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The Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore: A Historiographical Overview

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Abstract: Literary magazines played a critical role in the development of Bengali literature throughout the nineteenth and the first few decades of the twentieth century. As the father of Bengali short-stories, Rabindranath Tagore was the first Bengali writer to take short-story as a serious art form and dealt with real and contemporary life. He established a new artistic and intellectual standard to Bengali literature with this genre. The present paper in genre studies tries to explicate the mobilization of short story from the Western conjecture to an Indian aka Bengali perspective through a critical ramification of Tagore's short-stories. Also, it consist a historiographical analysis of the genre and a paradigmatic study of Tagore's stories with their thematic exploration.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Genre studies, short story, nineteenth-century Bengal.

If Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94) is considered as the founder-figure of modern Bengali prose, then Rabindranath Tagore can be well-credited as the father of Bengali short stories. Bankim Chandra Chatterji had established a distinctively artistic and intellectual standard for Bengali literature. With his efficient styling he had re-appropriated the language of Bengal from the stern edifices of the Sanskritized forms initiated by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), till this form again found delineation among his later successors namely, Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore had written about a hundred short-stories and took the art form to an exceptional plane, not only in the realm of Bengali literature but also in the World standards. The present paper tries to explicate the concept of short story, as propounded by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) and then carried forward by Rabindranath Tagore in an Indian context.



Critics have often agreed that the genre of short story is an enigma of the Modern Age: “Men have always felt a fascination for stories. Even in the pre-historic periods man used to tell stories to a fascinated audience. But short story as a genre is a recent development. The origin and growth of short story as a literary term owe largely to the modern age” (Ray 57). Rabindranath Tagore was the first Bengali writer who ventured the short story as a serious art form, writing about real and contemporary life that had been limited in scope and size, based on a small slice of life, an incident or experience, perceptively dealing with the inner. There had been other contemporary writers who wrote many short stories with utmost precision among whom Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1937) and Nagendranath Gupta (1861-1940) took this art form forward.

As an exponent of a new standard of Bengal’s artistic tradition, Tagore established an ingenious intellectual stratum for the Bengali literature. He was a master stylist and his language was potent and compact. His literary style had surpassed all existing paradigms, a feature that Krishna Kripalani vouchsafed:

(He)s was the first Indian to attempt this form proper and though the short-story as a literary genre is now very popular with Indian writers, no one has yet equaled him in this art, much less surpassed him. How far he was familiar with the works of Chekov and Maupassant is not known—the only two foreign masters who could be compared to him in this field, though he was as different from them in his technique and mode as they from each other. (158)

Talking of the ‘foreign masters’ it seems necessary here to explore the idea of short-story as a genre, which grows redundant eventually among the recent and modern critical acronyms. Moreover, while reading Tagore’s short-stories, many critics have found structural and thematic similarities with the Western masters of short-stories—Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekov and even Guy de Maupassant. The plot of “The Judge” (*Bicharak*, 1929) is found to be similar to the plot of Tolstoy’s “Resurrection”, with *The Wife’s Letter* found constantly been compared with Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*.



Critics generally define the term ‘short-story’ as “a prose work of fiction, differing from a novel by being shorter and less elaborate” (Lawrence 276). But this definition merely concentrates over the magnitude of a narrative and forfeits its diversification and allegorical reflection. It also informs that the word originated in 1877 in a magazine named *Independent*, thereby followed in 1882, 1898, 1902, 1923, 1929, 1936 and thereafter in its various editions. Edgar Allan Poe had tried to define it more clearly in *Graham’s Magazine* in May 1842 as a ‘unity of effect’. Edgar Allan Poe, an American writer who was known as a poet and critic, was most famous for mastering this form of short story—especially in the tales of the mysterious and macabre. Poe theorized short story as “unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose” (xv). According to Poe a “skillful literary artist’ should build a story carefully to create a ‘preconceived effect’” (xvi). He envisaged certain virtues of brevity and necessary coherence as the two elements required for the effect of totality in a short-story. The greatest advantage of short-story was also its ideal length, which was ample enough to produce ‘an intense and enduring impression’ but short enough to be experienced at one sitting and produce a temporary ‘exultation of the soul’ among the reader. Its length would allow the artist the opportunity to unify the total work for a single effect—thus transforming it from a mere narrative into a perfectly integrated work of art. Though Poe had little examples before him, except a few tales of Hawthorne and himself, the form hardly existed before 1842 and his visionary aesthetics proved prophetic to literature around the world.

After Poe, Brander Mathews (1852–1929) made this point clearer in his book named *The Philosophy of the Short-story* where he emphasized that the difference between short story and novel did not lie simply upon magnitude but a unity of impression which could only be derived from a unity of time, place and action (2-3). Now, what Poe and Matthews essentially asked for, was that the short fiction be written in the manner of lyric poetry. And these qualities find an optimum manifestation in Rabindranath Tagore and his greatest competence as a short fiction writer lies in this respect. The poet outrights the novelist, dramatist, painter and essayist in him. The lyrical nature in his prose pieces, drama and even



his paintings, is highly recognized by critics. Sisir Kumar Ghose envisioned the nature of Tagore's short-stories as revealing the "nuances of an aesthetically valid universe (*bhavalok-sristi*) closest to the lyric" (80). Interestingly, it is in a lyric that Tagore seems to express his aesthetic rationale for writing short-stories, named "Varsha- Yapan" (Passing the Rainy Season) in a collection of poems *Sonar Tari* (Golden Boat):

I feel the urge of writing stories, one after another in my own way, on humble lives and their small miseries, on matters of small consequence, really simple and plain, like a few drops of tears from thousands of forgotten memories flowing down to oblivion.

There would be no colourful narration, no piling up of incidents; there would be no philosophizing and no moralizing. On coming to the end one would feel a sort of unsatisfaction as if the is not really the end . . .

All that is neglected and rejected, all this unpurposeful display of life, I would for a moment gather for me and with it I would create a shower of all that is forgotten, in a rainy night of the life. (Ray 219)

As the first part of the poem depicts the Tagore's convictions over the contents of a short-story, the subsequent stanzas articulate his ideas regarding its form. The last part unifies the entire idea and envisions the whole *oeuvre* of nearly hundreds of stories that shows up the culmination of 'few drops' into a 'shower'. In other words, in the selective economy of materials in a short-story, the unity of design and mood, the spontaneous flow of emotions and the predominance of one temper, are overall poetic. But poetry is not the exact thing as the lyric verse, nor is Tagore's poetry identical to the lyric. Hence, it might seem to be improper to consider Tagore's stories to be essentially lyrical.

In the nineteenth century, Bengali literature in its initial phase, reached its readers mainly through periodicals. Novels were serialized in such journals that had been complemented by other literary pieces like poems, travelogues and small features. *Bangadarshan* had been a big name associated with Bankim Chandra Chatterji as its editor. Tagore's short-stories found their light in a series of such literary magazines thereby eroding



the distraught of literary outputs. *Hitabadi*, a weekly started in 1891 held some of his early stories, namely “Exercise-book” (*Khata*, 1891), “Debts and Dues” (*Dena Paona*, 1891), “Ramkanai’s Folly” (*Ramkanaier Nirbudhita*, 1891), “Taraprassana’s Fame” (*Taraprassanar Kirti*, 1891), “Postmaster” (1891), “The Divide” (*Babadhan*, 1891) and “Housewife” (*Ginni*, 1891). His talent found a more generous outlet in *Sadhana* (1891) a family magazine contributed mostly by the creative lot of the Tagores of Jorasanko. The magazine included mainly poetry, literary criticism, ‘modern science’, music, book reviews and short stories. Among the stories of Rabindranath Tagore that were written in this phase, “Little Master’s Return” (*Khokababur Pratyabartan*, 1891), “Skeleton” (*Kankal*, 1892), “The Living and the Dead” (*Jibito O Mrito*, 1892), “Holiday” (*Chuti*, 1892-3), “In the Middle of the Night” (*Nishitey*, 1894), “Punishment” (*Shasti*, 1893) are but a few. *Sadhana* became an immediate success and held high impact upon the development of modern Bengali literature, often comparable to Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s *Bangadarshan* and Pramatha Chaudhuri’s *Sabujpatra* (1914) in the later phase. But *Sadhana* had to be stopped in 1905, as Rabindranath Tagore could not carry forward with the burden of its editorship being its chief suppliant at the same time. Although it benefitted the literary history, since the years of *Sadhana* had been profoundly fertile in Tagore’s career as a short-story writer. He wrote forty-four short-stories between 1891- 95, almost one in a month to keep *Sadhana* going. Critics are of the belief that his attention seemed to be primarily centered upon story-telling during this phase (Saha 11). The poems that he wrote in this period were also based on tales and narratives, *Tales and Stories* (*Katha O Kahini*, 1900) being one of them. Another family magazine that came into light in this period was *Bharati*. Compared to the 1890’s Tagore wrote only eight stories between 1901 and 1914. His literary forte comprised of more short-stories to meet the demands of *Sabujpatra*. Tagore wrote some ten stories for this magazine, seven of which were published in the 1914. Afterwards he had written several short-stories in subsequent intervals; his last one being “The Story of a Muslim Woman” (*Musalmanir Galpa*), which was drafted in 1941, before his death but published posthumously in 1955 as an unfinished work.



The bulk of short stories written by Tagore can be divided broadly into two periods—the pre-*Gitanjali* period and the post-*Gitanjali* period by various critics. The stories of the first phase are “lyrical, objective, realistic, inter-connected with nature and human-life, psychological, supernatural but not unrealistic” (Ray 217). Dealing with the everyday life of small towns and villages in Bengal, the stern realism and superstitions, multifarious natural and unnatural elements are woven in the fabrics of realism. But the short-stories of the post-*Gitanjali* period reveal that Tagore is not merely a writer with romantic fervour, but he is also a realist who grapples with the tougher problems of contemporary life. There is a realistic appraisal of the social content and a brutally frank approach to the psychological complexities of human lives. Insidious tendencies within the society have been conspicuously exposed and the inner conflicts of the mind have been unveiled, while the human characters are interrogated with their excellences and limitations. Kripalani visualizes the stories of this phase quite abjectly:

The stories he wrote now have a different setting. They deal with middle-class life and its problems, in particular the tragedy of woman in a Hindu household, and if they lack the sweet fragrance of fresh fruit, they have the appetizing aroma of well-processed cheese. The author’s irony in exposing the cowardice and selfishness of the smug Hindu husband is as subtle and sharp as his courage in denouncing injustice perpetrated in the name of holy scriptures and tradition is admirable (252).

The matrices of Tagore’s short-stories are quite in a number. Some of them centers on the different moods, sentiments and atmosphere, while others emphasize character and temperaments, and yet a third group deal with problems. The first two had kept him engaged for about twelve years around the last of the nineteenth century, and the third group in the second decade of the twentieth century. In those days Tagore frequently visited his family estates in North Bengal and spent several months in the house-boat on the river Padma and its tributaries. His love for nature, his concern with the commonplace of day to day life of the villages of rural Bengal, and the sudden revelation of humanity in the least expected of situations and the most neglected of creatures flocked around the river-banks mark the stories



of this period. Tagore had repeatedly attributed the origin of his short-stories being the landscapes and the experiences gathered by meeting the villagers on his boat-trips over the river Padma, while he did spend much of his time supervising his family estates at Shilaidaha, Patisar and Shahjadpur (in present Bangladesh). Answering the question what made Tagore, the poet to employ himself immensely into writing short-stories, he more than once explained it in different terms. On some occasion, he commented:

To begin with I only wrote poetry—I didn't write stories. One day my father called me and said, 'I want you to take charge of the estates.' I was astonished: I was a poet, a scribbler—what did I know about such matters? But my father said, 'Never mind that—I want you to do it.' What could I do? Father had ordered me, so I had to go. Managing the *jamindāri* gave me the opportunity to mix with various kinds of people, and this was how my story-writing began. (*Selected Short Stories: The Postmaster and Others* 4)

Tagore's young creative mind was keen to portray the mundane world and the queer psychological efficacies of the ordinary people residing in it, unlike the somber note that presided in the stories of his later phase. Hence, probably, there was more of 'realism' in the stories of the earlier phase. Again, on another occasion of giving an English interview to a magazine *Forward* on February 23, 1935, Tagore remarked on the background of his stories and how they had originated, in the following terms:

It was when I was quite young that I began to write short stories. Being a landlord I had to go to villages and thus I came in touch with the village people and their modes of life. I enjoyed the surrounding scenery and the beauty of rural Bengal. The river system of Bengal, the best part of this province, fascinated me and I used to be quite familiar with those rivers. I got glimpses into the life of the people, which appealed to me very much indeed. At first I was quite unfamiliar with the village life as I was born and brought up in Calcutta and so there was an element of mystery for me. My whole heart went out to the simple village people as I came in close contact with them. They seemed to belong to quite another world, so very different from that of



Calcutta. My earlier stories have this background, and they describe this contact of mine with the village people. They have the freshness of youth. Before I had written these short stories there was not anything of that type in Bengali literature. No doubt Bankimchandra had written some stories but they were of the romantic type; mine were full of the temperament of the rural people... There is a note of universal appeal in them, for man is the same everywhere. My later stories haven't got that freshness, that tenderness of earlier stories. (4-5)

Some of the scenes and characters in his early stories were taken straight out of observation. For example, Rabindranath himself wrote about the origin of the story, "Conclusion" in this selection as follows:

A boat moored near our ghat and a crowd of local housewives were standing in front of it. Perhaps someone was going somewhere and they all came to bid farewell. Many little children, faces partly covered with a part of sari and heads with grey hair gathered there. But my attention was mostly on one girl among them. Perhaps she was twelve or thirteen years old. Because she was chubby she looked more like fourteen or fifteen. Her face was attractive. She was dark complexioned but with a pleasing appearance. Her hair was trimmed like that of a boy and it made her face look charming. She looked intelligent, smart, uninhibited and easy going. Carrying a boy on her hip she was observing me with an unembarrassed and curious look. There was no streak of dullness, pretentiousness or incompleteness in her face. Because she was half a boy and half a girl she had a special charm. Like boys she was not at all self-conscious. This, together with the pleasantness, made her a kind of novel girl. I didn't expect to see such a girl among the countrywomen in Bengal . . . At last when the time of departure came I saw the same shorthaired, bright and unsophisticated girl, adorned with bangles on her round arms, being led into the boat. I realized that the poor girl was leaving her father's house and going to that of her husband. When the



boat set sail the women kept on looking from the riverbank and a few of them wiped their eyes and noses with their sari's end. . . It appeared to me that the world was so beautiful and yet filled with such sadness. The story of this unfamiliar young girl seemed somewhat familiar to me. (Saha 13)

Whereas, a few of his earlier stories like "The Hungry Stones" (Khudito Pashan, 1895), "In the Middle of the Night" (*Nishithey*, 1894) and "The Skeleton" (*Kankal*, 1892) belong to quite a different genre. They are neither macabre, nor are tales of horror and mystery. But the ordinary human element lingers at the axis to turn the supernatural around itself. Other stories of this genre, for example, "Secret Wealth" (*Gupta-Dhan*, 1940) and "Wealth Surrendered" (*Sampatti Samarpan*, 1891-2) take off the weirdness by the dexterity in plot- weaving and a matter-of-fact style. Also there are instances of penetrating psychoanalysis "The Living and the Dead" (*Jibito O Mrito*, 1892), "Lost Jewels" (*Manihara*, 1898). *The Broken Nest* (*Nashtanir*, 1902) ends this epoch and begins a new one. It registers an important crisis in every sense—the then evolving 'woman question', deriding factors like the socio-political changes in the society, all together start the 'problem-story' in the Bengali literature. *The Wife's Letter* (*Streer Patra*, 1914), "House Number One" (*Paila Nambar*, 1917), "The Unapproved Story" (*Namanjur Golpo*, 1925) and "The Uncle" (the first part of *Chaturanga*) are essentially the derivatives of some significant problems; they are seas apart from the others, such as, "Rasmoni's Son" (*Rasmonir Chele*), "Elder Sister" (*Didi*), "Postmaster", "The Teacher" (*Mastermoshai*) and "Kabuliwallah" (1892).

The old cadence of union with the nature, typical characters that emerge out of the trifling human contour are not present in the stories of Tagore's later phase of writing. "Now it is not so much love as understanding, not the reality of living as the process of growth, not acceptance but refusal, i.e., to say, a new note of protest against the injustice of abstractions and institutions on the ground of personality" (Chatterjee, I. 44). For example, in "Haimanti" Tagore interrogates the evils implied within the institution of Hindu marriage and how Haimanti, a sensitive young woman, must—due to her sensitiveness and free spirit—sacrifice her life prematurely in the face of atrocities. Through *The Wife's Letter*, a dismal lifelessness



of Bengali women after they are married off and how pseudo-moral hypocrisies plague upon the Indian middle class *Bhadralok*. Even in the last passage of *The Wife's Letter*, Tagore directly attacks the Hindu custom of glorifying Sita's attempted self-immolation as a mean to appease her husband Rama's doubts, as depicted in the Sanskrit epic the *Ramayana*. Tagore also examines the strenuous relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims, a theme much in vogue, in "The Story of a Muslim Woman" and thus embodies the essence of Tagore's humanism in many ways.

The first evidence of Tagore's critical approach to the 'woman question' is found in the 1884 publication "Story of the Ghat" (*Ghater Katha*), which is commonly recognized as the first of his short-stories. He had been preoccupied with this theme over the years of his life, till his last and posthumously published story "The Story of a Muslim Woman" (*Musalmanir Golpo*, 1955). "Laboratory" published in 1940, took Tagore's notion of womanhood to the edges and led a paradigmatic shift within the contemporary ideals in the society. Critic Sumana Das Sur has identified an elementary question in every man of words, including Rabindranath Tagore—the man-woman relationship and women's position and roles in the society. She has found an articulation of passivity among the women characters projected in the trio of stories *Tinsangi* (1940), consisting "Sunday" (*Ravibar*), "Last Words" (*Sesh Katha*) and "Laboratory". In this context, I wish to cite a few excerpts from the lectures that Tagore had delivered in 1916-17, during his tour to America and were later published as a collection named *Personalities* (1917). "Woman" has been one of the six essays in this collection where Tagore is found to be insistent in demarcating the roles of women:

At present stage of history civilization is almost exclusively masculine, a civilization of power, in which woman has been thrust aside in the shade . . . Woman is endowed with the passive qualities of chastity, modesty, devotion and power of self-sacrifice in a greater measure than man is. It is the passive quality in nature which turns its monster forces into perfect creation of beauty—taming the wild elements into the delicacy to tenderness fit for the service of life. This passive quality has given



woman that large and deep placidity which is so necessary for the healing and nourishing and storing of life. (Bhattacharya and Samanta 173)

Critics try to formulate that all fiction emulate common events of life and have some basis, however insignificant it may be, in the writer's personal experiences. It may also be some aspects of a person's character, or fragments of a situation, real incidents or an image. One may recollect Coleridge's adding up of the imagination in this context. The amusing anecdote about the postmaster in Shahjadpur can be raised on this occasion; Tagore fondly recollects it in a letter to his niece Indira Devi which is later collected as Letter No. 17, in *Chinnapatravali*, on 10th February, 1891:

I dearly love to listen the stories of the postmaster. He can tell many impossible tales very seriously. He told me yesterday that the local people had so much reverence for the Ganges that if a relative died they grind a piece of his bones and keep it. If sometime they come across a person who had drunk waters of the Ganges they would mix the bone-powder with waters of the Ganges they would mix the bone-powder with his paan and think that a part of their dead relative had mingled with the Ganges, I laughed and said, 'It is probably just a story.' 'Sir, it may be so,' he admitted after thinking about it seriously. (Saha 13)

Rabindranath wrote most of his short-stories in the 1890s which were mostly published in several periodicals. In *Sadhana* alone thirty-six of his stories appeared. He intermingled stark realism and poetic idealism in his stories which reflected the contemporary life in rural and urban Bengal. Later, during 1914-1917, several of his great stories like *The Wife's Letter* and *Woman Unknown* appeared in the monthly magazine *Sabuj Patra*. The generic form changed gradually in his stories as he grew older. The themes from nature and rural Bengal were replaced with deep psychological revelation and Tagore's own ideologies. But novelty is evident in the changing pattern of the short-stories that have grown out of



Tagore's experience and worldview. It is certainly another reflection of the crisis that has been brought about by his deeper understanding of the world and the contemporary situation.

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Eudora Welty on Woman's Question

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Abstract: Eudora Welty is a South-American short story writer. The literary history of the American South since the Civil War has been fascinating. Later on account of modernization, consequent upon industrialization and urbanization, there has been a decline in the spiritual and ethical values in the Modern American South. And these find expression in the literature of the times. Eudora Welty being a strong observer of her surroundings and people draws her themes and characters from the South-American life. She mainly focuses on woman's queries. She also gives more importance to place in her fiction for she firmly believes in that the place and environment in which one is brought up shapes one's character. She is known for her characterization as her characters are drawn from her personal experience in the American South. They are from real life and appear natural in their emotional and behavioral aspects. Besides all this, her fiction mainly focuses on femininity. The present article deals with the writer's personal experiences as a woman and a writer and her views on the problems pertaining to the women of the American South. Her reflections on the importance of place, characterization, gender differentiation and Feminism would be discussed at length in the full paper.

Key words: femininity, place, gender, characterization, women's question.

* * *

Eudora Welty was born on April 13, 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi, in South America and died on July 23; 2001. She is a well known American writer. She has written a number of short stories and novels. Her works mainly focus on the regional manners of people



inhabiting a small Mississippi town that resembles her own birthplace and the Delta country with great precision. Besides a number of short stories and an autobiographical work *One Writer's Beginning*, she has to her credit a few novels titled *Delta Wedding*, *The Ponder Heart*, *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter*. She won a Pulitzer Prize for her Novel - *The Optimist's Daughter* in 1973. She was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, besides many other awards. The literary history of the American South since the Civil War has been fascinating. Later on account of modernization, consequent upon industrialization and urbanization, there has been a decline in the spiritual and ethical values in the Modern American South. And these find expression in the literature of the times. Although there were only a few women writers in the 19th century, their number increased in the 20th century. Some of the significant women writers of this period are Katherine Anne Porter, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Caroline Gordon, Carson Mc Cullers, Eudora Welty and Flannery O. Connor.

Eudora Welty being a strong observer of her surroundings and people draws her themes and characters from the South-American life. Through her fiction she focuses mainly on woman's questions. She also gives more importance to place in her fiction for she firmly believes that the place and environment in which one is brought up shapes one's character.

Eudora Welty's artistic vision her general habit of drawing material from the American South of her times on the basis of her personal experience, and her clear understanding of human nature are reflected in her fiction. In her fiction Welty depicts the American South in transition. She depicts American men and women of the South caught up in a whirlpool of modern civilization. Despite her emphasis on the importance of "place" in fiction, Welty is primarily concerned with human values on which the order of civilization is based. Welty considers the family as important institution, which is most essential in everyone' life. Although at times she deals with modern aspects such as alienation, separation from family and society in her fiction, she emphasizes strong family relations.



Eudora Welty being a writer of new fiction has chosen the themes from the American south. Welty's stories are predominantly about women and their place in the southern world. Welty is able to introduce different characters fusing into them the two worlds i.e., the inner and the outer world. She has a fine air of observation and gifted imagination that enabled her to create characters that appear lively. Each of Welty's character has his or her own identity. Though her name is among the 'Gothic' writers, Welty never uses the symbols of southern decadence. Further, Welty strongly believes that fiction must be firmly grounded in a place. Welty says, " - as a writer I think background matters most in how well it teaches you to look around and see clearly what's there" (Prenshaw 83). Welty has defined the role of place in literature. Its function is primarily to attach precise local values to feelings. Further, Welty strongly believes that fiction must be firmly grounded in a place. Thus the place, obviously, derives from its existence in time and people living in it. In spite of her strong opinion regarding the place in fiction, Welty doesn't restrict all stories to one place as William Faulkner's 'Yoknapatawpha' country. In Faulkner's fiction one can find more regionalism but not so much in Eudora Welty's. But Welty's characters are real people caught up in the transition period. She changes the locale and also projects some of her inherent aristocratic characters that try to keep up their family tradition fail in their lives and alienate themselves. On the whole her characters are timeless and universal.

Eudora Welty uncovers a world filled with life-natural, sensual, rational and moral. She invests in her characters an unlimited capability as male and female, for bodying forth the rich diversity. They try for attention when they save their lives in submission to prehistoric laws of birth and death or when they follow a personal vision heroically. As Simon de Beauvoir says, "We are accustomed to thinking of these two human destinies as characteristically sexual" (Prenshaw 48). traditionally the woman's place is in the home, she is the mother who gives us life and with it our morality. Welty belongs to the transition period in South America. Her short stories generally reflect the feminine point of view. This article



deals with the author's opinions concerning the gender difference, the importance of place, characterization etc.

Welty has a good family background in which she never experienced any gender difference. Both her parents were educated and she was treated equally with her two brothers at home since her childhood. She was fond of reading books from their home library. Her childhood reading is reflected much later in her writings. During her time some of the writers and critics were of the opinion that women couldn't write good stories. They expressed their own doubts about female writers. But Welty says that she had never been handicapped in writing for being a woman even when the society was discriminating between the male and the female. As she says, "I am a woman; in writing fiction imagination comes ahead of sex. A writer's got to live inside all characters, male, female, old, young, to live inside any other, in male or female is sub-ordinate..." (Prenshaw 54). Moreover she never showed any kind of interest in politics or any movements related to it. When she was questioned in this regard she said that she did not believe in any kind of female liberation movement. As she says, 'I'm not interested in any kind of a feminine repartee. I don't care what sex people are when they write. I just want the result to be a good book. All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply at all to women writers. We have always been able to do what we wished. I couldn't feel less deprived as a woman to be writing" (Prenshaw 54). She adds that she was never deprived of any privilege that men enjoy.

Even when there was a conspicuous discrimination between men and women, Welty did experience such a one except once i.e., with an Editor of a Magazine. As she says, "...I've never met so far as, I know with any prejudice from editors because I was a woman - with the exception of my story "Petrified Man ", which was turned down by Esquire Magazine because I was a woman.... I was too ignorant to know that they did not take stories by women" (Martha Van Open 21-22).



Eudora Welty's views on the "femininity and feminism"

Welty in her short stories depicts the kinds of responsibilities and commitments women have. She also shows the plight of women who suffer in fulfilling them. She believes strongly that women have more commitment and responsibility than men. They were ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of the same. She says: "... although I didn't marry, I had a family that was working with and helping to care of ..." (Martha Van Open 20). But in her case these responsibilities never caused her any disturbance to her career or they have not taken anything away. As she further says, "... human responsibilities come first. That would be blaming another person if you didn't get your writing done. I am speaking absolutely personally. My life was easier..... I' m sure, but I grew up in the depression which wasn't too easy , and my father died the year I got out of college, which wasn't too easy ,but that was just all in the way life was. You can write no matter what goes..." (Martha Van Open 21). By listening to her words we can conclude that her philosophy on life is that depressions, ups and downs in human life are part. The people should accept them the way they come up on each individual. They should withstand the adverse situation with courage and a determined mind.

Like Tillie Olsen, Welty also believes that women have always been at a disadvantage. But personally, as earlier stated, she never experienced any disadvantage and she has never aligned herself with any writers group. As an artist at work she has remained a solitary figure. She experienced consideration, kindness and politeness instead. According to Welty women's movements do not achieve anything. Some of the female chauvinists loudly demanded equality, forgetting that the rights cannot be demanded or gained but equality should be obtained by means of assertion. She also says; "All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply at all to women writers. We have been always able to do what we wished" (Prenshaw 54).

Most of Welty's characters suffer and experience the problems and difficulties which are common to women in general. Some of her characters such as Laurel Mc Kelva, Sabina, Virgie Rainey, Laura, and Miss Eckhart have been depicted differently from the other female characters. Even the few female characters portrayed as revolting are forced to do so under



the pressure of circumstances. For example, Sabina slaps her husband in front of many people for being oppressed and insulted for a long period. Her patience was lost. This shows us that Welty is not a feminist but feminine in her character portrayal. In general, her characters do not stem from feminism. Circumstances have forced them to deviate and go against the accepted norms. In fact, sometimes, she became critical of the feminists who agitated and raised slogans and made demands over petty reasons. She is of the opinion that "...some of the movements, women are making fools of themselves, and I'm sorry for that, because it's cast a wry sad light on the real facts of the matter" (Martha Van Noppen 22). Even though Welty was against Feminism as a political movement, she admits that it has improved the position of women. She bitterly criticized feminists, when they tried to make the entire women folk look comic. Welty says, "I hate the grotesque quality of it I think it should be done, but if it's making comedians all of us, I don't know that it's worth it. It can be done in another way" (Martha Van Noppen 23). By this we can conclude that Welty is neither a supporter of feminism nor a strong representative of the traditional woman.

Significance of "place in fiction"- Eudora Welty's viewpoint

Eudora Welty strongly opines that story/tale must be firmly grounded in 'place.' Irrespective of her characters and the universality of her themes, she has depicted most of her stories in southern culture and Mississippi in particular. The function of place is primarily to attach precise local values to feelings. Fredrick J. Hoffman says:

Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting and therefore credible, gathering- spot of all that has been felt ,is about to be experienced, in the novel's progress. Location pertains to feeling, feeling profoundly pertains to place, place in history partakes of feelings, as feeling about history partakes of place. (Hoffman 13-14)

Thus the place obviously derives from its existence in time and the people living in it.

Place in Welty's view has come to mean "home", the family. The home is a place arranged by a man for peaceful private life according to certain norms. In a fundamental sense the entire south is a family, rather than a state or a region. According to Andrew Lytle,



particular families were, "...the institution of southern life" (Lytle 76). The emphasis on family as an essential feature of southern life is generally evident in the works of writers belonging to the American south.

The southern writers, according to Welty retain their natural way of looking at things, the sense of the continuity of life and the sense of the family. The southerners generally prefer to live in one place where they can see whole life spread out around them. It enables them to develop a natural sense of the description of the life lived by the people which can become a readymade form for the story. Welty says that place is "a source of inspiration" and giving her knowledge. As she says, ".....as a writer, I think background matters most in how well it teaches you to look around and see clearly what's there" (Prenshaw 83).

Eudora Welty's views on "character portrayal"

According to Welty in characterization, background is very important because it is –

something shapes people and it is the world in which they act and that makes their experiences- what they act for and react against. And with its population a place produces the whole world in which a person lives his life. It furnishes the economic background that he grows up in and the folkways and the stories that come down to him in his family. It is the fountainhead of his knowledge and experience upon which we grow further. (Prenshaw159)

The southern writers have the talent for tale telling. Children of the southern families are receivers of family stories and active participants in the oral tradition. So the dialogues written by the author most of the time are colloquial in a typical southern style. Having known this tradition, Welty is distinctive in tale-telling when compared to other southern writers.

As Welty says, "All the characters are conceptions of the imagination, which are invented to carry out what I want to do them in the story. I endow them with things I have observed, dreamed or understood, but no one represent a real person" (Prenshaw 213-214). Although she emphasizes that all her characters imaginary, one can find familiar people



around. Thus her characters are real people. Through her characters Welty has shown the transition period in the American South. The impact of the North America is shown through some of her southern characters. She is neither against change nor does she strongly support the traditional woman. She is of the opinion that in spite of change the southerners have a great respect and reverence for the life, family and the sense of history.

Welty's characters constitute a combination of the tragic and comic elements. Some of her characters being unable to cope up with the changing environment alienate themselves. Charles E. Davis points out:

Her characters are often caught up in the tragic dilemma of either trying to maintain a tenacious grip on an outmoded and dying heritage or facing an essentially rootless existence which offers no viable substitute for the old tradition. Seen from this perspective the major theme which runs through Welty's short stories and novels are indeed that of a changing south and "the fact of isolation" which Warren found in 1944 to provide the basic situation of Miss Welty's fiction is most often the result of the individual ability to assimilate himself into that altered world. (Davies199)

She adopts the technique of changing the locale and also cast some of her inherent aristocratic characters which try to sustain their family tradition fail in their lives and distance themselves. Thus one can say that Welty is a keen observer of surroundings and the life in its truthful manner and projects very realistically and her characters are timeless and universal. .

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Ironical Subversion in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

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Abstract: Shakespeare's final tragedy *Coriolanus* depicts a quaint blend of the Greek tragedy and a vigorous projection of the manipulation of power. However, unlike other Greek tragedies and Shakespeare's plays, this tragedy offers a series of antitheses. Like a seasoned craftsman, Shakespeare dexterously works his way through a series of powerful contrasts and an array of ironical subversions. Like in a Greek tragedy, the hero scales the heights of extraordinary achievements but is faced with a sudden and brutal reversal of fate. Secondly, the paper attempts to scrutinize why Coriolanus despite being a hero is despised and deserted by a fickle populace. Thirdly, the ironical subversion of Coriolanus as a villain becomes prominent when his arrogance threatens dictatorship. An interesting instance of a more phenomenal subversion can be detected through Volumnia's conflict as a mother and as a responsible citizen of Rome. The bipolarity that exists between democracy and dictatorship has also been questioned by this ironical subversion throughout the play. The sound interplay of the text and its sources, nation or society and identity, estrangement and belonging, displacement and relocation, reverence and hatred, compliance and rebellion make the plot a more plausible story revealed through a well-contrived structure of intricate conspiracies piling up to the end. Moreover, the conspicuous contrast between appearance and reality endeavour to make the play a highly multi-layered but controversial text. The long train of interconnected events and multiple conflicts offer a fertile grounds for discussion and analyses. An attempt has been made through this paper to explore some of the various interpretations of this lesser discussed text in the context of its relevance in the present day.

Keywords: Tragedy, Roman play, Traitor, Mother, political mutiny, famine.



Written around 1608, *Coriolanus* is the last in the cycle of Shakespeare's Roman plays and historical tragedies. Shakespeare's creative Muse finds greatest expression in placing a war hero on the anvil of criticism and offering a disillusioned perspective of the same which is without much cynicism or despair. The play was written for an audience which constituted of people who were predominantly associated with the profession of law. As a result, *Coriolanus* might have been borrowed "Life of Caius Marcius Coriolanus" from *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by Plutarch, the diplomat and popular biographer and translated by Sir Thomas North into English in 1575. (Dickson 45) However, other scholars have observed parallels between the plot of the play and the political intricacies in England during Shakespeare's times. The political subversion of early 17th century London, civil militancy and a continual conflict between King James and the Parliament find echoes in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* as the depiction of the struggle between the patricians and the plebeians. The political conflict of the play has offered a large scope of controversy. The play is set in the early years of Rome when it was struggling to achieve its identity of an important city, long before Rome acquired the eminence of a prosperous and powerful empire.

Even the form of the play has been subverted. Mangan points out:

The world of Rome is also a central character in *Coriolanus* seemingly a return to individual centred tragedy, it turns out to be something very different. Marcus Caius Coriolanus thinks of himself as an autonomous individual – the man of action standing alone with his integrity against the mealy mouthed and often corrupt voices of Roman politics. What he cannot see is the extent to which he identifies with and is identified with the very group he despises. There are many varieties of 'Roman-ness' in the play, and Coriolanus's ideal of Rome (which is selective false and 'noble' in a rigidly militaristic and authoritarian way) is so bound up with his own sense of himself that he is unable to tolerate the gap between his ideals and the chaotic reality of a Rome in which a bad harvest means rioting on the streets as the poor demand



food. Shakespeare's vision in *Coriolanus* focuses on an individual but only to affirm that the tragedy is that of a society. (Mangan 213-214)

The play has attracted limited popularity and critical attention due to the fact that much of the action has been propelled by the incidents without much focus on the intricacies of the characters. Hence, the reader or the audience can relate or identify with the characters, especially, tragic hero Coriolanus only on fewer occasions unlike the characters in Shakespeare's other powerful plays like *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Tempest*. This makes *Coriolanus* seem more like a modern play.

According to Daiches, Coriolanus

meets his death the same boyish, bewildered, instinctive character he is at the beginning, and it is through this immaturity, almost in a sense, this innocence, that Shakespeare preserves throughout the play sufficient sympathy for him to enable his fall to be seen as tragic at all. Coriolanus is thus one of the most limited in scope of Shakespeare's mature plays. (Daiches 295-296)

The subversion can be seen here as the desired effect of sympathy towards a tragic hero is not evoked in the audience.

When the story opens, the plebeians of Rome are found to be complaining among themselves about the famine and the consequent dearth of corn that is given to them by the patricians who are the ruling class of aristocracy. The story also depicts in the backdrop, the historical event describing the aftermath following Tarquin's collapse (of whom there are several references in the text), the last ruler of Rome. However, the lack of food distracts the attention of the plebeians from the concerns of such political unrest and turbulence. This is perhaps the first instance of subversion that can be perceived in the play.

Subversion, here, may refer to the undermining of the power and authority of an established system or institution. However, if these instances of subversion are ironical in



nature its meaning may be extended to speculate upon instances that transpire to be a contrast of what is intended or expected. The examples cited duly above illustrate the same.

The aftermath of the famine provokes the common people to demand the right to decide their own prices for the city's grain supply. They suspect that the patricians have been hoarding all the grain. In order to pacify the "mutinous members" (Shakespeare 626). of the spirited crowd, the governing nobility, or patricians, offer the plebeians five representatives, or tribunes to be voices to their demands. However, Caius Marcius, an arrogant patrician soldier, despises lower classes (but not the proletariats)--and overtly expresses his contempt for them by calling them "dissentious rogues"(Shakespeare 627). This is yet another instance of subversion and the source of the conflict for the rest of the play. Coriolanus' excellence at warfare does not always translate into the nobility of his character.

Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus are the elected Tribunes to represent the commoners. Unlike Caius Marcius, they are not soldiers but wage their verbal battle against him. With their snide remarks against Caius Marcius, they conspire to rouse the fury of both the plebeians and Caius Marcius against each other. The two tribunes continually perceive Caius Marcius as their threat to their own political success and hence try to defeat the celebrated Roman general in other ways.

Since the beginning of the play the two Tribunes plot against Coriolanus with their strident, calculated words and moves. They despise him for his pride and for his scorn for the commoners. They suggest that he would seize all the glory from Cominius if the Romans defeat the Volsces. The ironical subversion becomes more prominent in the episode that follows. Caius Marcius returns triumphant almost single handed at Corioli against the Volscian army. The Roman senate honours him with the surname Coriolanus and he is promised the consulship if he will only humble himself to beg the citizen's voices in his support. He does this reluctantly, making his distaste quite obvious and Sicinius and Brutus seize the opportunity to turn the people against him. They persuade the other tribunes that if



they usher Coriolanus to the political arena by electing him Consul, he will get the other Tribunes eradicated.

After Coriolanus asks for the people's votes, the Tribunes use their war of words to incite the people against him, suggesting that he has only mocked at them while begging for their voices (or votes). The ensuing squabble in the marketplace causes the citizens to accuse Coriolanus of being a traitor and flies into a rage. This sabotages his opportunity to become the Consul and he subverts the expectations of the members of the Senate by undermining the honour. Despite his valour at warfare, Caius Marcius Coriolanus, the Roman general is too naïve to understand the Tribunes' political intrigues and loses his consul's office in Rome.

During warfare, the opponents combat one another. Though the fight maybe gruesome, but it is fair. In a political wars, Caius Marcius Coriolanus is not used to encountering dishonourable manipulative words, back-stabbing, treachery and deception. He is defenceless against them. Within only a few moments the political situation is subverted: instead of feeling inspired by his success, Sicinius and Brutus envy him and manipulate his flaws as a weapon to get him banished.

The subversions reach the climax when being rejected by Rome Coriolanus goes to Antium, where the Volscian forces are regrouping, and asks Aufidius, their commander and his chief rival to accept him as his ally or kill him. Aufidius offers him command of the Volscian army and Coriolanus agrees to lead them against Rome. The subversion takes place when Coriolanus becomes as successful and popular as their general that it rouses Aufidius' envy and he begins to contrive ways to accuse him of treachery.

The Volscians lay siege to Rome, and Coriolanus' friends plead with him to spare the city, but he ignores them. Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia, his wife, Virgilia and son Marcus make a second appeal: Virgilia's tearful appeal balanced by Volumnia's reminder to her son of his aristocratic duty finally dampen Coriolanus' determination to attack and take over the city.



The ultimate form of the ironical subversion which is also a dominant theme of the play is “the nature of the upbringing which caused this ice to form in Coriolanus’ soul” (Macleish and Unwin 33).

Volumnia had brought up her son in such a way that she “was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame” (Act 1, Scene 3). Instead of protecting her son Volumnia leads her son to destruction by pleading with him to not attack Rome. This is the ultimate instance of subversion in the play. Coriolanus knew that this would bring about his death.

Coriolanus:

O Mother, Mother!
What have you done? Behold, the Heavens do open,
The Gods look downe, and this unnatural Scene
They laugh at. Oh my Mother, Mother: Oh!
You have wonne a happy Victory to Rome.
But for your Sonne, believe it: Oh believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortall to him. But let it come:
Aufidius, though I cannot make true Warres,
Ile frame convenient peace. Now good *Aufidius*,
Were you in my stead, would you have heard
A Mother lesse? or granted lesse *Aufidius*? (*Coriolanus* 1.3)

The ironical subversion is clear here:

Ideally a mother guards her child with her life but here she guards her city against the wrath of her son—thus bringing about doom upon himself.

As a result of his family’s entreaties Coriolanus signs a peace treaty and returns with his Volscian soldiers to Antium. Instead of a happy reunion with Aufidius the final subversion happens next. Aufidius accuses him of treachery, the two men quarrel and



Aufidius' men murder Coriolanus. Only now, with Coriolanus dead at his feet, does Aufidius (ironical or otherwise).

Even in terms of language, “Shakespeare characteristically combines, on one side, an earthy prose and a healthy contempt for authority, with, on the other side, a supple verse and a weighty invocation of authority” (Bate 98).

The parallels between individual and their society are clear. Coriolanus' inner disintegration of himself can be compared to the tumultuous society he belongs to. This further accentuates the subversion of the tragedy. Shakespeare had replicated this subversion from the ancient documented histories available in his day and the England of his time. Innes aptly points out that “*Coriolanus* is set at the beginning of Roman history when the structures of the Republic were being worked out, usually violently” (Innes 22). He observes that plays like *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* “deal with the tumultuous events that see massive changes taking place in the state. They are concerned with the beginnings of Rome, the shift from Republic to Empire and then the disintegration of that Empire. Britain was itself on the way to becoming a major empire at the time Shakespeare was writing” (Idem.). Hence *Coriolanus* as a play greatly excited the imagination of the theatre going public in London since it depicted the history of what was until then the greatest empire known to western history.

Thus the play depicts an inspiring story of Coriolanus who represents the leader who never had to compromise, never had to consider the existence of political arts. He gets what he wants because of who he is—and when this fails to work as well in peacetime as on the battlefield, when instead of enemies to kill he has opponents to convince, his self-esteem collapses and his tragic fall begins. Coriolanus is a personal tragedy, a story of a military genius with no other talents destroyed by his inability to compromise. As in so many plays as in the lives of so many rulers, Shakespeare's point is that rank is nothing in itself without attention to its moral and human obligations.



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Dissolving Boundaries of Societal Prejudice: A Centripetal Reference to Global Immigrants' in Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing*

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Abstract The two existential questions 'Who am I' and 'Where do I belong?' haunt every human being. The most reflective self-possessed word in these questions is 'I' the sole cause of egotism in each individual who thinks of oneself as the supreme being which leads to one's own destruction. However, the word 'I' need not always involve self-centeredness. Its connotations as believed by many philosophers change according to the individual's framework of reference. That is to say, if one longs to see the vibes of charity and human kind in oneself, the very notion of self-possessiveness will be dissolved. Imbibing similar ideologies of elevating oneself from self-destruction to self-construction on the lines of humanistic values, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a renowned and acclaimed writer of South Asian Diaspora, endeavors to motivate her readers on the parallel lines of self-awareness. The present paper entitled "Dissolving Boundaries of Societal Prejudice: A Centripetal Reference to Global Immigrants' in Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing*" makes an attempt to bind people from different communities and cultures by promoting love and wisdom to finally make an effective social order.

Key Words: Self-exploration, Johari Window, Humanistic Values, Immigrant's Discourse, Diasporic consciousness, Transcultural Aspects, Centripetal Space, Karmic Principles.



The foremost thing that is given prime importance in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works is dissolving boundaries between cultures and between people. Discussing about her blending of genres to diffuse the borders, she alleges, "I also think that if we don't dissolve boundaries, if we stick to boundaries, it is a very dangerous thing. It creates a lot of suspicion and hatred. It's important for me as an artist to not do that, to not allow that to happen through my work. I really want my work to be at once authentic and also humanizing" (Leenerts 88). In this context, *One Amazing Thing* is Divakaruni's exceptional piece wherein she brings people from different background, community, culture and ages under one roof and under one label that is 'immigrants'. Her exceptional piece is a modern *Canterbury Tales* of the group of immigrants who while struck under the rubble of Visa office decides to turn a page from each immigrant's life. That one page turns out to be an amazing thing in their lives which they themselves have not realized until the moment when they started sharing their reminiscences. The piece, thus, disclose how these immigrants by peeping into the lives of each other discover the way out not only from their own messy lives but from the rubble of Visa Office where they get stuck, no one knows, for how long. The novel, though, is written from a different perspective of initiating self-awareness by exploring the inner realm of its immigrant characters, it is observed that the syndrome of *Desh-Videsh* which is the most important constituent of diasporic writing is present in the lives of each and every character. The wrecks of Visa office stand as a resemblance for their hyphenated world from where there is no getaway. Their lives are the best paradigms of this syndrome. If observed from bird's eye view, these immigrants very well befit Homi K. Bhabha's justification of diasporas which states that they are,

Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment. Of other worlds



lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.
(Bhaba 199)

During the course of time, diaspora has extended its periphery from the edges of hyphenated world to Homi K. Bhabha's 'Third Space' (53), which has its own unique phenomenon. With its advent, it draws attention towards its universal appeal of achieving virtue besides proving itself as a blessing in disguise for those living on the edges. It claims to attain a special stature for every immigrant who comes to its refuge, by transforming itself according to the spirit of place and the situation in which an immigrant is placed. That is to say, to stitch a quilt of comfort for these bewildered immigrants, this 'Third Space' acquires different forms in the need of hour, sometimes as reminiscences of past, sometimes as a room of cultural baggage, and in few other instances as a hyphenated existence or a dream home by transcending oneself beyond the margins of all the biases in the name of caste, creed and culture. Walking on the similar path of Bhabha's ideology, Divakaruni also interweaves her quilt of diasporic saga with distinct fabrics of immigrant's lives on it. *One Amazing Thing* is her masterpiece wherein she makes an exceptional effort to diffuse the boundaries among immigrants by discovering Bhabha's 'Third Space' in the form of story-telling. Through this story-telling, Divakaruni tries to bring vibration in the lives of these bemused immigrants by making them notice one amazing moment in their lives which has bound them to their dear ones until then. Simultaneously, while sharing a part of their lives with others, these immigrants also get a scope to peep into the lives of others and understand the agony through which they led their lives. If observed critically, it is worth pointing out that the novel is an excellent blending of four panes of Johari Window, a psychological tool created by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. A self-awareness tool, Johari Window explores four personas of an individual's self within a group, namely, open area, hidden area, blind area and unknown area with its prime focus on how to navigate the contours of the open area. It works on two factors: what you know about yourself and what others know about you. When an individual willingly shares something about oneself with others, it leads to the exploration of open area. By disclosing information about oneself, individuals can build trust among themselves and



can simultaneously learn about others. Any aspect of oneself that one is not aware of but others are, comes under blind area. If an individual is ready to receive feedback from others regarding one's positives and negatives by considering it an important part of exploring one's self, then a person's blind area will be reduced and open area will be expanded. The size of open area will be further expanded vertically towards hidden area if an individual discloses some personal information and issues to others in a group. However, care should be taken that certain aspects which are too personal should not be shared with all but trusted members in a group. Otherwise, it may lead to serious consequences compelling others to take the advantage of one's weaknesses. The fourth and last pane of Johari Window which is designated as 'unknown area' contains information which neither the individual nor the others in a group are aware of. It lies dormant somewhere in the subconscious mind and awakens when a person seeks to receive feedback from others at regular intervals. This process of Johari Window which leads to the expansion of open area is termed as self-disclosure which plays an important role in developing communication and bridging the gap between others in a group.

Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing* also seems to imbibe this psychological tool through its characters who make a remarkable effort to come out of the invincible web of their lives by hanging themselves to the only thread of life line, that is, story-telling. The author herself seems to have influenced by this psychological tool as she states:

...*One Amazing Thing* at least suggests to the reader that we may find a common space where we can respect each other's stories as we share them. In hearing a story or reading a story, or experiencing a story, the other really becomes ourselves, or is closer to us. That is happening in this novel, as people are listening to the stories that are being offered in a spirit of great trust. This is what we do when we are offering our stories as writers to readers. I mean, as a part of ourselves: something that comes from very deep within us and often has never been heard by anybody. The act of



speaking that creates vulnerability can also result in a great and powerful connection. And that is my hope as a writer. (Zupančič)

As discussed earlier, the plot of the novel revolves around nine immigrants of different race, culture, religion and age who come to the visa office of the Indian embassy to get their visas and complete other formalities in order to pay a visit to India which they believe to be a mystic land that will relieve them from their karmic debts. The land of numinous, India, thus, becomes a sacred place for these immigrants who decide to undertake a pilgrimage to its heart of cognizance. However, destiny has some other plans for them. No sooner do they start going through the procedure of getting their visas, than the whole building rumbles down due to small tremors from an earthquake imprisoning them under the debris as if to claim that they are stuck there due to their karma. Karma, as specified in Buddhist teachings, is the result of cause and effect. To put forth Newton's third law of motion, 'for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction', it is assumed that reaction may not take place instantly but it will surely happen in near future. Oblivious to the truth behind their misfortune, the immigrants without their knowledge acquire the process of reforming themselves before visiting the magical land. The process of reformation begins when at the suggestion of Uma, an Indian-American girl, each one starts initiating a story from his/her life to avoid instigating any cold war. Sensing the power behind it, she compels them by stating that 'I don't believe anyone can go through life without encountering at least one amazing thing' (Divakaruni 65). Her insistence uplifts the spirit in each and every individual present there and compels them to share their part of tale. This process of story-telling further leads to the exploration of their hidden areas, one of the four panes coined by Joseph and Harry for their psychological tool Johari Window. To be exact, the account of their hyphenated lives, befriends them with their own weaknesses and strengths. The deeper they dwell into their lives through their own tales, the deeper they come upon sensitivity of their relations. The amazing fact about their tales is that while they are still in the process of narrating it, they stumble upon the loose threads that resulted in the indifferences with their dear ones. Here, it is worth mentioning that the whole process of sharing and receiving



endows these immigrants with a cascade of purification that purifies their soul. This process of purifying one's soul by erasing the indifferences that have developed both within and outside one's self is in itself an individual's pilgrimage. Beyond this there is no holy land as such that bestows one with the ultimate solace. To be precise, the cosmic reality for which an individual visits distant spiritual lands lies within oneself and if a person succeeds in grasping that truth, there is no need to search for that reality in outside world. Once a person unites with that cosmic reality, no matter wherever s/he visits, whether it is India or some other distant land, everywhere he would observe that cosmic union.

A similar kind of outlook develops in Divakaruni's immigrant characters from *One Amazing Thing* when they peep into the depths of their as well as other lives through the account of their past. Through this act of disclosing their selves, they realize that all of them are somehow related to one another in their miseries. They also comprehend the fact that while sharing their sorrows with others, they could not realize exactly when their spirits are uplifted from the burden of those sorrows. The group consists of nine immigrants- two visa officers, Mr. Mangalam and Malathi who are both attracted to each other but disconcerted with the very thought of it; Uma, an Indian-American girl bewildered by some of her parents hasty decisions; Jiang- a Chinese-Indian woman in her sixties who wishes to rejuvenate her old spirit by visiting the land of her childhood; her teenage granddaughter, Lily who is both happy as well as vexed with her gifted talent of being a guitarist; Cameron, an ex-soldier haunted by a guilt of killing his own child; Tariq, an American-Muslim, perplexed with this new avatar of America after 9/11 attack; Mr and Mrs. Pritchett, an elderly white couple whose relationship is on the verge of breaking.

Jiang, is the first to initiate the story. In her part of narration, the word love is the positive constituent which brings amazing rainbow colors in her life. But before she could find her true love, she undergoes a long journey of penance from India to the U.S. in search of it. A silent observer and the one hiding the secrets of her heart to herself for all these years, she never let the others in her family know that she could very much speak English. Besides, all these years she compels her family to speak Mandarin. Speaking English, she believes,



will reopen her wounds from her past life in Calcutta. However, on this day under the rubble of visa office, when no one is sure of their future ahead, she decides to unlock the door to her secret chamber. Despite the instructions of elders to stay away from Indians whom they referred as ghosts, Jiang is the first to break this taboo. Unlike all her classmates, who get married, she makes the way to her family business of footwear and is responsible to author the name FENG'S FINE FOOTWEAR for their business. It is here at this store that for the first time she comes across Mohit Das, a young manager at National and Grindlays Bank, with whom she starts weaving her dream world unknown to the fact that her dreams are woven with loose threads which will anyhow break with one lash of Sino-Indian war of 1962. Mohit deserts her for the sake of his family. Soon after, under the pressure of war, she gets married to Curtis Chan, a dentist in Calcutta and together with other Chinese families they undertake a voyage to the U.S.

Although dejected with the sudden turn of events, Jiang is still determined to prove herself. Even though she is in oblivion stage in regard to her relation with Mr Chan, she assists him in setting up a small grocery in a Chinatown when his Dentist degree proves to be worthless in the hullabaloo of American culture. She is so good at business that in a few years the store is transformed into supermarket shifting their children to private school and moving them to a lavish apartment in a gated building. Amidst this tumult of life though she moves ahead, she leaves behind her vigorous and hearty self who used to enjoy every second of life. Her past is still hankering somewhere deep within herself holding her from identifying the worth of true love. Despite this gap, it has been observed that although, she has not expressed her love for Mr. Chan in words but the connection to their heart is very much there from the very beginning of their marital life. Jiang realizes this only after four years of their married life when one night during winter, Mr. Chan fell sick. Suddenly when he goes stiff, she gets tensed and shouts "Don't die, don't die, I love you" (85). Later, when she thinks about those words, she is surprised. She realizes that she has not uttered those words out of fear that without him she could not look after the store and the children. But the truth is she really loves him and without him her life will be like an empty shell. To quote her, "When



had it happened? Looking back, I could not point to one special time and say, *There!* That's what is amazing. We can change completely and not recognized it. We think terrible events have turned us into stone. But love slips in like a chisel—and suddenly it is an axe, breaking us into pieces from inside” (86). Here it is worth mentioning that all these years the spirit of love has always maintained its presence between them but Jiang has not realized this until that night when she feels that she is going to miss him. Here, it is notable that for a quite long time Jiang vacillates between her past and present. Though she has full-fledgedly accepted her present, her inner self gets struck somewhere in between her past and present life. To set it free from that unseen string of past memories, she decides in her last years to revisit the city of her youth to finally feel the trance of her olden days. Nevertheless, while narrating that hidden part of her life, she unknowingly relieves herself from the burden of her past memories. She realizes that with the passage of time herself has acquired a transformation both within and outside as she succeeds in searching the true love in her soul mate who despite knowing that she had a boyfriend not only accepts her at the time of trouble but gives her own personal space to recover from that agony of losing him.

Next in the course of narration comes Mr. Pritchett who during his childhood to save himself from the adulterous and treacherous act of his mother and her boyfriend Marvin, seeks refuge in Maths. A fatherless child, the boy's only world is his mother who works at *Mickey's Diner and Take Out*. At other times when his mother is not around, he loves to travel in the world of Maths and feels pleasure in doing multiplications and divisions. Though living a pitiable life where they could only afford from hands to mouth, the boy never considered himself an unhappy child. Everything is running smooth in their peaceful lives with his mother bringing hot-dogs buns along with apples after every pay day and reading to him during weekends *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* but then things fall apart with the arrival of Marvin, his mother's new boyfriend. Marvin has now started living with them because he pays half of the rent and looks after the boy when his mother goes to work in the afternoon. Marvin is allergic to cats and this becomes a big issue at home because recently the boy has developed a fondness for a kitten which he has found at the empty fields



behind their apartment and now wishes to keep it along with them. However, both his mother and her boyfriend are quite against it which hurts him a lot. This slowly develops in him hatred against his mother and Marvin. It becomes worse when one day he comes across his kitten suffocated to death in the freezer which he surely assumes to be the work of Marvin. He could not bear the sight of her mother because according to him this would not have happened, if she had not welcomed Marvin in their lives. When the boy observes that his world of dreams in which he used to idealize his mother, has scattered now, he turns to Maths which he believes will never desert him like his mother. He finds them quite amazing. Long before one could decipher the answers from the back of the book, he has them ready with him.

So he does more and more of it., asking his teacher for extra worksheets that he brings home, fractions and decimals and word problems about Aunt Anna who's driving from Boston to Philadelphia at a certain speed, or a bathtub where the stopper doesn't quite fit, and how long would it take to fill. The words transform themselves into numbers that line up like acrobats, numbers that can be trusted to perform the way they're supposed to. He begins to understand their nature they are ancient and immortal, not frail and easily broken. As long as he offers them his full attention, they will never abandon him. They sing their answers to him, and the inside of his head fills with light as he writes them down. (99)

Although, the affection for Maths brings solace to Mr Pritchett's soul succeeding him as an efficient banker, his wounds are still believed to be unhealed. This had a long lasting impact even on his marital life. He could never come out of his depressive stage and thus fails to give his full attention to Mrs. Pritchett. However, the narration of his hurting and agonizing story does bring a sort of transformation in his relation with Mrs. Pritchett. Mrs. Pritchett, who believes her husband, from the beginning of their marital life, to be one pathetic fellow who has no interest in her, now fills with sorrow for the kind of boy he is during his childhood and the trauma he is made to undergo. Earlier on that day in the Visa office when Mr. Pritchett offers to pick up something for her to eat, she denies in a leave-me-alone tone. Now after listening to her husband's part of tale, she feels sorry for him. So, after her husband's account of tale when Cameron suggests the group to adjust themselves on the few



left over tables because the room is slowly filling with water, Mrs. Pritchett joins her husband. Mr. Prirchett's story, thus, by enlarging his blind area, develops an understanding between both Mr. and Mrs. Pritchett finally bringing them closer to each other.

After the vigorous and fruitful tale of Mr. Pritchett's, Malathi decides to give her story. With her part of tale, Malathi, unconsciously explores her hidden area. A girl from a middle-class Brahmin family, Malathi weaves the path of her future with the world of beauty salon. Unlike her two sisters who are married off, she decides to be a bride maker instead of becoming a bride. She starts working at Lovely Ladies under the supervision of Lola against the wishes of her parents. But as if destiny has some better plans for her, she ends up here in the U.S. in one of the Indian consulates as an employee. A happenstance with Mrs Vani Balan, a frequent visitor of Lola's and wife of an industrialist, brings hullabaloo in Malathi's life transporting her across the oceans. Mrs Balan explicitly asks for Malathi whenever she visits Lola's. However, Malathi is not her sole favourite, she has a maid by name Nirmala who always accompanies her to the Saloon and awaits her in the waiting room until she is done. The frequent visits of Mrs Balan develop a special bonding between Nirmala and Malathi encouraging Nirmala address Malathi as her elder sister. Malathi comes to know that Nirmala has developed an intimate relationship with Ravi, Mrs Balan's son. To curb this development furthermore, Mrs Balan executes a plan to get rid of Nirmala. She takes her to Chennai to attend the fiftieth birthday of Mr Gopalan, her cousin and an owner of a five-star hotel franchisee. Nobody knows what happened next and then just like that Nirmala becomes Mr Gopalan's new girl and is moved from servant quarters to a suite of her own in another wing of the house. When Malathi comes to know about this new development, she curses herself for ruining Nirmala's life. Since she is the one who worked magic on Nirmala's face before she left for Chennai wishing her good luck, she feels herself responsible for Nirmala's fate and thus decides to teach Mrs Balan a lesson for playing a foul game with Nirmala. Malathi, who is fully aware that Mrs Balan has taken special fondness for her, takes the advantage of it and deliberately blends the wrong proportion of chemicals and applies it on Mrs Balan's hair. As a result, Mrs Balan loses most of her hair. Though Malathi is happy



with this new development in her, she is frightened that now Mrs Balan is going to sue Lola. But to her surprise, Lola dismisses her fear by stating that Mrs Balan cannot do any harm to her since she has many influential clients visiting her. She further claims that she cannot hire Malathi back but has found a job opening for her with Indian consulate abroad. Malathi's craving for something different, thus, lands her in the world across the oceans. With this job abroad, she could now fulfill her desire to open a new beauty salon of her own and can remain independent without relying on others. The beauty salon of Lola's and an acquaintance with Mrs Balan, thus, prove to be one amazing thing in Malathi's life that has completely transformed her way of looking at the world. When asked by Uma why did she pick this story, Malathi responds that 'It was the only time in my life I did something brave, even though it was a big cost for me. I don't think I can do that again. I am too selfish. So it is special to me' (123).

Unlocking the unknown area of her deserted self Malathi's part of tale certainly stands apart from the others as it imparts Malathi with the knowledge that she has the flair for accomplishing courageous tasks. Although she feels she is selfish, her brave step of punishing Mrs Balan for her treacherous acts underscore the fact that even she has the benevolent heart whose beat goes uneven whenever it senses that some injustice is taking place.

To observe whether other characters of this amazing novel harbour such potentials or not, one has to analyze even their accounts on the parameters of self-exploration. Accordingly, amidst the eerie, freaky tension of winning or losing their lives, Tariq turns the pages of his inner as well as outer realm. Alike others, even he discovers the wonder of his life amidst the hassles of 9/11 attack. The hullabaloo of 9/11 is so loud that it shakes the entire existence of his and his family's. In view of 9/11 repercussions, Muslim community is targeted mostly. Government agents, mostly FBI picked the people in suspect, sometimes without any reason and released them after a few days of interrogation. For few, it took much longer and by the time they were released their whole existence seem to be in shambles with nowhere to turn around. Tariq's family also becomes the object of this obscene act, when



four men come to Jalal's Janitorial Services and take away his father and his father's assistant manager, Hanif. Though after three days, Tariq's father returns home; nothing remains the same here after. On one gloomy day, his father gets a stroke and after a lengthy and expensive hospital stay when he is brought home, he could not move his left arm and leg.

When they look for suggestions from their closed ones, most of Tariq's uncles and aunts admit that it would be better for their parents to retire in India. But, then the very thought of parting from his mother land compels him to think if it is worth to flee his land of birth just because a few diplomats have marked his family with a blotch of terrorism. Would he be really happy by reuniting with his love in India? And what about his parents? Is it reasonable to force them to retire among the people of some distant land who have very least knowledge about their entire existence? He then recalls that since he is born in the U.S, he could not fit anywhere in Indian life style with his American attitude. He is very much American no matter how much he and his family is despised in the name of community or religion. The very thought of carving a new identity for one's self by leaving behind one's past fills him with rage. It is at this juncture that Ali comes to his rescue suggesting that it would be a cowardly act to turn one's back to his/her motherland. Bad things happen to everyone around us but that does not mean that one should run away from there. After listening to soothing and guiding words of Ali, Tariq is very much certain that he is not leaving his mother land and no matter what comes in his pathway, he is once again going to carve his identity on this very soil. However, he is confused about where to begin and is still contemplating about his tangled situation and a way out of these difficulties when the earthquake takes place blocking him under the wreckage of Visa office along with others. Here one point is quite clear that despite facing enormous domestic upheaval, Tariq is determined to succeed. His firm decision to stay back in his mother land and face the challenges thrown by it underscores his hidden and unknown area which further gets strengthened by developing his acquaintance with the other people who get struck under the debris of the visa office.



Tariq's rejuvenation doubles when Lily, expresses her feelings of considering him as her older brother and suggests that he could stay with them whenever he wishes to come back from India. By considering Tariq as her older brother, Lily opens her account of tale. In her part of tale, Lily has her older brother by name Mark who is child prodigy. In ninth grade itself, he has written a research paper on cancer that has bagged national science award. Even in behavioural aspects, he is the apple of his parents' eye. This over concern for her brother by her parents starts pinching Lily. Though she thinks that it will slowly develop hatred in her against her brother, she could not do that. To grab her parents' attention, she, thus, decides to be rebellious and performs a series of action one after another against her parents' wishes. Soon she succeeds in getting plenty of attention for herself from all. Her parents start yelling at her, grandmother talks about evil spirits but all this is not sufficient for her so she starts dressing in black, skips school and gets her eyebrow pierced. It is at this time that Mark comes to her rescue and instead of lecturing her, presents her his old flute. When for the first time Lily puts her lips against embouchure, she feels a strange sensation and just like that her brother's gift becomes her passion. Soon she starts attending music classes and enters local contest. After that there is no looking back and slowly she becomes the talk of the town. At home too, she becomes the topic of discussion. Doubly blessed with their gifted progeny, there is no limit to her parents' happiness. In the whole process, the only good thing that happens to her is that she discovers a great change in her. To quote her, "My parent yelled at me for coming home so late. And I still wore black. But inside, something had changed. I no longer wanted to waste my energy on being bad" (141). Here, it is noteworthy that in general, it would be difficult for anyone at Lily's home to bring a desired change in her, if they have counselled her. But the option chosen by Mark to guide his sister to correct her path is simply amazing in its own way. It brings out not only her hidden talent exploring her unknown area but also refines her way of thinking. She no longer desires to be stubborn or disobedient. She,



in fact, comprehends the real worth of family and how difficult it is to maintain the serenity within. Once implanted, she finds it difficult to root out these human values.

The sagas of self-exploration drawn out by a few members seem to have brought out a small transformation in other members who are still left with their accounts of life. When the nine survivors have the last of their food, it is observed that they are more snacks than originally counted earlier. To quote Uma, “People must have taken things out of their secret stashes and put them in the pile when no one was watching” (147), a fact to prove Uma’s belief that story-telling will bring people closer to one another making their bonds even stronger- a bond which Uma, Cameron, Mangalam and Mrs. Pritchett have hankered for throughout their lives but could not get it.

In case of Mangalam, he wishes to develop that bond between him and his parents by showing his gratitude towards them. Since they are the ones who despite having poor financial support provides him with all the privileges of life, Mangalam decides to repay their love and concern in the form of gratitude. Akin to other duty bound sons, even he has desires of marrying her sisters with a handsome dowry, renovate his old house and present his mother with a pair of golds bangles. To fulfil their needs and to become the saviour of the family, if he had relied on his own wealth of intellectuality, he would certainly have a bright future. But his eagerness to reach heights deprives him of all the chances of showering that warmth and affection on them. His zeal and passion to settle once and for all in heights compel him to commit a bigger mistake of his life. In his madness to secure a place amidst sophisticated people, he joins Film Club where children of rich discuss foreign movies. On one of his visits to the Film club, he comes across Naina, the only daughter of a high-level government official. Carving a secured place for himself in her heart, finally one day, he proposes to her. After initial hiccups, Naina’s father agrees to the proposal. The only thing he expects of Mangalam is that he should keep his daughter happy. Failure to do this would be dangerous for Mangalam’s health. Mangalam does not take this serious but slowly realizes that Naina’s demands are more luxurious than his salary could afford and if he asks her about that, she reminds him that she is paying her bills out of her allowance. Managalam overlooks



these small issues thinking that with the passage of time, Naina will slowly settle in domesticity. Everything is running smooth with Mangalam sending most of his pay cheques to his parents. But mere sending the cheque is not enough. There is the bond which he always craved to develop. Henceforth, an irreparable rift occurs between Mangalam and Naina when Mangalam realizes that Naina is not at all interested in welcoming his parents to their fancy new flat gifted by her father, nor does she show any concern to visit her in-laws. However, she is ready to pay for their bills if he makes some arrangements for them in a hotel. Realizing how insulting that would be to his parents, Mangalam loses interest in his marital life and develops an intimacy with his department accountant, Latika. Slowly, that intimacy blossoms into love and they, oblivious to the danger lying ahead, decide to get married and move to a smaller branch in the south of the country where Mangalam seeks a transfer. No sooner does Mangalam announces his intentions to Naina, than he discovers that his whole world has shattered into pieces. The very next morning Latika is charged with stealing a large sum of money that went missing from accounts and his transfer approval gets cancelled. He realizes then how morally is he degraded by his wife and her father. Finding his world of dreams shattered into pieces, Mangalam then decides to teach a lesson to Naina and her father by initiating to flirt with her closest friends whom she could neither ignore nor harm. Consequently, Naina and her father become the laughing stock of the high society. As a result, as expected to save their face among the people, Naina's father, using his influence, transfers Mangalam across the oceans to the U.S embassy. This unexpected transfer, however, becomes a pathway to explore his unknown area. It is only after moving to the U.S embassy that he realizes for the first time that the game which he has begun to punish his wife and father-in-law for their deceitful act has now become a practice for him. He cannot stop himself flirting with the women and Malathi becomes his new bait in this.

Mrs. Pritchett (Vivienne) who has been silent all the while now volunteers to share her part of the tale. Alike others in a group who express in their part of tales a close bonding or connection to their dear ones, even she wishes to have that attachment towards her husband. Oblivious to the fact that it is this bond of association that has tied her to her



husband over a span of sixty years, she gets distracted by the sight of an old man, whom she does not know, helping his wife take off her coat. The gesture of the old couple leads her to believe that her husband does not love her in the way she expects him to. To quote her:

I remembered the old man tilting his head attentively, listening to his wife making her menu choice. Her eyes had shone through her thick glasses as she watched him cut up their desserts for sharing. There was nothing like that tenderness in my life. And without it, what use were the things I'd built my days around? My garden, my home, my activities and friendships, even the time Mr. Pritchett and I spent together—they were all so many zeroes. With the 'one' of love in front of them, they could have been worth millions, but as of now, I was bankrupt, and it was too late to start over. (170)

Owing to this new sadness that completely engulfs her world of existence she goes into a depressive stage and decides to end her life. Soon after when she is hospitalized, she is visited by a guiding spirit in the form of a nurse, who leads her to the path of karmic principles. The visit of the nurse proves to be one amazing thing in Mrs. Pritchett's life as she suggests her that if she kills herself, she has to go through everything she tried to escape. So if she really wants to come out of all her agonies, she has to stop blaming her husband and herself and walk in the path of forgiveness and accept. The suggestion of the nurse, although, does not make any instant impact on Mrs. Pritchett, it leaves an indefinite mark in her mind which starts working gradually. At the moment, inspired by the nurse's earlier words of desiring 'a new life' instigates Vivienne to discover a new life for her by moving away from her husband. She blames none but herself for marrying Mr Pritchett against the wishes of her friends and family. Though she no longer decides to commit suicide, she continues carrying the pain of her old self. So when Mr Pritchett shows her the picture of an Indian palace, she, at once, realizes that it is this place where she is going to discover a new life for her. However, it is only when Mrs. Pritchett along with her husband gets struck under the rubble of Visa office does she understand the real worth of incarnating a new self. She understands the real cause behind her husband's indifference after listening to his part of tale and as guided by the nurse, decides to forgive all her husband's trespasses. Once again, the tools of



Johari window play their charm on Divakaruni's characters by immersing them in its give and take process enabling them build trust among themselves.

Drifting to another place as well as time while others are engaged in connecting their life line to the only thread of story-telling, Cameron, too, contemplates about the portal of bonding that connects people by means of love and affection. In his case, however, he himself has discarded that bond of love. And now, after years of penance though he hankers for that bond, it refuses to come to his assistance.

A black by birth, Cameron always desires to have a life altogether different from his community people where most of the young men are enlisted in the army or are engaged in some menial jobs. Cameron wants to become a doctor and have already sent numerous applications to different universities. But his love for Imani becomes a biggest stumbling rock in his path of success. He meets her for the first time at a party during his high school. The meeting slowly blossoms into love and by the time Cameron gets offer letter from one of the prestigious institutes, Imani is pregnant with his child. Though he is concerned for Imani, he is not ready to take the responsibility of a child and, thus, suggests her to abort their child. Hearing this, Imani grows quiet and leaves the place by uttering the words "No matter where you run, you be ending with ashes in your mouth" (183).

The words of Imani continue to haunt Cameron, due to which no matter wherever he goes, he fails to concentrate on anything. At the university he develops asthma owing to which he could not perform well in his studies. The other reasons are, his being black makes him feel dull among his fellow beings and the language of the textbooks also seems to be foreign to him. Soon, he loses interest and drops out of the university. After that, he tries his luck in various fields and at last ends up in the army. He believes all this to be the consequences of Imani's curse, but in truth, he is engulfed by his own guilt of losing his child. Henceforth, wherever he goes he could not deny the fact that he is solely responsible for the death of his baby and for the broken heart of Imani. Consequently, he fails to fit himself in any work undertaken by him. It is at this juncture that Jeff, a Buddhist monk comes to his rescue and suggests him to sponsor a boy in an orphanage situated in the hills of



India. Sponsoring a child, Jeff believes will relieve Cameron to some extent of his thirty years old grief and guilt of killing his own baby. To quote him, “Perhaps when Cameron saw this child in person, when he caught hold of his hand and felt the metta that upholds the universe flowing between them, he would be healed” (188). Besides, this sponsoring will also rejuvenate the lost bonding which Cameron mostly longed for throughout these years. Buoyed with a hope when Cameron contacts the orphanage, he, however, receives sponsorship of a girl by name Seva. But the officials at the orphanage people do not want to rush the things and suggest Cameron to write letters in the beginning and if things work out between them, they will soon arrange for a meeting. It is almost one year now, since he starts writing letters to Seva exchanging their codes of joy and sorrows. This new acquaintance between Cameron and Seva, in actual terms, accentuates the rebirth of his lost child in the form of Seva for whom Cameron undergoes a penance of almost thirty years- a point to underscore the karmic principles or cyclic nature of karma which actually works in each and every person’s life. To be precise, one gets back what one actually releases into the world. If one releases positive vibes, s/he will get the same and vice-versa. To aptly mark simple wisdom of Buddha by Dr. Rajan Pandey, “To make room for the positive energy available in this moment, you’ll need to release negative energy you’re holding onto from the past—be it distant or recent” (9). Cameron’s account of life seems to be swinging between these positive and negative vibes. He holds an inevitable pain and guilt within him which follows him like a shadow throughout his life. But when he decides to sponsor Seva, he could feel the mood of delight and pleasure that surrounds him as well as the environment in which he is placed.

Alike Cameron who revives his life after getting acquainted with Seva, Uma, the ninth survivor of the earthquake, is also at the heights of ecstasy during her graduation where there is no scope of negativity and only positive vibes matter. But, somehow, these positive vibes get surpassed by a small drift in her family. Her parents whom she believes to be the happiest couple on earth- her mother, a charming and devoted wife and her father, an adorable husband, seem to have developed serious differences. Uma is pursuing her graduation in one of the prestigious colleges of Texas, a place far away from home. She is



slowly getting acquainted with the lushness of the campus with its tropical foliage and old Southern elegance, when one evening, she gets a call from her father shattering her complete existence; he pronounces that he is planning to get a divorce because he no longer feels anything common between him and his wife except Uma. The shocking news of divorce is so hard-hitting that Uma loses interest in academics. She starts skipping her classes. The only class she now attends is kick-boxing where she feels at ease in the company of Jeri who regularly visits these classes. To beat the pain of her inner self Uma along with Jeri plans to travel to New York leaving behind all her agonies. It is during this adventurous journey that she comes across an amazing spectrum of aurora borealis in the sky. The sight of aurora is so soothing and pacifying that Uma spends the whole night under that startling garland of galaxy. When she wakes up after some time, the aurora is gone but its vibes are so strong that she could feel a kind of transformation in her. To quote her, “Something had happened as I lay in the field, watching the sky, an understanding that I couldn’t control the lives of others—but neither could they control mine” (Divakaruni 204). Although after a while, the news in a radio that a major explosion has taken place in the chemical factories to the east of the city, swipes away all the possibilities of any presence of aurora, Uma is very much certain about one thing that “...no matter what its source, the dance of lights over the night field had given me something facts couldn’t take away” (205). With this realization, she swings back to her college life.

Dexterously premised, the novel gives an exhilarating and invigorating panorama about a group of nine immigrants who get stuck somewhere in-between their past and present. To pull out these immigrants from the web of their past and to entwine them with the seal of their karmic nature; Divakaruni, with precision, adopts the method of story-telling, an incredible sample of Johari window. This technique of story-telling is in actual terms, a symbolic pilgrimage to one’s inner selves before an individual visits to the holy land, which heals the body both within and outside and purifies the soul.



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**Displaced Nation(s): Reading ‘The State of Exception’ In Debesh Ray’s
*Teesta Parer Brittanto (Story of The Banks of River Teesta)***

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Abstract: The advance of capitalist modernity in India and the widespread circulation and dissemination of colonial knowledge led to the formation of nationalist identity, curiously modelled upon the discourse of nation-state. In all this derivative formulation of nation state, what is lost is the voice of those people, whose concerns are never taken care of by the elites of the society and who continue to suffer in the dark labyrinth of history. In this context, this paper would like to reexamine the lost history of the ‘Burmans’ vis a vis Debesh Ray’s novel *Teesta Parer Breettanto* (1988). This novel has become the very point of departure which seeks to reestablish the pristine interconnection between man and river and the marginal community which is unfortunately thrown into the oblivious pages of history. Analyzing Agamben’s idea of ‘bare life’, this article will try to understand the context and situation of the subjects of modern democracies.

Key Words: Development, Displacement, Subaltern, Historiography.

From ancient times, river has ceaselessly worked for the construction of civilizations. Our ancient civilizations had flourished and prospered under the benevolence of rivers. With the advent of capitalist colonialist modernity into India, this traditional riverine culture had undergone enormous changes. As the focus gradually shifted towards the colonial metropolis, these rural riverine cultures had lost the due importance. The economic incursion in the name of modernity into the traditional structure of community life rendered them displaced and dislocated. But the existing historiography falls short of adequately explaining the weak response of this river based community to the nationalist movement in Bengal. This article



will try to explore the mental world of the people and examine the experience, perceptions of the community residing on the banks of several rivers. Their silence in the mainstream colonial and neocolonial sociological discourse marks the very enigma of nation building which the modern nation-state fails to encapsulate. The river novels provide that platform to witness this contest between the mighty power of nation and its dispossessed children. The agonies of dislocation on part of the community and the large scale exploitation of the nature on the other hand constitute the 'gap' within the monolithic narrative of national progress. This multifarious form of subalterneity is the nodal point from which this paper would try to analyze the flip side of the dominant modes of history writing in the context of Bengal.

The rivers of Bengal are important geographical territories that shape the social, political and economic organization along with the psychological responses, custom and religious belief of its people. Not surprisingly, therefore, this river centric environment has found prominent mentions not only in the musical genres, local sayings and folklores but also in the rich oeuvre of Bengali literature. The river novels in recent days have become the constant subject of introspection. But what is not adequately probed is the deep connection between the rivers and its various communities and their response vis a vis the stories of development, displacement and the global circulation of capital in the neocolonial age. Therefore, following the trajectories, already laid out by the figures like Manik Bandyopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, I would like to take up Debesh Ray's *Teesta Parer Brittanto* (1988) to look at this continuity of river based expressions and simultaneously its changed courses during the post independence years.

Before delving into the details of the text, it is germane to situate my reading of the novel along the lines of developing subaltern contexts. Therefore, I would take a brief theoretical detour to understand the complexities of subaltern representation in the novel. Partha Chatterjee in his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A derivative Discourse* (1993) discusses the mimetic nature of anti colonial nationalism and tries to find out the fault line of its journey. For Chatterjee, 'the fault line emerges at the very moment of its



conception, in its desire to counter the colonial claim that the non western world was fundamentally incapable of self rule in the challenging condition of the modern world' (Gandhi 119). Insofar, as Indian nationalism prepared to embark on the project of indigenous self-modernization, it announced its suicidal compromise with the colonial order. As a consequence, nationalist idioms succumbed to European etymology. Leela Gandhi suggests, 'nationalist production merely consists of particular utterances whose meanings are fixed by the lexical and grammatical system provided by the theoretical framework of post-Enlightenment rational thought' (Gandhi 120). As it comes up that the idea of Indian nationalism is a product of Eurocentric discourse, thereby open to the critical interrogation. This derivative discourse of nationalism first of all creates a fissure between the people-who-comprise-the-nation and the state-which-represents-the-nation, which the postcolonial nation struggles to bridge. This split between the preaching and the practice invites several problems to the construction of a homogeneous national identity.

Dipesh Chakraborty in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) shows 'how Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge' (Gandhi 119). 'The dominance of Europe as the subject of all histories is a part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world' (Chakraborty 42). The historical creation of modern state and its subsidiary knowledge is the result of a transition narrative which is unfortunately incomplete. It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the 'inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism'. He alerts us to the fact "The idea is to write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it" (Chakraborty 43). Chakraborty is in favour of situating the course of Subaltern histories in this deep chasm that still exists in the very digesis of modern nation. This inherent lacks or absences mark the texture of a vision of India which awaits its completion. Ray's novel belongs to this 'gap' which is critical of the schizophrenic nation state and its elite representatives.



Teesta Parer Brittanta (1988), part of Ray's trilogy, focuses on the relations between river, community and nation. The Rajbangshi community, on which this novel is written, describes the importance of Teesta in their life. Teesta is not the Ganges and the Rajbangshis are not also the elites of the nation. Therefore it has played with these two levels of dispossessions. Central to the story, is the narratives of pain and memories of dislocation, as the state of West Bengal undertakes the project of developments. As the colonial metropolis/ the new city is built on the ruins of villages, consequently this river novel turns out to be the best avenue for examining the unequal distribution of justice, wealth during the fag-end of colonial era and it also adumbrates dismal future of a newly independent nation. My contention is that this celebration of nature and the community is never a romantic engagement with the outside world, as exemplified by Tagore in his *Chinnapatra*, but fraught with the politics of the authors of the novels. The authorial direction and intervention makes these novels complex as it defies the logic of straightforward subaltern recuperation. This is always mediated and coloured by the novelist's own subjective engagement with the work of art. Ray's personal experience of being an immigrant from Bangladesh and the plight of settlement has also influenced him to pen down this novel. His personal engagement with the river Teesta often finds mention in his later writings too. He openly advocates Teesta has become the backbone of his identity and intellectual wings. Therefore it is of no surprise that the novel would bear the imprint of his concern for the river as well as for the residing community.

As far as the growth of the plot is concerned, Ray displays the pungent cultural insularity/fragmentation in *Teesta Parer Brittanta* through the use of the character of Suhas who arrives on the banks of Teesta as a settlement officer for Operation Barga, initiated by the contemporary Left Front Govt. in West Bengal. Earlier, he was also a part of the Naxalbari movement; he had also his share of belief in the utopic potential of the movement. Now he works as a bureaucrat, a government official. He is deputed here to oversee the land reform. Suhas experiences a strong disconnect with the ideal and the process when he understands the impending dislocation of the people living in the bank. His experience is



quite similar to that of Gora when he undertakes a journey across the countryside to feel the actual living condition of the people. He immediately discovers the widening gap between his imagination of India and the pragmatic reality of its people. Suhas, here is also appalled to see the poor living conditions of the Rajbangshi community. The latrines are dirty and filled with jungle. The frailty of the revolution and the destitution of the people give him an understanding of the pathetic pathogenic reality. As a former Naxalite leader he had ideas and a specific discourse, however, now he is surprised to look at this reality. He does not know how to change this reality. 'Just ten years ago what he thought, heard and saw about tribal, land, struggle happened to him, however, he didn't feel excited' (Roy).

A further example would help us to understand the growing disenchantment in Suhas as he feels the gnawing gap between the pedagogic and the performative reality of the nation. In the market Suhas meets a man called Nauchar Alam. Alam is very famous/ infamous there as the Govt. lost maximum land-cases against him. Suhas thinks him to be of huge shape however; he turns out a tiny one. This is how his daily experiences continue to shape the conceptual paradigms about the formulation of a new nation in the times of neo colonial set up. His experience and the expectations from the new state are further emboldened when he suddenly meets Bagharu in the middle of the crowd. Bagharu, a Koch- Rajbangshi, is symptomatic of the community, which fails to be mainstreamed, which still resides on the fringe of the state. Mised, deceived and finally uprooted from their traditional base on the pretext of creating a dam, this community bears the brunt of the mindless development project thereby constantly slipping from the codified semantics of the nation. Their entry into this is always postponed and deferred. This 'differance-deferral of colonial modernity' is responsible for the half-baked integration process. I will come back to the Rajbangshi identity formation and to the character Bagharu later to understand the impact of sovereign violence on the 'bare life'.

'Suhas' confrontation with Gayanath and the adivasis brought him a new realization about his Nation.' (Roy) When he faced Gayanath and his people in the remote forest he found he was alone and frightened. However, with lot of uncertainties he looks at their faces



and remembers his past life before ten or twelve years. It seems to him a fairy tale now. ‘The struggle and then revolution of the farmers and laborers in the background of village politics loomed large again and again in the activities of Radhaballav and Hrishikesh, Albish and Biren Babu’ (Roy). Suhas witnesses all these struggles, the lectures, the ironic struggle for unity and most dangerously the infighting between different tribal groups. At last after several incidents only Suhas stood alone in the field. He was astonished to see this changed reality about the Nation. His dream is shattered like the tribals of the bank are displaced. The revolution fails as the project of integration too surrenders to the roller coaster of development. The nation thus fragments into several displaced nations. Bagharu Burman leaves the river and the river silently witnesses the result of propagandist developments. Teesta becomes thus a metaphor in history.

Sudipta Kaviraj in his essay ‘The Imaginary Institution of India’ has talked about two forms of national identity- ‘gesellschaft’ and ‘gemeinschaft’(167-209). ‘Gesellschaft’ denotes the organized institutions like state, whereas ‘Gemeinschaft’ refers to the community which is plural and boasts of the multiplicity, the praxis. As the eponymous hero in Tagore’s *Gora* (1910) embarks on a search for the real ‘Bharatbarsha’ to have a sense of ‘everyday’, bypassing the myopic ‘historical’ of the nation, likewise Suhas’ search for the actual Burman lives is tantamount to a search for the community-the ‘gemeinschaft’. The gap between the imagined and the perceived makes him realize that he is a misfit into the society- the alienated traditional intellectual in Gramscian sense. The gerrymandering of the boundary between state and the community is a desired practice on the part of the nationalist leaders. But the failure to do so amounts to a cultural crime. His coming to terms with Bagharu provides him a vision which is wanted to see through the falsity of development- the development which costs the lives of the natives as well as is responsible for the destitution of nature. Therefore the inauguration of the barrage has refused to be the saga of development, but becomes the agonized narratives of displacements. Sajal Nag in his scholarly article “*Nationhood and Displacement in Indian Subcontinent*” (2001) argues that nation building is always a narcissistic project and it harps on creating a core self, excluding



the minorities in all sense of the term. “The journey of nations begins with the construction of self, the basic criteria for which is a preconceived homogeneity. But achieving such homogeneity proves elusive and the search becomes an exercise in peeling an onion, which involves the shedding of people who do not fit the constructed identity or who question the accepted framework”(Nag 4753). Analyzing the set up of Narmada dam and others like Teesta in the name of development, he goes on to argue how this politics of development carries the supplementary connotations of displacement in modern India. Riding on the stories of modernity, this, in a way, believes in the construction of a core identity, excluding the misfits. Bagharu Burman is the cultural other, therefore, he has to be sidelined. Thus, the novel becomes a stringent critique of the atrocious state power and its play of selective forgetting.

Ray’s novel helps to foreground the incompatible temporality that exists between the ‘historical’ and the ‘primitive’ of Indian society. Following Simmel’s argument in *Philosophy of Money* (2004) I would like to show that money becomes the only mode of interaction between these two antagonistic temporalities which is involved in ‘*representing the non-present*’ (Banerjee 18). Prathama Banerjee suggests that, ‘Historical’ is culturally superior, ‘Primitive’ is the alien other. One is duly incorporated into the mainstream and the other is sadly left to lurch on the border of society. The circulation and discursive formulation of ‘historical’ marks the formation of a composite national identity at the expense of marginalizing the primitive temporal reality. This continues to influence the newly independent nations like India. Therefore the significant bridge between the two realities can only be the idea of modern development as it tries to come to the terms with the troubled non-present. In expressing the outcast and the neglected, it categorically subsumes the heterodoxy of primitive voices. The primitives either surrender to the oppressive forces of the historical or get displaced by it. As in Tarashankar’s *The Tale of a River Bend*, the economic incursion with the advent of railways unsettles the traditional base of Kahar life, this novel also witnesses the same upheaval and resultant displacement as the Leftist Govt. of West Bengal decides to create a dam on the river. It forces Burman and his female-counterpart, Madari, to



relocate: “Bagharu and Madari are leaving the banks of the Teesta and Apalchand. The same reason, which would deforest the *Sal* trees, is likely to evict Burman and Madari. Deer, elephants, birds, and snakes, which used to roam all around the Teesta-based woods, would move away, and so would Burman's body. His battered physique would not survive the new Teesta-banks, the new forests...!”(Roy). As the novel finally ends with the hopeless surrender of the ‘primitives’ to the forces of capitalist intersection, it records the overpowering presence of the capital in their lives. The dismal failure of casteist mobilization under the yoke of colonial-capital is the failure of creating a composite national identity that this novel hints at.

Working on Aristotle’s distinction between ‘mere life’ (zoe) and ‘good life’ (bios), Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer* (1998) explicates the genealogy of ‘bare life’ from ancient regime. Banished from political significance and exposed to murderous violence, ‘bare life’ is the cumulative result of the sovereign decision on the state of exception and the target of sovereign violence. Damaged, tortured, violated body of bare life is not only the biological ‘Zoe’ but also the mutilated trace of the unfulfilled, destroyed political ‘Bios’. Evoking Theodor Adorno, one could surmise that ‘bare life’, not only the referent but also the effect of sovereign violence, is a form of damaged life. This has greater influence on the functioning of modern democracies. ‘Bare life’ is always already ambivalently positioned in the politics as being included only in the form of exclusion and being exposed to the tortuous violence. With the gradual transformation of sovereignty into biopower, the bare life results into the state of exception as it changes into disjunctive inclusion within the modern life. For Agamben, this inclusion of bare life within the bodies of each citizen becomes catastrophically apparent with the reversal of the democratic state into totalitarian states. In the novel, Bagharu becomes the symbol of ‘bare life’, a life which is swayed by the whims of the political developments. Bagharu’s body becomes the space where the contest between the state and the people is enacted. Suman Mukhopadhyay, commenting on Bagharu writes:

"Bagharu knows, knows in his bones: 'Everything is Gayanath's, that Teesta there is Gayanath's, those lands there are Gayanath's, this Bagharu here is Gayanath's'. Gayanath - the



lord and master of Bagharu - had once ordered Bagharu to tie trees to his body and let himself to be carried away by the waves of flooded Teesta. [...]One of them, an expert boatman of the region, was Kadakhowa. He was like a mirror image, a look-alike of Bagharu himself. Though the two came very near each other, no exchange took place between them at least that was what the rest thought. Does this mean that the Bagharus are incapable of entering into dialogue with other Bagharus? Are they really so alienated, so lonely? At the very beginning, while wading through a river with the local M.L.A. on his shoulders, Bagharu had requested the elected representative to give him a human name. Towards the end, ten years after the talk with the M.L.A., Bagharu is left with just a monosyllabic utterance, a word that he employs as a fixed reply to all questions: No. No, he is not anything, he is not Rajbanshi, he is not English, he is not of any party, and he has no festoons or flags.

Bagharu is negation personified. And this 'negative essence' ceaselessly intervenes, interrupts steady flows, and makes messy all *a-priori* designs. The society and the state keep him outside of history and for the same reason he remains irrepressible, he 're-turns' again and again to point towards the unrealised potentials of history, towards open- ends" (Mukhopadhyay).

Bagharu is exploited, tortured, misled and ultimately wiped out from the pages of history. Misled by politicians, he joins a procession from Maynaguri towards Jalpesh, without knowing that he is lending support to the eviction of thousands of people like himself. He is an eternal transient without any describable definite identity. He is like others, forced to give away their identity and rights. As he gets uprooted, along with him is also displaced the age old customs and rituals of the Rajbangshis, residing on the banks of Teesta. In the 'state of exception' the rights of man is taken away and this depravity is naturalized by the sovereign power of the state. During the building of the dam, a supposedly time of crisis, Bagharu along with other Rajbangshis are forced to move away to facilitate the smooth functioning of the dam. Unwilled, they are to face the state brutality and exposed to the violence of the state. That is why Bagharu's removal is a stark reminder of the 'bare life', wrecked by 'thanato-



political state of power', necessitated by the 'state of exception'. Therefore, this in a way becomes the epic story of the perpetually disadvantageous Koch- Rajbangshis.

Written in the fag-end of twentieth century, this novel projects the cultural alienation and the plight of the Rajbagshi community in Bengal and the concomitant withdrawal from the pages of official history. It warns us against the falsity of developments, which does not care for its own subjects. During the 'state of exception', the citizen is turned into the 'bare life', becoming the subject to the violence of the state and the resultant panorama of suffering engulf the marginals. The more this gap is widened, the more it runs the risk of obliterating its own self. *Teesta Parer Brittanto* thus turns out to be the testimony of a promise, which loses its track in the complex meandering of time.

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Being at Crossroads: The politics of identity in the narratives of Gloria Anzaldua

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Abstract: The radical narratives of Gloria Anzaldua and their subsequent formulation into a theory/culture imply the immense signification of territorialization and de territorialization of a country. As a colored, Chicana, homosexual, woman writer, her greatest endeavor has been to analyse the multifarious identities assumed by these women to find a foothold in the mainstream Western, heteronormative world, owing to their cultural, racial and sexual differences. Quite ostensibly it results in the annihilation of a woman's native entity. All of these contexts begs the question as to what efforts are made by such women to retain a concrete yet distinct identity in such a partial society? Also, are those 'efforts' one of appropriation or resistance? I will examine these issues through the "mythos" of the mestizaje as conceptualized in her works, *This bridge called my back* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

Keywords: Third world, feminism, Mestiza consciousness, Chicano, oppression. Identity.

Introduction

Noted Mexican-American author, Americo Paredes states the significance of identity through a person's naming- both literal and metaphorical, which lets him acquire power over others- mortals and immortals alike" (Paredes 31). Our author under scrutiny, Gloria Anzaldua, a Chicana feminist scholar, has based a fair share of her studies on the conflicts prevalent around these power relations in her homeland, the US-Southwest/Mexican border. Afro-American feminist Bell hooks summarizes the constraints of staying at the margins which holds similitude for the Chicanos; "Living as we did-on the edge-we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from inside out. We



focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both...” (Hooks Preface to the first edition.)

Consider the center/margin dichotomy hooks talks about. Anzaldúa, along with other women of color like her, highlights the existence of several such dichotomies, which are operative in the mainstream society to marginalize the border people on the grounds of racial, sexual and cultural differences. This eventually leads them first, to concealing their ‘real’ identity in order to prevent tokenization and later, assuming a ‘disguised’ identity with the intention of blending in what she calls the ‘white frame of reference’. Anzaldua rejects to adopt either of these identities and searches for a third alternative, in all her radical polemics. As Cherríe Moraga, another Chicana feminist and Anzaldua’s compatriot states, that the first bondage that restricts the woman of color to make her presence felt is the Western feminist mode of homogenizing women’s oppression. My first text in consideration, *This Bridge called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) that they both edited, subverts this notion of homogeneity in the mainstream system of social order in order to mark the difference in oppression from White women.

My second text, Anzaldua’s most celebrated work, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) is a more personal work which narrates the traumatizing stories of dispossession, extermination and exploitation (Bassnett 71) that have been an integral part of the lives of the people of her community. Anzaldua’s chief objective to compose this book was to divert the focus of the world to her Chicano heritage and locate them on the global map for identification. This was her first foundational step towards building a paradigm of struggle which is driven by the intersectionality of class, gender, race and sexual orientation.

Merging these two primary texts, what we get is an unusual discourse of ‘quest for identity’ which gives rise to diverse questions such as how do her texts prevent the annihilation of native identity? what efforts are made by these women to retain a concrete yet distinct identity dismissing all the spatio-temporal expectations of a society, which refuses to even recognize their existence? Are those efforts one of appropriation or resistance? And finally a brief inquiry into how do these questions shape Anzaldua’s concept



of the *áutohistoria-teoría*? I will analyze these issues in this paper, through the ‘mythos’ of the *mestizaje* as contemplated in her works, to trace a comparative pattern of her feminist epistemology, which Anzaldua tries to shape through her powers of language and spirituality.

Exploring ‘silenced’ spaces: making in-roads

The European perspective of designating anything non-European as the ‘Other’ is a kind of strategic formulation to create binaries of identity from the very beginning. Stuart Hall reiterates this fact by saying “...it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not...to what has been called its constitutive outside 'that the positive meaning of any term- and thus its identity- can be constructed. (Hall and Du Gay 4,5). Thus, the Other emerges as an artificial product of the Western, heterosexual and white standpoint. And when they do not conform to these standards, they are pushed further back into the periphery, an alternate space constructed out of hegemonic power. This bestows the former with what Bornstein-Gomez calls ‘hegemonic epistemic privilege’ (Bornstein-Gomez 47). Thus, the crisis of identity formation becomes a trap for the native consciousness in a Eurocentric setup.

Anzaldua and Moraga bring to the foreground the issue of representation of women by three forces: men, society and women themselves. Anzaldua informs that Chicano women, like women worldwide, endure ‘double colonization’ in the hands of the white supremacists and the Chicano men. Western discourses of theoretical practice, view women from the purview of men and this thought is deeply ingrained in how women view themselves. Hence the theories of ‘white is good/pure/male’ and ‘evil is dark/impure/female’ arise. What follows is the gradual submission to parochial notions, resulting in the ‘epistemic violence’ of a woman’s perceptions, ideas and knowledge, which are marginalized if not entirely erased. As Cherríe Moraga, in her preface to *This Bridge...* recounts how she confirmed to the notions of being ‘la guera’ or fair skinned which saved her from the ‘white gaze’ of ridicule in the society. Gloria Anzaldua re-affirms this by pointing out how she had internalized the superiority of the oppressor’s language and inferiority of her own in her initial years.



The grassroots foundation itself is problematic since women, with these segregated thoughts set out to claim their feminist rights, when feminism cropped up as a movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The White women spoke for themselves and, for marginalized women as well, by arbitrarily constructing an image of the ‘third world woman’ which “subsumes the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of woman” (Mohanty 336); equating their sufferings and by this notion of ‘familiarity’, White feminism reasserts the imperialist mode of sustaining the first world privilege through ‘otherness’ (Anderson 127). Because, building a unified, national identity around race is extremely difficult, since race is not a biological or genetic category; “It is a system of representation and social practices, based on bodily features- as ‘symbolic markers’ in order to differentiate one group socially from another” (Hall, Heed, Hubert and Thompson 617).

This anthology also addresses issue of the implicit and unconscious oppression that Queer people encounter. Moraga recounts how, initially, she nurtured a strange ‘shame’ for being Queer, a social misfit; “not man enough” to love, “not woman enough” to be loved (Moraga 33) and that later she achieved a renewed vision of her mother’s situation owing to her homosexuality, a concept that the Mexican culture refused to address and labelled its followers to be ‘abnormal’; sometimes even beating, torturing them. Moraga emphasizes that “For all women, lesbian and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies. Throughout ‘las Americas’ all these ‘lands’ remain under occupation by an Anglo-centric, patriarchal, imperialist United states” (173). Through this book, these women writers staunchly indict themselves and other women as to how they have failed each other terribly, to the escalating racial divisions within the US feminist movements and how white women have achieved their privileges at the expense of Third World colored women.

“And when our white sisters/ radical friends see us/ in the flesh...Not as a picture they own/ they are not quite as sure... If they like us as much: --Jo Carrillo” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 63)

The editors of the anthology promoted a ‘Theory in the Flesh’, which states that it is high time that women no longer shied away from voicing their opinions, emerging out of the



body politic. Thus, this anthology came out as a collection of poems, tales, essays and testimonials by radical women of color from diverse cultures, which brought to the Western forefront, a picture of segregation and humiliation carried out on colored women in the U.S. It turned the entire course of feminist epistemology in the West and gave a small but significant ‘visibility’ to the colored woman’s issues. “We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our own culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight” (23).

There is a close kinship between Gloria Anzaldua’s metaphors of the body and their subsequent formulation into a theoretical perspective; in fact, both are quite inseparable, for she views the woman’s body as the deepest source of her expressions. She equates the history of Anglo penetration into Mexican lands in terms of the violence of physical penetration into a woman’s body. For these women, colonization and sexual violence are used interchangeably. In one of her essays in the book, ‘Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers’, Anzaldua appeals to all women of her clan to give birth to a new language which uses their bodies as the site for reconciliation of the ‘First/Third World’ dichotomy. Anzaldua wishes these women to become ‘bridges’ carrying ideals of separate cultures, spaces and rationales on their backs.

The aim is to ‘bridge’ these gaps- gaps of linguistic, sexual, and racial identities which create ‘silenced spaces’ that hooks points out to be important factors (space and location) in Third World discourse of resistance. Hooks designates this very space to be a place of ‘radical possibility’ (Hooks 1989.206). It can be a location from which marginalized people may articulate their counter-hegemonic resistance. All of these points out to the necessity of the advent of a ‘strategic essentialism’ as Spivak posits.

Bridging gaps; Writing Borderlands

Post the publication of *This Bridge...*, Anzaldua found that the discrimination in American society was still very much in practice. Her individual inclusion into western academia as a dignified scholar couldn’t be viewed as a picture of ‘emancipation’ for Chicanas in a wider perspective. All her creative energies and frustrations thus culminated



into the composition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa starts off by defining a border as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa 3). These frequent territorializations are enmeshed in feelings of hatred, anger and humiliation. The tradition is hierarchal which gives rise to a new Border culture. A border, thus, straddles between two cultures, thereby alienating the sentiments of its inhabitants. The sense of exile, belonging and non-belonging is a fundamental companion of people across postcolonial cultures, such as these (Bassnett 75). Being a person of Anglo- Mexican descent herself, Anzaldúa has had to witness the shifting subjectivities of the women and thus, frames *Borderlands*, as a sort of hybrid text itself, one which also straddles between several genres of history, myth, anthropology, personal narratives and cultural studies. “I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean/ Where the two overlap/ a gentle coming together/ at other times and places a violent death. “This is my home/ this thin edge of barbed wire” (Anzaldúa 1).

The above lines from the first chapter of *Borderlands*, titled ‘The Homeland, Aztlán’, give away the sense of despair one feels on residing in a conjunction of two lands, when neither of them are her own, despite an ancestry which proclaims it to be hers. As one of the proponents of Chicana feminism in its infant stages, Anzaldúa uses her strength of mythmaking, storytelling and mysticism, hitherto deemed to be evil and pagan by the First World, to construct a whole new framework of feminist discourse which contributes largely into ‘US Third World Feminism’. We will be discussing these stages in the following pages, through which *Borderlands* provided a significant voice to these mute mouths by developing a whole new discourse of consciousness to look at oneself and intellect to fathom the inner soul, countering the Western standards of rationality.

- **Battling ‘Cultural Tyranny’.**

Mexican historian, Carlos Fuentes, had some historical facts about the global aspirations for discovering America; land of the Noble savage (Fuentes 184). All these aspirations met with disappointment when the conqueror plundered and demolished the virgin lands for their selfish economic goals, rendering the natives as a-historical. Gloria Anzaldúa from the onset attempts to construct a revisionist history of her indigenous roots; a claim that invalidates all



the prior Anglo centric postulations regarding the fixity of origin, to the Chicano community; “In 1000 B.C., descendants of the original Cochise people migrated into what is now Mexico and Central America and became the direct ancestors of many of the Mexican people” (Anzaldua 4).

Similarly, resurrecting legends of ancient Mexican and Mesoamerican deities to establish the antiquity of Chicano culture, helps her arguments to concretize, on reading which the border residents take pride in their heritage. She also exposes the extremist attitudes of the *Gringos* (Mexican name for the Anglos) towards the Chicanas by talking about the Mexican concept of Cervicide. Apart from this cross-cultural domination, she focuses on the domestic violence that is practiced by men, who have constructed all the metaphors of a women’s existence and demand subservience from women. According to Anzaldua, Culture is essentially a male domain, whose rules are to be transmitted by women (“...don’t poach on my preserves, only I can touch my child’s body”). The Chicano’s psychic restlessness, owing to his ambiguous identity, enrages him which leads him to brutalize women as proof of his ‘machismo’ (83). As she aptly states that a woman has been endowed with three vocations by patriarchy: a nun, a prostitute, a mother. Either she is the incarnation of *Virgen de Guadalupe* or shamed as the ominous *La Llorona/ Cihuacoatl*. However, “Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. A very few of us” (17).

Anzaldua notices that all the women goddesses in her culture have been depicted in horrid, and negative lights; capable solely of destruction of humankind. She dedicates an entire essay, “Entering into the Serpent” in which she invokes these deities to conjure uninhibited supernatural powers that women would imbibe and delegitimize metaphors designated to them earlier. She separates herself from all appellations of being a ‘woman’ and prefers being identified as a body with “coming together of opposite qualities within” [half and half] (19). Lesbianism is another act of resistance for women similar to the Black ‘womanish’ traditions, asserting the free will of one’s sexual preferences and establishing ideals of solidarity and sisterhood.



- **Invoking a ‘new’ spiritualism**

This sphere of her discourse can be further divided into two: 1.) *la facultad* and 2.) *Shamanic aesthetics*. These two categories are Anzaldua’s alternate means of cognition; a parallel cosmic world that a woman can resort to for “reprogramming my consciousness” (70). *La facultad* is a mode of resistance; a capacity to dispel binaries of heteronormative differences. Fear is what engenders this faculty of ‘senses’ rather than conscious reasoning. Anzaldua thus, calls for a separate spiritual invocation for the ones who are socially ‘separated’ from the world (females, homosexuals, dark skinned, persecuted, marginalized and the foreign, of all races). The ‘Shaman’ on the other hand, is the eternal conjurer, healer of wounds whose physical counterpart is the writer (“the writer, as shape-changer, is a nahual, a shaman”). Her literary discourses (or Writing as ‘sensuous act’, as she describes) are mostly shaped by these mystical epistemologies, which are often dark and depicts the dilemma of a writer, where h/she has to believe in her creative Self only for the total Self to manifest itself into a solidified whole (73). Her spiritual contemplations are empowering for every woman for it constitutes a state which is a prelude to transcending the ephemeral world (crossing) to attain ultimate freedom of the soul.

- **Shaping a Language of the Oppressed, by the Oppressed, for the Oppressed**

Chapter Five of the book is perhaps the most famous and widely mentioned piece of her colonial discourse. Titled “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, it talks about the violence that is caused by the negation of language (“Who is to say that robbing a people of/ its language is less violent than war?”) For Anzaldua, language is a ‘male discourse’ and a key component of her rhetorical strategy to define, describe and empower her Chicana identity. Constant subversion and demeaning of the native language gives rise to a sense of low-esteem in the Chicano children; “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity- I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (59).

Moraga recalls about having felt a deeper sense of proximity with Spanish language than with English, while listening to a seminar in the native tongue- the former, a language in her blood; the latter, a language injected into her body forcefully. In order to overcome this



humiliation, time demands the blooming of a new language, exclusive to the Chicanos; “a forked tongue... a secret language” (55). Anzaldua indicates the uprising of a new language- of the Borderlands- a mixture of several versions of Spanish- a ‘bastard language’ called Chicano Spanish which she claims is gradually making its way through the legitimate systems of linguistic discourse. This language is, she warns, gross, wild and ‘untamed, often slangy, thereby rejecting western hegemonic conventions of language. There is a consistent rupture involved while studying her works for she creates a unique mode of ‘code-switching’, incorporating Chicano Spanish in between the lines, interrupting the reader’s smooth absorption of knowledge. Barring the inculcation of a wholesome meaning of the text fulfils Anzaldua’s motive of inviting the reader and therefore decentering the author. However, Anzaldua also takes into account the need for the oppressor’s language’ which has a universal potential to become a medium for the oppressed to reach out to the world in order to inform them about the linguistic terrorism committed in various locales of the world, or effect what Chakrabarty terms ‘provincializing Europe’.

- **Connecting the dots: a new Consciousness**

So far, the author has catalogued distinct modes of reflections for the Chicanas to take refuge, for a better way of leading their lives within the First world. However, she fails to envision them fitting into an alienated society such as the US mainstream and conjures up an inclusive consciousness, which she realizes must emerge out of the same hybrid progeny (“crossing over”) to which their existences belong; only much more empowered, ready to take on the world. This new breed of females have an all-inclusive intellect resulting from the “racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination” (77) - that of the *mestiza*; “a consciousness of the Borderlands” (77). The new *mestiza*, straddles between cultures, constantly transitioning, exploring multiple layers of existence, assuming a plural identity; at once a Mexican, an Anglo- an indigenous native. Delving deeper, we find that what she expects of a new *mestiza* is not merely resisting the oppressive forces by engaging the self as an agent of violence but rather; “...constantly shifting out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking...to divergent thinking characterized by movement away from set



patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (79).

This emphasis on inclusivity’ is what propels the mestiza to finally secure a ‘place’ for her in the macrocosm of the world; nurturing divided loyalties for both White and Chicana identities- the final appropriation. Anzaldúa depicts this process in terms of a ‘rebirth’ of the Chicana; “push Gloria breathe Gloria/ feel their hands holding up...Trying to scream/ from between your legs...” (“that dark shining thing”, Ehecatl/The wind, 172).

This is when she finds herself at the ‘crossroads’; not of the master/ slave, male/ female, pure/evil dichotomies, but on the verge of a leap which results in her penultimate ‘crossing over’ bridging all gaps.

Conclusion

Gloria Anzaldúa’s methodology of appropriation and resistance prompt the formulation of the notion of ‘autohistoria- teoría’- a fleeting possibility of articulating the Self, one of the central concerns of her aesthetics. There is not any systematic definition of this proposition, except for some abstract ones like ‘a fictionalized biography’. But there are traces of transcendentalism throughout her earlier works which find expression in her later works. Going against the wind, Anzaldúa has located herself in several self-articulations: Chicana feminism, Mexican- American society, queer, straight, dominant and submissive paradigms, margin and the center- appropriating yet deconstructing all these “fleeting multiplicities of possible identities”, in a postmodern world where identities are rather incoherent, fractured and fragmented.

History has been replete with such instances of ‘exclusion through identification’, all of which share a similarity in their efforts to erase their ‘social invisibility’. Initially possessing a ‘disturbed- identity’, As a Chicana-feminist poet, she has looked into gender stereotypes, hegemonic approaches to language questioned them by cultivating a counter stance in her polemical texts. For her, ‘the personal is political’ as her discourses appeal women at the margins to take the baton of representation from the hands of first world women, speak in a new language of articulation, tell a new story of strength rather than of



pain and voicelessness. These final lines convey effectively, her trajectory of studying identity politics:

...this is a give away poem,
I cannot go home,
until you have taken everything
and the basket which held it
When my hands are empty
I will be full". (Chrystos)

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Celebrating Silence and Otherness: A Reading of Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*

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Abstract The fixity of the binary opposition has often been challenged in literary ventures and the fluidity between the two poles blurring the line of separation has been attempted. Retelling Indian myths is one such genre where the writers have experimented with criss-crossing binaries. Many Indian authors of late have made huge success in reversing the age old order of good versus evil, breaking the larger than life image of Gods and sprinkling a more humane flavour to the so called demons. In this experimentation of fluid binary opposites, both history and mythology have been deconstructed. Some notable names in this new discourse of myth retelling are Ashok K Banker, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavita Kane among others. Our paper is an attempt at critical engagements with the works of two such writers namely Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and to analyse how both the writers have tried to unearth the voices of the silenced and the vanquished. In the first book, Kane tries to look at the unfolding of events from Suparnakha's perspective while Neelakantan's narrative is a gripping tale from Ravana's standpoint. The paper will further analyse if women's way of retelling is in any way different from their male counterparts.



Key words: Binary opposites, myth retelling, myth deconstructed, voices of the vanquished

In an article in *The Hindu* titled “Myth for Modern Times”, the author, Anusha Parthasarathy, states that the meaning of the word mythology has been reworked by writers like Amish Tripathi. For Amish Tripathi, as stated in the article, “the very word mythology which is derived from the Greek term ‘mythos’ means to hide the truth and it is up to us to discover it through the story” (Parthasarathy). He further quotes Tripathi thus:

Probably the only ancient civilization that has kept its myths alive even today is India. This is not because the other myths aren’t as rich as ours but because we have understood the philosophy behind them. Myths are not about the stories but about the message you spread through them. And as societies and beliefs change, myths have to change along with them. Modernising and localising myths are ways of keeping them relevant in modern times. Otherwise, they would die out. Whether they would make them relatable is something readers will have to decide. (qtd. in Parthasarathy n.p.)

And indeed, ‘modernising’ and ‘localising’ myths have led to a new trend in Indian Writing in English, namely, retelling myth. Experimentation has invaded this new genre both in terms of theme, technique, subject matter and style. Sufficient liberty has been taken in terms of overturning the established hierarchy, introducing new voices and breaking stereotypes.

With the advent of post modernism and the breakdown of grand narratives, alternate narratives have made their presence felt. Retelling myth fits into such scheme of small narratives that can challenge the long standing hold of the Hindu myths as grand narratives. Many a contemporary writers have tried their hands in this genre where the established norms have been challenged and the great cause of *Dharma* or justice is looked at from different perspectives. Some of the prominent names that resonate in this new genre of retelling myth includes Ashok K Banker, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavita Kane among others. It is also interesting to note how the women writers in their respective experimentation have tried to bring to the surface the otherwise



silent female voices from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. For instance, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her *Palace of Illusions* looks at the unfolding of the events at Kurukshetra from Draupadi's point of view; Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife* and *Sita's Sister* foreground the voices of Uruvi, Karna's wife and Urmila, Lakshman's wife and who subsequently present their own views on the events in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, presenting an alternate view and an alternate voice. These female voices are quite strong in questioning male patriarchy thereby breaking stereotypical ideals built up by the Indian myths. In Anand Neelakantan's works like *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and *Ajeya: the Game of Dice*, we encounter a totally different approach in presenting the incarnation of evil. An altogether different perspective and trajectory is built in studying the good versus evil dichotomy. In this new discourse of retelling Indian myths, the writers have deconstructed both Indian history and the age old Indian perspective of victory of good over evil which has led to the breaking of the binary concepts. The long standing debate between good versus evil; right versus wrong; just versus unjust; brave versus cowardice; god versus demon has been put into an alternate trajectory where the fixity of the binary opposition has been challenged making room for fluidity between the right hand and left hand postulates, thereby challenging the superiority of the left hand side postulations. The application of postmodernist, deconstructivist and feminist approach in the study of myths has resulted in a new discourse of myth retelling. And the writers have in a consorted effort displaced the larger than life image of the gods coupled with a more humanely treatment of the demons.

The present paper will attempt to study Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* in the light of the trends that have emerged in this relatively new genre of retelling myth. The paper will try to establish that in their attempt to subvert the fixity of binary opposites, the authors have drawn insights from critical theories, such as postmodernism, feminism and deconstruction. The age old dichotomous assumption between good and evil have been made fluid as they do not remain fixed in water tight compartments of the binaries.



‘Yes, I am a monster!’ screeched Meenakshi, her eyes flashing, baring her claws at her mother. ‘See them? If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!! I am Surparnakha!’ (Kane 9)

Surparnakha, Ravan’s famous sister— ugly and untamed, brutal and brazen— this is often how she is commonly perceived. One whose nose was sliced off by Lakshman and the one who started a war. But, was she really just a perpetrator of war? Or was she a victim? Was she Lanka’s princess? Or was she the reason behind its destruction? Surparnakha, which means the woman ‘as hard as nails’, was born as Meenakshi — the one with beautiful, fish-shaped eyes, is often the most misunderstood character in the *Ramayana*. Growing up in the shadow of her brothers, who were destined to win wars, fame and prestige, she, instead, charted out a path filled with misery and revenge. Accused of manipulating events between Ram and Ravan, which culminated into a bloody war and annihilation of her family, Kavita Kane’s *Lanka’s Princess* makes us see the familiar events unfold through the eyes of a woman more hated than hateful.

Meenakshi, who was rechristened Surparnakha by Ravan in an early duel grew up with that hateful name only to reveal some hidden truths and unspoken episodes of the great epic. When Kuber’s attempt to abduct Meenakshi was foiled by the latter’s sharp attack with her nails, Kaikesi, Meenakshi’s mother jeered at her husband, Rishi Vishravas’ ‘cowardliness’ who stood helpless and defenceless throughout the entire drama of Kuber’s attempted abduction. Meenakshi who always admired her father silently cursed her father’s helplessness on that fateful day that fired a silver of red hot anger in her, sizzling with shame and hurt. He never made an attempt to rush to her aid as she had anticipated. He had stood silently, shocked but passive as his son (Kuber) had dragged her by her wrist and seized her. She hated to admit to herself that it was the same father who, laying aside pride, dignity and differences, had begged for Ravan’s release from Kartiviryarjun. The realisation reverberated dully in her weeping mind: her father did not love her, as a father should, or as much as she loved him— so unquestioningly, so faithfully.



Throughout the novel, many a times, the trickery and the treacheries of the gods and rishis are revealed. One such example is when Kumbhakarna is tricked to his sleep. While Kumbhakarna was to ask for the boon of Indraasan from Brahma, he asked for Nidraasan instead. In place of the high seat of Indra, Kumbha landed up asking for sleep. Having realised the slip, Kumbha intended to ask Nirdevatvam— the annihilation of the Devas— but instead ended up saying Nidravatvam— sleep. However, it was later found that this foul play was wrought by Indra who felt threatened by Kumbha's might. Indra felt so insecure by Kumbha's might that he beseeched Saraswati, the Lady of Knowledge, to confound Kumbha's tongue. Knowing this trickery Kaikesi, Ravan's mother burst out "This is outrageous ... And wicked and unfair ... But then, what do you expect from the devas and the rishis? ... They are infamously known to cheat when cornered, rather than battle it out!" (Kane 57).

In another such instance when Surparnakha in Dandak forest approaches Ram and Lakshman with an eye to seduce them, the duo toyed with her emotion each asking her to go to the other. She did accordingly without a morsel of doubt that she was actually being insulted by both Ram and Lakshman. As realisation dawned, she stood in the middle watching the two brothers, handsome and cruel, grinning surreptitiously, sharing a secret jest. She was the jest. As Ram beseeched Lakshman not to kill but maim her, she retorts back that it was the same pair who killed Taraka, her grandmother. And Surparnakha's introspection at this point is quite touching:

Maim her, what weird barbarity was this and for what, she thought panicking. For displaying desire for these two handsome men? How could someone so beautiful be so ugly and cruel? What were they furious about— me attacking Sita or me assaulting their chastity, their moral righteousness? Was it their apprehension for my uninhibited behaviour, assuming it to be an overt vulgarity, an open display of unleashed carnal anarchy? Was that why they had laughed at me, ridiculing me in their contempt and amazement, their



arrogant condescendence condemning me for my feminine profanities? (Kane 202)

As Surparnakha was lost in her thoughts, quick swishes from Lakshman's sword left her maimed— with her nose and ears cut. Her painful experience comes alive in Kane's words:

Three odd bloody pieces of flesh and cartilage strewn carelessly in the dust. She stared at it confused and befuddled, the pain coursing through her, not allowing her to think. She touched her face again: it felt odd, her hands slipping off the wetness of her blood. She had no nose! She gasped in frenzied horror. Her frantic hands moved further over her ruined face...she felt no ear where it should be. Nor the other, her frightened mind whispered to her. She looked down comprehendingly. It was the straggly remains of her ears and her nose that were lying at her feet. It was then she screamed, her wail sailing through the still air. (Kane 203)

There are numerous instances in the book where the devas are accused of deviating from the path of righteousness— from the path of principles. Meghnad, Ravan's son is attacked by Lakshman with the aid of Vibhishan even before sunrise, before the time of battle, when the former was defenceless in his act of praying. This was, to use Surparnakha's words, "betrayal", "disloyalty", "treason", "murder" (Kane 259). Surparnakha also exposes the false ideals of piety and virtuousness of the royalty pointing how Ram tried hard to prove his wife as 'pure and pious' in a trial by fire at Lanka. This was Ram's gift to Sita in freedom. Surparnakha rightly questions if it was freedom or humiliation? In spite of being an ideal and upright king, Ram compelled Sita to perform *Agnipariksha* to prove to the world that she was innocent, pure and untouched. Torn between being husband and king, the king in him took over to perform his duty even if it meant letting go of the woman he loved.

Such projections in the text make the fixed ideals showered on the gods and the demons take a middle point with the propensity of the ideals moving in either direction. The fluidity in the binary opposites lends a new flavour and a new angle to the established norms of the myths.



I will never try to be a God. I will live exactly as my emotions tell me to. I do not want to be a model man for future generations to follow. My life begins with me and ends with me. But I will live my life to its full and die as a man should. So borrowing from your words, I shall be a man with ten faces – I am *Dasamukha*. (Neelakantan 41)

This is Ravan speaking in *Asura*, the Ravanayana by Anand Neelakantan, where the author has a different story to tell, the story of the dead and the vanquished. In this alternate version of the *Ramayana*, Neelakantan has chosen two asuras as his prime narrators: Ravan and Bhadra, voices that have so long remained suppressed and unheard. The accepted notions of good versus evil are throughout thwarted in the text making the binary opposites fluid and flexible. From the very beginning a contrasting picture is being presented of the devas and the asuras. In Chapter 2, Ravan laughs at the Brahmins as people who are no fools. They knew how to project even the mundane tasks of burning twigs as earth-shaking scientific discoveries and claimed to tame the forces that controlled the world. Ravan further observed that it was funny how majority of people like the carpenters, masons and farmers who were doing something meaningful, had become supplicant to these jokers croaking under the warm sun, sweat pouring from their faces in front of a raging fire and chanting God knows what. In contrast, the Asuras, according to Ravan, were a casteless society and had a highly democratic set up where an elected council, instead of a king, held actual power. They were a prosperous tribe and at a time when the kings of Egypt were busy building great tombs to bury themselves, the democratic council of the Asura kingdom was busy laying roads, building hospitals, drainage systems and everything they thought was useful for the people. Ravan too sarcastically observes how deva men did not honour their women enough in comparison to the asuras. The devas were trained to treat their women like worms. Ravan was courageous enough to declare that Ram and Lakshman made a strange pair in relation to their women – while one was willing to fight and kill thousands of men and women for the sake of a wife he had never wanted, the other left his wife to languish in his palace for fourteen long years.



When Queen Mandodari was abducted and molested by the Angada men, an ally of Ram against Ravan, the latter's true humane nature came to the fore. As the Queen was lying on the bare earth naked and unconscious, Ravan stood stunned, weeping silently. As she slowly regained consciousness, Ravan caught her in his arms and hugged her. As her nudity, shame and violation dawned on her, she let out an animal cry and tried to cover herself in a tattered and stinking shawl offered by Bhadra. As she tried to run out of shame, Ravan caught her arm and hugged her tightly. As she expressed her wish to die, Ravan assured Mandodari that she was his lawfully wedded wife and would remain so. Bhadra's appreciation of Ravan at this point bringing out the fragility of Ram in a similar situation is quite striking:

...I felt a growing admiration for the man who thus stood by his wife in her trial. As a ruler, nothing worse could have happened to him, not even his own death. The Queen was forever tainted and the easiest thing for him would have been to fling her away like a used rag. But he chose the tough way, to live with snickering subordinates who would make lewd comments about his wife the moment his back was turned. Perhaps, in such choices lay his greatness and also his weakness. At the time, I doubt whether I completely appreciated his gesture towards his violated Queen. It was later, much later, when I witnessed the behaviour of another man towards his chosen wife, in circumstance that were much less serious, that I understood why Ravana would never be deified. He was too humane to be God. (Neelakantan 393)

Ram's so called *Dharma* is once again exposed in the Shambuka episode. When Ram came across this fourteen year old untouchable reciting the Vedas, bringing in a threat to the rigid caste system of his land, Ram became furious. And an instigation by the head priest that such act of defiance has not only made a Shudra literate, but has made him literate in the Holy Vedas too, was enough to make Ram lose his temper with the result that he severed the head of Shambuka in an instant. In the name of protecting *Dharma*, this upright and ideal godly figure, thus, commits an inhuman act.



Thus, both Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* are an attempt to bring forth the voice of the vanquished that remains lost in silence. As the demons speak in both the texts, Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess* and Ravan in *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, an alternate perspective is offered to the regular reading of the *Ramayana*, thereby establishing an alternate discourse of retelling myth. This new discourse has succeeded in deconstructing the godly image of Ram and at the same time lending a more humane image to the demons with their more human strength and weakness. These texts in the genre of retelling myths have broken the firmly established grounds of the binary opposites giving impetus to the fact that the binaries are not fixed domains, rather they are flexible and fluid. These texts fit into the paradigms established by the postmodernist critic, Jean-Francois Lyotard, in his book, *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard argues that postmodernism posits a threat to the meta or grand narratives that had so far provided the framework of human understanding. This new genre of retelling myth is also in tune with Ihab Hassan's postulations that postmodernism is an impulse of negation and unmasking, a celebration of silence and otherness that was always present, though always repressed. And indeed, Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* are milestones in unmasking the ideals that have so long been cherished while celebrating silence and otherness.

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The Trusted Army

(for Manohar Mouli Biswas)

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If you need a band of active
Peace Army, I bet for poets.

Poets give law
Of the land and the seas.

Poets are humanists,
Who break walls
In silence. Sign peace accord
With owners of law
Rulers of the code. Frontiers of
Several environmental zones.

I bet for them.
Give them a job.
They will pay you back
In words, words and volumes of words



For peace of the land and mind.

I bet for them

They can give us a green earth

Of values and morals

Poets shake hands with green grammars of the land.

I bet for them.

They usher hopes for tomorrow, beyond all

Doubts and uncertainties. They are formidable

Forces of all nations. They keep guns alive.

Slogans ready:

Your name, my name, their name: poets!

We cross corridors of haziness

Mistrust and exploitation. They write.

They are busy. For all seasons.

Long Live kings! Power of poems!



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Cartography of Dreams

Sergio A. Ortiz
Poet, Mexico

By the time you arrive
I'll possess night in my hands.
It carries the sleeplessness of the rooftops
in its peak, the distant humidity of the streets
that lack your footsteps.
I wear wings borrowed from an angel,
and retain the warmth of his arms
for when you decide to doze away.
Come, tonight we dine on the moon!

Like winter born
on one December afternoon,
I felt the urge to journey
all the way to silence
and listen to you breathe light.
I dragged a heap of leaves
towards me. They stopped
before I swept them

leaving memories lying
on the dark waters of sleep.
It was as if your voice came from the side
of my body, or the echo of your smile
inside some other ear,



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those clear labyrinths open to voices.

It was the dying perfume of rain,
the distance pending caresses,
the smiles that never crossed each other,
and walking barefoot
where the sun won't shine.

It's that I know you won't be there,
and I won't untie myself
from the bones of your name
or your body.



The Night Train to Ghum¹

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Slumbering berths whizz past towns and villages,
a shrieking whistle proliferates the wind,
and, for an instant the dark world inside comes alive
under the fast passing station lights.

The mountains creep up slowly into my sleepy eyes, gushing out onto the landscape, their
slow, staggered metre contesting the speed of the train,
the locomotive no match to their grandeur.

They might have laid out their heart to be incised by iron and stifled by smoke,
but they were markers of geo time of aeons, contouring the sphere in leisure,
and when they impulsively yawned, the ground instinctively rumbled.

A cold morning light descends, waking my dreaming berth,
the train chugs into a sleepy station, literally ghum!²

¹ Ghum is a small hilly habitat in Darjeeling Himalayan region of West Bengal, India.

² Ghum in Bengali language means sleep.



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My Love is of a Birth as Rare

Ruchi Nagpal
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The glory of the life is yet unseen,
Something eternal yet forbidden,
A hope amidst darkness is yet to be born,
Something out of the blue to be written.
The calmness of the night is yet to be broken,
Serenity of the topos is yet to be shaken,
The colors of the life are yet to be smitten,
Something encompassing is secretly hidden.

A feeling so close,
A feeling so near,
Breaking all the cages,
Kissing the sky without any fear.
The heart my dance and soul will cheer,
My love is of a birth as rare.



The Clear Blue Sky

Pratishtha Shyam

Give me my wings and Let me fly
I would succeed first let me try
I might weep and I might cry
But all I want is a clear blue sky
No fights to win no medals to grab
I just want a smiling snap
I don't boost I won't flaunt
At least don't gift me always a taunt
My Dreams are colored red blue and green
I too want what my eyes have seen
Far beyond those horizons deep
I can reach before I sleep
Running far I want to break the records
I will win with no sharp swords
Yes I know I am in a world that tough
Believe me I have strength, which is enough
I bore life ... a life in me
Let there be hundred locks I can still find my key
My wings look delicate, beautiful and pristine



But I can cover those mountains strong along with the big ocean

My size may, May not look big

You may feel my strength as low as a twig

But I have a heart with aspirations umpteen

The heart that has feelings pure and clean

All I wanted was one small faith

But always got a diamond studded skaith

I know you call it a revolutionary age

But I am born in a golden cage

All I see is a clear but sky

I break I fall but I still want to fly

When will I get that clear blue sky?

Not borrowed not begged I just want my clear blue sky.



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BOOK REVIEW

Odiya Dalit Poet Writes Back

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***The Mortgaged Man*, Pitambar Tarai, Translated from the original Odia, Sidhesh Publishing House, Cuttack, 2017, Pages 108, ISBN 978-81-930875-1-0, Rs. 110/-**

Dalit does not signify a particular caste but stands for an awareness of the everyday lived experiences of those human beings belonging to the lowest strata of caste hierarchy in a stratified society in India. The feeling is of oppressed and deprived by the age-old stereotypes. Brahmins made dalits churn the ocean to have *amrit* for them and poison for the dalits. Dalit literature intends to articulate this social, cultural, political and religious oppression perpetrated in this country. “Awareness of this oppression does not simply manifest itself in torrid descriptions of Dalit life. Rather, it attempts to derive out of these experiences a new value system that would help dalits to carve out a new social reality.” (Jatin Bala: 167-68)

No militant movement or rebellion on the part of dalits has taken place in Odisha (like what happened in Maharashtra) which does not negate the suffering and angst of the dalits. One can take a dalit poem and feel the rhythm of distress and anguish arising out of the pain suffering for generations. Pitambar Tarai(b. 1959) is an Odisha Sahitya Academy awarded poet. Many poems in *The Mortgaged Man* is rich in aesthetic responsibility towards life:

“Since childhood I knew



at the north end of our village lie

like two separated brothers

two ancient cremation grounds(.)” (‘Untouchable’, p. 17)

Another associated aim of dalit literature is the creation of a literary circle that will nurture younger talent and train them to work for dalit liberation. They will usher in a casteless society with one united race inhabiting it – the Indians.

Progressive literature movement aims at the projection of a socialist order, the appeal of Dalit literature lies in its remarkable life force, in the portrayal of the Dalit way of life, their painful lived experiences, the denials they face, the resistance they offer and in the creation of an ideology. If one has to fight against the established social order, then an alternate value system pertaining to the Dalit way of life must first be decided upon. This in turn necessitates a paradigm shift – a cultural revolution. Pitambar writes,

“I am the gate of hell.” (Woman, 108)

Land is a haunting place for the dalits in India. They are displaced from the mainstream:

“My ancestors had not

Attempted to buy a piece of land” (‘A Piece of Land’, p.37)

Dalit texts are about a movement:

“If you like,

Shoot me with arrow.” (‘The Bird’, p. 98)

So, any work of translation involving these texts is a social engagement. Dalit literary movements emblematis a fight against untouchability and the resultant socio-economic divide. Pitambar in *The Mortgaged Man* writes,



“Oh unredeemed man!

On the outskirts for thousand years (.)” (‘ Man on the Outskirts’, p. 64)

Pitambar’s poetic idioms are subtle, specific and razor-sharp where the poetic corpus retains as an inviting discourse:

“Friends, better not ask

of the house.” (The House, p. 24)

In an Interview with Jaydeep Sarangi Tamil dalit writer/activist Bama Faustima exclaims, “It (Dalit Literature) is the literature of oppressed people It liberates them and gives them their identity. It heals them and strengthens them to fight for their rights.” (*Muse India*, Issue 42, 2012)

Like many contemporary poets from Odisha, Pitambar is an ardent lover of rain and rivers which bring a promise of renewed vitality.

“See , she a serpent

no, never a river.” (‘The River’, p.29)

His aim is to achieve cleansing of the minds by purgation of pent-up feelings and angst. He is a committed artist. His poems remind us poems on rain and rivers by Niranjana Mohanty and Bibhu Padhi. Pitambar is a part of an amazing tradition and legacy of poets.

The aim of dalit literature movement is to facilitate dalit liberation. This journey is just nothing to something. The wheel has started turning. Dalit writers are writing back. We cannot deny the intermingling of thoughts, contexts, engagements and concepts of these



writers, which make them unique. They are aware selves who can think beyond a definite boundary and create their own space.

Pitambar drums up optimism. Some poems in this collection pop up a prophetic note of hope and renewal of humane feelings:

“Wait, Wait

Wait and stop.” (‘The River’, p.29)

Translation is an intimate act of reading. Translation is like transfer of power. Identity is always a kind of representation of oneself to Others. There is a power hierarchy between the *Bhasa* text and the translated one. Emancipation of dalits is constantly on-going movement. It has seen many changes. Translators of this collection from Odiya to English include Jayanta Mahapatra, Panchanan Dalai, Amiya Kumar Patra, Sapan Kumar Jena, Kmal Kumar Mohanty, Bibhudatta Mohanty, Rajendra Das, Namita Nayak, Kishore Panigrahi, and Gobinda Sahoo. Translators have tried to remain close to the texts in original. A good foreword to the book would have given us the background and the immediate literary contexts of the poet and his commitments. Poems in this collection go beyond a predictable tag and attain universality in appeal.

No doubt the reader will not remain indifferent after encountering the poems in this collected volume, *The Mortgaged Man*.

Notes:

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