surpanakha was so much in love with Vidyujiva that she was not ready to accept that Vidyujiva was a traitor. According to her, the kingdom is more important for Ravan than his sister's feelings. Kavita Kane has penned down Surpanakha's reaction like this: "She felt cold all over . . . She shuddered, putting her hands to her face. 'For which he had to be killed?' she gasped, her face slack with shock and fury. 'How do I

know it to be true? You never gave him a chance to live and to explain... '" (167-168)

However, Kavita Kane does not make it clear in the novel whether Vidyujiva really loved Surpanakha or he had just used her as a tool to reach Ravan. It was not easy for a woman to accept the death of her husband in her brother's hand. None of her family members stood with her and provide her with any comfort or solace: "They had left her with nothing, except with a vicious determination to seek solace through vengeance" (Kane 175). After losing her husband, she left behind everything in Lanka, and went to the *Dandaka1* forest along with her son Kumar. All these events in her life contribute to her transformation from Meenakshi to Surpanakha: "From henceforth she was Surpanakha: she was shrugging off the cloak of Meenakshi forever as she left the shores of Lanka" (179). In the forest, she was raising her only son Kumar to be a warrior so that he could take revenge for his father's death, but unfortunately, she lost her son too as he was killed one day in the forest.

Surpanakha's mutilation is one of the crucial incidents in the epic, Ramayana. Kane has used the same episode in her novel too. But through this episode, she has given the space to her readers to think if Surpanakha really deserved that punishment for expressing her desire or Lakshman chopped off her nose to control their own desire for her since she was in the form of a very attractive woman. Kane opens up the possibility to interpret this episode from a different angle. When Surpanakha was madly searching for her son's murderer in the *Dandak* forest, she saw two princes, Ram and Lakshman there and got captivated by their charm and beauty. She immediately feels a sexual desire. This desire is considered as the greatest sin of Surpanakha and makes her an immoral woman in the Ramayana. But in her novel, Kane has treated her desire as a woman's natural desire. As depicted in the novel,

> ... a spurt of anger prompted her to ask, why be ashamed? She had reasoned with herself, the desires she felt. She had done nothing to make herself feel ashamed. In fact, she told herself without much conviction, that she wanted

it. She wanted those two men just as she had wanted Vidyujiva. She wanted to share something, to blot out this awful loneliness... That was the kind of help she wanted and yet how few could or would give her that? In solitude, one welcomes any living thing. In complete loneliness even a certain tenderness can be born. (195)

After her husband's death, Surpanakha had spent a lonesome life for years as a widow. Therefore, it is natural for her to feel such desire when she saw Ram and Lakshman: "She could not run away from herself, from her desires", and her boldness to express her bodily desire makes her character unique and strong (194). No doubt, Surpanakha initially felt an emotion of shame for lusting after two young men at her age: "She shut her eyes in shame and grief", but she also needed some solace that she could find in lust, and feverishly wanted men to fill in the lonely hours (194). She recalled what her grandmothers taught her "…there was no shame in desiring a man…a self-assured woman be comfortable with her flowing urges and desires" (194).

Surpanakha wanted "sexual intimacy with either of the two men to dissipate the loneliness she felt after Vidyujiva's death" (Dirghangi & Mohanty 13). However, when Surpanakha finally expressed her desire to them, as Kane shows in the novel, both the brothers play with her feelings. Ram rejected her saying that his wife Sita is already with him, so he cannot take another woman. But since Lakshman's wife is not with him, she can approach him. But Lakshman also rejected her saying the fact that even though he was alone, he was married to Urmila, who was waiting for him in Ayodhya. Lakshman told her to approach Rama again suggesting that he was just a mere servant to his brother Rama and she deserved better, so she must convince Rama. Surpanakha realised that both the brothers were mocking her. Kane has described this episode in an empathic way that readers sympathise with Surpanakha for her condition: "She was confused, looking from one brother to the other: there was a certain tension in the air and suddenly Surpanakha realised that both of them were laughing at her, reeling her to and fro like a toy, like a

mere means of amusement…She stood in the middle and watched the two brothers, handsome and cruel, grinning and poking fun at her" (Kane 200). This made her furious, but at the same time she felt herself vulnerable too: "Were she and her emotions so frivolous so as to be played with and to be sniggered at so openly?" (200). Then she noticed Sita who was quiet even after seeing another woman being ridiculed by her husband and brother-in-law. In the rage of rejection and humiliation, she tried to attack Sita but was stopped by Lakshman. Ram ordered Lakshman to mutilate her as a punishment which will be a reminder for her dishonourable crime. This episode of mutilation of Surpanakha "sheds light on the Hindu attitude towards female sexuality in relationship to polarities like pure and impure, 'good woman' and 'bad woman'" (Dirghangi & Mohanty 14). Ram labeled Surpanakha as 'unvirtuous' because she did not hide her desire. However, after being humiliated by Ram and Lakshman, Surpanakha ran to her brother Ravan and tried to convince him to avenge for the heinous crime that the princes had committed. She narrated the dreadful scene to him, but at the same time she did not forget to describe the extraordinary beauty of Sita as she knew hearing about Sita's beauty, he would certainly take some action. Moreover, she is the same Sita whom Ravan lost in her swayamvar to Ram. So, it can be thought that Ravan abducted Sita not only to avenge his sister's mutilation, but to take his own revenge too. But in the original text Ramayana, Surpanakha is only blamed for the war between Ram and Ravan, ignoring all other possible reasons responsible for the war. It is Kavita Kane, who keeps it open for the readers to decide who was really responsible for it.

Thus, in *Lanka's Princess*, Kane has wonderfully described the life of Surpanakha exploring the other side of her character. She has dismantled the previous image of Surpanakha given by the original Ramayana and challenged the epic's explicit dharmic formulations of the binary of 'good woman' and 'bad woman'. Surpanakha was a resilient woman with many qualities to admire. Pretty Terangpi in her article "Subverting Androcentrism and Voicing the Silenced in Kavita Kane's *The Lanka's Princess*" remarks,

By attributing her with human emotions, Kane cuts through the binary structure prescribed for women by basically emphasizing the idea that she is a human first who can love, hate, and have compassion just as any other being, thereby attempting to unarmour the inhuman Myth attributed to her (Terangpi 107).

Moreover, while the original epic presented a singular perspective for Surpanakha's character by labeling her as an immoral, unvirtuous and contemptible woman, Kane's alternative retelling gives another new perspective by portraying her as a bold and independent woman who wants to assert her individuality, fights for her own rights and take her own independent decisions. This gives a different perspective to her character and to the existing narrative as well.

Endnotes

1. Androcentrism basically refers to the general tendency to center the world around men's needs and perspectives while pushing women's desire and aspiration to the periphery.

2. In Greek mythology, Helen, the most beautiful woman of Greece is considered as the indirect cause of the Trojan War

3. *Dandaka* is the name of a forest mentioned in the ancient Indian text *Ramayana*. It is also known as *Dandakaranya*, *aranya* being the Sanskrit word for 'forest'.

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■ ■ ■

Arthur Miller and the Salem Witches: A Study of his Re-imagining the Hysterical Episode as Part of the American Myth in his play, *The Crucible*

Priyanka Bharali

As part of a giant structure encircling American myth, the retelling of one of the devastating episodes of history i.e. the Salem witch trials, is what incorporates Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as a serious historical play. In all its details and characterizations, the play involves the ruthless political and social dynamics that worked upon the people. It resulted in a greater oppression over the mental and physical state of individuals, which lead to a series of "mass hysteria". Accusations, vengeance, spectral evidences, political scandals and the fear of the "unknown", are what rendered the witch trials to further its deadly judgements. This issue of witch-hunting, its further association with the power dynamics of the State, and as such its position in the American literary history rendering a political myth is

very vividly expressed in *The Crucible*. By revisiting the role of women in the play, one can analyse how this form of irrational behaviour has its source not only within psychology, but also emerges out of political and social instability. In Northrop Frye's words expressed in his work "Myth, Fiction and Displacement", myth deals "not with the world that man contemplates, but with the world that man creates" (Frye 598). Similarly, the town of Salem and its people represented a larger myth signifying a socio-political dilemma, gripped between the public and private, the good and the evil, justice and morality. *The Crucible*, as the title suggests becomes a test of goodliness, of virtue as well as a challenge towards the established faith and moral order.

Inspired by the communist witch hunts of Joseph McCarthy, in the 1950s, Miller rephrases the seventeenth century myth of Salem in its repressive and oppressive space. The Salem witch trials are one of America's most notorious events of mass hysteria that signifies the dangers of religious extremism, isolationism, false accusations and lapses in due process. The accused being mostly women, the trials resulted in the deaths of many innocents and created a sense of utter bewilderment and horror across the continent. In *The Crucible*, the antics of some sportive teenage girls are twisted and mould by sensitive adult minds, resulting in a satanic conspiracy. Before long, in the wave of mass hysteria, it seems as though half the Massachusetts colony has been either imprisoned or hanged. The Puritan community along with its authoritarian State council which includes also the Church rendered a series of irrational belief systems and conventions which was partly the direct influence of their strict religious fanaticism. This includes the hunt for "witch" i.e. anything that seems unknown and peculiar by the established community, in order to cleanse the society from the evil and its corruption. However, in *The Crucible*, Miller recreates a different version of the historic myth by representing women in a very contradictory way which involves both their suffering as well as their rebellion against the so-called moral order of the State.

The aim of this paper is to analyse as of how Miller has inculcated the idea of re-imagining the community of a historically notorious Salem in *The Crucible*. Miller has in a way turned the table upside down through his narrativity, where the "witches" are battling not just against a politically overshadowed region, but, are also in full force to overthrow each other over simple human emotions and sentiments. The paper aims to delve into the particular corners of the text where the voices of the supposedly accused seems to be at its peak, and where social and political power appears to collide, thus, resulting in an absolute devastating episode of mass hysteria. Edward Soja's postmodern geographical theory on space sheds light into the particular aspect of a community driven by political, social and cultural entanglement, which has been duly connected with the scenario of Salem in *The Crucible*. The major historically significant witch-hunting i.e. the Salem Witch Trials has been given a new shape and form in the text, where the "witches" have been presented in all glory, with their follies and foibles, and most importantly as characters who have a choice to make on their own.

In Act I, we are introduced to the ailing Betty Parris, whose mysterious illness becomes a burning topic over the town. Readers are already hinted towards a growing sense of irrationalism in Salem, as Doctor Griggs sends a message to Reverend Parris to "look to unnatural things" to get the gist of this disease. Parris discovered his daughter Betty, his niece Abigail Williams and some other girls dancing in the forest, which he believes as a sign of trafficking with the spirits. Here, the idea of the "forest" as a space of the otherworld is evident, as the narrator initially describes : "The American continent stretched endlessly west, and it was full of mystery for them. It stood dark and threatening, over their shoulders night and day, for out of it Indian tribes marauded from time to time... And the Salem folk believed that the virgin forest was the Devil's last preserve, his home base and the citadel of his final stand" (Miller 14-15).

The myth surrounding a "forest", a product of nature, is often associated as the dwelling of the devil and is also seen as a common dwelling of the "witch" in popular media like TV shows, cartoons,

fairy-tales etc. As viewers and readers, we can interpret it in terms of the politics of inclusion and exclusion of anyone found with certain different traits or qualities that doesn't sync with the established norms of the authority. Here it is important to note that Tituba, the Black slave from Barbados, becomes the "other" for the rest of them, since her identity differs from the common mass. She is the first victim of this witch-hunting, who falls into the trap of accusations laid by Abigail Williams. The exotic Barbados songs of Tituba are already seen as a force that speaks beyond the living. The role of Tituba is significant in expressing the community's insecurity against people not of their kind, people belonging to different race of which they know little of. She was an outsider, a mystery unknown to the patriarchal State that made her an easy target to prey.

Personal revenge carried out the chain of hysterical outcries of which everybody became a part. Reverend Parris's own doubts of seeing a dress lying on the grass, someone running naked, a kettle with a frog in it, comes from his own part of his extreme religious fanaticism. He is worried that his "ministry's at stake", which reflects his insecurity for his social position and wealth. As a part of the Church, he is seen exercising his power over the mass by being a part of the scandalous witch-hunt in order to continue his control over the gentry. We are already given a bigger motive of the mass hysteria that attacked Salem, as the narrator says :

> **Long-held hatreds of neighbours could be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible's charitable injunctions. Land-lust which had been expressed before by constant bickering over boundaries and deeds, could now be elevated to the arena of morality; one could cry witch against one's neighbour... suspicions and the envy of the miserable towards the happy could and did burst out in the general revenge. (Miller 17)**

In some sort of way, this hysteria became "pretence", a word that recurs throughout the play. Ironically, act I ends in Tituba's confession of being a part of the Devil's work and thus, further creating the concept of "naming names". Reverend Hale considers her as

God's instrument to discover the Devil's agents, as the "chosen one" to help in cleansing Salem. Tituba's confession can be seen as a form of subjugation by the colonists, where she felt her isolated black identity, but, her accusing other women and naming more names can also be seen as the power that she felt over others when she was declared as the one chosen by God. The most striking character was Abigail Williams who created a series of illusion and threats that spread like an epidemic, out of personal hatred and jealousy. Abigail's takeover can be represented as one form of power play against the existing patriarchal Puritan community that manifested truths for its own profit, in terms of ruling and governing.

The end of Act I is the beginning of the disaster that Salem was heading into, as we see Abigail and Betty chanting names after names of the so-called agents of Devil. It is interesting to note that, the accused were commonly the people that either have a lowly social status, or someone who is a threat to the established community and its practices. Sarah Good is a woman of about sixty who "sleeps in the ditches"; whereas John Proctor, a local farmer, doesn't like the smell of "authority". His less visits on Sabbath Days and his despise for Reverend Parris' hypocritical preaching, enlisted him as an anti-social being. Speaking against the State and the Church, the two poles of the Massachusetts colony, would imply as an act of blasphemy against God's rules. The narrator says: "The witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn towards greater individual freedom" (Miller 16).

The authorities frightened the girls into admitting that they have seen witches, using McCarthy-era parlance i.e. "naming names". However it is ironical that the power shifts from the political and religious authority to the hands of a few teenage girls. The ministers and priests, under the sway of their religious and overtly stern political principles got mislead. The necessity to balance their traditional and political dominion made them to accept the witch-hunting programme, thus, furthering more catastrophes. Here, politics is seen as a force that is not independent, but something that has its claws on all individual

minds: "A political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence. Once such an equation is effectively made, society becomes a congeries of plots and counterplots, and the main role of government changes from that of the arbiter to that of the scourge of God" (Miller 38).

Sowing fear and ruining lives under the guise of seeking the "truth" is what led Salem to its downfall. The community-wide fear overwhelming logic and individual thought ended up justifying its own existence. It is a case of fear feeding on fear itself. To explain why everybody was afraid, the community started believing that the fear must have legitimate origins. Mass hysteria in *The Crucible* became an allegorical tool of representing the witch-hunting myth, an unconscious means of expressing the resentment and anger suppressed by strict Puritan society. It showed how religious fervour fuels hysteria, thus, sacrificing justice and reason. Abigail pleads to Proctor: "I never knew what pretence Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot!" (Miller 30).

The Deputy Governor "promises" hanging if the accused don't confess; an act of the political power dynamics asserted by the State in order to maintain its hold over the people, ideologically. The theologically upright society made women a target, especially those belonging to the lowly section i.e., people like Tituba and Sarah Good who was a slave and a beggar respectively. Parris is ordained and "the light of God" is within him, which makes Proctor an enemy of the common religion for hating him. This signifies repression of one's liberty to speak or chose one's own path to freedom, from the entanglements of such a suppressive social sphere.

In Act III, in the General Court the proceedings are carried out by Danforth and Hawthorne, through the girls' testimony, as they believe that it is God's own voice which is speaking through them. However, the shy and meek Mary Warren embodies the weakness of a teenager succumbing to the most heinous form of peer pressure. Abigail and the girls accused Mary of witchcraft to prevent her from

testifying against them. Mary's confession became a threat to them and they slyly created their act of "pretence" once again. They became hysterical and claimed that she sends her spirit out in the form of a yellow bird to attack them, and started mimicking everything that Mary said. Shortly, the emotion is so intense that Miller writes the stage direction as: "She and all the girls run to one wall, shielding their eyes. And now, as though cornered, they let out a gigantic scream, and Mary, as though infected, opens her mouth and screams with them" (Miller 103).

It is notable how Miller describes Mary's behaviour as an infection received from the other girls. She yielded to the collective sense of fear and guilt, which ultimately lead her to accuse Proctor as "the Devil's man". Miller finds a motive for the young girls in adolescent rebellion and sexual transgression, which were larger manifestations of the tight authoritarian regime of the Massachusetts colony. Although there is enough evidence to say that Abigail and the others acted out of deliberate conscience, a deeper study would look into their individual minds to produce more meanings. Abigail is an orphan, and the spurned lover of Proctor who demands a "soft word" from him. Her desire for him leads her subconsciously to seek vengeance, persuading the girls to "cry out" against Elizabeth. Mary is often violated by Proctor through his orders and threats, which she sees as a form of subjugation. After being an official of the court, she explicitly demands Proctor more civil behaviour, which is in her part an attainment of power and position.

In Freudian terms of the Id, the Ego and the Superego, the hysteria fuelled by Abigail became the representation of her baser desires i.e., the Id. Similarly, Proctor embodies the Ego i.e., he conceives the reality as it is, which made him utter that "God is dead". The whole community fallen under the sway and horror of witch-hunting, is a pure implication of the working of their subconscious mind under an absolute "repression" by the State and authority. Abigail's sexual transgression subverts the Puritan regime's uphold ideas and principles regarding sin and morality. She stood out from the community and refused in her part to be another Puritan puppet,

thus involving herself in an act of rebellion against everyone else. Thomas P. Adler in his essay *Conscience and Community in An Enemy of the People and The Crucible* states: "If the repressive and closed Puritan society somehow made her conclude that her sexual stirrings were shameful and peculiar to herself alone, Abigail discovered in the sexual act that these were normal and universal human feelings, that if she was depraved, then underneath they were all depraved, only acting as if they were among the elect whom God had saved" (Adler 95).

Reverend Hale entered into the plot with books "weighted down by authority" and later realizing the blood on his head, prophesizes the value of life over martyrdom. The inability to judge "what no one has ever seen" by the authority of Danforth and Hawthorne, reflects the duality that comprises the Puritan Salem i.e., society and space. Salem is in the grasp of a tightly packed society who has already created a closely structured moral and religious space to dwell upon. Those spaces also became the medium that governs the patterns of behaviour of the people. From the theological space, they have built upon an ideology of "exclusion and prohibition" to survive. This very much fuels the idea of the myth behind the Salem witch trials as Thomas P. Adler further states: "Those who felt the least rebellion against the Establishment were almost forced, then, to channel their own guilt into accusations demonizing the Other" (Adler 92).

Danforth explicitly remarks that a person is either with the court or he must be counted against it, and there is no road between. Edward Soja in his essay *History: Geography: Modernity*, talks about the three abstract dimensions that comprise all facets of human existence i.e. space, time and being. He further states: "Each of these abstract existential dimensions comes to life as a social construct which shapes empirical reality and is simultaneously shaped by it" (Soja 25).

The temporality of the Puritan Massachusetts signifies their extreme hardships to maintain a communal space, free from any other form of external threat or misgivings to their devoted religious foundations. The idea of "being" is strictly determined through the practices they had. They believed that they hold the candle which

would light up the world. A continuous sense of repression of one's natural instincts and such basic structures may erupt as a form of unconscious rebellion towards the authority. *The Crucible* can be seen as such turmoil among the individual minds, where the act of living within an oppressive social space heightened their fears and frustrations, and rendered them as firm believers of the witch-hunting myth which is strictly seen as an act directly connected to some sort of "purification".

The juxtaposition of the political and the religious, i.e., the Church and the State, offered Parris, Danforth and Hawthorne a greater cause to maintain the power structure over the common mass. Danforth claims: "But witchcraft is *ipso facto*, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it? The witch and the victim. None other" (Miller 90).

The extreme religious necessity of a group of community that migrated from England to America rests upon their ideological status of being "one". Their self-denial, their purposefulness, their suspicion of all vain pursuits, their hard-handed justice, was altogether perfect instruments for the conquest of a space. In *The Crucible*, this form of a singularity is seen to be overthrown by a group of new younger-generation girls, who are aware of their growth as flawed-humans. The mass hysteria in this play, can also be regarded as a form of "outcry" within the subconscious as well as the conscious mind, in order to seek the "truth" that the community has long been holding onto. The accuser and the accused both, thrives for a space within themselves, to meet their demands and propagations. The concept of the "witch" i.e., someone having a power that others don't, was always a source of terror for the patriarchal order in case it tries to overthrow the dominant regime. Apart from the traditional definition of a woman practicing magical stuffs, the connotation of a "witch" is more complex and broader. In a place like Salem, woman having knowledge of anything other than the common household chores and religious devotion was looked up as a threat to the higher authority, which was partially the reason of such misleading irrational beliefs

like "witch-hunting". Hence, the myth was not only religious, but also had its claws on the politics of the time. The narrator specifically shows Salem in its most rigid form:

> No one can really know what their lives were like. They had no novelists- and would not have permitted anyone to read a novel if one were handy. Their creed forbade anything resembling a theatre or 'vain enjoyment'. They did not celebrate Christmas, and a holiday from work meant only that they must concentrate even more upon prayer. (Miller 14)

The role of women in either way proves to be what comprises of the necessity to uphold the dominion by the greater patriarchal State, as well as the importance of going against it. Miller has relocated the witch-hunting myth by putting women like Abigail in a position where she can speak and act on her own will, and has also presented women in their worst forms, as liars and victims. Women in *The Crucible* are seen to be the centre, the power-holder, and are also simultaneously represented as the harbinger of destruction. However, it can be said that the former is more applicable in case of central characters like Abigail Williams who challenged the doctrines of Puritanical principles and conventions. The "witch-hunting" propaganda backfired on the authority themselves, and led to the execution of many innocents out of the blue. However, this conflict of the political and the personal remained intact, as the State carried out its instillation of fear and terror among the individuals, especially women, in terms of practices outside of their moral and civil codes. This reimagining and readdressing the myth of witch hunting in Salem can definitely be considered as somewhat allegorical to put forward a picture of a society in crisis under McCarthy's reign. Northrop Frye remarks:

> Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*....deals with the Salem witch trials in a way that suggested McCarthyism to most of its original audience. This relation in itself is allegorical. But if *The Crucible* is good enough to hold a stage after McCarthyism has become as dead an issue as the Salem

> Trials, it would be clear that the theme of *The Crucible* is one which can always be used in literature, and that any social hysteria can form its subject matter......As so often happens in literature, the only explicit clue to its mythical shape is provided by the title. (Frye 604-605)

The colony of Massachusetts witnessed the danger of democracy when a society is disoriented and estranged. Instead of uniting those fragments, the authority decided to capitalize on them, thus, hoisting themselves into prominence by appealing to the deep-rooted fears and superstitions of the common mass. Just like the title, the private and the public melted into the crucible, only to come out as chaos in the overall social structure of Salem. Hysteria became a political myth and a test to seek the "truth unknown", as Miller considers and reconsiders it as a hope for "the new sun" that would finally emerge after this period of crisis.

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■ ■ ■

Comprehending Narrative Restructuring of Myth : A Study of Dan Brown's *Inferno*

Raginee Mahanta

A symbolic narrative of unknown origin that presumably relates actual events and that which is especially associated with religious beliefs is termed as "myth". Myth is partly traditional as it is also seen to deal with place specific ideas that have been generated across generations of believers. Taking the form of a story, a myth usually tries to explain the origin of things with the aid of supernatural elements which further enables in mirroring the strengths and weaknesses of mankind. The origins of myth can most certainly be traced back to the Greek word "mythos" which is seen to connote a wide range of meanings from 'word', through 'saying' and 'story', to 'fiction'. Contrasting it with the concept of 'logos', the validity of which can be argued and demonstrated; nonetheless, the validity of myth is simply not fraught with the certainty required to make it authentic. As it is devoid of any factual basis, the word myth has become synonymous with falsehood or misconception. However, in its central modern

significance, a myth is one story in a 'mythology' — "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives." (Abrams 230). Generally, it is also observed that most myths are related to social 'rituals', yet anthropologists on the other hand, are seen to disagree as to whether it is rituals that generated the idea of myths or myths that gave way to rituals.

Dan Brown's *Inferno* deals primarily with the modern world's condition and passage towards an uncertain future, taking into account the mythic1 vision of Dante's original version of the first book of the "Divine Comedy: Inferno"*,* which invariably shows the journey undertaken by Dante himself under the prominent guidance of Virgil to the afterlife. "Overpopulation" and the ruthless inroads of the plague during the 1300s were a parallel contrast as the hellish throngs of overpopulation needs curbing only by "god's gift to man in the form of the Plague or Black Death" which killed more than one thirds of the world population. Dan Brown's book takes an unconventional form as the protagonist, Robert Langdon, finds himself mysteriously and quite interestingly involved in a huge conflict regarding the culling of the population. With all the essential twists and turns that encompass the fabric of the book, Brown unfolds a story which consistently looks into the mysteries that led "The Shade" to come up with a different solution that would render the world population impotent.

This paper is an attempt to look into how myth and narrative have been employed to present an overpowering story of mankind's imminent inroads into Hell in Dan Brown's *Inferno*. The argument in the paper runs on the lines of how the element of narrativity has been construed by Dan Brown to decode as well as revision a new quest towards hell and a denouement after. The concept of 'The Shade' is an important segment in the novel and this is another aspect

which shall be discussed to understand how the narrative traits of the plot work in Brown's *Inferno.*

Dante Aligheri's "The Divine Comedy" written in the form of verse lines, customarily narrates a personal quest of the poet, who also happens to be a character in the action of the story, towards achieving absolute knowledge and purgatory within. On the other hand, Dan Brown's *Inferno* is an unexpected quest on the part of the protagonist, which involves the action revolving around a number of characters who try to come up with a possible solution to stop the world from being, overpopulated thereby exhausting the resources within it. Brown's *Inferno* begins in the middle of things as the Prologue swiftly reveals not just the plot of his own story but also draws upon the "Inferno" of Dante. The figure of "the Shade" is introduced in the very beginning who happens to be a fleeting creature, lying hidden underground, wishing with all their might to escape entrapment only to become more and more aware that escape is not possible after reclining towards hell or the underground. Robert Langdon, the Harvard Symbologist and the protagonist who takes the readers forward with his point of view, finds himself in a strange situation at the beginning of the novel as he wakes up partially in a hospital bed, with his head stitched up and his hair covered with blood. The state in which he was in, had left him unconscious and he is completely blank when he tries to recall how he ended up in this state of dishevel. When he finally wakes up to be aware of his surroundings, he is told that he is suffering from amnesia after a bullet grazed his head by the graceful Dr. Sienna Brooks. At this point, the circumstances Langdon finds himself in, itself suggests the symbolic Hell that he has already descended into; just like Dante in his "Inferno" with the only difference that Dante wilfully entered the gates of Hell to attain purgatory whereas Langdon, without any wish of his own, is now entrapped in this hellish plot.

Dante's passage through hell was not easy at all as he must follow the Roman poet Virgil where above the gates of hell are inscribed, the following words:

Through me the way is to the city dolent;
Through me the way is to eternal woe;
Through me the way among the people lost.
Abandon all hope ye who enter here.

("Inferno", Canto III)

Dante is seen to pass through even deeper circles of Hell as the course of the story in his "The Divine Comedy" progresses. There he comes across the shades of the damned and he also reflects bitterly upon Florence, his native city, which has banished him into exile and condemned him to death by burning at the stake if he ever returns. It is only after he passes through Hell and Purgatory that his cleansed aura can unite with his beloved Beatrice and journey freely to the stars and beyond. The 'Shade' in Dante's "Inferno" refers to the soul of a dead person who resides in one of the nine circles of hell. Shades are supposed to be weightless but unlike the common perception of ghosts, shades are neither translucent nor penetrable. "Tell us where you've hidden it", the voices within the precincts of hell threaten (Haag 12). But the Shade is standing then on a fine outcropping high above the terracotta rooftops of Florence. They blaze underneath him like a sea of fire, illuminating the otherwise pale landscape where giants like Giotto, Donatello, Michelangelo and Botticelli once roamed. Dante cries out, 'Guide me, dear Virgil, across the void' (Brown 21). All of a sudden, the Shade, in these final moments, is troubled by a face in the cobblestoned piazza hundreds of feet below. He sees her mournful eyes, in which he also senses a reverential undertone for what he has accomplished, a wilful acceptance that he has no choice and with prayers to aid his cause, he wishes the world to remember him not as a monstrous sinner but as a glorious saviour. Uttering his final words: "My gift is the future. My gift is salvation. My gift is Inferno." (Brown 22). Thus, whispering "Amen" he descends towards the impending abyss.

Just like Dante, Langdon also has visions in the form of a dream wherein he witnesses a scalding red river, Dante's "river of blood that boils the soul of those who through their violence injured others" (Dante 178). The difference in both these mythic dreams of Dante

and Langdon is that Langdon sees a mysterious veiled woman who reaches out her hands pleading him for help, uttering the following words: "Seek and ye shall find"; whereas Dante's dream was about his beloved Beatrice (Brown 23). At this point, Langdon has no clue about the Shade or his infernal device and all that he knows is that someone is trying to kill him with no proper reasons that he can think off. His knowledge is limited to only the justification as to why he is in the hospital and that also gives the readers a reason as to why he has to spend more than half the book running away from his pursuers and pleasantly accompanied by his mysteriously helpful stranger, Sienna Brooks. However, when he thinks deeper into the depths of the questions "Why are they trying to kill me?", the only answer that he could come up with has to do with the ancient cylinder seal he has found sewn inside his jacket. He discovers, inside the seal, a tiny self-regulating projector that displays on the nearest wall Botticelli's *Mappa dell'Inferno,* which illustrates Dante's "Inferno", crammed with microscopic figures populating the various circles of punishment, agony and pain. Since, Langdon happens to be a Professor of art history and symbology, he at once notices the variations present in this altered version of Botticelli's *Mappa dell'Inferno.* The alteration of the sequence of the circles hints upon this being a possible clue towards a solution for the present mystery.

The plot records Langdon racing through the streets and secret passageways of Florence, being chased by black uniformed soldiers with stony eyes and umlauts2 over their names along with a spike-haired female motorbike rider dressed in black leather and to add more distress to his fate, there was surveillance all the while through overhead drones. Langdon is devoid of coming into any conclusion at this point as the entire situation that he has been in so far for less than twenty-four hours is more than confusing for him to comprehend. He tries, nevertheless, to solve the mystery that has led him to come across this life-threatening quest.

The Shade, in Brown's *Inferno* is discovered to be a man named Bertrand Zobrist, a billionaire Swiss geneticist, a Dante aficionado and the owner of Dante's death mask. It is through the clues left

down by Zobrist that Langdon is able to solve the mystery of his situation in some ways, realising also, at the same time, the great danger that awaits the world at large with Zobrist's infernal device to solve the problem of overpopulation and the challenge to stop this from happening in less than twenty-four hours. Here again, Langdon realises that he most certainly represents a mere puppet in a larger skit that is being directed somewhere else because slowly and gradually he could sense that everyone he has met and connected with are not exactly the people they have so far posed to be. They are mere actors enacting their roles in a larger play wherein they purposefully rope in Langdon to figure out where Zobrist had hidden his infernal device. This inferno that Zobrist has let loose is a modern day replica of the Black Death that wrecked havoc in the 1300s. Zobrist's belief that the world is overpopulated and that it needs curbing had led him to create his own hellish prop to save the world from lacking resources and this perpetually, has rendered him blind to the tenets of sanity. He tries to reason with the 'mythic concept' that just like how the Black Death killed off a third of the European population and saved the planet from growing more in human proportion in the same way he must devise a plan in order to eliminate the exact same amount to restore the balance in the world yet again. Zobrist was also trying to challenge the WHO for not trying to do something to stop this problem of overpopulation from being a pandemic of sorts.

In Chapter 22 of Brown's *Inferno* this revelation of Zobrist accusing the WHO for not taking care of the overpopulation problem is made as Elizabeth Sinsky, director of WHO is mentioned and she in turn objects to this accusation by pointing out: "Recently we spent millions of dollars sending doctors into Africa to deliver free condoms and educate people about birth control"(Brown 144). Zobrist's reply to this is even shocking as he states: "And an even bigger army of Catholic missionaries marched in on your heels and told the Africans that if they used the condoms, they'd all go to hell" (Brown 144). This whole mention about the Catholic missionaries again throws light upon the fact that the Catholics had this belief that stopping

the flow of population is a sin and Zobrist also happens to criticise their faith. Elizabeth Sinsky later on help Langdon and reveals her role in bringing him into this labyrinthine mess of finding Zobrist's device.

Langdon here becomes aware of how The World Health Organisation was actually responsible in seeking him to find Zobrist's infernal device, so that they can deactivate it. However, another shadowy organisation called the Consortium, located on an enormous Mediterranean yacht are also seeking Langdon's help for the exact same thing. It is again interesting to note that Zobrist had hired the Consortium a year ago, before he killed himself by jumping off the Badia tower. He hired this organisation to help protect his secrets without actually ever revealing what those secrets of his were. But, the intentions behind both these organisations are different as the Consortium wishes to activate the device that Zobrist had planted somewhere while on the other hand, the WHO has plans to deactivate it. So, this revelation helps in throwing light upon how Langdon actually got kidnapped in the first place. Langdon's role is more like that of the roman poet Virgil who guided Dante through his journey to purgatory and beyond. The consortium and the WHO are representative of Dante and his quest. The character roles that can be traced back to Dante actually gets reversed or rather constantly changes back and forth so that every character in the novel fluctuates between this and that character from the original *Inferno* of Dante's. Another example of this is seen in the character of Sienna Brooks who at first resembled the kind and generous Beatrice of Dante, but towards the end of the novel she is Beatrice still, only to be portrayed as having the intentions modified and leaning more towards the villainous but well meaning intentions 3 of Zobrist, who could again be regarded as a representative of Dante himself.

Hell is one space which is constantly positioned in the narrative structure of the story in Brown's *Inferno* and it is quite intriguing to notice that the epigraph which contains the following words: "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis", does not clearly state a source

(15). Nevertheless, this probably is one message that the writer wishes to share in terms of how narratives can be manipulated to create a fiction which is feasible for the contemporary readers to relish. The concept of narrative is another segment in the paper that needs further discussion and the word narrative is generally referred to a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do. Literary forms like the novel, short story, epics and even romance in verse are all categorised as explicit narratives that is told by a 'narrator' and in the case of drama, the narrative is not told by a narrator but rather it involves direct presentation on the stage by the characters who are a part of the action within the play. It is also very interesting to note that there are quite a few lyric poems that have implicit narrative elements involved in their structural aspects.

> What is involved, then, in that finding of the "true story," that discovery of the "real story" within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of "historical records"? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of the narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity. (White 4)

In the very first chapter of his book, *The Content of Form,* titled, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", Hayden White focuses upon the role of 'narration' in historical writings; whether the concept of narration is essential in a work of history and how narration came to be a part of historical works. That 'narrative' is a natural part of 'culture' and of 'humanity' as a whole is without question true. White distinguishes the characteristics of the three kinds of historical representations: annals, chronicles and history proper, to explain the prominence of the third kind. While, the genres of annals have closure, the genres of chronicles do not; it is

the history proper which has elements of the narrative and hence, is more interesting to read. However, the demand for closure in a historical story according to White is a demand for coming into moral meanings and thereby a demand to connect the sequences of the events of the story as having moral connotations or implications. White questions the need of such moral conclusions in a narrative of history proper: "… far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experiences with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. Arising as Barthes says, between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language, narrative "ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted. And it would follow that the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself" (White 1-2).

Dan Brown's *Inferno* although not a historical narrative proper, nevertheless has incorporated the ideas of a work from the past, reversing its structural unity and by fictionalizing an event that could actually become very much real in the near future. The use of the ancient site of Florence which has a lot of symbolic significance to the text, along with the limited and celebrated artworks from the Renaissance which are the only clues, the decoding of which will solve the mystery of the situation. Florence is described as the 'old city' as it is in this place that Dante was born into and he was baptized beneath the magnificent mosaic ceiling of heaven and hell. It is in this baptistery of the mosaic ceiling in Florence that Robert Langdon witnesses a horrific scene of hell which portrays Satan as tearing and devouring the souls of dead sinners. The concept of Hell is again heightened when Sienna Brooks recalls her traumatic youthful visit to Manila, the capital of the Phillipines as the following lines from chapter 79 of Inferno express : "Manila had six hours traffic jams, suffocating pollutions and a horrifying sex trade, whose workers consisted primarily of young children, many of whom had been sold to pimps by parents who took solace in knowing that at least their

children would be fed... All around her, she could see humanity overrun by its primal instinct for survival. When they face desperation... human beings become animals" (Brown 474).

In this chapter, the revelation that Sienna Brooks is not who Langdon imagined her to be is laid bare, as she expresses how she had "run through the gates of hell" because three men were trying to chase her with lust in their eyes (475). After successfully entrapping her, they were about to strip her of all hopes but then an old woman chased them away with her knife and it was then that she thanked God and the woman for saving her. This traumatic situation led her to leave Phillipines immediately and never look back. This incident and the crowds of people she had witnessed in the streets of Manila had filled Sienna with a deep sense of concern for the impending crisis of overpopulation and her eventual discovery of Bertrand Zobrist and his writings. She regarded him a Genius and she educated herself with all his mathematical and Malthusian theories of saving the world. With Sienna's deep interest and enthusiasm in fighting the same cause as Zobrist, they both fell in love and herein, their characters resonate more of Dante and Beatrice. Zobrists optimism had attracted Sienna and his ideas from Dante about reaching Paradise only through passing the gates of hell is symbolically explained by how he wishes to give a paradise to the world by exterminating the problem of overpopulation which is already transforming the world into Hell. The fact that Zobrist is the "Shade" is again a contrast to the whole concept of 'Shade' as depicted in Dante. This is because in Dante the 'shades' are bodiless entities who are totally and forever dead whereas in Dan Brown the 'Shade' in the form of Zobrist is trapped between life and death.

Towards the end when Sienna reveals her true intentions and leaves Langdon behind as her mission of delaying Langdon's ability to solve the mystery sooner is achieved, she tries to catch up with Zobrist as the location in which the infernal device of culling the world population is released is actually an enclosed space where a concert is taking place named Topkapi Sarayi, the name of Istanbul's ancient cistern, a water supply chain which is now modernized. Zobrist

chose this space because it is a tourist attraction and a perfect spot to release his vector virus which would render the world population sterile. This was his plan all along and he successfully executed his plan. The notion of Transhumanism is deeply felt in Zobrists plan to cull the population as Transhumanism decodes the idea that is devoted to promote the research and development of robust human-enhancement technologies. The word also interestingly goes back to the tenets of humanism which in turn holds centre stage in the tenets of Renaissance.

Thus, the novel, Inferno merges both narrative and fiction to recreate a new and reversed "Inferno" of Dante with much more resonance with the cause of humanity. Brown reveals that there are three watchwords to look for in his *Inferno,* Contrapasso which means letting the punishment suit the sin as Zobrist's invention of the vector virus does not kill anyone but stops the population from spreading further. Secondly, Malthusianism wherein the notion of human population only getting bigger until it is slashed by disease, famine or war is expressed and Zobrist's praise for the Black Death is an instance of this idea. The third being Transhumanism, which calls for the manipulation of our own genetic make-up to create posthumans, which in the case of Zobrist, the invention of the vector virus to make every one sterile substantiates. All of these instances together with the references and allusions to Dante and his "Divine Comedy" suggest Brown's intentions of creating a modern day tale out of *Inferno,* in a much more horrific way. The characters he has re-created from Dante are constantly fluctuating in their intentions and this is deliberately done to render the narrative more convincing to the popular reader. The myths in Dante are altered here and there to enable the mystery in the plot to take root. The concept of the Shade and the whole trope of Hell is portrayed in Brown to further enhance the theme of overpopulation that throws light upon how the world is inching towards its own hell and thus, the text ends with a purgation achieved by the antagonist, Bertrand Zobrist as his vision to curb the world population is finally accomplished.

Endnote

i. The word 'mythic' has been used here, in order to signify the larger than life thematic totality of Dante's *Inferno*

ii. An umlaut is a word of German origin which means a mark put over a vowel to show that the pronunciation of the vowel is changed.

iii. Well meaning is a word that has been used in the paper to denote the fact that Zobrist had a good intention of saving the world by stopping it from being overpopulated, but his methods can be questioned.

iv. Renaissance first took shape in the 14th century in Italy and that is why Florence is mentioned here as a city where cultural history of celebrated art and budding artists emerged. Renaissance which means 'rebirth' ended with the Fall of Rome in the 17th century.

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The Myth of "Hustle Culture": A Study of Satoshi Kon's *Paranoia Agent*

Reetuparna Dey

> "But objects – things can also function as signs, provided they have been assigned a concept and meaning within our cultural and linguistic codes. As signs, they work symbolically – they represent concepts, and signify. Their effects are however felt in the material and social world… They regulate the social behaviour…"
>
> – Stuart Hall, *Representation*

Introduction

The term "hustle culture", being relatively new, is yet to receive a single, specific definition within academic discourses. The Merriam Webster Dictionary tried to trace its origins in an article[1] along with its counterpart, the "side hustle". In the contemporary spaces, hustle culture essentially stands for the glorified struggle of humanity to reach their perceived state of success by incessantly working to the bones, sacrificing ones psychological, emotional and physical well-being. Millennials (people born between the 1980s and early 2000s)

understand this rising trend to be an almost indelible part of their psyche. This notion of embracing workaholism has been internalised to an extent that it appears to be completely normal and acceptable. Latching on to the very structure of everyday life, hustle culture and its exaltation has become the reality of the present. The terminology may be relatively novel, but the concept originated much earlier. One example would be the propaganda ridden poster of Soviet Union (1931) urging people to work harder because "We smite the lazy workers"[2]

Japan, unfortunately, has been one of the countries which is most infamous for a specific type of death. "Karoshi" or "work to death" is a phenomenon that has plagued Japan since the mid 50s[3]. A culture that upholds values such as discipline, loyalty, punctuality and collectivism, antithetically reports numerous deaths of young workers every year. Theirs is a case of having taken the myth of hustle culture to the very extreme. This paper shall analyse this aspect of work addiction through the lens of myth creation in the urban sense. For this purpose, an anime series created by the late auteur, Satoshi Kon, titled *Paranoia Agent* (2004), will be studied closely. Consisting of thirteen episodes woven together through masterful storytelling and image play, this psychological thriller stands to shed some much needed light on the issue of workaholism, stress and the cyclical nature of the human condition that reverts back to patterns resembling the past, further re-enforcing the myth.

Text Analysis

Although *Paranoia Agent* contains a bevy of important characters, it mainly revolves around the central character – Tsukiko Sagi. The entire plot originates from her, circling back to her in the end. An overburdened Sagi is a young character designer who had successfully created the now famous cartoon dog called Maromi. Pink all over, googly eyed Maromi brings the population some much needed solace with its softness and cuteness. Maromi has become a mascot for the population at large; a sign for relaxation. But now the capitalist tendencies of her company urge Sagi for a new character. She tries and constantly fails to create something even close to

resembling her former work. As pressure builds up, she starts to crumble underneath it. One late night while returning from work, she gets attacked by someone and is hospitalized. The news spreads throughout Japan due to her fame. This cues the entry of the two detectives, Keiichi Ikari and Mitsuhiro Maniwa, who are assigned to capture the criminal responsible. On persistent questioning, the introverted Sagi finally gives description of the alleged assailant. She roughly sketches the silhouette of a school boy wearing a cap and golden in-line skates, brandishing a golden baseball bat. This, however, is not enough to convince Ikari who firmly believes that it is a made up story and that Sagi is lying. The series superficially embraces a whodunit theme from here on. But a deeper look reveals other, more serious issues.

As news channels name this alleged assailant "Shonen Batto" (roughly translates to Bat Boy) people start developing mental pictures of him based on their own imaginations. As the plot proceeds, new additions are made to the traits presumably possessed by this boy. On one hand, there is the symbol of Maromi, exuding ideas of relaxation, peace and solace; on the other hand the Shonen Batto becomes the symbol of fear and violence. But, with the passage of time, as more and more incidents of attacks and deaths keep occurring, the ideas signified by his image begin to morph. It is soon noticed that only those people (regardless of age) who find themselves absolutely cornered in life get attacked by Shonen Batto. A shrewd journalist who resorts to stalking Sagi becomes the second victim. He too is previously shown to be deep in debt. His work develops in him unethical habits of stealing stories, forcing people for interviews, stalking, breaching personal space etc. One day when he follows Sagi without consent, he gets attacked. He too seems strangely relieved after the incident.

Stuart Hall, while discussing about the meaning making process, highlights the two ways in which it takes place. Firstly, there is the formation of concept which allows for the mind to categorize and classify characteristics. This is followed by the construction of signs and codes that the society uses to translate the concept into language

(and vice versa). It can be illustrated through the example of the assailant's identity creation. The idea of the assailant first takes root into the minds of the citizens through his various media representations, leading them towards turning him into a sign for danger and later, escape. By christening him Shonen Batto they give him an amount of legitimacy and fuel to become increasingly real with time. His presence percolates into the society to such an extent that it leads to two types of problems. A young schoolboy called Yuichi Taira gets bullied and shunned by his friends and neighbours. This is because he fits into the depictions of the Shonen Batto almost perfectly. He wears a cap, owns inline skates and carries a golden baseball bat. It is only after he himself gets attacked that people believe in his innocence. Secondly, another boy dons the appearance of the Shonen Batto and becomes a copycat attacker based on his delusions. He sees himself as a saviour of the people. Shonen Batto thus transforms from being an object which attacks to a signifier which changes human behaviour significantly.

Both Shonen Batto and Maromi are but extensions of Tsukiko Sagi. She herself is portrayed as an image for success. She is good at her job. At such a young age, she has both fame and money and is, in the view of society and her jealous colleagues, living the dream life. On the surface level, she appears to remain untouched by the ills of the hustle culture. There is only the positive outcome, i.e., Maromi's creation. But it is the unbearable work pressure which pushes her to the brink, forcing her to undergo a psychosis. This is precisely what leads to the birth of Shonen Batto.

Gradually many more victims are reported. Detective Maniwa, in episode 3, comments after visiting a victim, "She looks so relieved" [21:05]. He continues by adding that in fact all the victims looked rather calm and relieved after the attack. He correctly infers that these people in the hospital welcomed this sort of an escape that the injury provided them. Here, Daniel Boorstin's concept of the "pseudo-event" comes into play. A pseudo-event may be described as an orchestrated, false event that would serve the purpose of generating desired reaction from the population. Boorstin's discourse mainly deals

with media, public relations and the creation of public image. But it can be applicable in this context as well. The appearance of Shonen Batto is comparable to a pseudo-event. In the final few episodes, it starts to become clear that the assailant is not a real person. Although there was a copycat assailant, even he is suspiciously found dead in a closed room. Just like Maromi, this serial killer was a creation of Sagi's imagination. She had in fact lied in her first interrogation. Sagi had fantasized a way out of her work environment through an imagined scenario where she is attacked and brutally hurt. This thought urges her to fabricate a scene where she indulges in self harm in order to get hospitalized. Since hustle culture looks down upon work-breaks or time-outs, employees are often reluctant to apply for leave. Oftentimes it is dire health conditions that becomes the only valid ground to hope for a rest. It is exactly for this legitimacy that Sagi finds herself blatantly deceiving an entire population into thinking that she was indeed attacked by someone.

But it is not just Sagi who embraces this modus operandi. As the series unfurls, a multitude of similar attacks seem to take place all over Japan. In one such episode (9), it appears as if the population has started to use the image of Shonen Batto as a cover up or excuse for most things. A repeatedly failing student unable to memorize formulas for his exams, a young bride who is tortured by her mother-in-law, a hospital mix-up where a woman receives the wrong fertilized egg in her womb, etc., they all have Shonen Batto's attacks ending their misery. These stories have started to become increasingly absurd. In episode 9, where these incidents are being discussed, it is actually four women gossiping away with grocery bags in hand. It soon becomes a competitive storytelling session. They start belittling the youngest women saying she should take lessons from her husband who is a professional scriptwriter. Dejected, when she reaches home, she finds her bloodied husband on the floor as he begs her to call for an ambulance. Her face instantly lights up into the broadest of smiles as she knows that it is a Shonen Batto attack. She mercilessly shakes him by his shoulders to tell her all about it, ignoring the fact that he is probably dying from all the blood-loss. The Shonen Batto and the

image of his victims has now become lucrative. One half of the population now fantasizes about getting released from their social constraints (related to work and personal life) by being assaulted, whereas the other half passionately waits for more fodder for gossip. Either way, the myth of the Bat Boy grows exponentially. It no longer relies on the actuality of the event. As mentioned earlier, this pseudo-event successfully transmogrifies and changes the behaviour of the people with or without their consent. Now they all want to conform into the narrative of the attacked and the attacker.

Episode 10 deals extensively with Japan's culture of workaholism leading to complete burnout (a state of having reached a point of severe mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion caused due to prolonged exposure to work which leads to dangerous health conditions and sometimes even death). Among one of the most demanding spaces is the animation industry which churns out anime films and series by the hundreds every year. Sources have recorded animators spending up to 400 hours per month working. This inevitably has led to many suicides and uncountable hospital visits.[4] This condition is portrayed effectively in episode 10. Revolving around one person named Naoyuki Saruta, it chronicles the systemic damage caused to the people employed within the company. Constant conversations about artists and other employees becoming ill, getting paralysed and hospitalized are heard. This episode exposes the complex hierarchy of people with their set of responsibilities stacked like dominoes. If even one of them falls, the entire structure of production comes toppling down. They are interestingly animating a pilot episode of a series titled "Mellow Maromi" where a pink Maromi gently coaxes a young baseball player into resting and releasing stress.

Saruta seems to be hit the worst from the very beginning. He is shown as missing huge chunks of his life in the hustle of getting the work done as a production manager. Amidst all this, Tsukiko's team gifts the animation team a boxful of Maromi plushies as an act of encouragement. Resting his head on a soft toy, Saruta softly dozes off, only to be rudely awoken by a car horn blaring at him. He finds himself at the steering wheel, alone in his car, on the road. As if

hypnotized by the swinging motion of a Maromi car accessory he falls asleep yet again. Aggressively slapping himself awake he is next seen on the office floor, face down on a tangled mass of wires. He has tripped on them while wearing Maromi slippers. It is as though anytime he encounters an image or form of Maromi, he is encouraged to sleep, ending up committing an unforgivable mistake every time. His ineptitude at work does not help either. He ends up erasing an artist's hours of work, forgets to inform about the deadline to another artist, and somehow does not notice a dead artist on her table and upsets the whole system. He gets harshly rebuked by his senior and finally ends up bashing this senior's head in a fit of vengeful rage. Towards the very end, he is the only one to have the finished product in his hand. But he is shown lying dead on the ground implying that he has been a victim of Shonen Batto. The video cassette is snatched from his lifeless hand by the producers who remain unperturbed by the death. They treat it as collateral damage that they are all too familiar with. This raises a question on the value assigned to human life in a society where hustle culture is the norm. Saruta is often heard frantically screaming, "It's not my fault!" [12:15]. But since the system does not allow for any human error, it is unforgiving and fatal towards the fallible.

Conclusion

Discussing about the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's theory of play in a child's world, Robert A. Segal, in *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* draws parallels between an adult's need to create and cling on to a myth among other things. They do it in order to survive the onslaught of life at large. It is done with an oblique understanding that the concerned myth is perhaps unreal, but necessary for the sole purpose of existence. Also, myth is not always treated as being imaginary. It can be a representative of a system of beliefs about events that have happened or are about to happen. As it is later on accepted by Sagi herself, she creates the myth of the Shonen Batto out of her imagination. But the entire population sincerely believes the event to be real and thus propagates the myth further. This process seeps into the very fabric of social life because it actually allows for

an escape route to take form. In an otherwise fast paced lifestyle, which disallows healthy work-life balance and discourages breaks or breathing space, a violent presence of an imagined attacker is welcomed. Although damaging and ultimately negative in nature, this seems to be the only other way out for the overworked masses. In order to balance the myth of hustle culture and the active systems that ensure its presence, another myth is created and nurtured.

Towards the very end, Sagi and the rest dismantle both Maromi and Shonen Batto from their stronghold over the entire population. On realising that these objects stand only for a temporary form of solution, they reject it. But the last few scenes of the finale end with a large screen displaying another cartoon image; this time it is a cute cat. This only implies that the myth of hustle culture is so deep-rooted and normalised that it would be nearly impossible to deconstruct or demolish it so fast. In Japan, there has been a prevalence of the "Kawaii" (cute or loveable) culture. Since the "Hello Kitty" days back in the mid-70s, Japan has tried to popularise itself in the global arena through this particular aesthetic. But in recent times, the adolescent and adult community has come up with reactionary trends to represent the complex and darker realities of the country that often get overshadowed by the cuteness overdose. Sub-cultures of "Yami-Kawaii" (sick-cute) and "Guro-Kawaii" (gory-cute) are surfacing among the masses to allow different perspectives to attain visibility. Japanese culture still stigmatizes discussions related to mental and psychological instability. With suicide cases at an all time high, these underground waves are providing agency and a much-needed platform for this oft veiled issue in Japan.

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Consumer Culture Myths : An Advertising Saga

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With the paradigm shift of locus from production to consumption, a new culture in the pretext of consumer culture has taken grip of the entire human world. Among the various factors that guide and govern the consumer culture of the contemporary times, the role of advertising is paramount. A consumer, consciously or unconsciously, to a great extent, is dependent on advertising to buy the products that he/ she needs. But whether his needs are genuine or an artificially generated feel of lack is a question that needs to be addressed. The consumer culture today is packed with a number of myths, which when critically analysed can be traced back to advertising cult. Advertising has almost normalized the myths associated with the trends of consumption, so much so that the myths have become the very essence of consumer culture. It was Jean Baudrillard, who much ahead of his contemporaries, prophesized the turn of global focus from production to consumption. Consumption, as envisaged by Baudrillard, has become a system and a way of thought in the entire modern cultural system. To quote J. P. Mayer in the Foreword to

Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structure*: "Consumption, as a new tribal myth, has become the morality of our present world. It is currently destroying the foundations of the human being, in other words, the balance which European thought has maintained since the Greeks between our mythological roots and the world of the logos" (*Consumer* ix). This paper is an attempt to examine how advertisements have been normalizing the myths in the construct of consumer culture. It will also look at some of the popular myths that are common among the consumers and how the latter responds towards these myths socially, culturally and psychologically.

The Happiness Cult

Triggering the happiness capsule in consumers is one of the chief myths in advertising discourse. The narrative of happiness, as pointed by Baudrillard, is based on a "naïve anthropology" where happiness is considered synonymous to salvation (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 49). The myth of happiness, also through advertising narrative, comes close to the myth of equality. Happiness, as an egalitarian myth, came to be measured in terms of objects and signs. The basic sign is the sign of comfort, a marker of well-being in the contemporary societies through "reduction of social misfortune" and "equalization of all desires" (49). The age-old concept of inner happiness, free of any visible markers was overtaken by a notion of happiness that stood on the pillars of equality and material possession. This was accompanied by a shift from the collective to individual principle of happiness, indicating also a shift in political stand, which demanded equality before objects and possessions. Baudrillard, in his *Consumer Society*, comments on this shift:

> The democratic principle is then transferred from a real equality of capacities, of responsibilities, of social chances and of happiness (in the full sense of the term) to an equality before the Object and other manifest signs of social success and happiness. This is the democracy of social standing, the democracy of the TV, the car and the stereo, an apparently concrete but, in fact equally formal democracy which, beyond contradictions and social inequalities,

corresponds to the formal democracy enshrined in the constitution. Both of these, the one serving as an alibi for the other, combine in a general democratic ideology which conceals the absence of democracy and the non-existence of equality.

...The implicit argument is as follows: all men are equal before need and before the principle of satisfaction, since all men are equal before the use-value of objects and goods (whereas they are unequal and divided before exchange-value). Need being indexed to use-value, we have here a relationship of objective utility or natural finality, in the face of which there is no longer any social or historical inequality. At the meat-and-drink level (use-value), there are no proletarians, no privileged individuals. (50)

A recent upsurge in consumer culture is the notion of secularism, a culture that stands secularized in terms of goods and its use value. Upholding the happiness myth, advertisers vouch for products that seem to offer equality in terms of possession. For democracy of equality to sustain in terms of possession, the same product should be available for anyone to acquire. The tag of equality in consumption is the driving force behind advertising, for instance, the fashion industry, the cosmetic industry, holiday packages and destinations are projected as equal for all consumers. Advertising thrives on the principle of equality. It projects an image of growth and affluence that becomes the corollary to democracy. This combo of the myth of abundance, affluence and happiness, as projected by advertisers camouflage the stark reality that lies behind unequal distribution. Such projection of happiness myth isolates from its ambit the poor and the underprivileged who remain outside the purview of growth and industrial system.

The commercial for Idea Cellular Network that was aired a couple of years back hints at equality in terms of possession. The ad featured Abhishek Bachchan as the principal of an elitist missionary school who bumps upon the idea of a virtual school unable to admit a

poor kid who sought admission in his school. As the seats were already filled up, the principal's idea for a virtual schooling through idea network becomes the epitome of homogeneous social growth and secularization of possession. The mobile handset in the hands of a poor kid from a remote region itself turns into a school. Thus, the ad fabricates a reality of an easily accessible environment of quality education through mobile network. This ad replicates the myth of democracy, secularization, and equality of possession, where even a poor kid has access to quality education. This ad was aired much ahead of the pandemic that made us familiar with the concept of virtual education. However, the pandemic has also proved that technological advancement only remains a myth for the poor and the underprivileged of a country like India.

Although advertising seems to be driven by the principle of equality of possession, yet differences and signs establish a deep link between monopolized structure of production and the individualistic structure of consumption. And a key component of generalized production is the consumption of differences. Although in this narrative of equality, consumption seems homogenized as the consumer appears equal in terms of consuming signs and differences, yet everything gets ruled by a code, violation of which entails punishment. An interesting example of this application of code is offered by Baudrillard of a commercial traveler who "bought the same Mercedes as his boss and was fired. He appealed against his dismissal and was granted compensation by a tribunal, but the employer did not take him back. All men are equal before objects as use-value, but they are by no means equal before objects as signs and differences, which are profoundly hierarchical" (*Consumer* 90).

Advertisers also play around the consumer's notion of status differentiation. A semiotic climate is created whereby the consumer is assured a feel of superiority on purchase of a particular product. The semiotic appeal is built round status rivalry, where the consumer buyer is made to feel scaling the ladder of prestige.

This class affinity can be strongly felt in the Hyundai Santro car ad featuring Shahrukh Khan, which too was aired in television

some time back. SRK is projected as a proud owner of a Santro car, and when a family newly shifts in his neighbourhood, who also owns the same car, a rapport is instantly built with the famous tagline "Hum Santro walen hein" (We are Santro people). The ownership of the car semiotically confers the Santro owning families a socially better status infusing in them the element of status rivalry. The ad also connotatively hints at an element of envy among those who do not own it. The owners bask in a feel-good factor of scaling higher up in the social ladder. The tagline, at the connotative level, touches several human chords like status affinity, status rivalry, pride, jealousy, envy etc.

The ads create an impression among the consumers that the possession of luxury items is an absolute gain and aids them in scaling higher up the social ladder. The consumer, however, remains oblivious of the fact that positions, no doubt change, but the order of differences remain. And based on this principle of order of difference advertisements are designed, instilling in the consumer the feel that he is not only different but above many others.

In the modern consumer set-up, the demand production ratio is projected in a manner where limited wants for a particular product are set against unlimited socio-cultural appeal for the product. A fitting analogy to this is the quantitative intake of food and digestive system, both of which are limited as against the cultural system and signification of food that is indefinite. Herein lies the advertisers' strategy, treating the consumer as a relational entity, whose sole concern for a product is a reified social prestige. The advertiser's target is not a lone customer, but a whole set in their differential relations, and the ambit is inclusive of friends, relatives, groups and societies, all hierarchically ordered, who are well versed in the symbolical interpretation of "setting off" or "showing off" (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 64). The urge to be different from the rest has become a common symptom among the consumers, especially in the urbanscape, driven solely by growing appetite and a competitive mindset. Baudrillard rightly comments on this urge to be different that in the urbanized spaces takes the shape of competition:

> But the language of cities is competition itself. Motives, desires, encounters, stimuli, the endless judgement of others, continual eroticization, information, the appeal of advertising: all these things make up a kind of abstract destiny of collective participation, set against a real background of generalized competition. (65)

In this malady of urban concentration, ever increasing human need overtakes the increased production of industrial concentration. This results in an affluent society, the gist of which is a tussle between competitive needs and production, leading to an artificial scarcity. Baudrillard calls this situation "psychological pauperization," where production is directed at individual needs at the cost of collective needs (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 65). What is prioritized is the production of privileges over production of goods, thereby forging a relationship between privilege and penury. The contemporary consumer society is thus afflicted with an illusion, a myth of an affluent society wherein growth is not synonymous to democracy.

The myth of forced enjoyment vis-à-vis products is solely fabricated by advertisements. In his *Ways of Seeing* (1972), gaze theorist John Berger has warned consumers not to confuse publicity with the pleasure or benefits to be derived on the purchase of the product that it advertises. The effectiveness of publicity is drawn by feeding upon the real; the things/ products in advertisements are real, things to be enjoyed in themselves. However, this promise of enjoyment, in the opinion of Berger, is only a myth, for he observes:

> Publicity begins by working on a natural appetite for pleasure. But it cannot offer the real object of pleasure and there is no convincing substitute for a pleasure in that pleasure's own terms. The more convincingly publicity conveys the pleasure of bathing in a warm, distant sea, the more the spectator-buyer will become aware that he is hundreds of miles away from that sea and the more remote the chance of bathing in it will seem to him. That is why publicity can never really afford to be about the product or opportunity it is proposing to the buyer who is not yet

enjoying it. Publicity is never a celebration of pleasure-in-itself. (126)

Thus, advertising manipulates with reality which is similar to real and yet removed from the real. This narrative of the unreal as real is built round the notion of the future buyer. The commercials are almost invariably designed round the image of a consumer who is dissatisfied for his present lack, looking forward to a future image of himself made glamorous by the possession of the promised product in advertising. The consumer is semiotically so trapped that the future image of himself makes him envious of his projected future self. This envy is a byproduct of the consciousness that on possession of the product, people will be envious of him. Publicity drives, as such go beyond the objects to address social relations. In the words of John Berger: "Its promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour" (*Seeing* 126). Thus, enjoyment or happiness thus sold by advertisers is only a myth consumed in terms of semiotic appeal of social standing.

Myth, Sign and Female Consumer

In advertising parlance, the female consumer is often targeted to pamper herself in self-indulgence. Observing woman as a collective and cultural model of self-indulgence, Evelyne Sullerot comments: "Woman is sold to women... while doing what she believes is preening herself, scenting herself, clothing herself, in a word 'creating' herself, she is, in fact, consuming herself" (qtd. in Baudrillard, *Consumer*: 95).

In this manipulative set-up, one's relation, not only to others, but also to oneself becomes a consumed one. A woman ceasing to please herself by her own terms of beauty, charm etc., she switches over to codes of beauty determined by signs, mostly the signs made vogue by advertisements. She moves from a spontaneous relation with herself to a consuming relation of herself. Her sole concern now is to conform to the signs of feminine model, and she stands in an objectivized relation to herself. The result is consuming herself in an

attempt to personalize herself. Advertising compels women to lose confidence in their own looks, eyes, skin, hair etc., switching over to the model of ready-made codes. This switching over means a movement from natural values of charm, beauty and sensuality to artificial values of naturalness, resulting in what Baudrillard has termed "functional feminity" (*Consumer* 96). Baudrillard's observation on women conforming to ready-made codes of beauty is interesting:

> Like violence, the forms of seduction and narcissism are laid down in advance by models produced industrially by the mass media and composed of identifiable signs (if all girls are to think they are Brigitte Bardot, then they must stand out from the crowd by virtue of their hair, their mouths or a particular feature of clothing – that is to say, necessarily the same thing for all of them). Everyone finds his or her own personality in living up to these models. (*Consumer* 96)

The counterpart of functional feminity is functional virility. However, the difference is based not on sex, rather on the differential logic of the system. In advertising purview, the relation between the masculine and feminine projections with real men and women to some extent is arbitrary. The application of signifying codes, reduces both the masculine and feminine models into factors of consumption.

The masculine model is almost endowed with the power to choose. In advertising frames, he is the epitome of exercising his privileged power over choice, he is not only particular and demanding, but also revealing in him the codes of professional ethics. It is his prerogative to select (although his selection is orchestrated by factors outside himself), that distances him from self-indulgence, and his sole focus is to achieve distinction. The masculine model becomes the epitome of competitive or selective virtue. This power to choose is semiotically turned into a prerogative of only a few, thereby constructing a discourse that the one who is projected as able to choose also deserves status.

The feminine model, on the other hand, revels in self-indulgence and narcissism. Both these concerns for one's body and beauty stand

distinct from male selectivity and particularity. At the bottom of these projections lie gendered connotations: while men play soldiers, women play dolls with themselves. Majority of the advertisements are designed on these two models – the masculine and the feminine – the masculine dominating the hierarchical ladder.

This dichotomy of the privileged subjective men as opposed to objectified women in advertising discourse also incorporates the narrative of the gaze theory. John Berger, in his *Ways of Seeing* brought out the difference between men and women in terms of social presence. What determines a man's presence is basically a "promise of power" that he embodies (Berger 39). In this power projection in advertising, the volume of the man's presence is directly proportional to the largeness and credibility of his promise – the greater and credible the promise, the more striking is the presence. As opposed to this, if this promise is small or incredible, the presence too is insignificant. The promised power may take the shape of moral, physical, economic, social, political, sexual bearing, the object however, always remaining exterior to the man. His presence is just an indicator of what he is capable of doing to others. In contrast, a woman's presence, Berger observes :

> expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste – indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence. Presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura. (*Seeing* 40)

The very fact of being a woman implies a space that is confined; a space "into the keeping of men" (Berger 40). Within the confines of a limited space, a woman's social space comes to bear a connotative meaning. However, within the social presence and space that is permissible to her, a woman's self, in Berger's view, splits into two. In all her acts, ranging from the simple everyday chores to the most complicated ones, a woman is always conscious of being

watched and also watching herself. Her own image of herself remains a constant companion. She in fact, has been trained from very childhood to survey herself continuously. In the words of Berger: "And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman" (*Seeing* 40). This difference in the social presence of men and women, as pointed out by John Berger is replicated in advertising.

The Myth of the Body Cult

In the consumer discourse constructed by advertising, the human body is projected as holy and hence worthy of worship. The body, in Baudrillard's view is in a state of:

> It's 'rediscovery', in a spirit of physical and sexual liberation, after a millennial age of puritanism; its omnipresence (specifically the omnipresence of the female body...) in advertising, fashion and mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility / feminity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has today become an object of salvation. It has literally taken over the moral and ideological function from the soul. (*Consumer* 129)

Centering the body, a massive industry has flourished, whose propaganda is coloured in religious overtone, urging that our body needs to be saved. Advertisers are constantly campaigning to convince the people of the importance of their bodies. This narrative of the body has turned it into a cultural artefact. The body, in the capitalist parlance, is a narcissist investment, treated like a private property. In the production consumption culture, the body represents both the capital and the fetish, in other words, a deliberate investment in economic and physical terms.

While celebrating the body cult, most advertisers in selling products related to the body, posit this question: "Are you at ease in your body?" (qtd. in Baudrillard, *Consumer*: 130). In reply to this

question, celebrities and models endorsing various products are paraded to convince that they are at ease with their bodies. As they inhabit their bodies, everything about them is beautiful – inside, out. They are made to wear their bodies like dresses, constructing a fashion effect and packaged effect based on consumption of signs and codes. As opposed to the past, when the soul was supposed to clothe the body, today it is the skin that clothes it. Read as a sign, the skin becomes a prestige garment, a second home. This explains the logic behind excessive nudity in advertising and other modes of popular representation. Such representations, apart from false sexual undertone, become an important aspect in fashion paradigm. Most advertising carry the message quite loud and clear that ignoring the body is a sin and such an act calls for punishment. Taking cue of such narrative, advertising reconciles the consumers with their body, constructing a relation between the subject and the objectivized body. The system appeals everyone to narcissistically invest in the body, not in terms of knowing it better, rather by the application of a fetishistic and spectacular logic, to make the body look better, smoother, appealing, perfect and a functional object for the outside world. Commenting on the narcissistic relation of the consumer to his body, Baudrillard observes: "it is managed narcissism, operating in the body as in colonized virgin 'territory', 'affectionately' [tenderment] exploring the body like a deposit to be mined in order to extract from it the visible signs of happiness, health, beauty, and the animality which triumphs in the marketplace of fashion . . ." (*Consumer* 131). In the process, the body is turned into the finest amongst the physically possessed, manipulated and consumed object.

In the consumerist structure, this narcissist investment in the body is a purely competitive and economic enterprise. The body is moulded to meet capitalist objectives, as the investment has to produce yield. Clothed in narcissist flavours, the body submits to the codes of production and managed consumption. The codes of narcissist investment groom the consumer to treat his body like a property of inheritance. By projecting the body as an indicator of prestige and instrument of enjoyment, the body is then trained to submit to the

"labour of investment", resulting in a "profoundly alienated labour" (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 132).

This body, in the long run, turns into a sacrilege, a functional body, which is neither made of flesh and blood in the religious sense, nor labour power in an industrial sense. Rather, it becomes an entity of materiality, a narcissist cult object, whose twin pillars are beauty and eroticism. They get fused with masculine and feminine models, the basic elements remaining interchangeable. While the feminine model is termed "phryneism", the counterpart of masculine model is "athleticism". The feminine model, however, is prioritized as embodying the new ethics (qtd. in Baudrillard, *Consumer* 132).

The feminine model is ruled by a concept of beauty which is synonymous to an absolute, religious imperative. Beauty no longer is a gift of nature or supplement to other qualities, rather it is mandatory to take care of one's body and physique, the way one takes care of one's soul. As a sign, possession of beauty makes one privileged the same way as success is the sign of flourishing business. In advertising parlance, beauty is treated as synonymous to success. A beautiful woman is always viewed as a successful woman. Whereas for a woman, the sole concern is projected as sensitivity and taking holistic care of the body; for the entrepreneur, it is the possibilities of a market. As beauty comes to be equated with success, beauty takes the form of capital.

As beauty comes to be treated as capital, the concrete or use-value of the body like energy, gestation and sexual, are reduced to a single functional exchange-value. In the process, the body is denied all its desires and pleasures, leaving it to cater to the exchange of signs. The body, thus, like any other consumer product, functions as sign-value.

The body as a consumable good, is accompanied by the notions of beauty and sexuality. The narcissistic investment in the body, turns it to an advantage in the market, involving both beauty and eroticism. The erotic body as a site of exchanged signs and desires stands distinct from the body as a site of fantasy and desire. While fantasy drive dominates individual desire, the eroticise body, on the

other hand is dominated by social function of exchange. The erotic imperative is guided and governed by the instrumental code of signs.

As functional beauty of fashion models is located in their figures and not in their expressions, similarly, the erotic is located in signs and not in desires. In the arena of fashion and advertising industry, the concept of beauty is an abstraction, a vacuum, and an "ecstatic absence" (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 134). In the field of advertising, the body, especially the female body, becomes simply an object that is similar to other sexless and functional objects.

Conclusion

Advertising thus conjures up a reality which is far removed from actual reality. Advertising also plays a healing effect by fabricating signs and codes based culture as the substitute of reality markers. Advertisers no doubt, employ persuasion and mystification in selling products, it is equally a fact that consumers and viewers take pleasure in being seduced and deceived. In is not just one way move of duping the consumers; the consumers themselves take delight in being deceived, harbouring the pseudo-reality as reality. This tendency of the consumers to camouflage reality can be related to Freud's concept of fetishism where people are guided by a strong sense of refusal to know. This tendency of refusal to know finds similarity in Baudrillard's logic of Father Christmas, a syndrome prevalent in advertising too. Without bothering for its logic, children universally believe in the existence of the figure of Father Christmas. They hardly consider the gifts from Father Christmas as an effect of the cause (existence of the figure); rather, "their belief in Father Christmas is a rationalizing confabulation designed to extend earliest infancy's miraculously gratifying relationship with the parents (and particularly with the mother) into a larger state of childhood" (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 181). With growing age, the miraculous relationship gets faded, yet it gets internalized as a belief. So, the myth of Father Christmas cannot be said to carry much artificiality as both the parents and their children share interest in the preservation of the culture. What the children consume in the process is a "magical

parental solicitude and the care taken by the parents to continue colluding with their children's embrace of the fable" (181).

According to Baudrillard, the myth of Father Christmas, psychologically works on the same formula as advertising. Like the myth, advertising's effectiveness too lies neither in its rhetoric, nor in its ability to inform. The consumers are lured by advertisement's leitmotif of "protection" and "gratification", an attempt to solicit and persuade in the guise of sign (Baudrillard, *System* 181). Advertising plays the role of a social agency in making the consumer aware of his desires and at the same time rationalize these desires for his satisfaction. Thus, the consumer, even without an inherent belief in the product, starts believing in advertising and all that it semiotically stands for.

When theoretically and critically read, it can be safely surmised that advertising goes far deeper than simply promoting sales. And the various sales strategies devised and executed by the advertisers speak volumes regarding creation, promotion and propagation of a new socio-cultural myth in consuming parlance. In this fabricated myth called consumption, the very act of buying and selling establish a narrative that is based on semiotics; in other words, consuming takes place through the buying and selling of signs. Advertisers play a huge role in prioritizing the sign value of the product over its utility value. As a modern day myth, advertising has come a long way in formulating certain codes among the consuming classes and the consumers religiously adhere to these codes while making a purchase. Even the varied responses of consumers are homogenized by advertising, building a consensus through creation of advertising codes. This creates a market that is based on the production and consumption of images, which in a way is an imitation of reality. Variously termed neo-reality, hyper-reality, alternate-reality or pseudo-reality, advertising has definitely contributed towards the growth of an image-based culture which is only the performance of the real.

This trend only testifies to Roland Barthes' stand that every popular culture and system of representation can develop into a myth. Barthes has very powerfully demonstrated how any object can

function as signifier in the production of meaning. The products in advertising frames can be read both as a code (signifier) that fits into our mental concepts of it (signified). The combination in Saussurean parlance is a sign that combines both denotative and connotative implications. The use value of a product can be read as denotative, whereas the sign value can be read as having a connotative appeal. Most products in advertising fall back on their connotative implication which is inseparable from signs. The connotative interpretation, for Barthes, is far more complex as it involves much wide-ranging codes devised by advertising traditions. The advertising codes in turn play a crucial role in devising a consumer myth that targets the naturalization of the cultural.

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Alternative Myths and the Questions of Caste and Gender : A Study of Meena Kandasamy's Poetry

Saswati Kashyap

Introduction

The word mythology is derived from the Greek word *mythos* which means story/ tale and *logos* which means word/speech. Hence, mythology means the spoken story of a group of people. Mythology is the study of the origin of a group of people often involving supernatural beings and events, known as myths. Myths are an integral part of every culture and civilization in the world because they explain their origin and development. Myths also describe the origin of the world, the gods and goddesses, humans with supernatural powers, age old rituals and customs as well as natural phenomena like sunrise and sunset, lightning and thunder and the changing of seasons. It is myth that binds the people of a region together through a group of characteristic symbols. Talking about India, myths are not seen merely as some supernatural stories of Gods and Goddesses but they have always been a part of its socio-cultural realm. The

epics, Vedas and Puranas which incorporate Hindu myths and archetypes have never become obsolete and archaic, on the contrary, they are readily available to the present generation through various forms of media and popular culture. Indian writers writing in English or in any other Indian languages for that matter, take liberties in using mythological characters and archetypes because readers can instantly connect to them. However, at large, these writers have tried to offer different perspectives to these mythological stories so that they are relevant to the socio-political context of a particular time. To mention about Indian English literature specifically, writers have been constantly banking on the ancient Indian epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishads, the Vedas and the Puranas for myths and archetypes.

According to French literary theorist Roland Barthes, the most important function performed by myth is that it 'naturalizes' an ideology. People accept and believe in myth because the ideological intentions of myth have been naturalized. The constant re-enactment of myth act as a sacred ritual in our daily life, ensuring the handing down of myths from one generation to another and thereby, turn it into an unchanging pattern of the future. Through its ritualized pattern and naturalization, myths act as a major cultural tool to uphold cultural hegemony. Thus, the dominant group (in the power hierarchy) constructs narratives that help them maintain their own cultural superiority and status quo. As Barthes suggests, the only way out is to break the dominant order of signification and write new myths and offer counter hegemonic narratives. Anthropologist Brownislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory of myth talks about the social function of myth and it emphasizes that religious myths firstly, legitimize the power structure of a society and secondly, it supports the social roles allocated for each member of the society. Malinowski insists that myths tended to advance the agendas of the story tellers and of the people in power. Many Greek myths for example, were formulated when Greece was under the rule of kings. Hence, those myths extoll those in power and promote the kingship custom. So, a myth is used to reinforce the status quo in a society and it is formulated to advocate

a specific social agenda. In Greek myths, Medea and Clytemnestra are projected as unruly monsters who need to be controlled while various other myths justify the powerlessness of women in society. Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* for example, proves himself to be a hero by conquering a female monster, the Sphinx, who was represented as destroying Thebes.

Explorations of Caste in Kandasamy's Poetry

The word *'caste'* was used first by the Portuguese invaders in the 15th century BC to define the Sanskrit word *'varna'* which means classification of society in terms of professions. Manusmriti and other Hindu religious texts like the Vedas mentioned about classifying the society in four varnas or castes :

Brahmins (born from Lord Brahma's head) belong to the highest order of the *'caste'* system comprise priests, scholars and teachers.

Kshatriyas (born from Brahma's arms) belong to the second highest order of the *'caste'* system and they comprise rulers and warriors.

Vaishyas (born from Brahma's thighs) belong to the third highest order of the caste system and they belong to the merchant and trader class.

Shudras (born from Brahma's feet) belong to the lowest strata in the caste system and they comprise labourers.

People belonging to any of the four aforementioned castes are called savarna or caste Hindus. On the other hand, the Dalits who do not belong to any of the four castes are called avarna or casteless. Thus, the caste system follows a rigid hierarchical system based on Hindu religious notions of purity / impurity and excludes the rest as outcastes (avarna) and untouchables. This caste system then, sanctioned inequality among the 'higher' and the 'lower' castes and it saw a violent past as much as it is witness to an equally oppressive contemporary reality in India when in the name of caste, Dalits are being exploited, tortured, disgraced and are even subjected to mass killings at times.

Poet activist Meena Kandasamy herself hails from a caste-conscious background and she uncompromisingly reveals the built-in

casteism in the myths and uses her poetry as a way of resistance against the inhuman caste system that sanctions subjugation of the non-dominant caste by the dominant caste. The title of her first anthology of poetry, *Touch*, talks about some of the most vicious stigmas associated with the Dalits and their very touch which is considered to be rather foul by the upper castes giving rise to the absolutely ridiculous idea of the 'untouchable' that has had been very much a part of the Indian society :

> But, you will never have known
> that touch—the taboo
> to your transcendence.
> when crystallized in caste
> was a paraphernalia of
> undeserving hate.
>
> (Kandasamy 38-43)

In the poem "Ekalaivan", the mythological figure Ekalaivan from the Indian epic Mahabharata, turns into the rather discriminated Dalit of the present time. Guru Dronacharya is rather terrorized by Ekalaivan's sheer brilliance in archery as he is even better than his favourite student, Arjuna. Kandasamy writes to Ekalaivan in her characteristic style, targeting 'fascist' Dronacharya—

> You can do a lot of things
> With your left hand.
> Besides, fascist Dronacharyas warrant
> Left-handed treatment.
> Also,
> You don't need your right thumb,
> To pull a trigger or hurl a bomb.
>
> (Kandasamy 2-8)

Kandasamy's poetic sensibilities are informed by her political belief which stems from her active resistance against the atrocities undergone by the non-dominant caste in the hands of their upper caste communities. Kamala Das, who is one of the major Indian English poets, writes in her foreword to Kandasamy's maiden poetry

collection *Touch*: "Dying and then resurrecting herself again and again in a country that refuses to forget the unkind myths of caste and perhaps of religion, Meena carries as her twin self, her shadow the dark cynicism of youth that must help her to survive" (7).

Kandasamy uses a language that is hard-hitting and contemporary. In the preface 'Should You Take Offence' to her second book of poetry *Ms. Militancy*, she writes: "Your myths put me in my place. Therefore,... I struggle with any story that has stayed the same way for far too long. So, my 'Mahabharata' moves to Las Vegas; my Ramayana is retold in three different ways... telling my story another way lets me forgive you" (Kandasamy 8).

In *"The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and the Revisionist Mythmaking",* Alicia Suskin Ostriker observes that whenever a poet uses myth, that use has all the potential to be 'revisionist: that is, "the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible" (317). Ostriker goes on to say:

> ... old stories are changed... by female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead... they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival. (316)

While talking about the uses of myth in modern poetry, Reginald Shepherd focuses on three main points: "retell the myth, relieve it by entering it on a personal level as a moment or a character, or revise it in order to enlighten readers about some aspect of it that is clouded or oppressive" (Shepherd blogpost).

Question of Women in Kandasamy's Poetry

There is no denying that be it Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu, Indian women poets in English have been using myth since the 19th century but they were primarily retellings of the ancient Indian myths. However,

in the recent times, poets like Meena Kandasamy have appropriated myths to offer counter narratives of power and also to empower the female collective. A number of women poets since the late 1990s till date have employed Hindu religious myths, Gods and Goddesses to draw a kind of comparison with the present day socio-political milieu of India. As against the normative notions of the meek and submissive women, Kandasamy's women are fearless and revolutionary. She says in the preface to her second anthology of poetry *Ms Militancy*: "I do not write into patriarchy. My Maariamma bays for blood. My Kali kills. My Draupadi strips. My Sita climbs on to a stranger's lap. All my women militate. They brave bombs, they belittle kings. They take on the sun, they take after me" (Kandasamy 8).

The title poem of the anthology *Ms Militancy* is named after the revolutionary female character Kannaki who features as the central character in the Tamil epic *Silapathikaram.* Kannaki is an epitome of courage who protests like a fiery revolutionary against the injustices of the king's court which wrongfully accuses her husband of stealing the queen's anklet and beheads him without trial. She puts up an active resistance against the sheer injustices of the king's court by tearing her bleeding breast and hurling it at the city of Madurai. She is the embodiment of female rebellion, Kandasamy wishes to see in her female counterparts against all the wrongs meted out to them:

> On the edge, ms militancy bayed for more blood.
> Vending vengeance, she made a bomb
> Of her left breast and blew up the blasted city.
>
> (Kandasamy 20-22)

In the poems "Princess- in-exile", "Random access man" and "Traitress" (all three from *Ms Militancy*), Kandasamy takes up two mythical women from the Ramayana - Sita and Shoorpanakha and looks at them from a feminist perspective. In the Indian epic Ramayana, Sita is portrayed as a pious, ideal and devoted wife who follows her husband in exile. During the exile, she is abducted by Ravana and later rescued by her husband Rama. On her return, she has to go through the 'agni pariksha' to prove her sexual purity to the

people. Coming to Meena Kandasamy's portrayal of Sita in the poem "Princess-in-exile' and "Random access man" she is not abducted rather she walks away on her own free will crossing all the barriers drawn by patriarchy (suggested by the *Lakshman Rekha* of mythology). Kandasamy says in the Preface to *Ms Militancy*: "My Sita climbs on to a stranger's lap" (Kandasamy 8).

Woman's body/ sexuality is always associated with the ideas of purity/ impurity in a patriarchal society. Sita's sexual purity is questioned after her return from the confines of Ravana and she has to go through patriarchy's 'agni pariksha' to prove her sexual purity. Kandasamy however, offers us a Sita who disdains all sorts of patriarchal barriers and is proficient at moving away:

> Years later, her husband won her back
> but by then, she was adept at walkouts,
> she had perfected the vanishing act.
>
> (Kandasamy 4-6)

As against the mythological/ patriarchal notions of Sita being pious and chaste, Kandasamy in 'Random access man" portrays Sita as a woman who is full of lust and sexual desire. However, she is denied of her physical and emotional needs by her husband, Rama. Hence, Sita demands her husband to go get 'the testicle of a golden deer' so that it can help her to rouse the manhood of her husband. It is actually a random man, a stranger who taught her about love and left her 'hot and forever hungry'. Kandasamy debunks the mythological image of Sita and turns her into a transformed woman:

> By the time she left
> this stranger's lap
> she had learnt
> all about love.
> First to last.
> *Mamasita*
>
> (Kandasamy 29-34)

In the poem "Traitress", Kandasamy projects Shoorpanakha as a woman being wronged by patriarchy. "Widowed and forsaken",

she is "ordered to exist in erasures" (Kandasamy 1). Deprived of
love and desires (read sexual), she offers her 'body' to two brothers
- Rama and Lakshmana of the mythology. However, they mistreat
her and tear away her "ears, nose, breasts" for being outrightly vocal
about her desires (Kandasamy 12). The two brothers, who are the
representatives of patriarchy then offered a patriarchal narrative to
foil their own violence:

> they told the world she was sharp-clawed,
> long-nosed, big-buddha-eared, pot-bellied, cross-eyed,
> with a potato-peeler voice, and a neck that grew at night.
> (Kandasamy 13-15)

Thus, Kandasamy uses these mythological characters of Sita
and Shoorpanakha as rebels against patriarchy as they speak their
minds. Rather than being subservient, both emotionally and physically,
Kandasamy's Sita and Shoorpanakha are independent and are in
total control of their minds and bodies. Rather than repressing their
sexual pleasures, they are absolutely vocal about their needs and
desires. As the French feminist theorist Helene Cixous who coined
the term *ecriture feminine* or 'women's writing' says, "Woman must
write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing,
from which they have been driven away as violently as from their
bodies" (875).

Inspired by Cixous and other feminist theorists, Kandasamy
looks at patriarchal representations of women in mythologies and
tries to refigure and reclaim them from feminist perspectives in her
characteristic style. One such mythological character is Nalayani,
Rishi Mudgal's wife. According to the Hindu mythology, Rishi Mudgal
wanted to test his wife and her chastity and to do that he took on a
diseased appearance, supposedly due to leprosy. Nalayani took great
care of her husband despite everything and remained devoted towards
him. One day, the sage expressed his desire to have intercourse with
a prostitute who sold sex for gold. Nalayani sold her gold chain and
put her husband in a basket and carried him to the brothel and waited
outside with utmost loyalty until he was done. However, in
Kandasamy's narrative, Nalayani is mistaken for a prostitute as she

waits outside the brothel for her husband. In 'Six hours of chastity', Kandasamy's Nalayani has "six men, one for every hour of night" (Kandasamy 28). There is the traveler, the spice vendor, the lean eighteen year old boy, the gambler and even the priest who come and sleep with her and Nalayani enjoys herself as her sexual desires are fulfilled. Kandasamy's Nalayani is as chaste as her husband and hence, she does not feel the pangs of guilt that is forced upon women by traditional patriarchal male narratives of mythology for exercising sexual freedom. Kandasamy writes in 'Six hours of chastity':

> Six men, one for every hour of night.
> And on the way home, as his weight cuts her
> Shoulder blades, she laughs and cries and laughs
> Again, at the lightness of her burden, the end of fate.
>   (Kandasamy 32-35)

Hindu mythology remains one of the most utilized and most admired devices for Indian English literature, be it poetry, fiction or non-fiction. However, as Vrinda Nabar says, "the characters, episodes and events contained in a myth on the one hand, and a literature which uses them or images derived from them on the other, are similar only in their broad contours and necessarily not identical to each other" (169).

The Nalayani or Draupadi of the Mahabharata, the Rama/ Sita of the Ramayana are therefore very different from the way poets like Meena Kandasamy see them and refashion them in their poetry. She has dexterously used and reinterpreted episodes/ characters from Hindu mythology to derive unexplored meanings from feminist and anti-caste perspectives.

Conclusion

Kandasamy critiques Hindu religious mythologies that are predominantly patriarchal narratives, replete with oppression of women and the lowest castes. These mythological stories which have been part of the cultural fabric of India, sponsor divinely-sanctioned injustices and contemporary woman poet Meena Kandasamy appropriates these mythological narratives and raises questions about

the inherent caste and gender based politics behind these mythological stories by offering alternative mythologies from feminist and anti-caste perspectives so that it finds relevance in the present times.

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Writing Counter Hegemonies Through Myth: Karnad and the Reworking of *Yayati*

Dr. Saurav Sengupta

Introduction

> The first thing I did in Bombay was to go and see a play, which happened to be Stridberg's *Miss Julie* directed by the brilliant Ebrahim Alkazi... [...] it was one of Alkazi's less successful productions. [...]. But, when I walked out of the theater that evening, I felt as though I had been put through an emotionally or even a physically painful rite of passage [...]. (Karnad, "Afterward" to *Yayati*).

Alkazi's production laid bare the "inner recess of the human psyche for public consumption" (Afterward to *Yayati*). But the play was also a transition from "mythological plays lit by torches or petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers," effectively combining "a new technology with a new psychology" (Afterward to *Yayati*). The recognition of a "new psychology" was important, especially in

the context of India's independence, after colonialism had dented India's past as effeminate, barbaric, marked by stereotypes. For Karnad, the necessity of resolving such a past without "apologies and or self- justifications" was possible through a theater of negotiation and for this he had the story of *Yayati* in mind (*Yayati* 71). But his story could not be "mythological," or aim at the "sentiment of devotion" (Karnad, Prologue to *Yayati*). Mythological plays configure reality as a set of particulars, thereby narrowing down experience to profane and facetious romanticism. It denies death, therefore denying humanity any scope for individualism. Karnad emphasizes death and sets "lucidity," (Prologue 6) as the prize for accepting the multivalent nature of experience. His art would that be of the "Saneevani vidya- the art of reviving the dead," (Prologue to *Yayati*), when a new telling is always risky but has its benefits, not just to find answers, instead "ask questions" (*Yayati* 70).

Methodology

The paper studies Girish Karnad's reworking of *Yayati* as a myth and views it as different from mythology, which implies God devotion. It can be argue that the playwright uses a subversive politics of humor, irony and outright ridicule to comment on the various social and political hierarchies in India - patriarchy, the marginalization of woman, as also the existence of caste and class divides. There are parts of the play, where Karnad uses images - animals, filth, predatory violence and stealth, to program a counter insurgency. The paper examines the playwright's use of the body as a weapon, especially his ideas of miscegenation, which implies the corruption of bloodline through marriages, a common fact in India and also rest of the world. Miscegenation can be seen both as a political and aesthetic weapon of resistance. I see how Karnad incorporates "erotic desire" as an act of transgression. In the process, he not only questions the assumptive frameworks on which these divisions were based but also comments on their exploitative denials of human freedom. This is done to say that Karnad's reworking not only undermines hierarchies but also makes an important addition to Anglophone writings in English.

Discussion

Adapted from the epic Mahabharata and originally written in Sanskrit, *Yayati* tells the story of a young prince Pooru, who returns to the kingdom of his father with his young bride Chitralekha. But here he discovers that his father has violated the norms of marriage and was on his way to get engaged to a different woman by the name of Sharmishtha. His lawfully wedded wife Devayani, the daughter of sage Sukracharya complains to her father about the moral perversions of her husband and the sage, in a fit of anger curses the king with immediate old age and senility but with an interesting rider - the possibility of averting age, if only some young man accepts the curse. The king requests his sons and even many of his subjects to accept his predicament and when they all decline, it is now left to young Pooru to accept his father's punishment on himself.

Oedipal / Contra Oedipal

After Karnad had finished working his play, he approached his publisher Mr. G.B. Joshi, who published "good tasteful literature" (Preface to *Yayati* ix). Joshi's assistant Kurtkoti had other provisos for Karnad - that he should not work out a "psychoanalytic reinterpretation of a myth in the manner of Eugene O' Neill" (Preface to *Yayati* ix). While Karnad admired O Neill's ability to achieve a kind of "quivering intensity, he also needed a more subtle and direct engagement with the material forces of political power and change, hunger, the dehumanization of woman, questions of caste, inequality and underdevelopment (Preface to *Yayati* in *Yayati* ix). Added to this was the 'anxiety of influence,' the difficulty of using English to represent a native subject. However, the play's enthusiastic reception by critic suggests that Karnad's work surpassed such an anxiety. But Karnad's play could not be easily put to stage because, as critics like Saugata Bhaduri (*Myth, Literature and Unconscious* 41), Devdutta Pattanaik (Indian Mythology 190) and Paranjape (*Self and Identity* 254), point out, *Yayati* was contra-oedipal or reverse-oedipal. Karnad himself cites the Shantanu Bheesma story, the Rama story and even the Ganesha story to suggest the contra-oedipal tendency in *Yayati* (Ganesh "The Time Loop," included in *The Hindu* 2007).

However, a critic like Robert P. Goldman in his essay "Fathers, sons and gurus: Oedipal conflict in the Sanskrit epics" see the work as oedipal (325).

Miscegenation and Subversion

But the Oedipus complex is just one aspect of the play. Karnad's work also subverts power hierarchies by sexualizing people in power and inviting readers to participate in the subversion of such hierarchies, though this fact of the play has been less commented upon. Karnad's subalterns are not passive and the paper attempts to argue that the writer works his subversive tactics by using a language that uses animal images, with images of filth, predatory violence and stealth, to program an insurgency against an unjust hierarchy. There are indications of incest and ideas of the body as a weapon, especially when the weak has no way of resisting the oppressions of the powerful and mighty, except through miscegenation - the corruption of bloodline through marriages. Over a period of India's history, the torturous differences between the pure and polluted created a country of many nationalities and was one of the reasons for the success of the British policy of divide and rule. Miscegenation was a part of the nation's social and political life and matrimonial alliances were organized to placate an otherwise oppressed and subjugated people. Of course, the higher classes had such fears of the lower orders that they even could not trust their children born from an inadvertent wedlock.

Protest and Rewriting

Karnad organizes an idea of protest and dissent by rewriting an old mythology, without being sentimental or endorsing a "reformist, liberal outlook" (Limbale 27). His contributions must be examined against the background of Anglophone writing that either ignored questions of gender and the lower castes or "depoliticized" their struggles through mimetic realism. While Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Mahesh Dattani created radically new perspectives on "caste, class, sexuality, gender, family relationships", they emphasized on the "realistic representations of urban social experience" (Dharwadker 71). Badal Sircar's Third Theater drew from the avant-garde practices of Grotowski and Richard Schechner. But his play

like *Baki Itihas* (1965) is realistic and more about the "process of enactment" despite the narrative counterpoints it presents (Dharwadker 66). Among recent writers only Arundhati Roy, in her *God of Small Things* (1997) resists hegemony through the incorporation of "erotic desire" as an "act of transgression" (Brinda Bose 59). Such an interjection, says Bose cannot be dismissed as a momentary lapse from the politicization of one's being" (59). But Roy's central protagonist Velutha does not survive, though she evokes pain and suffering. At other times, the social outsider is a romanticized figure on the margins, viewed from a middle-class sensibility, hence "subsumed, rewritten and marginalized" (Khair 137).

Karnad's *Yayati* departs from such conventional portrayal of the social outcastes in having a protagonist Pooru, who is outspoken, openly critical of his father and of his own political and racial heritage as a Bharata prince. He calls himself a "half caste, a mongrel" (*Yayati* 40), who sardonically dismisses his father's idea of "happiness" (*Yayati* 34). Pooru's distrust of mythical fictions of his father and his forefathers take roots from the memory of his mother, who had married his father but protested Aryan injustice and its history of marginalizing the non-Aryas till her last. She was a "rakshasa woman and the Aryas had destroyed her home and hearth. She was bent on vengeance and the inferno she created was her way of celebrating her success" (*Yayati* 40). Yayati's first love was however different initially. She was "beautiful-ethereal […] the gentlest, most loving woman one could imagine" (*Yayati* 39). It is possible to argue here that the idea of racial and patriarchal superiority hoisted on the non-Aryas by the Aryas was a political stratagem aimed at suppressing the 'other' and the idea of pollution was a transference of this political idea into a religious symbol and meaning, a kind of nascent formulation of later sixteenth and seventeenth century imperialism, exacerbated in Apartheid and the Nazi concentration camps in Germany.

Like Roy's protagonist, Velutha, Pooru's mother dies. But, before her end, she ensures that the "crown Prince of the Bharatas had rakshasa blood in him. The Aryas would be "ruled by a […]" (*Yayati* 40). Unlike subalterns in Anglophone works, she has the choice of

independence and moves the plot because it is her memory that stays with the prince. Pooru's memories of his mother's face, trapped in deathly silence is his personal rite of passage, a "sanctum" (*Yayati* 39), without "details" (*Yayati* 36), that need be to "filled in" (*Yayati* 36) and so risky because it is open to diverse interpretations - the faithful wife, protesting against her dishonor versus the rakshasa woman who is a mongrel, equally immoral. This is why his wish to be left alone, suggests an imperative - to define her against the negatives of patriarchy. But it scandalizes Yayati, (who cannot think of woman other than a sexual object) and makes it an oedipal drive.

Mocking hetero-normative Power differentials

Pooru could not risk contamination, especially when Yayati, his perverted old father had compromised the idea of home and the home made by the father as a place of safety and security. The play mocks the Aryan notion of racial and patriarchal superiority, when it creates 'imbeciles' of the upper castes-men and woman, whose glorious deeds in 'public life' is a visual gloss on an otherwise 'stunted' personal growth. So, while Pooru ridicules the "greatest rulers of the world" (*Yayati* 35), Sharmishtha, Devayani's alter-ego, likewise describes upper caste Brahmin woman, as many "namby-pambies" (*Yayati* 17), since they are merely passive and only" (*Yayati* 17). In fact, the upper-case women are "reared" for men and are only automations (*Yayati* 11). In Devayani's case, she is means to an end, which is immortality through her father, who knew the sanjeevani spell. But, as a woman, wife etc., she is like any other member of her gender, merely a "bitch" if she protests her oppressor. This would explain why Sharmistha does not poison Devayani, despite her initial wish to do so, because the queen with all her pomposity and lineages is in fact more ineffectual than herself- the "demonic," "conniving barbarian", when she plots her succession, as the King's other queen (*Yayati* 46). Sharmistha uses her sexual powers to entice the king to her bed, as a kind of "diversion", thereby inverting the misogyny of marriages, when woman suffer the discontents of masculinity or suffer its hetero-normative power differentials (*Yayati* 43). But, her act of rebellion is a counter to oppressive homoeroticism, when she must

be a "slave" to Devayani, as per Manu's prescription of relations between various social orders. Sharmistha is also an educated, beautiful and confident princess, whose father, a king took religious and moral lessons from Devayani's father, sage Sukracharya. That initial official arrangement between her father and his law giver percolates to the daughters, when Devayani assumed a superior role for her compared to Sharmistha, as inversion of political as personal and assumed this as a divine law.

Such moral has/had no inherent logic, though the history of oppression of the racial and caste outsider in India operated down generations, remaining "hypervisible" to the lower orders (read non-Aryas) and "invisible" for the so-called upper classes (Despande 32). In Karnad's play, the invisibility of racial divides among the upper caste Aryas and the overt politicization of the same by the marginal orders are equally satirized. This is achieved in the character of Chitralekha, who being a princess, with assured rights to choose her husband after an archery contest, settles for Pooru though he is no match for the other princes. Chitralekha understands the pretentions, lies and make believe of her family members, when they "cancel" the contest, fearing disruption of their ambitions - making her the "Empress of Aryavarta," (*Yayati* 36). Paraded as the outcome of masculine skills, the marriage turns out about snaring Pooru and becomes as much immoral, as forcing a girl to marry a "door keeper statue" (*Yayati* 37), because it was a "male figure" (*Yayati* 37). While Pooru resists this arrangement initially, Chitralekha "laughs" at the events.

The text intervenes at this point to set Sharmistha's idea of "chaos" against the skewed formalism of the upper classes (*Yayati* 18). Sharmistha's "chaos" is to be aware of human limitations and is paradoxically lucid. It is a matter of "choice" (*Yayati* 18). However, the text also indicates that if the rich and powerful are pretentious or fix value to reality, the underprivileged are equally guilty of such pretense. Swarnalata, Devayani's maid for example, lies to her husband about her adultery with a poor Brahmin teacher only to satisfy the husband's ego-that a woman, because of her gender "should" be

immoral (*Yayati* 59). Karnad's art would then be an art of acceptance. Pooru and his wife both ridicule such certainty. They mock the events of their marriage and while she finds it funny, he calls it "nonsense", thereby bracketing patriarchy with confusion and indolence (*Yayati* 37). Pooru's confessions that he and his wife want a son limit the politics of his resistance. However, this work both ways, either to suggest the collapse of resistance within patriarchy or even to mock the traditional role of a husband and wife as dummies to patriarchy.

Karnad's best jibe, however, is reserved for King Yayati, a moral and sexual pervert but representative of a glorious line of kings and ascetics nonetheless, whose claim to power is a cruel ability to make woman cringe, thereby reducing them to mere objects for sexual gratification. But because most of these women are "reared" for him, as gifts for a male monarch, they are just bodies without any psychological depth or growth of character (*Yayati* 11). Yayati however cannot ignore Pooru's mother or Sharmistha and his clandestine liaisons with them confirm to the subterranean chaos underneath India's gender and class façade, which relegated untouchable men and women to the margins but also feared the "conundrum" they presented (*Yayati* 39). Yayati in an unusual confession calls himself a "desiccated fool" because he cannot see beyond his silly offspring", thereby suggesting the impossibility of salvations through heroic and sexual escapades (*Yayati* 42). Even when he accepts the "emptiness" (*Yayati* 42) of old age he still materializes life as a boy's game: "precious stones […] I could play with (*Yayati* 43). But youth indicate adolescent fantasies, even "fornication" (*Yayati* 66), when Chitralekha ridicules the king, who seeks youth, but not "everything that comes attached to it" (*Yayati* 66). The play ends with the text counterpointing life and living; death and dying, where the first signifiers - life and death are physical embodiments and the second involve perception. *Yayati* acknowledges that his youthful body is just "grasping" meaning that it is a biological function, "unable to grasp anything," whereas Chitralekha, was dying with the knowledge of eternity (*Yayati* 68). Yayati ends romantically

with Pooru young again but equally staring at death and dementia, as tragic routes to such knowledge.

Conclusion

Karnad's reworking of *Yayati* is significant. It marks a "post" in traditional dramatic enactment, whereby mythology is reshaped to question the assumptions of history. That Karnad used the English language allows him to hobnob with the risks of narration, even when they are taboos. So, instead of a single narrative construct, the idea of India is more polyvalent than what a mainstream definition of the nation, might allow. For a writer, the act of writing is an act of reading, an act of resistance and becomes an event, especially when the spectacle of performance disturbs, without allowing sufficient possibility for recuperation. It is also Karnad's achievement that his heroes are no high-class men or kings but eunuchs, women normally ostracized from society, rakshasas (rakshasas here denotes the socially demonic, therefore blacks, non- Brahmins, the Tribal, aboriginal driven away from his hearth and home, silenced and dishonored. And yet, Karnad's subalterns do not go away defeated but argue for their rights and speak up against torture and while the dramatist draws influences both from Europe and Americas, he is also a postcolonial writer who writes about India without sentimentality and apologies. His desire to face up to the past makes him an avant-garde, who is not so much concerned about formal experimentations in theater, with stage, settings and lights but more eager to invent a tradition, where the narrative voice implies an author, who sees more and enjoys the knowledge.

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