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THE MYSTIQUE OF NUMBER IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POEMS AND SANSKRIT RELIGIOUS TEXTS

S. Viswanathan

The count 108, the number of sonnets common in English Renaissance sonnet sequences, has posed a mystery to scholars. Most of the large number of sonnet sequences of the period count 108 sonnets each. It has provoked speculation but Indian readers will recall that the number of *archana* names used in the most current mode of ritual worship of gods and goddesses, singing their praises is *ashtotra*, 108 of these. And we have significant numbers of this sort, *tri-*, *pancha-*, *sapta-sata* (hundreds), the count of slokas in devotional hymns as *sahastranama archanas*, 1008. Hence the number 108 customary in the number of Elizabethan sonnet sequences will not surprise us, but it does lead to a consideration of the similarity in *ashtotras*, of the likeness and, more important, the differences between the significances which attach to such number count (*sankya*) in English poems and Sanskrit religious texts. These correspondences, especially the divergences in purpose and effect point to broader cultural affinities and telling variations and differences of outlook in the two cultures, far removed as they are in space though there may be a sort of overlap in time-frame, the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance of the West.

In the last five decades or so, several scholars of English Renaissance poetry have taken a great interest in discovering and studying the role of number count in the poems and studying the kinds of use it has been put to. Among them, they have examined the number of lines and stanzas or sections in a poem, the number of division of parts, the placement and disposition of crucial occurrences in the poem, and the suggestive number symbolism which some poets incorporate in the texture and the intricate number schemes which mark certain poems. A. Kent and Mary Kiatt, Alastair Fowler, Marie Sofen-Rostvig, Thomas P. Roche Jr. and, more recently, Katherine Duncan-Jones in her Arden-3 edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are instances; this historical critical analysis has been in the period of

distinct branch of literary scholarship. Major poems such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a number of important shorter poems have been found to be organized on an elaborate and sophisticated number scheme in structure and movement, which shows the artistic skills and design emerging in the poems. Scholars have tried to explore the import and consequence of the deployment of such numerology by the poets. These enquiries are based on Western traditions such as the Pythagorean theory of numbers, the elaborate memory systems which use the contemplation of the spatial division, disposition and sequence of church architecture as a major memory clue, and, above all, the significances which numbers acquire in both popular and learned traditions and in the interpretation of the Bible.

We in India have had for ages a number of elaborate number systems which govern various areas of life, culture and activity, and their legacy still operative. The count of number or measurement in terms of number have a pivotal role in ritual worship, recitation and meditation. Number consideration governs astronomy and astrology, music and dance, architecture of different kinds, and the preparation and consumption of Ayurvedic and traditional medicines, for example, not to mention the currency, especially in recent times of practices of *vastu* in building construction and advice and forecast based on numerology. Besides these, as already mentioned, our devotional works are structured, conventionally to certain counts of the units which constitute them. The number of units or divisions into acts, slokas etc. is in accordance with this convention of *ashtaka*, *dasa*, *sata*, *ashtotra* etc.

Against this general background, we can make a brief comparative consideration of the kinds of uses and effects of number in Renaissance English poetry and Indian religious texts. To go back to the example of many Elizabethan sonnet sequences, of which there was a prolific output during the period, containing 108 sonnets each, and the fact has been the poser to English scholars, we can juxtapose the 108 count with our *ashtotra* mode of praise of a god or goddess. The Elizabethan sequence of sonnets was addressed by the poet to his patron or patroness as an idealized

figure, almost an object of worship the convention takes it up again from the sonnets of Petrarch which established such a cult of worship of and service to, and singing the praises of the lady addressee, in his case his Laura. The common count of 108 sonnets and 108 *namavalis* or holy names originates from the essential motive and purpose of panegyric to please the addressee and win their favour. In this context, we also note that the Renaissance sonnet genre, which arose as love-poetry, soon turned out to be a medium of religious poetry. Furthermore, interestingly in the context of the present comparison, the love expressed in the sonnet mode, acquired a 'metaphysic of love', thanks to Neo-Platonist philosophy in terms of which earthy or sensual love turned out ultimately to be a ladder of ascent from the earthly to the heavenly. Thus, the love and worship of a human figure, idolatry as it may smack of, evolves through the alchemy of the 'metaphysic of love' into a love and longing for the divine, passing in the process from the lower to the higher sense. As for the basic factor of both the sonnet tradition and our devotional works of the number count of 108 in a sequence, it seems to go back still some deep-laid connection between the number 108 and the act (or art) of praise and worship. It may be an imbedded cultural affinity springing from the Jungian collective unconscious.

In the light of this, we could see why, as Katherine Duncan-Jones has brought to our attention in her recent Arden 3 edition of these, among Shakespeare's sonnets, comprising in all 153 sonnets in the two sequences, to the Fair Friend and to the Dark Lady, the central group of panegyric addressed to the patron, the Fair Friend, there are precisely 108 sonnets of praise and idealization of the figure, excluding Sonnet 126 which is an envoi, postscript of twelve lines and hence not exactly a sonnet. No wonder that this group leaving aside also the first set of 17 sonnets where the poet tries to persuade the Fair Youth to ensure immortality by marrying and begetting progeny.

Given the basic likeness we notice between the two traditions, what is more interesting and significant is the divergences in the way number suggestion is used in the two. The use of number

significance in English poetry has close reference to time, and, in particular, the cycle of day and night, and of the seasons, especially time as dictating mutability and change. The immediate, existential concern of the English poets for the most part is with time as a temporal factor, in connection with the number devices they employ, though, inevitably, they occasionally do refer to the eternal, the heavenly and its attribute of timelessness. The numerical organization that governs English poems operates as an internal as well as total structural principle. In the details of particular lines and passages, in the internal disposition of parts or sections, number suggestion functions as a means of poetic communication. In Indian religious works, on the other hand, number mysticism is keyed not so much to time and the mutability it entails as to eternity, a longing and aspiration after the eternal and a transcending of the temporal, though it may involve a certain kind of inclusion of it. Moreover, number symbolism in Indian works serves more as a total structural factor rather than in the internal details and progression of the poems.

We may now take a brief look at a Renaissance English poem, Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion* (1596), a marriage ode composed by the poet in celebration of his own wedding. It is perhaps the most significant marriage ode in the language. It is a lyrical expression of the sheer joy of the experience of the wedding processes and a celebration of marriage as an institution, ultimately as an answer to mutability and a linking of two souls to each other and both to eternity. But the fervour of the poem is about the ritual experience of wedding, and the poem's active engagement with and enjoyment of that experience and its movement in time. The intricate and elaborate number scheme on which it is built has to do with temporality of the experience, the whirligig of time. The artistic deployment of number significance was brought to light by A. Kent and Mary Hieatt in their book *Short Time's Endless Monument* (1965). The poem dwells with relish upon the details of the routine of the wedding day and night, the entire proceedings of the ceremony during day and, after that, at night. The poem has exactly 24 stanzas, slightly varying in length, corresponding to the hours. The central, crucial ceremony

of solemnization at church comes at stanzas 12 and 13 at the central point, with two groups of 10 stanzas each flanking it, besides an introductory stanza at the start and an *envoi* stanza at the end, separately, counting 24 in all. And the poem has precisely 365 long lines, implicitly marking the number of days in a year, the symmetry of correspondent suggestion of the diurnal and seasonal cycle, the passage of time, is thus suggested.

The purpose is to employ number technique besides as a principle of intricate artistic design, to bring home the passage of time, changes wrought in the process, mutability, the existential emphasis is on the temporal movement though the longing to specialise the temporal in an 'endless monument' which the poet would like to make his ode. The poem also tries to convey the message that marriage, the union of two souls, may effect a communion of both as a unity with the universal and eternal spirit, thus serving a sacramental function. But the engagement throughout the poem's progression is on the temporal movement, involving the diurnal and the seasonal cycle. Likewise, in Shakespeare's sonnets the engagement with the movement of time and its whirligig of changes like ageing is expressed also in terms of a number scheme, which marks the particular number in the order of a sonnet and the internal suggestion in the texture of particular sonnets, for example, in Sonnet 60 the stress on the movement of moments and minutes in hour after hour. Besides, particular seasons are invoked. In Spenser's marriage ode, interestingly further, the first 18 stanzas correspond to the long daylight hours and the six rest to short night, exactly indicating the day and night division on the particular day of wedding, the longest day in England's clime which it coincided with, the difference is also marked by a change in the refrain in the two sets of stanzas in the poem.

On the other hand, in our Indian religious texts especially the purpose of number mysticism is that of suggesting a connection with the divine and the everlasting. That concern prevails, it is not with changes so much as with unchanging permanence. Even in a relatively secular text like Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara*, a text keyed to the six seasons, the love-longing remains unchanging if intensified

as the seasons pass and change. The use of number in Sanskrit religious texts is to forge links with timelessness rather than time. These texts, in this sense, have more of a spatial orientation than temporal.

The ultimate factor in all this is perhaps to be traced to a basic deviation or divergence in cultural temper and orientation: the supervening concern with eternity, timelessness at large, almost cosmic, units or divisions of time or, for that matter, also distance and space in some respects like our astronomy and arithmetic (for example, Aryabhatta and Varahamira, the founding pioneers in these) rather than with relatively limited historical or temporal passage of time. This also perhaps is behind what has often been diagnosed as our insufficient sense of history. An example of our use of number to suggest a spatial stretch from earth to heaven and eternity and from man to God, is the number in general of the temple *devajasthambas* which is 32; the pillar is a symbol, much as *gopuram* and church spires also are of the human longing for eternity. Now, interestingly 32 also is the number of discs in total in the human backbone; the fact enforces the link between man and God, the kindred points of heaven and home.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that there may be some very few exceptions to the postulated generalization that Sanskrit religious poets use *sankya* to only or mainly choose the total number of units or slokas which go to make a particular work but do not seem to use number as an internal principle of organization or design within the work and its texture. For instance, in a remark virtuoso effect, Vedantadesika, a prime poet of Srivaishnavism, belonging to the thirteenth century, happens to use number as an internal poetic feature in his poem *Raghuviragadyam*, a celebration of Sri Rama, and it is also in effect the poet's version of the *Ramayana* in the form of hymns to Rama. The poem has 92 hymns, and the *kandas* of this *Ramayana* are corresponding to Valmiki's set in varying lengths. Hence the count of hymns in each canto varies, one of them 21, another 18 and 28, and yet another 5 and so on. But *Sundarakanda* consists of a single hymn only. It compresses this canto, regarded as the most significant and centrally crucial of all

kandas in *Ramayana* and hence preferred for daily reading as a devotional act, all into a single hymn so tightly packed that it incorporates all the significance of the canto and that, incidentally, of the previous *aranyakanda* which Vedantadesika excludes from his work. And this sole hymn of *sundarakanda* is placed as the 45 hymn among the 92 of the poem, thus almost at the centre. Similarly, Milton in his original ten book version of *Paradise Lost* made the line, saying that the Son ascended the chariot of wrath to quell the invading Satan and the fallen angels, the exact central line in the total line count. The placing marks the canto as the crown in the jewel. There may be a few such exceptions to the generalization made in this essay, but there must be very few such exceptions to the general rule.

RELEVANCE OF SONGS IN THE TRAGEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

Iffat Ara

Tragedies are Shakespeare's supreme achievement in drama. For those who are musically sensitive the songs in the tragedies provide entertainment and also a greater or better understanding of the meaning of the play which reveals itself gradually. The use of imagery even in the songs gains an enhanced power. In Shakespeare's plays there is a conflict between appearance and reality, what human beings are and what they appear to be. The natural function of language is communication of meaning and relationships. But the characters in his plays often use language for covering their pretensions and hence they make a very stylized use of it. The songs that Iago sings to entertain the drunkards in *Othello* illustrate this. The playwright in his plays aims at the establishment of harmonious relationships and the emergence of a perfect order. This is sometimes done or undone through songs and music. Music is also interpreted in terms of mystical effect and therefore in his plays Shakespeare presents the supernatural in a special way.

In *Macbeth* Act IV opens with the song of the witches preparing broth in a cauldron and the ingredients consist of toads, snakes, bats, dogs, lizards, blind worm, howlet, mummy, dragon, wolf, shark, liver of Jew, goat, yew, nose of Turk and Tatar's lips, finger of birth-strangled babe, prostitute, tiger's entrails, baboon's blood for all these will enhance the effect of magic. When the Hecate arrives, she invites the witches to dance and sing and encircle the Cauldron and then to put the spell of magic on everything contained in the vessel:

And now about the Cauldron sing,

Like elves and fairies in a ring,

Enchanting all that you put in. (IV.i. 41-43)

And as they await Macbeth's arrival, he knocks and presents himself before the witches and demands further revelation regarding his fate:

Show his eyes, and grieve his heart;

Come like shadows, so depart. (IV.i. 110-111)

The witches sing and dance to cheer up the spellbound Macbeth

who is brooding over the future predictions that are not very favourable:

Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,
And show the best of our delights.
I'll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antic round;
That this great king may kindly say,
Our duties did his welcome pay. (IV.i. 127-132)

The three witches known as weird sisters are placed outside the natural order and therefore they do not have human passions and human relations. They appear along with thunder and lightning and disappear with airy music. They do not control Macbeth who enjoys freedom to exercise his will power. And yet like Milton's Satan their presence is felt from the beginning to the end, for Macbeth's temptation and fall is to some extent associated with them. Macbeth resembles the witches for like their unnatural existence his own way of life is contrary to nature. Though not superstitious like Lady Macbeth the ambitious man is inspired both by the witches and his wife to make the best use of the opportunity offered to him by fate. The witches merely celebrate his success by singing songs and dancing gaily because he entertains them for their prophecy which he takes seriously, for it voices his chief motive and deep desire.

England was a country known for its appreciation of music, dance and folklore. The patronage of royalty in this regard made the higher and lower classes equally inclined towards music. The guests in taverns were entertained by music and the singers sang both ballads and catches. The dinners were made interesting by the effect of music and songs. Shakespeare's distinction is to maintain a balance between tragedy and comedy. Hence songs in the tragedies create a soothing effect but this aspect of Shakespeare's work is criticized by writers.

Iago the imposter in *Othello* plays the role of a good companion who sings tavern songs for the entertainment of Cassio urging him to drink freely without inhibition, for it is a night of revels to celebrate Othello's nuptials:

And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink:

A soldier's a man;
A life's but a span;

Why then let a soldier drink. (II.iii. 63-67)

First through the song Iago attracts the listeners by the clinking sound of glasses which is no less admirable than the tinkling sound of harness bells hung round the necks of horses. Then he pities a soldier whose short life-span makes him all the more deserve sheer entertainment. He orders for more wine and Cassio could not help boasting that the British surpassed all other Europeans in drinking in excess and remaining unmoved. This reminds Iago of another song that is in veneration of the Crown:

King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence all too dear,
With that he call'd the tailor lown,
He was a wight of high renown.
And thou art but of low degree:

'T is pride that pulls the country down,

Then take thine auld cloak about thee. (II.iii. 82-89)

He reflects on the simplicity of King Stephen that gave way to success.

Desdemona and Ophelia are two rare exceptions in all Shakespearean tragedies who sing songs that extend the action of the respective play and have a new bearing on the theme as well. Voltaire and Dr. Johnson assigned the task of minimizing the effect of tragic intensity to a clown who could sing songs for comic relief. Shakespeare has woven sad songs into the fabric of tragedy to emphasize tragic undertones and comic songs subdue the bitterness of tragedy.

The willow song in *Othello* that Desdemona sings is the best presentation of the tragic lyric. This song is echoed by Emilia and it recurs like an intuition to remind all of its permanence. Also the willow song specifically is a reflection of the pathos of Desdemona who is strangled mercilessly. She is alone like the lover in the song sitting by the side of the tree. Emilia's repetition of the refrain of the song further emphasizes the theme of the play. If willow pertains to sorrow, Desdemona's singing announces her subsequent death.

Desdemona on her death-bed, unaware of her fate, as if by intuition seems to sing of unrequited love. She is reminded of an old song her mother's maid Barbara sang before her death when she was forsaken by her deceptive lover:

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green Willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing Willow, Willow, Willow:
The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur'd her moans;
Sing Willow, Willow, Willow:
Her salt tears fell from her, and soften'd the stones:
Sing willow, willow, willow:
Sing all a green willow must be my garland.
Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve, -
I call'd my love false love; but what said he in then?
Sing willow, willow, willow:
If I court moe women, you'll couch with moe men. (IV.iii. 39-55)

It is a traditional song in which the maid is shown sitting by a sycamore tree and wailing on account of sorrow. The sycamore tree usually found growing in graveyards is a known symbol of grief and sadness. She sings a song of the willow which on account of its drooping shape also marks irreparable loss and sorrow. She is yielding and supple like the willow plant. The water flowing in the stream where the maid sits and sheds tears and moans also echoes her grief and joins her in her despair. Her salt tears fall on the stones and make them soft but her lover and Desdemona's husband are hard hearts who remain unmoved. They consider them just and are ready to forgive them in spite of their betrayal.

Coleridge thinks that 'songs in Shakespeare are introduced as songs only, just as songs are in real life. Hence in accordance with the tradition prevalent in Elizabethan times gentlewomen and men, those associated with the aristocratic class could, draw pleasure from music played by professional singers in private along with friends and acquaintances. Desdemona also follows the trend and sings in the presence of her loving maid named Emilia.

The two songs sung by Iago and Desdemona highlight the two kinds of human temperament. Iago tempts and bewitches others trying to collapse a whole system of values that holds together the

human order and organism. Desdemona ceases to exist for the sake of the welfare of others and makes eternal the values of love and virtuous living. One may compare Mozart with Shakespeare in the unique art of assimilating dramatic action and lyrical utterances that lend greatness to the tragedies of Shakespeare.

In *Hamlet* after the mouse-trap is over and Claudius in an embarrassed state leaves the scene, Hamlet comes forward to speak the epilogue relevant to the play. The piece of poetry Hamlet recites is, in fact, a stanza from some ballad now lost:

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep
So runs the world away. (III.ii. 268-271).

The guilty man who has poured poison into the sleeper's ears is described as a wounded deer who weeps when it becomes a victim of the huntsman.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, spies of Claudius, come to see Hamlet, he calls for music to ignore them. He utters another ballad snatch:

For if the King like not the comedy,
Why then, belike he likes it not, perdy. (III.ii. 289-90)

These words, cynically said, indicate that the King's evil acts are revealed and he is extremely disturbed.

Hamlet's awareness about music and songs reflect his knowledge of the subtleties of art. He also resolves to expose his mother Gertrude to let her confess her misdeeds and acquire redemption. He dislikes all women including the innocent Ophelia. The Queen feels guilty when the mouse-trap is enacted before her and she is advised to meet Ophelia who is in a state of unrest. She enters playing on a lute and her hair disorderly while she sings to her satisfaction. It is a special feature of Shakespeare's heroines that they convey their deep thoughts through songs. Also she is so distracted that she sings songs perhaps her nurse taught her, not songs suitable to her rank but 'crude songs of the common folk'. She reverts to old tunes and sings many songs in succession. It is so because in the play *Hamlet* the songs become an essential feature of the particular tragic presentation.

Ophelia, like Desdemona, sings songs that express her 'anxieties' and 'forebodings' and Coleridge thinks that Ophelia's imagination is filled with her love for Hamlet and filial love. She is also concerned about her honour whose protection none seems to ensure. She is so tense that she fails to recognize her lover in the conventional dress of a pilgrim just returned from a visit to the holy shrine:

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon. (IV.v. 23-26).

The Queen wishes to know the relevance of the song and the grief-stricken lady indulges in deep sorrow and revives the sad memory of her father by singing another ditty:

He is dead and gone lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf;
At his heels a stone. (IV.v. 29-32)

As Ophelia's relationship with the social world is almost broken on account of its injustice, she is drawn towards the world of nature that has enrolled her father in the cycle of life. Ophelia believes that grass grows on graves where the dead are buried and a stone is put up on the tomb to serve as an epitaph to make memorable the dead person. The thought continues in the next stanza when Ophelia sings the song in a state of forgetfulness: "White his shroud as the mountain snow" (IV.v. 36). She remembers the shroud in which the dead body of her father was wrapped for burial. The white colour of the sheets was like snow hence nature imagery is apt for the occasion. Ophelia is thinking in terms of the 'obscure burial' of her father:

Larded all with sweet flowers;
Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true love showers. (IV.v. 38-40)

His grave is adorned with beautiful flowers and these natural objects seem to mourn his loss in a loving manner. Due to her derangement, she sings in front of the court and forgets it is unmaidenly behaviour. Ladies of royal class invited entertainment through

musicians and singers instead of degrading themselves by singing.

In the next song Ophelia becomes an epitome of 'conjugal faithfulness' but remembers sadly Hamlet's indifference:

To morrow is saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine:
Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd the chamber door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid.
Never departed more. (IV.v. 48-55)

She emphasizes the relevance of St. Valentine's Day according to an old custom. The maid seen by a man on St. Valentine's Day is accepted as true love and is readily admitted to his room. But she laments her own misfortune, for Hamlet pays no heed to her:

By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they com to' t:
By cock they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed. (IV.v. 58-63)

In this lyric Ophelia does not overlook her deep dejection that penetrates her being and she is equally touched by the unkind lover's refusal to be united with her:

So would I ha'done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed. (IV.v. 64-65)

Ophelia enters fantastically dressed with straws and flowers, for both in moments of joy and sorrow, nature offers protection. Since she is deprived of filial affection she becomes a part of nature that encircles her existence. She very well remembers her father's bare-faced burial. He is not alive yet she showers tears that can penetrate the grave and reach her father:

They bore him barefac'd on the bier;
Hey non nonny, nonny, hy nonny;

Then she bids him farewell and calls him dove, a symbol of peace and love. She refers to their father's grave where he lies asleep:

You must sing a-down-a-down,
And you call him a-down. (IV.v. 168-169)

She likes the refrain of the song which resembles the turning of the

spinning wheel to whose motion ballads are sung. It is fortune that makes men great. Like Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, Ophelia also distributes flowers to appropriate men on the funeral day according to the old custom. Also she repeats the words from a well-known ballad which a mad girl sang in 'Two Noble Kinsmen': "For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy" (IV.v. 184). These songs indicate Ophelia's real and imaginary thought-process at work. Her mind is in a state of consternation for she is still dazed and bewildered:

And will a'not come again?
And will a'not come again?
No, no, he is dead;
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow
All flaxen was his poll,
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan:
God ha'mercy on his soul! (IV.v. 187-196)

Ophelia is convinced that her father is dead and gone. She does not want to disturb him and yet describes his honoured existence. His white beard is like snow and is therefore pure and chaste. His hair that are pale and yellow further make him impressive.

Like Desdemona in *Othello*, Ophelia is also associated with willow plant. Like the swans of Apollo who sing before death, Ophelia sings all the time while she sits by the willow plant near a brook and hangs garlands of flowers growing on the branches of the willow plant. As the branch breaks she in her weedy dress falls in the weeping brook that shares her sorrow. After death she floats on water and sings hymns in praise of God. Ophelia's songs like those of other heroines contribute to the unity of the plot, the effectiveness of dialogues and development of characters.

In the grave-diggers scene in the last Act of *Hamlet* one comes across a group of homely folk jesting and singing. But the grave-diggers' songs are not entirely comic in spirit; they also have artistic beauty and are an essential part of the play. Hence one concludes that the ordinary business of life continues in a normal way and is not affected by sorrows, murders and death of the royalty. As Hamlet

is present on the occasion he also learns about this truth that similar fate is shared by the great and small on the eve of death.

While digging the grave of Ophelia, the grave-diggers sing to wash away the tinge of pain and sorrow and make the tragic event look less intense. The grave-digger sings a song relating to his youth when he was married and had a sweet companion who was incomparable. The memory of these happy moments makes him overcome the present grief of death:

In youth, when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet,
To contract o'the time, for-a my behove,
O! methought there was nothing meet. (V.i. 60-63).

The grave-digger sings these few verses from 'The Aged Lover renounceth his Love' by Lord Vaux, which was published in *Trotter's Miscellany*, the first of the many sixteenth century collections of songs and sonnets. Hamlet wonders how the grave-digger sings when he is performing the sad task of digging graves for the dead. There is dramatic irony involved here for Hamlet is himself guilty of breaking the heart of a girl whose grave is being prepared. He is no less insensitive than the grave-digger. Horatio states the truth that it is his profession that makes him so and it involves no pain or sorrow and makes the work easier for all the grave-diggers.

The grave-digger speaks and sings about death and is no less conscious of the passage of time than the wise and best:

But age, with his stealing steps,
Hath claw'd me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me intil the land,
As if I had never been such. (V.i. 70-73)

He gravely ruminates that age quickly changes human beings till they cease to exist. He throws up a skull while the process of grave-digging continues. Hamlet picks up the skull and wonders how man looks like when he is alive. He has a tongue and can sing well. It is the turn of Fortune's wheel that the bones of the dead become a plaything in a variety of ways:

A pick-axe, and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet;
O! a pit of clay for to be made

For such a guest is meet. (V.I. 90-93)

The grave-digger, happy at the prospect that he will earn his living by preparing a grave, is indifferent to the fate of the dead person. The dead person is like a guest whose arrival will be a source of benefit to him. The hard facts of life make the poor insensitive and ruthless. Hamlet grows more speculative regarding the fate of man after death. Man staggers and falls and loses all affluence and this pathetic end makes Hamlet mourn the loss of poor York, the jester who once entertained him. He also recalls his art of singing songs and sense of humour. Now he is motionless and cannot even mock at his own fate with his sense of humour. The two great Kings, Alexander and Caesar, are also part of dust, the same earth that shook with fear when they trod on it.

In *King Lear* quite a few songs are sung by the fool and mad-songs by Edgar disguised as Poor Tom like 'Tom O'Bedlam', popular in 17th century England. The Fool's songs provide relaxation to the afflicted souls. The Fool being a minor character is given a simple role and yet he is concerned about Lear's losses in every respect. The Fool tries to enlighten the King and sings songs of wisdom and also mocks at Lear whose age and lack of experience froze his perceptiveness:

Fools had ne'er less grace in a year;
For wise men are grown foppish,
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish. (I.iv. 173-176)

Lear grows ironic regarding the swift flow of songs that the Fool could sing in succession. The Fool retorts that when Lear is dictated by his head-strong daughters the Fool will reproach the King in a light-hearted manner:

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a King should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among. (I.iv. 182-85).

This song is adapted from an old ballad. The Fool is concerned about the fate of the King and says that the conflict of patience and sorrow shatters Lear's existence. To cheer the King the Fool sings a joyous and festive song yet he cannot help indicating the silly

pranks in which the King indulges and sees not the evil involved in his decision. While Lear is groping in darkness during the storm, accompanied by Kent and the Fool, the latter sings a song that is an adaptation of Feste's song and probably sung by the same actor. Here the Fool may be referring to Lear or to himself:

He that has a little tiny wit,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
Though the rain it raineth every day. (III.ii. 74-77)

The seasonal changes like the wind and rain is a natural phenomenon and therefore a sensible person should come to terms with his fortune and accept the inevitable patiently. The Fool teaches the King to give up his stubbornness.

Lear in a fit of madness tears off his clothes and thinks Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, a mad man, to be a philosopher and a learned "Theban". Edgar talks in an inconsistent manner and mentions the fate of child Rowland who goes in quest of his sister, Helen, who was carried away by a monster and confined into an enchanted castle. When the brother reaches there his sister secretly conceals him. But the monster finds him due to his human smell. This is probably a line from a lost and forgotten ballad:

Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
His word was still: Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man. (III.iv. 186-188)

Edgar's father is also lost to him and the demon like brother Edmund will not let the father and son unite in happiness.

Lear's mind obsessed with the unkindness of his daughters calls them 'she foxes'. Edgar tries to divert Lear's attention and despite his feigned madness acts like a lover and invites his beloved to meet him across the stream. This song is taken from a lover's song: "Come O'er the bourn, Bessy, to me" (III.vi. 26). And the Fool sings a song to show the helplessness of the beloved in this regard:

Her boat hath a leak
And she must not speak;
Why she dares not come over to thee! (III.vi. 27-29)

He may be thinking of Cordelia whose lack of contact is in his

subconscious mind. But Edgar is of the opinion that the Fool's song reflects the concept of a fiend disguised as a nightingale.

Lear is determined to hold a court of justice, put his daughters to trial and impose justice on the wrong doers. Edgar sings a fragment from a song which is an adaptation of an old song:

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly Shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn;
And for one blast of thy manikin mouth,
Thy sheep shall take no harm. (III.vi. 42-45)

The jolly shepherd whether asleep or awake by blowing his pipe calls his sheep doing damage in a cornfield. It is his style of shouting and not the pipe that is relevant. Minikin or dainty is a musical term used for the treble stirring of the lute. Lear could also make his daughters obedient by exercising parental authority and imposing his honourable position on them. Lear compares his daughters to barking dogs and Edgar mentions all kinds of dogs whom he could drive away by blowing the ox's horn. He utters a line from a song in which a vagabond calls upon a companion to accompany him on his rounds:

Do de, de, de, come march to wakes
And fairs and market towns. (III.vi. 74-75)

Edgar wishes the king to join him in order to forget his sorrow.

The boy, though anonymous, who sings a song in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is hired for the purpose. The only thing Enobarbas could do was to invite all to accompany the singer by repeating the refrain of the song with the boy singer. As the music is played Enobarbas joins the hands of all and the boy singer starts singing a song in praise of the spirit of wine that is praiseworthy and is welcomed as a monarch:

Come, thou monarch of the vine,
Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne!
In thy fats our cares be drown'd,
With thy grapes our hairs be crown'd.
Cup us till the world go round
Cup us till the world go round. (II.vii. 111-116)

Bacchus, the god of wine, with half-closed eyes is urged to absorb the worries and cares of the humans in his vats. Also the grapes that produce wine are enjoyed and serve as food and provide deco-

ration to those who love the beauty and fecundity of Nature. The effect of excessive drinking takes mind prisoner and the drunkards look like dancers for wine spins them round and round and they forget all decency and decorum. It is a feast like the one celebrated in Egypt and it is in honour of world rulers or leaders like Antony, Caesar and Pompey who are expected to make the empire of Rome strong by their joint efforts and by giving up their mutual differences. It is also a vision of a drunken dance and singing to Bacchus, god of wine.

In *Julius Caesar* after Caesar's death he is disturbed and Lucius who is with him as a good caretaker plays music and sings a song to settle his disorderly brain. Brutus feels relieved by the soothing effect of music and song that bring sweet sleep because like death sleep makes light the burdens of life each day. And then the apparition of Caesar appears like Brutus's evil spirit to remind him of his ill-deeds.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's parents are enraged by her secret marriage with Romeo. After Romeo's exile they arrange Juliet's marriage with an eligible suitor of their choice. He is named Paris. The wedding preparations include the display of music and song but soon they learn of Juliet's sudden demise whose feigned death out of grief is on account of her husband's exile. Hence the grieved parents prepare the funeral, and, Peter, left behind, jests with the musicians who have been called to celebrate the wedding and make it colourful. Peter demands the musicians to play music to relieve him of laden thoughts and unhappiness. The musicians admire Peter for his sense of humour and ask him to say something witty. Peter then utters a piece of verse which is like a song:

When griping grief the heart doth wound,

And doleful dumps the mind oppress,

Then music with her silver sound –

With speedy help doth lend redress. (IV.v. 125-128 and 142).

When one is oppressed by grief which touches one's heart and hurts it and sad tunes add more sorrow to what resides in one's mind then music with its soft silvery effect readily removes the tinge of pain.

In *Troilus and Cressida* the lovers of the same name belonging

to two opposite parties related to Trojan War seek eternal union but Time has the power both to preserve and destroy love. Pandarus uncle to Cressida truly understands the lovers and desires their success. He is quite close to Troilus who depends on him in certain respects. Pandarus therefore performs their imaginary wedding by 'hand fasting' and firmly believes in and confirms their eternal love. In conformity to his belief he sings a song that engenders hope:

Love, love, nothing but love, still love, still more!
 For O love's bow
 Shoots buck and doe;
 The shaft confounds
 Not that it wounds,
 But tickles still the sore.
 These lovers cry O ho, they die!
 Yet that which seems the wound to kill
 Doth turn O ho, to Ha, ha, ha!
 So dying love lives still.
 O ho, a while, but Ha, ha, ha!
 O ho, groans out for Ha, ha, ha!- Heigh ho! (III.i. 110-121)

The shaft of love does not hurt the heart where love is seated. And yet it worries the person concerned. But with the passage of time the fatal wound heals and brings relief followed by joy and laughter. As Cressida embraces Pandarus, he sings a song:

'O heart', as the goodly saying is,
 O heart, heavy heart,
 Why sigh'st thou without breaking.
 Because thou canst not ease thy smart.
 By friendship nor by speaking. (IV.iv. 14-19)

The lovers sigh but the heart does not break. And Pandarus utters a note of discontent and expresses his sorrow and complains through a song:

Full merrily the humble-bee doth sing
 Till he hath lost his honey and his sting,
 And being once subdu'd in armed tail,
 Sweet honey and sweet notes together fall. (V.x. 42-45)

Pandarus is grieved that though once he was acceptable because of his touch of song and music but is not now worth attention. This is like an unhappy experience of sufferers in love who are victims of hope and revulsion.

The singers of songs and music players whether they are wise or not, good or evil express their deep sense of reality either by grasping the meaning of life or touching upon the truth unconsciously. They are no doubt subject to pressure from within and without and therefore they bring to light something substantial through songs and music. They reveal the happier aspects of life and also the unpleasant ones. They make other characters either indulge in self-pity or get rid of self-delusion. Hence awareness or discovery of the self is what these songs provide. The songs therefore give protection from pain by providing comfort. These songs taken from ballads are usually the voice of the common man whose strength lies in his simplicity and intimation of some kind of security he offers. The songs breathe freedom and blow out passionate intensity from human existence. Thus a vision of truth lurks behind most of the songs if one comprehends the meaning and knows the relevance of music and songs. Life is a very complex experience but through songs, one may discover the 'positive values' one normally fails to acknowledge.

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HAMLET : AN INTERPRETATION IN THE LIGHT OF INDIAN IDEA OF KINGSHIP

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Hamlet is considered to be "the 'Mona Lisa' of Literature" (Eliot 47) mainly because "[critical] minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence of their own artistic realization" (45) which gives it an enigmatic touch of Mona Lisa's smile. T.S. Eliot judges it as "an artistic failure" for lacking "an objective correlative" and being "full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art" (45-49). But contrary to Eliot's observation the play has attracted a great deal of critical attention. The critics have variously answered several vexing issues regarding structure, character, theme and action of the play but an all encompassing and acceptable interpretation is still elusive. A number of critics from Coleridge to Harold Bloom have tried to explore the crux of the tragedy. Most of them believe that tragedy occurs because Hamlet "delays action till action is of no use" (Coleridge 87). The critical speculations for a viable cause of Hamlet's delay have given birth to an unending discourse. Coleridge finds Hamlet an intellectual man incapable of acting because of his habit-of-contemplation. Friedrich Nietzsche also finds Hamlet in the Dionysian ecstasy, a state in which he glimpses beyond reality into "the essence of things" that mars the action, "for action requires a state of being in which we are covered with the veil of illusion" (26-27).

There are other critics too who have made speculations for a genuine cause for Hamlet's procrastination. For Freud, "Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is rooted in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*." He says: "... the play is based upon Hamlet's hesitation in accomplishing the task of revenge assigned to him; the text does not give the cause or the motive of this hesitation, nor have the manifold attempts at interpretation succeeded in doing so.... Hamlet is able to do anything but take vengeance upon the man who did away with his father and has taken his father's place with his mother - the man who shows him in realization the repressed desires of his own childhood. The loathing which should have driven him to revenge is

thus replaced by self-reproach, by conscious scruples, which tell him that he himself is no better than the murderer whom he is required to punish" (121). David Leverenz finds *Hamlet* "the most frustrating of Shakespeare's plays precisely because it is the one most specifically about frustration" (137). Scholars from continents other than Europe and America too have made some brilliant explanations regarding the cause of Hamlet's delay. B.D. Sharma finds "the real cause of delay ... in the relations of Claudius and Hamlet" (17). He writes: "the real cause of delay in the execution of revenge is the fact that there exists a father-son relationship between Claudius and Hamlet and Hamlet, being a son, instinctively likes his father Claudius not to be killed, and so delays the execution of revenge until it becomes inevitable for him to kill Claudius" (17).

If Coleridge and Nietzsche and other many more critics explore the cause in Hamlet's inner and imaginary world one finds a shift in Maynard Mack's critique of the play that makes a delicate balance between imaginary and real. For him, since Hamlet's world consists of mystery and problematic reality which he finds himself unable to accept. In this world he is unable to act because "the act requires of him, though retributive justice, is one that necessarily involves the doer in the general guilt" (57). But Helen Gardner suggests more outer and worldly causes than the inner ones when she writes that "the tragedy of Hamlet ... does not lie in the unfitness of the hero for his task or in some fatal flaw. The tragedy lies in the nature of the task, which only the noble will feel called on to undertake, or rather, in the nature of the world which is exposed to the hero's contemplation and in his responsibility to the world in which he finds himself" (69-70).

Though, a large number of critics have been engaged in the exploration of the cause of delay yet some of them have also made comments regarding the theme of the play. As for Eliot "*Hamlet* is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son" (46), for Philip Edwards "it devotes itself to the whole issue of the legitimacy of violence and the responsibility of the individual in perusing justice, finding in the revenge convention an extraordinary rich source

of conflicts to exhibit an illuminating the many faces of violence and redress" (39). And according to Harold Bloom, "*Hamlet* is scarcely the revenge tragedy that it only pretends to be. It is the theatre of the world, like *Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost* or *Faust*, or *Ulysses*, or *In Search of Lost Time*. (*The Invention of the Human* 383). In the view of Rossiter the central moral theme of the play is "to bring the 'native hue of resolution' to bear on life, and to make the deeper findings of 'pale thought' effective in the world of living men, the thinker must come down to the world" (185). And for Kim "*Hamlet* deserves the title of 'tragedy of moral idealism'" (12). A.C. Bradley considers the play to be a story of a single man i.e. the protagonist, who procrastinates because of melancholia caused by his father's murder and his mother's overhasty marriage but eventually brings the final catastrophe. The above survey makes it evident that the critics have mainly focused their attention on a particular character to study the cause of delay or the source of tragedy. Caroline Spurgeon believes that the problem in *Hamlet* is not a problem of will and reason "of a mind too philosophical or a nature temperamentally unfitted to act quickly, nor even a problem of an individual at all. Rather it is a condition for which the individual himself is apparently not responsible" (Mack 54).

Contrary to the Bradley's idea i.e. "the centre of tragedy may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character or character issuing in action" (7), the hypothesis of this paper is that the tragedy in *Hamlet* takes place because of Claudius and other characters who do not rise to the expectations and qualifications of the particular post that they are holding. Therefore, by applying the Indian idea of kingship one may arrive at a possible cause of tragedy in the play.

I

The Indian idea of kingship gives a vivid description about a king's status, category, virtues, education, appointment, duties and assistants. According to it a king has to please and protect the people (*Shukranitisara* 1.11; *Shantiparva* 57.11).¹ He is regarded divine but he is not given the right of kingship as was the case in Europe. It is said that all being stay in order (*dharma*) and order

resides in king, hence only he, who protects order in the best manner, is the lord of the earth (*Shantiparva* 59.125 & 89.10; *Shukranitisara* 1.57-62). Indian polity makes three categories of kings viz. Divine (*Satvika*), Passionate (*Rajasika*), and Demonic (*Tamasika*) based on the inherent nature of 'sata', 'raja', and 'tama'. It is firmly stated that only the kings of the first category are divine kings (*Shukranitisara* 1.21-26; *Shantiparva* 90.4). In India a king does not enjoy an absolute authority. He is governed by the divine law of order — *dharma* (*Shantiparva* 32.2-9; Kautilya I.ii).

The polity also provides a catalogue of external (*Bahirang*) and internal (*Antarang*) virtues essential for a king. As per the external qualities a king has to be of noble birth, physically and mentally fit, good looking, firm and skilful in selection of assistants (*Shukranitisara* 2.11-14). As per the internal qualities he should have the qualities of inviting nature, viz. gratefulness, magnanimity, discipline and resolution; the qualities of intellect and intuition, viz. intelligence, curiosity, expertness in discovering the weak points of adversaries, attention, assimilation, memory, discernment, discretion and passion for truth; the qualities of enthusiasm, viz. courage, energy, heroism, pride, promptitude and skill; and the qualities of self-restraint, viz. wisdom, prudence, self-control, justice and freedom from passion, irritability, greed, arrogance, indolence, inconsistency, impotence and cruelty (Kautilya III.ii). Moreover, it is very emphatically stated that avarice is the root cause of evils. Therefore, a king should not be avaricious (*Manusmriti* 7.49).

In Indian tradition princes are taught philosophy (*anvikshiki*), history and tradition (*trayi*), economics (*varta*) and administrative and military sciences (*dandniti*) by the learned and the noble scholars (Kautilya III.i). On completion of their education and training one of them, generally the elder son of the king is appointed as the crown prince to help the king in administration. He becomes the successive king on resignation or death of the king (Kautilya III.vi; *Shukranitisara* 1.185).

Indians believe that king's duties (*rajadharma*), both personal as well as public, protect the rest and thus are vital for the stability of the society (*Shantiparva* 68). His personal duties include all sorts of

renunciation, initiation, learning and self-protection. He has to shun ten evils of sensuality (*kama*), viz. hunting, gambling, sleeping in day, speaking ill of others, sexual indulgence, spirituous, dancing, music, illness, and liquor; and eight evils of wrath (*krodha*), viz. back-biting, criminal violence, hatred, envy, jealousy, wasteful expenditure, reprimand, and reproach (*Manusmriti* 7. 44-49). He should take lessons and counsel from the aged and learned people (*Shantiparva* 57.20; *Manusmriti* 7.39). He should keep his wives, relatives, friends, counselors, and dependents under control with all means (*Shukranitisara* 1.150). He should not place much faith in others and with the help of spies should know their hearts. He should check the usurpation of the authority and must be respected by the people (*Manusmriti* 7.62-65; Kautilya III.iv & v; *Shukranitisara* 3. 62 & 64. 7-9). His public duties are collective incarnation of protection and welfare of the people (*Shantiparva* 56. 45-46). He should make good relations with the neighboring states and should only make righteous victory (*Manusmriti* 7. 206; *Shantiparva* 69. 23-24 & 103). He has to ensure that taxation should be just and collected money should be invested in public welfare (*Manusmriti* 7. 128-36; *Shukranitisara* 4. 2-10).

II

In this section of the paper, a study of King Hamlet, King Claudius, Hamlet, Young Fortinbras, Polonius, Gertrude and Ophelia will be attempted. They will be judged in the light of Indian idea of kingship to arrive at a conclusion about the play. Though the King Hamlet is described by Hamlet as the "royal Dane" (I.iv. 45)² and by Horatio as the "goodly king" (I.ii.186) yet he does not deserve the title. He has been described in contradictory terms in the play. He is known as the "valiant Hamlet" (I.i. 87) but "was stolen of life, of crown, of queen" (I.v. 75). Subjecting him to Indian idea of kingship it is found that he lacked in personal duties for he had to ensure his own protection. He had to keep his own wife, relatives, friends, assistants, and dependents in control by all means. He had to know the orientations of his surrounding persons and check the usurpation of the throne. But he was careless about all these and did not

realize that

The single and peculiar life is bound
 With all the strength and armour of the mind
 To keep itself from noyance; but much more
 The spirit upon whose weal depends the rests
 The lives of many. The cress of majesty
 Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
 What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel
 Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
 To whose huge spokes the thousand lesser things
 Are mortis'd and adjoin'd, which when it falls.
 Each small annexment, petty consequence,
 Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
 Did the king sigh, but with a general groan. (III.iii. 11-23)

Moreover, contrary to the righteous victory he made an avaricious victory over the Norway and created a perpetual threat to his state. Due to his weakness in personal affairs, passion for war, avarice and lack of foresight he is doomed to death and has contributed in making the world a dungeon and Denmark a prison.

G. Wilson Knight describes King Claudius as an efficient and kindly administrator. He affirms: "Claudius is not drawn as wholly evil – far from it. We see the government of Denmark working smoothly. Claudius shows every sign of being an excellent diplomatist and king" (36). But this figure of Claudius is turned upside down by his villainy. Actually, he is "a murderer and a villain, ... a vice of kings, /A cutpurse of the empire and rule" (III.iv. 96-99). A.P. Rossiter writes: "...he is highly efficient king – a king of smiles like Bolingbroke, a 'vile politician' – with all the strength that comes from concentration on a narrow pragmatic aim" (184). He is a three-fold sinner who has committed regicide, fratricide and married his brother's widow. First, he kills his brother by poisoning him, usurps the throne and finally gets Hamlet killed through poisoning:

If he be now return'd,
 As checking at his voyage, and that he means
 No more to undertake it, I will work him
 To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
 Under the which he shall not choose but fall. (IV.vii. 61-65)

On assessing his character in the light of Indian idea of kingship he is found lacking in the qualities of self-restraint. He is not

a man of wisdom, prudence, self-control and justice. Unlike an ideal king, he is enslaved by the evils of sensuality, viz. incest, dancing, music and liquor; and also by the evils of wrath, viz. back-biting, criminal violence, hatred, envy, jealousy and wasteful expenditure. He himself confesses:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't—
A brother's murder.
...I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder—
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. (III. iv. 36-55)

He is too mean to pray with a pure heart; "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below./ Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (III.iv.97-98). So Linda Woodbridge is right in saying that "tragic disaster is brought on not only by flawed hero(s) like... Hamlet ... but also by villain(s) like Claudius in *Hamlet*..." (213).

Hamlet, the prince, has often been described as the noblest and most complex character ever created by Shakespeare and he deserves the complement. For Harold Bloom, "consciousness is his salient characteristics (*The Invention of the Human* 404), and he is "a charismatic-of-charismatics" (384). According to the Indian idea of kingship, he has the qualities of a courtier, a soldier, and a scholar. He dares to speak even to a ghost, can flight and defeat the opposition in an immediate trial and can question the worthless customs. Moreover, in the entire play he is the only person who possesses the rarest but most vital kingly grace, i.e. a sense of moral responsibility. Contrary to others, only he realizes the responsibility that is expected of him as the head of the state, as Laertes states:

His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own.
For he himself is subject to his birth:
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Crave for himself, for on his choice depends
The sanity and health of this whole state;
And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. (I.iii. 17-24)

It is only he who perceives that "The time is out of joint ... [and he] was born to set it right" (I.v. 196-97). But this "indifferent honest" (III.

i. 122) is found puzzled with the spiritual bankruptcy of the human-kind: "give me that man/ That is not passion's slave" (III.ii. 72-73), and irritated with the duplicity of human behavior: "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (I.v. 108). He finds the world "an unweeded garden/That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature" (I.ii. 135-36). This ingenuity of the world has opened him to "craven scruple" (IV.iv. 40) that has entangled him in the situation of "To be, or not to be" (III.i. 56). According to Kim, who interprets "*Hamlet* by the Eastern cardinal virtue mainly according to Confucius' ancient thought" ("Hamlet's Oriental Virtue" 8), "Hamlet opposes immoral conduct; he opposes the unrighteous and impurity of Claudius, the king of 'most unnatural murder' and of 'incestuous, adulterate, serpent' who appears indifferent before him and others" (11). Despite all his nobility and moral sensibility, because of a villain on the throne, he is deprived of any hope to get justice through proper channel and by committing murder is bound to be "ov'rthrown... quite, quite, down" (III.i. 151-55).

The description of the next character, Young Fortinbras, shows that he is an enthusiastic, valorous, skilled and foresighted worrier. Unlike Hamlet, he,

...a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. (IV.iv. 48-53)

He, like Octavius Caesar in *Antony and Cleopatra*, overshadows, though physically absent for the most part, the whole play. He makes an excellent leap towards the kingship. In the beginning he is preparing to attack Denmark. Very skillfully he has employed troops on the frontiers of Denmark but he is still open to the counsel from his old uncle and on his advice makes peace-treaty and gets benefits from it. Due to these kingly virtues, he carves a niche in the heart of the noble Hamlet and is elected by him as the next king of Denmark. According to Indian idea of kingship he is, in comparison to King Hamlet and King Claudius, a fit candidate to be a king. He is good and efficient in kingly duties of protection and maintenance of the

state and has other kingly virtues of inviting nature, of intellect and intuition, and of enthusiasm. But he shares weakness of being passionate in war with King Hamlet:

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw!
This is th'impostume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies. (IV.v. 25-29)

Thirty years ago King Hamlet had made an avaricious victory over Fortinbras's father whose consequences were haunting Denmark. Now Fortinbras is going to repeat the same mistake.

In the king's assistants the chief minister Polonius is a "faithful and honorable" (II.ii. 130) "good old man" (IV.i. 12). He is very dear to the country. Though he is a straightforward man, yet he is too old to deal with state affairs. Because of his age he is skeptical about everything and several times is found busy with spying in a foolish manner. Though it seems that the country is his first priority but in reality he has more allegiance to the king than to the state. He himself accepts that he is unable to discuss the policy matters:

...I do think – or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trial of policy so sure
As it hath us'd to do. (II.ii. 46-48)

According to Indian idea of kingship Polonius is old enough to be retired. As per the *varnashram* system a person has to retire from his professional and public life to seek spiritual development. But Polonius is still serving. He is too ripe to weed out the contamination from the country.

Both the female characters in the play, viz. Queen Gertrude and Ophelia, too lack in intellect and resolution. They are prone to temptations and, like puppets, are directed by others. By their frailty, instead of checking disaster, they strengthen it. While on the one hand Gertrude's foolishness gives a passage to Claudius's villainy, on the other hand Ophelia's indifference contaminates Hamlet's mind against women's love. They both unknowingly make Hamlet scrupulous about the reality of human behavior and toil to make world a hell.

After making a detailed study of the characters of the play in

the light of Indian idea of kingship, it may be concluded that the tragedy in the play takes place because of the failure of kings in performing their kingly duties. As a king, King Hamlet had to ensure his own safety but his carelessness facilitated Claudius to murder him and usurp the throne. By this act Claudius has committed a sin to which Hamlet is asked to revenge by the ghost. They have created a situation in which Hamlet is entangled and brings the disaster on himself and others. In Indian idea of kingship, a king is expected to be the paragon of virtues for the rest of the society. He had to ensure an atmosphere for the people to survive without being amoral or immoral. But, contrary to it, both these kings have ensnared Hamlet to be a murderer. Besides, Polonius and Queen Gertrude, because of their ignorance, worsen the situation. According to Indian idea of kingship, King Claudius, in spite of his claims to divinity (IV.v. 123-25), is a demonic king. King Hamlet and Young Fortinbras, though the latter is better than the former, are passionate kings because both of them have deep love for war. While the "most royal" (V, ii, 405) Hamlet with his nobility possesses the qualities of divine king. Looking at the categories, it becomes clearer that the most avaricious Claudius is the prime cause of the tragedy in the play while King Hamlet, Polonius, and Queen Gertrude are also responsible for enhancing it. Therefore, after studying the play in this perspective it becomes evident that the final catastrophe of the play is only the epicenter, and the focus of the tragedy lies in the incompetence of the kings in discharging their responsibilities as kings.

NOTES

1. The original Sanskrit version with Hindi translation of the Indian canonical texts has been used. However, only the ideas translated into English by the authors of the paper, have been incorporated in the text of the paper.
2. All citations of *Hamlet* are from *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*. Eds. Richard Proudfoot et al.

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"BELLA LIBERTA": ITALIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE AND E.B. BROWNING

Madhu D. Singh

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was one of the most prominent literary figures of the Victorian age. In her life time, she was even more famous than her poet-husband Robert Browning. During the last fifteen years of her life in Italy, Italian freedom movement deeply affected her. Inevitably, a large number of her poems of this period were occasioned by the contemporary political upheavals in Italy to which she was a passionate witness. Sir Henry Jones comments in this regard:

Italy was the land where she [E.B Browning] herself knew freedom and her emotions swept her into song. Of the four publications of her later life, two are entirely Italian in their theme — *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Poems before Congress*. And both are political.¹

But it is pertinent to note here that politics for E.B. Browning was not mere politicking; her approach was basically imbued with humanism. She firmly believed that politics could deliver goods only if it was humanistic in essence. Such an outlook naturally crosses national boundaries. In the Preface to *Poems before Congress*, she makes her stand on the so-called nationalism/ patriotism amply clear:

And if patriotism means the flattery of one's nation in every case, then the patriot, take it as you please, is merely a courtier, which I am not Non-intervention in the affairs of neighboring states is a high political virtue; but non-intervention does not mean passing by on the other side, when your neighbour falls among the thieves.... Freedom of the seas does not mean piracy..... So if patriotism be a virtue indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to one's country's interests, for that is only another form of devotion to personal interests, family interests or provincial interests, all of which, if not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral objects.²

Casa Guidi Windows Part I, composed in 1849, records the hopes and aspirations of its author at the prospect of Italian liberation. A brief recapitulation of the important political events preceding the Revolution of 1848 would help examine *Casa Guidi Windows* against a wider perspective. As it was, the Italian peninsula had been broken up among a dozen different sovereigns on the eve of the French Revolution. Napoleon I, however, completely reorgan-

ized the whole political system, shook it out of its 18th century mould, turned out its feudal dynasties, introduced democratic doctrines and French code of law, united one group of states into what became the Italian Kingdom under his own sovereignty, and attached another to the administration of the French empire. Thus he contributed significantly towards the unification of the Italian Kingdom. But after Napoleon's fall, Italy once again faced disintegration. The pre-revolutionary dynasties returned to their respective kingdoms. Though the Austrian influence predominated most of the parts of the peninsula, the hope of a unified Italy was kept alive mainly by secret societies such as Carbonari which fostered among all classes the ideals of liberalism and nationalism. Mini-revolutions, breaking out in 1820-1821 and 1830, were suppressed by the Austrian troops and it seemed Italy was yet unprepared for a total revolution. The formation of Young Italy Society by Mazzini in 1831 and the accession of Charles Albert to the throne of Sardinia further paved way for the Revolution of 1848. Charles Albert supported the idea of a federal rather than of a complete union under a possible Papal Presidency. In 1846, Pope Pius IX acceded to the Papacy, and he issued a general amnesty, granted many administrative reforms and lifted ban from political newspapers. Tuscany and Sardinia also followed Pope's lead, and other states which did not do so became the centres of increasing agitation. The demand for reform grew side by side with anti-Austrian feeling. With the beginning of 1848, a revolution broke out in Italy. In January 1848, the Sicilians revolted at Palermo, demanding autonomy. Piedmont, Tuscany and the Papacy also granted constitutions and parliamentary governments within their respective dominions. The anti-Austrian feeling in Italy gathered further momentum when Metternich was forced to flee, after a revolution broke out in Vienna in March 1848. A demand for war arose to exterminate the hated Austrian dominion. There could be only one leader for such a war and he was Charles Albert of Sardinia. When he declared war on Austria, Leopold of Tuscany joined him, and even the Pope and Ferdinand of Naples sent troops.

Casa Guidi Windows records how E.B. Browning was stirred by the political events of Italy when she saw that there was a nation

working out its destiny. The poet describes how the exclaiming of '*Bella Liberta*' by a young child sets her thinking about the fate of Italy. That day the streets of Florence were flooded with a tumult. The people converged towards the Pitti Palace to thank their Grand Duke to whom they looked as to the "first torch of Italian freedom." In the poem, there is a picturesque description of the captivating beauty of Florence followed by a glowing tribute to great Italian artists. Then there is a vivid description of what the poet saw from the windows of her apartments. The unending lines of people were moving in orderly procession, with banners raised aloft. There were lawyers and magistrates, artists and priests, tradesman and servicemen, all shouting '*Viva Italia*' and '*Il Popolo*' (349).

The poet passionately urges Italy to be strong, "Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy/ Will to be noble" (351). She further says ".... When nations roar/ Like lions, who shall tame them, and defraud / Of the due pasture by the river-shore"(351)! But mere passion, devoid of reason and conscience, is not what the poet desires for her dear country Italy:

Meanwhile, in this same Italy we want
Nor popular passion, to arise and crush
But popular conscience, which may covenant
For what it knows. (352)

The poet also fervently appeals to all nations to help Italy.

The second part of the poem, composed in 1851, records E.B. Browning's despair because of the failure of 1848 Revolution. It so happened that when Charles Albert declared war on Austria, Duke Leopold of Tuscany joined him, and the Pope also sent troops. But alarmed by the Austrian protests, the Pope and Ferdinand recalled their troops. In July Charles Albert was defeated at Custozza and forced to sign a capitulation. Lombardy was then regained by Austria. But the Sardinian defeat, however, precipitated the third phase of the prolonged struggle of 1848-49. It had begun with a constitutional movement; it now developed into a war of independence. Venice had already been proclaimed a Republic. After a period of great turbulence, the temporal power of the Papacy was overthrown, a Republic was set up at Rome, and another in Tuscany. The Duke

Leopold joined Pio Nono, entirely alienated from the popular movement and in exile at Gaeta. The poet says in scorn:

From Casa Guidi windows I looked out
Again looked, and beheld a different sight
The Duke had fled before the people's shout
"Long Live the Duke!" (362)

When the Republic was proclaimed in Tuscany, for a while it appeared as if the collective might of the people would overthrow the tyrannical Austrian: "We proved that Austria was dislodged or would/ Or should be, and that Tuscany in arms/ Should, dislodge her ending the old feud" (363). But the effort to do so failed, because, according to the poet, the people of Italy perhaps were not clear about their aims: "Conviction was not, courage failed and truth/ Was something to be doubted of" (364).

In March 1849, Charles Albert denounced the armistice with Austria and renewed the war. On the 23rd of the same month his army was routed at Novara. This second Sardinian defeat involved the collapse of all democratic and nationalist movements throughout Italy. In May, Sicily was conquered by Ferdinand and Duke Leopold returned to Florence which is scornfully described by the poet thus:

Sword and bayonet
Horse, foot, artillery, cannons rolling in
Like blind slow storm-clouds with the heat
Of undeveloped lightnings, each bestrode
By a single man, dust white from head to heel. (365)

The armistice signed at Custozza comes in for a scathing attack by the poet who declares that she hates such hypocritical peace: "I loathe to take its name upon my tongue./ It is nowise peace. 'Tis treason, stiff with doom, /'Tis gagged despair, and inarticulate wrong...." (367). The faith she had reposed in the intentions of the Pope lies shattered: "Who will speak a Pope's name as they rise again?/What woman or what child will count him true?/What dreamer, praise him with the voice or pen" (369)? While denouncing the cowardice of Pope Pius, E.B. Browning pays glowing tributes to the heroes of the Italian freedom struggle. Despite its predominant note of frustration and bitterness, the poem does end on a note of hope

and conviction (373).

Poems before Congress are also based on political theme, but their title proved to be a misnomer because the intended Congress to be held in Paris in January that year never took place. Once again it would be worthwhile to recapitulate in a nutshell what happened to Italian freedom movement during the decade 1849-1860, so as to analyse the political significance of *Poems before Congress*. Cavour, the mastermind behind the unification of Italy, realized that Italy could not on her own strength drive out Austria. He resolved therefore to seek assistance from France. An opportunity came during the Crimean War when he proposed to help the allies and sent fifteen thousand soldiers to Crimea. As a result, he was able to get a place on the Congress of Paris even in the teeth of Austrian opposition. There he vociferously expressed grievances of Italy on the international forum. Napoleon II himself, despite his defence of the Pope in 1849, was friendly to the Italian cause. In July 1858, he arranged a secret meeting with Cavour at Plombiers, and agreed to make a war together on Austria and drive her out of Italy. In April 1859, France declared war against Austria, and spontaneous risings began to break out all over the Northern Italy. All the provinces united under Victor Emmanuel. Meanwhile, Franco-Sardinian forces defeated the Austrians at Magenta and Solferino. The Austrians seemed to be on the point of being driven out of Italy when Napoleon decided abruptly to put an end to the war and signed the 'Peace of Villafranca' with the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph.

In the poem "Napoleon II in Italy", E.B Browning calls Napoleon "Sublime Deliverer" who has awakened the hope of Italy's deliverance from the clutches of Austrian empire. The enthusiasm of the Italian people was unbounded during the war of 1858. The poet says that this time they will not let the prospect of a united Italy slip out of their hands as it happened in 1849:

And each man stand with his face in the light
Of his own drawn sword
Ready to do, what a hero can
Wall to sap, or river to ford
All of them sons of the land. (543)

The poet hails France as a helper. Italy now cries as a "nation freed."

It is the ecstasy of a "newly delivered impassioned land". She also scoffs at the word "autocrat" used for Napoleon by some people. He was a truly great man because he always acted unselfishly while helping Italy: "Believing a nation may act / Unselfishly—shiver a lance/ And not for a cause of finance His name shall stand perpetually/ As a name to applaud and cherish" (545).

In another poem "The Dance" the theme of French help is presented through the metaphor of dance. She calls the French soldiers the gallant sons of France. In "A Tale of Villafranca" the theme of Napoleon's plan for the liberation of Italy is dwelt upon. Once again the poet calls Napoleon a "great man" who imagined a great deed, but was thwarted by various greedy powers. Some even dubbed the heroic act of Napoleon as sinful. They tried to frustrate all his plans. There is a note of sadness and frustration running through the poem, because the poet feels deceived at the failure of Napoleon's plan. The hope of an independent and united Italy was once again belied. But towards the end of the poem, she consoles her heart by saying: "God's fruit of justice ripens slow / Men's souls are narrow; let them grow / My brothers, we must wait" (547).

"A Court Lady" elaborates the theme of how young men from all parts of Italy took part in the freedom struggle and shed blood for their country. The poet depicts the poignant scene of valiant soldiers from Tuscany, Lombardy and Venetia lying wounded in the hospital. The poet says that they are fortunate to have served their motherland. But even more praiseworthy are the French soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of Italy's freedom:

Each of the heroes around us has fought
For his land and line
But thou has fought for a stranger, in
Hate of a wrong not thine. (549)

A passionate votary of freedom, Mrs. Browning is truly eloquent whenever she sings of freedom, for she hates slavery of every kind:

Happy are all free peoples, too strong
To be dispossessed
But blessed are those among nations, who
Dare to be strong for the rest ! (549)

The role of the Piedmontese comes in for special praise, as she

says: "Out of the Piedmont lion/ Cometh the sweetness of freedom"(549).

The dubious role played by the Grand Duke during the freedom movement has been satirically commented upon in the poem "An August Voice". As mentioned earlier, the Duke of Tuscany, popularly known as the Grand Duke, had initially supported the struggle against Austria. When the army of King Charles was defeated at Custozza, this struggle precipitated and it was taken over by the republicans like Mazzini. It was then (when Tuscany was proclaimed a Republic) that the Grand Duke fled to Gaeta. The poet scoffs at the oath he had taken in 1848:

For instance, the oath which he took
(In the Forty Eight rough weather)
He'd nail your flag to his mast
Then softly scuttled the boat you
Hoped to escape in at last. (550)

The tone of anger and bitterness gradually mounts up as the poet cries: "He cheated betrayed and forsook/ Then called in the foe to protect you"(550). And then in a crescendo of reproachment she compares him with Cain because he is guilty of fratricide.

The poem "Italy and the World" establishes Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a champion of universal brotherhood. She mocks at the so-called patriotism of the politicians who in reality "drape their self-love" in cheap vernacular patriotism. She has a vision of "... one confederate brotherhood planting/ One flag only, to mark the advance / Onward and upward, of all humanity" (552). To the poet's mind, only that nation is strong which stands up to oppose all sorts of injustice and oppression, and protects the weak. She also questions the role of England in the context of Italian freedom movement:

I cry aloud in my poet passion
Viewing my England
I loved her more in her ancient fashion
She carries her rifles too thick for me. (553)

Mrs. Browning's *Last Poems* also contain some pieces which deal with the political theme. The poem "First News From Villafranca" is distinct from "A Tale of Villafranca" inasmuch as it no more jus-

tifies the act of Napoleon; rather it focuses on the bewilderment caused among the patriots of Italy by this abrupt move on Napoleon's part. People like Garibaldi felt extremely cheated and robbed. The poet raises a pertinent question when she asks if there can be peace with enemy's guns still booming in their ears. This treaty aborted the move for Italy's unification, and rendered vain the sacrifices of thousands of soldiers.

"King Victor Emmanuel Entering Florence, April 1860" hails the King as a true leader, the first soldier of Italy. There was exultation all around, when brave King Victor entered the city of Florence. The Italians honoured the right man, when they chose Victor Emmanuel as their King. He carried on his shoulders the grave responsibility of justifying the trust that the whole nation reposed in him. The Italian people were immensely grateful to him, and were ready to lay down their lives for his sake. Another poem based on the same theme is "The Sword of Castruccio Castracani". This sword, presented to the King by the Italian people as an emblem of their faith, was accepted by him gratefully. The people were equally grateful to the King for freeing their dear nation Italy: "In a burst of fierce gratitude, say/As they tore out their hearts for the king" (572).

In the poem "Garibaldi" the poet peeps into the sad heart of the Knight Errant of Italian Nationalist Movement. Few lives of the 19th century were as adventurous. His successful seizure of Rome with only one thousand soldiers was only one of the many daring deeds which characterized his adventurous life throughout. He was prepared to defy France, Austria and Spain, but his small army was overwhelmed and he had to flee. His sick wife was with him and died in his arms. After years of wandering, Garibaldi bought the north end of the island of Caprera where he could look and dream and prepare, if Italy should again call him. When Nice acceded to France through a pact signed by Cavour and Napoleon, Garibaldi felt betrayed, but gradually this large-hearted man reconciled. This poem movingly brings out the slow struggle in this hero's heart to convince himself of Cavour's larger plans:

Perhaps we are not ill-repaid
Perhaps this is not a true test

Perhaps that was not foul trick
 Perhaps none wronged and none betrayed. (575)

Another poem titled "The Forced Recruit" is the poignant saga of a brave youngman of Italy who is forcibly recruited by the hated tyrants (Austrians) in their army: "By your enemy tortured and goaded/ To march with them, stand in their file ..." (575). This youngman only yearns for death, if not in Italian ranks, at least at the hands of Italian soldiers. He exhorts his fellow countrymen:

Aim straightly, fire steadily ! Spare me
 A ball in the body which may
 Deliver my heart here, and tear me
 This badge of the Austrian away! (575)

The poet says that such a fellow deserves at least a tribute of tears.

Thus Italy, Mrs Browning's country of adoption, played a very important role in her life and career. It exemplified for her the miracle of her own resurrection. If her life in England before marriage was like staying within a cage, life in Italy after marriage meant freedom, health, happiness and more complete expression in poetry. Lilian Whiting has aptly remarked that to Mrs. Browning, "Italy was from the first a living fire, not the bed of dead ashes at which the world was wont to sneer."³ She was whole heartedly devoted to the cause of Italian freedom. George Stillman Hillard once described Mrs. Browning as "a soul of fire enclosed in a shell of pearl."⁴ This aspect of her personality is vividly brought out in her poems based on Italian freedom struggle, characterized as they are by a noble fervour and humanitarian zeal.

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- ¹Sir Henry Jones, "Robert Browning and Mrs. Browning", *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. XIII, Part Two, eds. A. W. Ward and A.R. Waller (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.48.
- ²Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with Two Prose Essays*, ed. Humphrey Milford (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), p.540. All subsequent citations are from this edition and have been given in parentheses in the text of the article.
- ³Quoted in Kate Field, *A Study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Gay and Bird, 1899), p.64.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, p.74.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND MARK TWAIN'S IMPACT ON THE TRADITION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Leonard R.N. Ashley

I love to think of the great and godlike [Samuel Langhorne] Clemens. He is the biggest man you have on your side of the water by a damn sight, and don't you forget it. Cervantes was a relation of his.

(Rudyard Kipling in an undated letter to US publisher Frank Doubleday)

Ernest Hemingway famously said that *Huckleberry Finn* was the granddaddy of modern American literature and many professional critics have hailed it as that elusive masterpiece, The Great American Novel. Mark Twain loved exaggeration, but that verdict was not (unlike the premature report of Twain's death) an exaggeration. This article will argue that Mark Twain's most famous work, so utterly characteristic of him, is extremely significant. This is true because *Huckleberry Finn* is that great American invention, the department store, everything for young and old. There later American authors have selected many of the materials that they have run up into the most fashionable offerings, the one mart most in the true American style.

In no particular order of importance, because times change and fashions with them, here are major features of *Huckleberry Finn* that were followed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and still are around today to give American fiction its distinctive traits. Every author writes from experience as well as imagination, and American authors are notably "inspired by a true story," fascinated by facts, working in the presence, as it were, of their contemporaries and all the known literature of the genre to date. *Huckleberry Finn* has been particularly powerful as a clever departure and a certain success that has been copied, a guide to how and when to use what is inherited from the literary past and what is observed in the passing show of how to deal artistically with the actual past hut, as Robert Hughes (p. 207) says, writing about modern painters not Twain or other writers, "glazed by nostalgia but incarnated in real objects, which millions of people look back upon as the lost marrow of American history" presented in personal experience recollected in tranquility and fic-

tionalized.

The several biographers of Twain have discovered not only the wellsprings of his talent and all the details of a checkered career that led up to *Huckleberry Finn* but also the real names and real incidents that lie behind many of the fictional people and places and events in *Huckleberry Finn*. That sort of thing is what M. C. Rintoul does in her compendious *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction*. He told Andrew Lang in a letter of 1890 he had no desire to please the "cultivated classes". He offered the ordinary reader entertainment and took the opportunity as what modern education-ists call a "teaching moment". Americans believe that experience is the best teacher. Objective and philosophical fiction is not our line. We hear the boy/the author tell us at the outset that you need to have read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, adding that that book told the truth — "mostly". What we sense from the start is that Huck's superbly captured, credible voice will sound forever in American literature.

The glorification of the adolescent is the marked feature of many great American works, including *Huckleberry Finn*. Young Huck is the leading young person in American literature, eclipsing even young Henry in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Dennis the Menace in the comics and Bart Simpson in *The Simpsons* of TV and cinema. The book does not have the sustained craftsmanship or intellectual solidity of other books about boys. Less obvious there is the abiding American issues of Calvinism and apocalypse that we see in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Russell Hoban's *Ridley Walker* but it has the eponymous character who is one of the great literary achievements of all time, Huck.

Huck is a little guy. The focus of American literature is not the kings of the earth or the romance of the nobility but the little guy, whether he be a poor lad picked up by some benevolent rich man and given the golden chance "by pluck and luck" to rise in the world (the favorite theme of the pedophile Horatio Alger but also part of the typical US "big break" syndrome) or the simple but goodhearted fellow who, without much or any schooling, has more wisdom than

learning and gets ahead despite a lack of privilege (our Lincoln myth). Huck is part of another theme prevalent in American literature, the bad boy disturber of the peace (*Peck's Bad Boy*, the US equivalent of Richmal Compton's *William* in the UK) who never grows up, who is transgressive in one way or another. Young Huck will never lose the innocence of youth. He is our Noble Savage. Huck is uneducated and so unspoiled. Jim is likewise deprived of education and so is free of the society's foolish beliefs.

Depressing as the society is, Huck remains pure and good, and one of the few really good people in literature to gain and retain our unqualified respect. He is representative of the hopeful side of the American dream, our unquenchable belief that Americans are special and that a special providence has good things in store for us, that we can all be all that we want to be, that our nation is the "last best hope of earth" and the model for the whole world and that it has a manifest destiny to prosper and lead. Huck and his creator Twain says that the individual is born good and that society corrupts. Huck can be the great American ideal, the independent individual even in post-lapsarian and maybe end times.

Huck rejects being "sivilized". At the end of the book's adventures he makes a mature decision and his real life begins as he lights out for the territory. We can for him confidently expect the traditional American, sometimes called Hollywood, happy ending. For *Huckleberry Finn* it is not a boy-gets-girl situation that will enable a pair to live happily ever after. He does not have even the little love affair that Tom Sawyer got into in the previous book and as a boy Huck has no adult temptations. Huck's story celebrates the openness to any experience of Walt Whitman or Jack Kerouac and so many other Americans. He welcomes all that beckons the adventurous and in typically American optimism hopes until, as Shelley once said, hope creates. In the end it is not Abel but bad boy Cain from which Peck's Bad Boy and Huck and all the rest of the doers are descended. It is the outlaw, contemptuous of so-called civilized society's regulations, rejecting its bribes to conform, that is the true American, the full-fledged and true-blue citizen of the great rogue state that undertakes to tell the rest of the world how to live and

threatens to demolish what it cannot control. "My way or the highway," says our society. "I'm outa here," says Huck, an inspiration for a new sort of courageous reaction to the Home of the Brave—a clearer definition of the Land of the Free. The flag has stars on it as well as bars. Seek the stars; break out from behind the bars.

A river runs through this novel. It is an obvious and actually a ponderous symbol, as important as the white whale in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The muddy, mighty Mississippi carries not only Huck and Nigger Jim and the plots in which they are involved but stands for the division of the nation, slave and free, effete east and brash west. It bears a freight of history, a richness and a richness that does not come from ambiguity. Twain's book never seeks ambiguity. The language is straightforward, the truth unvarnished, because Twain discards the ornate vocabulary of society's spelling-bee words and would-be-learned style and he deliberately sidesteps arty vagueness that tries to make the figures look larger, as figures do in dense fog. Twain borrows the demotic, as did the early silent cinema, from the periodical serial and the funny anecdote, the theater and vaudeville, the lecture circuit and the dramatic newspaper report. The Henry James explainer does not intrude but the work is masterful because we have in Huck an archetype who seems first and foremost a real person.

Twain's novel was first written in nearly 700 pages. "Everyone writes too long," American authors especially, from Melville to Stephen King and even the writers of thrillers, spy stories, etc. For us size="great". Twain dashed the book off in six weeks once he had conceived the narrator Huck, the frank, unspoiled lad who at once embodied the American belief in the wisdom of youth and the value of not being loaded down with old, adult learned lumber and even unconscious hypocrisies. The boy captured and spoke to Twain, made him the writer of an ideal youth. Then the yarn gushed forth, as swift as the arrow of time. Jack Kerouac and others also wrote at speed but did not, as Twain did before publication, copyedit manuscript and deliberately try to choose better words and improve sentences. Twain got stuck about 150 pages in. You can see the reason he had to put the work aside, pick it up later, and in fact

never made the rest of the book fit right with the riveting beginning of it. Americans are chiefly sprinters. They are world-class in the demanding short story but have never equaled Europe or Asia in the larger narrative. We call care artificial. Artisan-ship you have to acquire. Art for us just happens. What is often regarded as more authentic than the calculated is the likes of Jack Kerouac with his roll of paper fed into the typewriter so that he would not have to pause to change pages. Kerouac's was a style of "letting it all hang out" that caused Capote to say, "That ain't writing; that's typing". A few writers do labor over draft after draft and some take years to get a novel done, if ever. William Burroughs looked for accident to assist him to write. In our view the accidental is welcome in painting, in photography, in acting, and other arts. Craft? The undoubted craft of short-story writer Katherine Anne Porter did not serve her when after years of effort she produced a novel. Petronius' novel disproves the illusion that the genre was invented in the sixteenth (or seventeenth, or eighteenth) century. The real inspiration of Twain is not so much the novel as the oral yarn that as Sir Philip Sidney said drew the children from play and old men from the chimney corner.

Another ancient narrative technique influential on the American (and other) novel traditions is the picaresque. *Huckleberry Finn* partakes of this method of stringing episodes together, the beads on a string approach, any one of which, or many of which, might have been omitted, playing the audience. Twain searched for ways his Huck and friends could make use of actions of characters Twain had met and made notes on in real life. Dickens collected odd names for his characters, based some on his friends and acquaintances, and had to manage to produce cliff-hanging episodes in complex plots for long works published in parts—and paid for by the word, so Dickens' humor depends as much upon that as it does on the rhetoric of the politicians he had to listen to as a parliamentary reporter. Twain's humor is based on the brash inventiveness and salty style of rural America.

American writers usually have to have what Lord Byron called "a twig of fact" to which the writer attaches, like the spider, the

gossamer web spun out of his own guts. Moreover, few if any American writers can work from a single fact like Joseph Conrad in *Lord Jim*. Once Twain had the notion of the free boy he wished he had been it was just a matter of sitting down to write, and that would not need a clipboard for each chapter hung around the walls to receive relevant jottings or a toy theater in which the playwright could move around little figures. The tale would not have to have the restrictive classical limits of unity of time and place and tone and the rest. Twain's could write without knowing exactly what was coming, just as the country did. He could reflect the fascinating diversity of American life, its chaos and contradictions, its frontier wildness and the pretensions to gentility among the urbane. Twain liked to mock those. Neither his taste nor his style was Brahmin. Twain's novel would be essentially immune to editing not because it was perfect (nothing to be added, nothing to be deleted) but because any effort to tame it, as with any effort to tame Huck, would fail.

Editing was done on the bulky manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn*. Editing was cosmetic, not structural, though a friend might say, as friends often did to Twain, "take that out or you will get into trouble". There was no editor to take the mass of manuscript in hand and make a better book of it as was done with the work of Tom Wolfe, the earlier novelist of that name. The old-fashioned writer was longwinded in the three-volume novel tradition of the Victorian period. Big is better. Don't finger the quality, appreciate the width.

Huck can be devious; it is one of his charming qualities. But, after innate cleverness gets him to the crux, in the end Huck faces up to making hard decisions and acting definitely, taking personal responsibility. Huck's creator believed that Americans needed to get on the right side of a great number of issues, foreign and domestic, secular and religious, political and artistic — and take a responsible stand.

Popular modern American writers tend to throw in a lot of extras on the way to the wrap and they often defy the classical tenet that comedy and tragedy should not be mixed and that the conclusion should be inevitable. *Huckleberry Finn's* story terminates like comedy in that the hero has discovered happiness but it lacks comedy's

usual re-establishment of order. You might even say that for the society depicted the end is tragedy, not comedy, because the society loses the sort of person Huck is. In Huck's triumphant departure there is a pessimistic note struck in terms of the society unless that society can produce enough Hucks to reform it. At the end of his career, well after the generally upbeat mood of *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain was to have the same dark dismissal of traditional religion as Huck does down south. Twain was going to reject God and His heaven and His hell. Twain would go somewhere else, into the unknown, but undaunted. At long last he would be Huck.

It is quite usual for our literature to question the rationality or strength of the Establishment's manners and morals or at least to be more or less ambiguous regarding ethics and ethnics. This partly is due to the fact that our writers are almost without exception from the upper lower or lower middle class, not the upper class. Edith Wharton and Louis Auchincloss are notable exceptions. In fact some of our most remarkable writers have been extremely unlikely, clumsy writers, including Cooper and Melville and Dreiser, not to come closer to the present. Mark Twain's facility with the frontier tall tale and the edgy American comic riff are all too rare but they still find echoes in certain recent novels if, just now, with a harder edge, more bitterness, more anger, more situational ethics.

Mark Twain was one of the earliest practitioners of the American art of standup comedy. He was a harbinger of Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl and many a less talented "have you ever noticed" commentator with a keen eye and a sharp tongue. He was much better at disliking than liking, a not uncommon American trait. His books demand to be read aloud. They have a jazzy feel to them when that is done. The prose of Hemingway, however, is mannerist writing. It is unspeakable, though it works on the page if not nearly as well as the prose of the creator of the style, Dashiell Hammett. Hemingway when read aloud is even more unpleasant to modern ears. Twain does not "beat about the bush" as our slang puts it.

Playwright George S. Kaufman, noting that people became annoyed when they were struck rather than stroked, said that "satire is what closes on Saturday night". But if you mock absent others,

not your audience themselves, there is general delight in satire. *Huckleberry Finn's* satire can have quite a sharp edge to it but its readers are given the "out" that it is others, not themselves, who are ignorant, superstitious, pompous, prejudiced, and so on. Twain can as George Bernard Shaw later said about writing humorously say things that are devastatingly critical things, things that you can say in jest that you cannot get away with saying in sober words. Twain knew that from his popular lectures as well as from his publications even if he impulsively or mischievously stepped over the line on occasion, he usually got away with it, wit saving him, as was the case with the even more cynical and more caustic Ambrose Bierce, author of *The Devil's Dictionary*. Huck, the outsider, is the licensed fool. He can blurt out the truth about what he encounters. Twain allows us to be judgmental about Huck as well and Twain can hide behind the character as a ventriloquist's dummy. Later writers have picked up and used many of his sly dodges.

One thing that touched Twain in the art of writing, or putting in and leaving out, is that the world of *Huckleberry Finn* is a real world he knew well. Twain wrote from observation and memory, without library research. We need more of the single individuating gesture, the *mot juste*, and less of the "laundry lists" of details, the inner workings of the law office or the hospital, etc. Twain is using an historical setting but it is not one he has based on books from the London Library as the boys' books writer George Alfred Henty produced. Both Henty's books and Twain's are used today for home schooling but the first to teach old conservative values and seek to bolster a lost imperial dream and the second because *Huckleberry Finn* carries a revisionist and crucial message for the imperial power of today.

Allusions and references of all sorts are the heart of many modern, mostly unreadable novels, from Joyce to lesser lights. They appeal chiefly to professors who want to teach fiction, not to the average person who wants to read fiction. *Huckleberry Finn* has been bought by tens of millions of people not because it is a classic but because it is fun to read. Twain and his readers knew The Bible and you will see evidence of that in the novel. As a popular author,

Twain realized that exhibitionism should never descend to trying to look too erudite. *Huckleberry Finn* is modern in that it combines some of the fundamentals but it is long lasting in that it makes little scholarly demand on its readers. Readers do not have to use reference books to read it or read it twice to grasp its meaning, or repeatedly as with Joyce's *Ulysses* and some other modern fictions.

Since Eliot modern poetry has become more hermetic and some novels are far too reader unfriendly. Not Huck's *Bildungsroman*. If you read it more than once it is because it from the first and always gives pleasure, not puzzles. *Huckleberry Finn* is in the great tradition of works intended to teach delightfully. It is in the line of novels intended for young and old and for ordinary readers, not professional explicators, and it takes a reasonable and pretty clear stand on matters of some importance to a wide swath of Americans. It even works in countries where personal freedom and civil rights and pragmatism and situational ethics and ideal absolutism because it deals in human injustice and frailty. Twain says anyone trying to find a moral in the book "will be shot" but as usual he is joking. It deals with very serious, very American ethical questions and it preaches — Twain always said he wanted to be a clergyman but he did his preaching in art — individual responsibility, even to our era in which we like to be more individual than socially responsible.

One part of the United States sure to attract readers, and one that has given us a disproportionate number of our most eminent writers, both male and female, is the Deep South and the slavery. Slavery, of course, has, as we may say, colored all the white as well as all the black literature of the country. *Huckleberry Finn*, although the political correctness police are furious about the very name of Nigger Jim, is, in fact, an abolitionist novel, much more so than the fence-sitting nineteenth-century bestseller by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which introduced the Uncle Tom caricature that compels some modern readers of color to deplore Huck's slave friend.

American used to be a dialect of British English. Now it is a language, with many homespun dialects. Twain had perfect pitch

for speech and used many varieties almost flawlessly in *Huckleberry Finn*, slipping up chiefly with Nigger Jim, whose dialect has a bit more of the white man in blackface in the minstrel show than of real black men whom Twain knew and counted among his most respected friends. There are various white dialects as well. Fortunately, Twain avoids most of the weird phonetic spelling so favored by the "phunny phellers" of his time. Those included Artemus Ward, George Washington Harris' Southerners such as Sut Lovingood. They spelled in a difficult style which moderns find intolerable. Twain's dialect is most like that of the black Uncle Remus tales of Brer (Brother) Rabbit; it catches the distinct flavor, the cadences, the mindset, often satirized but always trenchantly expressed. Twain's different voices make the characters sound real, as real as a very bad poet like Col. Grangerford's young daughter Emmeline in *Huckleberry Finn* whom Huck thinks writes "very good poetry" and says "there ain't no telling what she could do by and by". As with all comedy, the reader is supposed to get pleasure from feeling superior, not only to the fledgling flights of doggerel but also to the whole pretentious Grangerford clan with their hideous furnishings "all the way from Philadelphia," the uppity plantation provincials. Twain can tick off a Mr. Podsnap as effectively as Dickens and does not have, as Dickens did, to rely on verbal quirks such as "Barkis is willin'" but seems to be recording real people actually talking.

Twain lays especial emphasis on common people in his fiction. There are various levels of society in *Huckleberry Finn* and each is carefully pinned and labeled for inspection. Twain does not limit himself to a smallish area as do valuable recorders of time and place such as John O'Hara and John Updike and so many other regional and ethnic and class recorders. His novel is a journey through a large territory and Huck interacts with quite a number of levels of people white and black. Overall the emphasis is on common people.

There is an unmistakable touch of the homosocial in Mark Twain. "Come back to the raft, Huck honey" set Leslie A. Fiedler off on an elaborate screed on homosexuality in Twain. American authors not only produced the growing up stories of boys but also the buddy story and sidekicks and the male-bonded groups in schools, the

armed services, the police, among cowboys and in the gold rush camps and elsewhere. That became a regular feature of our fiction, often more obvious with the guys on the road like the Beats and the Merry Pranksters. *Huckleberry Finn* has an ivory and ebony pair that is somewhat echoed in the modern partners in police cars and action films and the like, though not as obviously joined together like the escaping prisoners, one black and one white, chained together (as the races are in this multiracial country) in a famous Tony Curtis popcorn if corny Hollywood epic.

The use of cartoon-y stereotypes is a striking feature of Twain's fiction. Symbolic characters abound in our narratives though today they are less likely to have significant names, a device that goes back even farther, of course, than Young Goodman Brown's wife named, in Puritan style, Faith. Twain sidesteps this for more realistic naming, pretty much demanded by his intensely realistic Deep South scenery, but he does not hesitate to reference what Ben Jonson called humours in his humor and some of Twain's striking characters are as much embodiments of ideas as is another powerful writer's Babbitt. Twain for all his joking has moral concerns and social criticism. No amount of sugar coating should permit you to ignore the fact that young Huck tells us to do what we know to be right no matter what society has tried to inculcate. We are told to listen to our conscience and break the rules and "go to hell" if we have to pay a price for that. Actually Twain paid a price for not winding up the novel after Huck states he will follow his own lights and go to hell; the book goes to hell after that and the extra material is a drag. Twain like all great writers of comedy is a moralist. Indeed, as a satirist, he is an outraged moralist. This approach has produced some of the best American writing in Twain's wake. It was the mantra, as we say today, of the "do your own thing" generation, a period we have never quite escaped from no matter how much the world has changed since then.

Perhaps the worst villain in *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's father, is the drunken stage Irishman at his worst. Though liquor has proved the downfall of a great many of America's best writers, American literature can always use alcohol to fuel the plot and to destroy

unwanted characters. Of course Twain when considering the evils of drink would certainly drink to that. More recent blockbuster novels tend to feature not drunkenness but sex, drugs and violence, while the movies like chainsaw massacres and serial killers, disaster and terrorism, etc.

The use of vulgar language is quite obvious in Twain's masterpiece. Hard swearing went along with hard drinking in nineteenth-century America even as theater audiences attended *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and *The Drunkard*. Twain went on and off the [water] wagon. Twain, even when sober, could reel off an astonishing string of what we now call, genteelly, epithets. His friends all commented on it. You may know that his very conservative wife once followed him around for a day and wrote down all the offensive words he uttered. At dinner that night she read him the list. Twain allowed as how she had got the lyrics but missed the music. There can be few world literatures as full of "adult language," as if it were grown up to be obscene, as American literature. Norman Mailer substituted for what we later called the *f-word* the coinage *fug* and its variants. He felt he had great need of it for realism in his first and (typically American) his best novel, *The Naked and the Dead*. Twain does not use the bad word — it really made its debut when Kenneth Tynan threw it into an interview on the staid old "auntie" BBC—but in his time many critics noted Twain's language could be "gross". His wife cut some bad words out of his manuscript. Huck's age and the censorship of his era put another damper on Twain's vulgarity but the young descendants of Huck, in fiction, drama, and cinema, let alone def poetry and gangsta rap, are as outspoken and much more what the British call "potty mouthed" than he. Still, for his time, Twain's prose was likely — another British locution — to "bring the blush to the maiden cheek". There is nothing as shocking in *Huckleberry Finn* as modern sex and violence on cable television or, in fact, the 70 percent of Internet traffic exclusively devoted to pornography. When the Brooklyn Public Library banned the first edition of *Huckleberry Finn* it was not for dirty words. It was because the book and the society it describes was full of murder and mayhem, one hideous bit of violence after another and even an

accident brings us inescapably against how the society is desperately *wrong*.

There can be no argument over the presence in the book, however revolutionary it was, of stock elements of the period. That the hero is consciously playing a part and staging a life is patent in *Huckleberry Finn* and is a tradition of our later fiction. We are delighted when, the situation threatening to be dire because Jim might be caught, on the spur of the moment Huck scares off the danger by lying about infectious disease. There are tense moments as well as funny scenes with characters in disguise. Two of the most audacious frauds, the King and the Duke, are a major feature of the novel even though the plot, such as it is, could have well done without them, as indeed the plot might have done without the Southern feud that takes some lives or the murder of a drunk but we would be sorry to miss them. Americans love violence, we thrill at things blowing up and people killing each other, and we have a real soft spot for con men. Think of the movie *The Sting*. There is the ironic twist that conveniently comes at the end: the Widow Douglas has died and manumitted Nigger Jim in her will. Rising up Americans can gain civil rights for all (they have been free without knowing it to do this) if they have the determination to act, or they can finally improve their individual lives if they come to Huck's epiphany and resolve.

In conclusion, there are many other ways in which Twain's masterpiece uses and establishes conventions and rages against the conventional and pitieously describes and criticizes society. Twain's autobiographical writings and letters and periodical columns have been collected and evaluated, every scrap, even unfinished work—*The Mysterious Stranger* was tried over and over and never completed and yet gives us some of the best clues to Twain's thinking—and there has been a string of biographies (from the three volumes by Albert B. Paine to the hefty one volume by Ron Powers, 2005) and endless criticism of many aspects of Twain's life as well as of his work. But in a way the striking fact is that Twain is not Huck, never was. Walter Allen asserts (p. 174):

Twain's reputation rests ultimately on a single book, *The Adventures of*

Huckleberry Finn. It has been called the most universal book to have come out of the United States of America, and it is easy to see why this should be so. ...it is as American as the Mississippi itself. At the same time, it is the classic of boyhood everywhere. It dramatises every man's dream of freedom, or rather, every man's dream of the freedom that he was robbed of as a boy. It was Twain's own dream of freedom....It was Mark Twain's return to his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri, but obviously not a realistic return. The boy Sam Clemens may have been Tom Sawyer; he had never been Huck Finn, for Huck is the representation of a freedom he had only dreamed of.

There is much such criticism, though usually not that penetrating, of *Huckleberry Finn*, Talmudic examination in ways we have here neither space nor desire to analyze and judge. Besides, Twain's classic novel is one that makes the reader want to enjoy it again, not look into the commentaries, and it is a classic not that one has to say one has read but actually did read and enjoy. There are many other things that might be said about how Huck is an American Everyman, as iconic as Captain America in Marvel Comics. If you are an expert in American popular culture you will recall that Captain Marvel had at one point to strike out for fresh fields and pastures new — and that for a while he called himself Nomad.

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"NO ENGLISH NOVELIST IS AS GREAT AS TOLSTOY": E.M. FORSTER'S ADULATORY ASSESSMENT OF TOLSTOY'S GENIUS

K.K. Sharma

E.M. Forster, whose luminous literary career spread over a long period of more than half a century — all through the momentous first half of the twentieth century —, distinguished himself as fictionist, fiction critic, reviewer, journalist, radio broadcaster, humanist and administrator. An intellectual aristocrat, he was a prominent member of the famous Bloomsbury group of artists, consisting of celebrated persons like Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, Roger Fry and T.S. Eliot. However, he was primarily concerned, rather obsessed, with fiction in English, and read it voraciously and thought about it very seriously, the evidence of which is the fact that he was invited to deliver the Clark lectures on fiction at Cambridge in the spring of nineteen twenty-seven, later published in book form as *Aspects of the Novel* which has run in many editions till today. No wonder he perused Tolstoy's fictional writings, and made numerous incisive comments on them. His observations on the great Russian's mind and art are interspersed all over his essays, radio talks, lectures and interviews which are contained in his well-known books, *Aspects of the Novel*, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, *Abinger Harvest*, etc. In the present article I have attempted to collect, collate, systematise and critically examine them in order to bring out his assessment of Tolstoy's art and ideas in particular, and the art of fiction in general, demonstrating the Russian's greatness as fiction writer.

Strikingly different from Percy Lubbock, the author of *Craft of Fiction* in which he lays immense stress on form in the novel illustrating from Henry James's novels and thus highlighting their value, E.M. Forster holds that it is the portrayal of life in abundance and the delineation of characters having real life models that impart lasting significance to a work of fiction. During the discussion of the art of fiction with Paris Review interviewers in the nineteen fifties, Forster remarks that much of Tolstoy's greatness as fictionist is due to his

wonderful capability of perceiving life in its breadth and depth and delineating it truthfully and objectively in his creative works, and that only a few writers can emulate him in this respect. He says: "We have not the power of observing the variety of life and describing it dispassionately. There are a few who have done this. Tolstoi was one, wasn't he" (*Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* 31)? Indeed, Forster holds Tolstoy's fiction in such a high esteem mainly because it is soaked in human life, and for him the novel cannot be alienated from its ingrained human quality and if it is done, the novel will be left with almost nothing:

The intensely, stiflingly human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity; there is no escaping the uplift or the downpour, nor can they be kept out of criticism. We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised or even purified the novel wilts, little is left but a bunch of words. (*Aspects of the Novel* 31)

Accordingly, Forster repeatedly points to Tolstoy's astonishing power of presenting a vast panorama of life in *War and Peace* which makes the book 'warm-hearted', 'heroic' and 'great' ("Our Second Greatest Novel," *Two Cheers for Democracy* 227).

Decades before Somerset Maugham's considered pronouncement in mid nineteen fifties that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is the greatest novel of the world, E.M. Forster as early as 1927 unequivocally declared Tolstoy to be a master novelist, greater than any British fictionist, and the reason he advanced for his assertion was that the inimitable Russian could paint a very comprehensive picture of human life, inclusive of the private as well as the public life, which is almost impossible for any other writer to emulate. To quote Forster's own words: "No English novelist is as great as Tolstoy — that is to say has given so complete a picture of man's life, both on its domestic and heroic side" (*Aspects of the Novel* 15). In fact, the vastness of *War and Peace* is simply overwhelming and even some of the very popular and outstanding English novels look very small in comparison with it. Forster elucidates the point by referring to four British fictional works — Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*, Sir Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and George Meredith's *Richard Feverel*. He spotlights the merits of these books: the radiant humour of the urban midlands in *Cranford*, the

brilliant portrayal of Edinburgh in *The Heart of Midlothian*, the passionate dream of a fine but undeveloped woman in *Jane Eyre*, and the exquisite farmhouse lyricism and flickers of wit permeating *Richard Feverel*. But these four books with their extraordinary traits, according to Forster, are just small structures beside the stupendous, awe-inspiring edifice of *War and Peace*. Apropos of this, he writes: "But all four are little mansions, not mighty edifices, and we shall see and respect them for what they are if we stand them for an instant in the colonnades of *War and Peace*..." (16).

Forster asserts that every novel inescapably presents the life in time, for without this it will have little sense as in the case of Gertrude Stein's fiction,¹ although the traditional delineation of the life in time may be somewhat base and inferior. But a great novelist like Tolstoy is concerned with much more than the life in time; he goes beyond even the life by values and takes into his compass space in its vastness. Undoubtedly, in *War and Peace* Tolstoy celebrates the life in time instinctively very much like Arnold Bennett in *The Old Wives' Tale*, but while in the latter book time is the real hero and this makes it miss greatness despite its sincerity and sadness, the Russian novel is doubtless great even in its emphatic portrayal of the effects of time through the effects of the waxing and waning of people. Though Tolstoy shows people like Nicholas and Natasha getting old and decayed like Arnold Bennett's Constance and Sophia and we feel like losing our own youth, yet *War and Peace*, as Forster rightly avers, is not depressing like *The Old Wives' Tale*. The reason is that "it has extended over space as well as over time, and the sense of space until it terrifies us is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music" (46).

Forster rightly points out that Tolstoy is as much interested in the story element — in what comes next — as Sir Walter Scott, and is as sincere about it as Arnold Bennett. No doubt, he is master of the art of story telling, concoctation of episodes and character delineation, but what is most striking about his fictional art is his unparalleled sense of space and it is the fact of space being the ruler of *War and Peace* that makes this masterpiece of his the greatest work of fictional art. This is the reason why after reading this novel,

one feels the sound of great chords, and this emanates from his unique sense of space, and not time, from, to quote Forster's words, "the immense area of Russia over which episodes and characters have been scattered, from the sum-total of bridges and frozen rivers, forests, roads, gardens, fields, which accumulate grandeur and sonority after we have passed them" (46). True, he is not the only novelist endowed with the remarkable feeling for place; there are many who possess it — namely Arnold Bennett, Auld Reckie and William Faulkner, to mention a few. But certainly few have Tolstoy-like rare sense of space and this ranks so high in his 'divine equipment' that Forster rightly asserts: "Space is the lord of *War and Peace*, not time" (47).

Tolstoy's art of character-delineation elicits Forster's unreserved commendation. The Russian, unlike most of the fictionists of the world, does not pretend that he does not use real people in his books. The fact is that he, in comparison with other writers, does not usually model his characters after the people he has chanced to know closely in life, though, of course, he has also the originals of some of his characters in the real world of his times. But none of his fictional characters is exactly like his original, for an outstanding novelist like him follows a certain process of turning a real man into a fictional one. Consequently, the characters in his fiction could have only a certain degree of reality and this degree of reality differs from character to character.² This can easily be illustrated from his portrayal of such major characters in *War and Peace* as the thriftless Count, Nicholas Rostov, Prince Mary, Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrew who have their germs in his own self, his grandfather, father, mother and persons closely related to him.

What appeals to Forster as well as to most of the serious readers is Tolstoy's ability to make his people real in spite of their complex natures and split personalities fraught with opposite traits. He delights in presenting men and women as bundles of contradictions, but the contrary qualities in them are very close to life. To quote Forster's own words: "Tolstoy is conscientious over his characters, he has a personal responsibility to each of them, he has a vital conception of them, and though they are full of contradictions,

those contradictions are true to life" ("Julius Caesar," *Two Cheers for Democracy* 162). In fact, their contradictory traits make them vital and convincing, and they become more real when they contradict themselves. Thus, they are living human beings, and not masked skeletons. This feature of a writer's art of characterization is so important to Forster that he does not hesitate to affirm that Tolstoy is, in a way, superior to Shakespeare, for the latter, like the former, is not always necessarily particular and painstaking in making his people lifelike, though he is universally considered as the supreme master of the art of creating real people. Forster dares say and it is hard to disagree with him:

Contrast Casca with Dolohov in *War and Peace*. Shakespeare often doesn't mind about his people. And when I am reading him one of my difficulties is to detect when he does mind and when he doesn't. This may be heresy on my part, but it seems to me that a great deal of Shakespearean criticism is invalid because it assumes that his characters are real people, and are never put in just to make the play go. (162)

However, immediately after this assertion, he points out that Shakespeare, being a great, natural genius, does bother about making his main characters true to life, and it is surely delightful when he or Tolstoy creates real men and women.

Forster points out another remarkable feature of Tolstoy's mastery of the art of character delineation — viz. the immortality of his characters. To Forster, the immortal characters created by great novelists live two lives: life in the book and life eternal. There are many fictional characters who are real in the pages of the book and are liked by the reader, but they do not remain with the reader for ever and are not remembered after the book has been closed. On the other hand, great characters are not only convincing in the novel but also linger on in the memory of the reader. Forster illustrates it by stating that Virginia Woolf's characters, with the possible exceptions of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Rachel and Clarissa Dalloway, are not among the immortal characters like the memorable creations of Tolstoy and Jane Austen. What is striking is the fact that he finds fault with Virginia Woolf with whom he cherished lifelong intimate relationship, and highlights Tolstoy's greatness by comparing the latter's unforgettable creations with those of the former, thus evinc-

ing his rare critical objectivity. After a long, convincing discussion, he concludes that while most of Virginia Woolf's characters live only in the books, Tolstoy's men and women live continuously and have a perennial life. It is pertinent here to cite a part of his observations in this context:

I feel that they do live, but not continuously, whereas the characters of Tolstoy (let us say) live continuously. With her, the reader is in a state of constant approval. 'Yes, that is right,' he says, each time she implies something more about Jacob or Peter: 'yes, that would be so: yes.' Whereas in the case of Tolstoy approval is absent. We sink into Andre, into Nicolay Rostoff during the moments they come forth, and no more endorse the correctness of their functioning than we endorse our own. And the problem before her — the problem that she has set herself, and that certainly would inaugurate a new literature if solved — is to retain her own wonderful new method and form, and yet allow her readers to inhabit each character with Victorian thoroughness. Think how difficult this is. If you work in a storm of atoms and seconds, if your highest joy is 'life; London; this moment in June' and your deepest mystery 'here is one room; there another,' then how can you construct your human beings so that each shall be not a movable monument but an abiding home, how can you build between them any permanent roads of love and hate? There was continuous life in the little hotel people of *The Voyage Out* because there was no innovation in the method. But Jacob in *Jacob's Room* is discontinuous, demanding — and obtaining — separate approval for everything he feels or does. And *Mrs Dalloway*? There seems a slight change here, an approach towards character-construction in the Tolstoyan sense; Sir William Bradshaw, for instance, is uninterruptedly and embracingly evil. ("The Early Novels of Virginia Woolf," *Abinger Harvest* 127-28)

Forster further elucidates his point by drawing a comparison between Tolstoy's portrait of a young girl in Natasha Rostov in *War and Peace* and Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* with regard to their dancing scenes. A young girl is naturally absorbed in dancing, but while Natasha is simply wonderful in that she, being young, dances and dances ceaselessly with pure rapture without bothering the least about anything else, Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet dances joyously but her eyes are all the time observant to catch the sight of some suitable man to marry. While the former is immersed in dancing completely detached from everything else but dance, the latter dances with all gusto and gaiety but with a specific

purpose which does not leave her even for a moment. Lydia, as Forster justly points out, "has none of the disinterested rapture which fills... Natasha Rostov in the far-distant universe of *War and Peace*, dancing the polonaise, dancing, dancing, because she is young" ("Jane Austen," *Abinger Harvest* 174). Inevitably, Lydia is a shadowy, unacceptable figure in comparison with Natasha who is universally acceptable and true to life as a young girl.

Forster extols Tolstoy for creating genuine round characters because he is of the view that round characters are greater achievements than flat characters. One great drawback with a flat character is that he cannot be serious or tragic without being a bore. That is to say, a flat character can be best drawn only when he is comic. But this is not the case with a round character, who can be effectively portrayed as a tragic figure consistently for any length of time. He greatly commends Tolstoy and Jane Austen for creating characters who are round or capable of rotundity. Everyone of her or his great creations has a mind, a heart and a moral fervour. Unlike Dickens' characters who give us only repetitive pleasure, they are usually refreshing and give new pleasure each time we meet them in the book. A true realist, Tolstoy or Jane Austen seldom draws caricatures like Dickens; his or her characters function all round. They are ready for an extended life, for a life which the scheme of the book seldom requires them to lead, and this is why they are able to lead their real lives so satisfactorily. Some of the most outstanding round characters, according to Forster, are "the principal characters in *War and Peace*", almost all the people of Dostoevsky, some of Proust's creations, Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Thackeray's Becky Sharp and Beatrice, Lucy Snowe of Charlotte Brontë, and Fielding's Tom Jones and Parson Adams (*Aspects of the Novel* 85).

Forster refers to Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to illustrate how the skilful use of the shifting viewpoint contributes to the greatness of the author and his work. He agrees with Percy Lubbock, the author of the valuable treatise on the art of fiction entitled *The Craft of Fiction*, that the novelist's greatness as artist lies in his power "to bounce the reader into accepting what he says," but while Lubbock

does not put this power of the writer at the centre, he does so: "I should put it plumb in the centre" (86). And then Forster explains his stand by analysing briefly Dickens' *Bleak House* to show how the eminent Victorian bounces the reader wonderfully well. On this basis he rejects Lubbock's contention that there should not be shifting viewpoint in a good work of fiction, and asserts that *Bleak House*, though "all to pieces" logically, bounces the reader and hence "we do not mind the shiftings of the view-point" (86-7). More remarkable than *Bleak House* and Andre Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs* is Tolstoy's *War and Peace* for employing purposefully the multiple point of view to achieve the vital result as a work of thematic and artistic excellence. He functionally uses omniscient, semi-omniscient and dramatized modes of narration in consonance with the thematic and artistic demands of the narrative, and there lies his greatness because he does all this so convincingly that we accept his picture of the world willingly without any doubt. Apropos of this, Forster asserts: "... we are bounced up and down Russia — omniscient, semi-omniscient, dramatized here or there as the moment dictates — and at the end we have accepted it all" (88). Naturally, he outright rejects Lubbock's assertion that *War and Peace*, though great, would have been greater if it had only a single point of view because by doing so Tolstoy would have been able to put into it the entire weight of his mind and art. Forster is right when he contends that a writer can resort to multiple/ shifting point of view if he can manage to do so successfully like Tolstoy and Dickens, for the laws of fiction writing are not what Lubbock understands them to be. He is justified when he avers:

Indeed this power to expand and contract perception (of which the shifting view-point is a symptom), this right to intermittent knowledge — I find it one of the great advantages of the novel-form, and it has a parallel in our perception of life. We are stupider at some times than others; we can enter into people's minds occasionally but not always, because our own minds get tired; and this intermittence lends in the long run variety and colour to the experiences we receive. A quantity of novelists, English novelists especially, have behaved like this to the people in their books: played fast and loose with them, and I cannot see why they should be censured. (88)

In the last of Clark lectures entitled "Pattern and Rhythm",

Forster eulogizes Tolstoy's *War and Peace* by stating that this is the only fictional work which has close affinity with the highest form of music, the most difficult type of rhythm like that of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as a whole. He points out that rhythm can be of two kinds: easy and difficult. The beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with 'diddidy dum' is an example of easy rhythm, while the rhythm of the symphony as a whole, based on the relation between its movements, is very difficult. In some great novels, we usually see the rhythm of the first kind, but it is very difficult to find in fiction the effect of the rhythm of the Fifth Symphony as a whole. Marcel Proust's monumental work, *Remembrance of Things Past*, exemplifies rhythm in its easy form. Badly constructed and chaotic, the book does not have external form; what gives it inner unity is the rhythm it has in the form of the 'little phrase' in the music of Vinteuil which recurs in the book time and again. The artistic excellence of the little phrase is that at times it is very significant for the characters in the book as well as the reader, while for quite some time it is forgotten and does not mean much to anybody. According to Forster, this is the true function of rhythm in the novel; unlike the pattern, it is not present from the beginning to the end of a work. If handled badly, rhythm is something very tedious as in the case of Galsworthy's spaniel John or Meredith's cherry trees and yachts. If a book is planned beforehand, it cannot easily have a genuine rhythm. But if handled rightly, it makes the need for an external form redundant as is evident from Proust's and Tolstoy's masterpieces. Highlighting Tolstoy's matchless achievement in fiction, Forster avers that the great Russian has shown the kinship of fiction with music by absorbing the difficult type of rhythm — the effect of the Fifth Symphony as a whole — in *War and Peace*. Even when the Orchestra stops, we hear something that has never been actually produced, and such is the effect of the type of the Fifth Symphony as a whole. Tolstoy is able to invest his *magnum opus* with the difficult kind of rhythm like that of the Fifth Symphony as a whole by achieving in it the effect of expansion — a sort of opening out —, and not of completion. Forster elucidates it conclusively thus:

Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not

rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom. Cannot the novel be like that? Is not there something of it in *War and Peace*?... Such an untidy book. Yet, as we read it, do not great chords begin to sound behind us, and when we have finished does not every item — even the catalogue of strategies — lead a larger existence than was possible at the time? (170)

Forster believes that form is an integral part of a work of art, since it is the outcome of the artist's innate sensitiveness and his urge to impose order on what he creates. Patently, it has always been very important for the artist in the past as well as in the present. Though it is not something unchangeable because it inevitably changes from age to age, yet it is essential in one way or another as it is the manifestation of internal harmony and external unity. Small wonder Forster lauds Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, not because it is an enormous work of art presenting a vast panorama of life, but because it is remarkably artistic as well. He does not fail to notice and emphasize its "architectural unity and pre-ordained form" ("Our Second Greatest Novelist?" *Two Cheers for Democracy* 227). Indeed, he is fascinated by the unity beneath multiplicity, presented so artistically in this novel.

The epic quality of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* elicits Forster's spontaneous admiration for it. He refers to a few types of novels of which he especially acclaims the epic novel which re-creates the whole of the age to which it belongs. And in this context he finds Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* simply outstanding because both of them express the spirit of the age they deal with. For this kind of work he also uses the term 'panorama novel'. As Virgil's *Aeneid* authentically paints the early Roman Empire, Dante's *Divine Comedy* the late Middle Ages, and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* the early twentieth century, so Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a remarkable and reliable document about the life/world of the Napoleonic period. Undoubtedly, it is an indispensable literary work, an epic which truly expresses the spirit of its age — the Napoleonic wars and the life of those times.

Allied to the merit, discussed in the preceding paragraph, is

Tolstoy's comprehensive vision of humanity, his alternative vision, manifested artistically in his *magnum opus*. His view of the permanence of human race, as evident in his depiction of the rise, fall and rise of the generations, is, indeed, a prayer to life and its Creator. All this becomes crystal clear when he is put beside Marcel Proust, the author of the 'second greatest novel' of the world in Forster's view. In contrast to *War and Peace*, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, though an epic expressing the spirit of its age and "as baffling as life itself — life when apprehended by the modern cultivated man" ("Proust," *Abinger Harvest* 110), offers us only a new view of the impermanence of human race. To understand the point correctly, it is necessary to cast a glance at the endings of the two greatest novels of the world. No doubt the epilogue at the end of *War and Peace* is disheartening when we see the ravages the cruel passage of time has done to Natasha and Nicholas, but, to quote Forster's perceptive opinion from which it is impossible to differ,

... there the rhythmic rise, fall, rise, of the generations offers an alternative vision, whereas Proust, at the close of *Le Temps retrouve*, is tethered to his selected personages, and cannot supply their wastage by new births. He introduces a new generation it is true; Madame de saint-Euverte is a girl instead of the anxious harridan whom we have hitherto connected with the title. But he only introduces it to slap the old in the face. The upwelling of fresh lives did not interest him, and as to babies, they were quite outside his imaginative scope. (112)

Thus Forster rightly infers that Proust's vision of humanity in this regard, in comparison with that of Tolstoy, is limited. The British novelist-critic advances a cogent reason for it. He points out that the two had different conceptions of time: the Russian considered time as something regular, a continuous process, while the French believed it to be something intermittent like memory and affection. To quote his words: "Tolstoy conceived of time as something regular, against which a chronicle could be stretched; to Proust it is almost as intermittent as memory and affection, and it is easier in such a cosmogony to picture the human race as always decaying and never being renovated" (112). The result is that Proust's landmark work is characterized by pessimism and despair underlying his view of personal relationships and life as a whole, whereas it is

not so in the case of *War and Peace* and we clearly perceive in it just the opposite of what is so apparent in *Remembrance of Things Past*, and therein lies the perennial, elevating appeal and renovative force of *War and Peace*.

In addition to many incisive comments on Tolstoy and his *War and Peace*, scattered all over his expository writings, Forster has written a useful short essay entitled "Three Stories by Tolstoy" which surely helps us in acquiring a better understanding of the different facets of his creative mind. The three stories — namely "The Cossacks", "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch" and "The Three Hermits" —, which he chooses for critical examination, are strikingly different from one another regarding the subject matter and the phase of his literary career. The first is one of his early creative writings, which deals with war, love, mountains and ambushes, and its action mostly takes place at the foot of the Caucasus. The second story, belonging to the later period of his literary life, focuses on the illness and suffering in domestic life, far from the fresh air of the outside world. And the third story, which is also one of his later works, is a kind of folk-tale about three holy men who are simple to the extent of stupidity and hence unable to learn even the Lord's Prayer. Obviously, though these three stories are, as stated earlier, so different in subject matter, setting, etc., yet they deliver one common moral lesson that simple people are the best. In fact, they fully demonstrate Tolstoy's unflinching faith in simplicity, which remains the very cornerstone of his mental make-up despite the contradictory, changing traits in his personality from time to time. Speaking of his unswerving belief in simplicity, assuming variegated forms in the different periods of his life, Forster observes:

It took various forms at various times of his life and led him into all sorts of contradictions — sometimes he believed in fighting, sometimes in non-violence and passive resistance, sometimes he was a Christian, sometimes he wasn't, was sometimes an ascetic, sometimes a voluptuary, but the idea that simple people are best underlies all his opinions from start to finish. He was himself far from simple — one of the most complex and difficult characters with whom the historian of literature has to deal, he was an aristocrat, an intellectual, a landowner who thought property wrong, he was ravaged with introspection and remorse. But that's his faith, simplicity. ("Three

Stories by Tolstoy," *Two Cheers for Democracy* 212)

Tolstoy's first masterpiece was the result of his fascination for the Cossacks' free life of love and violence during his stay in Caucasus as a young army officer. It hinges on a Cossack village girl, Marianka, who is betrothed to a wild local youngster, but is passionately loved by a young Russian officer stationed there. For quite some time she feels tempted to desert her own people for the sake of the Russian officer; but when her fiancé is wounded by a tribesman, she turns away from her Russian lover in fury and returns finally to her old lover and her own people. The plot, with all its complications, is loose, thin and stagey, but what made it "a great sensation in Russia" on its publication in 1863, was, according to Forster, the masterly "character-drawing", "the wealth of incident" and "the splendid descriptions of scenery" (213). Needless to reiterate, this story of youth, written by Tolstoy the youngman, is steeped in the author's belief in simplicity of life.

The first little masterpiece of Tolstoy was followed by such great works as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and so when he wrote "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch" — the second story that Forster discusses in the critical essay under consideration — he was a famous man of letters. This story centres around Ivan Ilyitch, a successful public servant who rises to become a judge. A decent fellow, he marries a nice girl for love. But unfortunately romance does not last long and by the time they attain middle age, they quarrel a good deal. Inevitably, the narrative becomes gruesome and ends with the agonizing death of Ivan Ilyitch whose existence is embittered by his knowledge that he is in everyone's way and that all will be happy when he is no more. But before his end, he has a great realisation which comes to him from his young peasant-servant named Gerasim, and he discovers that there has been something grossly wrong with him in that he, unlike his servant, has never been able to rise above selfishness. Thus through the humble peasant-servant he gets enlightenment and inner light, and this demonstrates Tolstoy's unwavering faith in the indispensability of simplicity. The gruesome end of the story is lit up with illumination, and Forster appropriately remarks:

And Ivan Ilyitch discovers before the end that something is wrong with his life; unlike Gerasim he has lived only for himself — even when he was in love with his wife it was for the sake of his own pleasure, and that's what has been wrong. The illumination comes, and at the supreme moment he understands. 'In the place of death there was light.' (215)

Forster rightly points out that while "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch" is an indictment of modern civilization, Tolstoy's "The Three Hermits" is intended to show what civilization needs. It is about a noble bishop, who is on a voyage to meet three hermits who live on an island saving their souls. When he meets them, he is impressed by their genuine holiness and sincerity, but is shocked to see that they are so ignorant as they do not know even the Lord's Prayer. However, he teaches it to them with great difficulty after repeated efforts, for they are quite stupid. But soon after his ship leaves them, he finds them chasing him running over the surface of the waves to ask him to teach them the Lord's Prayer again because they have forgotten it. The inference which Forster draws after a close analysis of the story is that the author all the time highlights his belief in simple people and the immense value of simplicity in life. Forster elucidates it thus:

You will see now what I mean by saying Tolstoy believes in simple people. And he believed in a different sort of simplicity at various times in his life. When he was young, and himself a bit of a rip, he believed in the Cossacks, because they were spontaneous and loved animal violence and pleasure. In *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* he has shifted his affection to the Russian peasant, Gerasim, who is placid and imperturbable and unselfish. And in *The Three Hermits* he recommends a third type — the saint who is an imbecile in the world's judgement, but walks on the water through the powers of the spirit. Tolstoy was inconsistent. Here are some of his inconsistencies, and they laid him open to attack. But he never wavered in his central faith: simplicity. (215)

However, Forster concludes the essay by affirming that it is not easy to find a suitable mode of simplicity in the modern industrialized society, and that Tolstoy could accentuate simplicity in life because his outlook was agricultural and so he never thought of the modern world of machines, etc. Apparently, these little masterpieces of Tolstoy do not possess much appeal for the readers of the present times.

The above discussion leads us to draw a couple of inferences. First, Forster seems to be overwhelmed by Tolstoy's genius as reflected in *War and Peace*, and he feels that any serious, detailed discussion of fiction means references to Tolstoy's mind and art time and again. He admits it towards the end of the Clark lectures on the novel when he states that in the beginning *War and Peace* was referred to and with a reference to it "we must end" (*Aspects of the Novel* 170). Also, he, without the least hesitation and doubt, places *War and Peace* among the world's three great books, the two being Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ("A Book That Influenced Me," *Two Cheers for Democracy* 222), and, again, proclaims: "Most people agree that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is the greatest novel that western civilization has produced" ("Our Second Greatest Novel?" *Two Cheers for Democracy* 226). Secondly, a careful reader easily marks a glaring blemish in Forster's sizable body of statements about Tolstoy's fiction — viz. this outstanding fictionist-critic, despite his vast range of knowledge of world fiction, does not make even once a mention of his such great novels as *Anna Karenina*, *The Resurrection* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Then, it is surprisingly disappointing, rather appalling that notwithstanding his lasting interest in, and admiration for, Tolstoy, he has not written even a short critical piece exclusively on *War and Peace* or any of his major novels, while he has published an essay on his three stories and has written two articles on Marcel Proust, two on Virginia Woolf and independent pieces on many writers. Nevertheless, despite the above-mentioned lacunas in his response to Tolstoy's fiction, his observations on the inimitable Russian writer are mostly balanced, and hence indispensable to apprehend and assess correctly his unique fictional genius.

NOTES

1. Speaking of Gertrude Stein's unsuccessful effort to banish the traditional notion of time from the novel, and the impossibility of rejecting the story elements, Forster says:

She fails, because as soon as fiction is completely delivered from time it cannot express anything at all, and in her later writing we can see the slope down which she is slipping. She wants to abolish this whole

aspect of the story, this sequence in chronology, and my heart goes out to her. She cannot do it without abolishing the sequence between the sentences. But this is not effective unless the order of words in the sentences is also abolished, which in its turn entails the abolition of the order of the letters or sounds in the words. And now she is over the precipice. There is nothing to ridicule in such an experiment as hers. It is much more important to play about like this plan to rewrite the *Waverley* novels. Yet the experiment is doomed to failure. The time-sequence cannot be destroyed without carrying in its ruin all that should have taken its place; the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless. (*Aspects of the Novel* 49)

2. In this context, it is pertinent to refer to Forster's discussion with the *Paris Riview* interviewers about the process of turning an actual person into a fictional one, and thus making the two vastly different from each other:

A useful trick is to look back upon such a person with half-closed eyes, fully describing certain characteristics. I am left with about two-thirds of a human being and can get to work. A likeness isn't aimed at and couldn't be obtained, because a man's only himself amidst the particular circumstances of his life and not amid other circumstances. So that to refer back to Dent when Philip was in difficulties with Gino, or to ask one and one-half Miss Dickinsons how Helen should comport herself with an illegitimate baby would have ruined the atmosphere and the book. When all goes well, the original material soon disappears, and a character who belongs to the book and nowhere else emerges. (*Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* 31)

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"HOME IS WHERE YOU START FROM": CONTEMPORARY WOMEN POETS' TREATMENT OF LOVE

Anamika

If we bear the Greek meaning of anomaly in mind, contemporary poetry is basically a poetry not of analogies but of anomalies, a poetry not of the equality of ratios but of the disproportion of ratios, and the interplay of differences as such. Thus, to read modern poem is, thus, to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface and to repeat all that we know. It is like entering the endless prosopopoeia. Stirring up the sediments of dark thoughts and half ideas through the masterfully unconventional idioms, it actually underlines our quizzical sense of being and leaves us freezing at a point where terror and humour, anger and celebration, and nihilism and mysticism meet.

The dark, emotive force and the daring innovativeness of modernism could have taken poetry away from the dockyard and market place, but it did a very important thing by initiating some kind of a civilizational dialogue between countries all over the world which produced magnanimous intersexual, palimpsestic texts. A still more important development was that the ex-colonies and emergent nations nativised modernism, and on the whole, it so happened that the "sense of place" in poetry got a predominance, over the "sense of time". All the celebrities of the world poetry today — Paz, Walcott, Heaney, Shimborska and others — actually enter time through their culture-specific geographic dots. Thus they are as much local as universal.

Ideally love is an extension of the self, an active concern for the life and growth of someone we admire, but the realistic treatment of love is different. It is obsessed with the problems of aggression, sadism and masochism. Modern womens' poetry is especially sensitive to the dialectics of love in union and separatism, self-surrender and possessiveness. The instinct to gain and to lose, to rule and to be ruled go hand-in-hand in most of the post-War love poems. This gets the treatment of love almost as elusive and

paradoxical as that of death.

Behind all the love poetry that women wrote in the mid nineteenth century, was the conscious intention to reverse the ancient tradition of love poems by men. In poetry as in fiction, the creation of the woman in love was an enterprise of heroism and the result was the love poems written by Emily Bronte, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti and Mrs. Browning. Different from it, women's poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, however, is triumphantly concerned with a feminist impetus for love. But whoever wants to take the subject of women love poetry seriously must know many languages, for the subject must carry them from Sappho to the saints in the days when the poetry of spiritual love was revealed in the imagery of marriage with Christ or 'Girdhar Gopal'. There are French, Italian and Spanish women poets to be read seriously, and Russian would be absolutely essential for Anna Akhmatova used love poetry as her principal vehicle for ideas of a philosophical and historical cast.

This is an achievement indeed that most of the women writing today are running a full fledged home. In the past we have had an abundance of chaste women, reclusive and withdrawn perhaps for the sake of their own survival as writers — Jane Austen, the Brontes, Christina Rossetti, Katherine Mansfield, Gertrude Stein, Mariane Moore, St. Vincent Millay, H.D. Elinor Wylie, Anais Nin, Mahadevi Varma and many more. Most of them were either single or childless. Andreinne Rich wrote about the best of them, Emily Dickinson:

And in your half cracked way you chose
Silence for entertainment, ...
have it out at last on your own premises?¹

Women's gift for relationship is fundamental. Contemporary women understand it. What they rebel against is psychic seduction and male hostility: "This problem of the Feminine has equal importance for the psychologist of culture... the peril of present day mankind springs in large part from the one-sided patriarchal development in the male intellectual consciousness, which is no longer kept in balance by the matriarchal world of the psychic."²

There was a time when men wrote poems, and women frequently inhabited them. These women were almost always beautiful

but threatened with the loss of beauty, the loss of youth — the fate worse than death —, or they were beautiful and died young like Lucy and Lenore, or they were like Maud Gonne, hard-hearted and disastrously mistaken, and the poem reproached them because they had refused to become a luxury for the poet. The woman who tries writing today looks eagerly for guides, maps and possibilities. Previous literature offers her a woman that negates her own image of her essential self. She finds a terror and a dream.

In a letter to her friend Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison, the great classical anthropologist, wrote in 1914: "By the by, about 'women' it has bothered me often — why do women never want to write poetry about men as a sex, why is woman a dream and a terror to man and not the other way round?"³ Thinking about that question one begins to think of the work of two twentieth century women poets, Sylvia Plath and Diane Wakoake. In the work of both, man appears as not a dream but a fascination and a terror, and the source of the fascination and terror is simply man's power to dominate, tyrannize, choose or reject woman. And in the work of both these poets, it is finally the woman's sense of herself (embattled, possessed) that gives the poetry its dynamic charge, its rhythms of struggle, need, will and female energy. Until recently this female anger and furious awareness of the man's power over her were not available materials to the female poet; she either tended to write of love as the source of her suffering and to view victimization by love as an almost inevitable fate or, like Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, she kept sexual relationship at a measured and chiseled distance.

Another answer to Jane Harrison's questions has to be that historically men and women have played very different parts in each other's lives. Where woman has been a luxury for man, and has served as the painter's model and the poet's muse, and also as commander, nurse, cook, bearer of his seed, secretarial assistant and copyist of manuscripts, man has played a quite different role for the female artist. Henry James repeats an incident, which the writer Prosper Merimee has described, as how, while he was living with George Sand, "he once opened his eyes, in the raw winter dawn, to see his companion, in a dressing gown, on her knees before

the domestic hearth, a candle stick behind her and a red madras round her head, making bravely with her own hands, the fire that was to enable her to sit down to urgent pen and paper."⁴

What one wishes to suggest is that this kind of male judgment, along with the active discouragement and thwarting of her needs by a culture controlled by males, has created problems for the woman writer, problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, and problems of energy and survival. Audre Lorde recognizes all such risks and responsibilities in nearly all her later poems. The ten sections of "Snapshot" comprise an album of woman as daughter-in-law, bound into the set of roles which men have established and which female acquiescence has reinforced: "Your mind now, mouldering like wedding cake, crumbling to pieces under the knife edge of mere fact...."⁵ Love may be a relief of the body and the reconstruction of the mind but the man she is in love with is "Just a dear fellow, electric dust."⁶ She is blown with

The only real love I have ever felt was

for children and other women

Everything else was lust, pity, self-hatred pity, lust.⁷

The black woman poet's vision of love and death is lyrical and dramatic, and simple and complex at the same time. We would consider Sonia Sanchez primarily. For Sonia, love is a miracle. Most of her love poems are introspective and meditative:

The old men and women

quilt their legs

in the shade while

tapestry pigeons

strut their necks

as I walk, think about you, my love

I wonder what it is to be old

and swallow death each day

like warm beer.⁸

There is a hunger for life all through, howsoever tense it may be: "death is a five O'clock train, forever, changing time but at the centre of death is birth." Thus the libido asserts itself in her poems almost always.

Leverkov is another case in point. Her earlier love poems are

vague, romantic description as in "The Marriage I & II". In her 1958 and 1960 collections, however, marriage provides powerful metaphors for poems about other themes — "A Ring of Chances", "Luxury", etc. —, but she seldom writes about love as such. She comes close to evoking this in "The Bird" and "To the Snake" — poems not directly concerned with the love-hate relationship. "To the Snake", for example, employs strong physical usages to recreate the complete absorption of the artist in his art — an absorption contradicting all logic.

Other poems which employ these usages of sensuality within a context of resonant, warm vowels are "Song for a Dark Voice", "Resting Figure" and "Love Song". The lush images of the former poem ("Your tongue has found/ my tongue, peonies/ turn their profusion towards/ the lamp/ it is you that is born there"⁹) are more subdued in "Love Song", but no less fervent. And the images usually associated with her concept of sensuality, rippling movement, darkness, guttural sounds and body hair appear frequently in many of these late poems. The old maple groans with "almost unbearable satisfaction". The act of creating a poem is as physical as an intercourse. And the very fact that she recognizes the importance of the physical party of love is quite a mark of departure. But her post-modern ability to move quickly from one perception to another does not always let us mark it out.

Her "Candles in Babylon" begins by placing us in a situation, a specific "when", a gesture that includes us in the ongoing action and places us in the act of perceiving. We begin with "Solitaires Draw Close", when two individuals "give to each other the rose of our communication". The speaker then proceeds to make a connection between the act of two coming together. There is no explicit love making but the metaphors work together to indicate an intimacy in a fairly confined realm, and a political action in the larger world:

When we taste in small victories sometimes
the small, ephemeral yet joyful
harvest of our striving
great power flows from us

luminous, a promise. Yet... then
 great energy flows from solitude
 and great power from communion.¹⁰

Organic form works here to bring them together on more than a physical level. This is a lyric revolution. The lyric in stress creates both political viability and communion. The movement of this short lyric, political action beginning with individual intimacy, and the poet discovering the connection through his or her perception, finds expression in the post-modern lyrics of other contemporary poets as well. Galway Kinnell's "The Waking", for example, is such a poem where a couple is able to give change to beggars for breakfast because they have been in bed together.

Less overt in its connections, but perhaps more powerful in its evocation of emotional response to sexual intimacy, is "The Good Dream" from *Footprints* (1972). The poem begins with two lovers rediscovering each other "upon the big bed". This is the only narrative situation in the poem, a brief anecdote. The speaker then finishes the poem with an explication of the situation:

The joy was not in a narrow sense
 erotic – not
 narrow in any sense
 it was that all impediments,
 every barrier, of history,
 wrong place and wrong time,
 had gone down,
 vanished.
 it was the joy of two rivers
 meeting in the depths of the sea.¹¹

Levertov's organic interest is able to overcome history and present trouble in the most intimate of ways here. The poem is not static in its presentation of the lovers, but active in extending their actions to the world, and in bringing the world to its actions. The love poem itself is what enables the speaker to overcome the burden of history and post-modern multiplicity — that is, in its most intimate setting, Levertov's organicism.

Syvetlana Boym makes a valid judgment in her conclusion to *Death in Quotation Marks*. After analysing how our main modern

critical impulse has been a kind of "necrophilia" that seeks both the literal and figurative death of the past and of the poet's work, she asserts: "we have to recover a certain kind of antiauthoritaria ethics that helps to put together the making of poetry, love, and criticism as the making and unmaking of the self. And Levertov excels in this art."¹²

On the whole, women's love poetry seems to be the I-You poetry, not the I-He poetry. The effect is verse letters directed by women to the specific men they love in which they seldom celebrate men, their eyes, hair or smile. They mostly write about "Me". Oddly enough, this results in a certain realism: the lover seems to be a real man because he is "You". Male critics usually put this adversely, calling it too responsive to their own emotions, etc. On the other hand, one should criticize male love poetry as abstract and too conventional.

Promising women poets rarely complain of the power of love, the poison on Cupid's dart. On the contrary, they rejoice in love, and boast of the transformation in themselves resulting from what Kate Chopin called, "The Awakening", Emily Dickinson called a "Glory", a "Sumptuousness", a "Resurrection", a "Little Divine", and Meera metaphorised as a cosmic dance with her ghunghroos on. They all exalt in the revelation love has brought.

There seems to be more than ice even in the western woman's love poetry. Men always have to draw on the imagery of cold, because their beloved's resistance, denial and betrayal are the principal occasions dramatized in their poems. But lightning bolts and volcanic eruptions are as useful to Emily Dickinson as to Charlotte Bronte. Edna Millay makes clever use of burning cigarette as well as candle, and in Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* pure fire stirs the red flames of passions in the ashes of life before love. Elizabeth Barret Browning imagines the overturning of a burial urn at her lover's feet almost in Meera's frame of mind which prompts her to raise a pyre of sandalwood (chandan ki chita) in the name of Giridhar Gopal:

Behold and see what a great heap of grief lay rid
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn in me

Through the ashen grayness.¹³

And she concludes with a line in the imperative voice, for which women love poets have a marked weakness "Stand farther off then, go." C. Rossetti, on the other hand, says, "Come back to me who wait and watch for you". But the ultimate in order giving can be found in the wifely love poems of Anne Bradstreet, such as her charming "Phoebus" poem, where she hurls a series of contradictory commands at the Sun-God employed to carry her message to her absent husband. It starts with "Phoebus make haste", "Moving on to", "But stay this once", and ends with "Now post with double speed mark what I say" ... "But all our loves conjure him not stay". The effect of all these love commands in verse is deftly summed up by Bradstreet's couplet:

And if he loves, how can be there abide

My interests more than all the world besides.¹⁴

In women's love poetry, just as in men's, the convention holds that the beloved must be placed high above the lover as a divine or royal object on a superior plain. But women poets seem to devote a special ingenuity to imagining the lovers as both high and low and simultaneously on a plane of equality. Meera, for instance, treats her Lord like an article she has brought from the market: "Koi kahe mangho, koi kahe suhalo, liyojee tarajoo tol."

Not all post-War women poets have written about love, but most of them have. Bishop's mature poetic style, known for its rich ambiguities and oblique approach of love and sexuality, stresses the emotional dislocation and instability in all efforts of affection. She successfully carries her childhood experience of love's stabilities and betrayals into the world of adult relationships, ironically declaring that the "art of losing isn't hard to master". Refusing to speak directly about her personal tragedies, she always finds herself struggling upstream against the currents of a post nineteen fifties generation like that of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton who follow the example of Bishop's own dear friend, Robert Lowell, and plunge headlong into the river of self-reference making rich use of the sorrow to be found there.

The outpouring of these poets raised grave suspicions in Bish-

op's mind. They struck her as egocentric. To speak as though one were always in the throes of some intolerable crisis, Bishop wrote in 1967 that it is "really something new in the world. There have been diaries that were frank – and generally intended to be read after the poet's death. Now the idea is that we live in a horrible and terrifying world and the worst moments of horrible and terrifying lives are an allegory of the world. The tendency is to overdo the morbidity."¹⁵ Objecting to the way confessional art transformed the poet into a diarist and the reader into a confidant, Bishop insisted that the actual bond between the writer and the reader was marked, not by genuine intimacy, but by distance and impersonality. Andrienne Rich suggests that the intimacy was altogether absent in Bishop's later work, where the poet seems to examine instead the way people are distanced from one another by differences of class and race. But this effect of distance can as easily be seen in the poet's delineation of her own experience of intimacy, the unyielding reality of loss, separation, and even betrayal that makes erotic and emotional connection "a billion time more lovelier and more dangerous", to borrow from G.M. Hopkins, one of Bishop's poetic masters.

The search for existential identity which is the dominant motif in the poetry of Plath and Sexton is also a search for a meaningful relationship of the self with the world around. They subject their roles as daughter, wife and mother basically to define identity in terms of all shades of love-hate relationship prevalent in this world of "sick hurry and divided aims". For Plath, love is basically a quest that fails, and this failure results in a recurrent death wish that dominates her poetry all through.

The special thing about Anne Sexton's treatment of love and death is comic vitality, its humour: "I am the queen of this summer hotel/ or the laughing bean on a stalk of death". And the marked difference between Plath's and Sexton's treatment of love and death is that death seems to be the most favoured lover for Plath, and for Sexton life with its most agonizing contradictions is still preferable. Even her love poems are tempered by a subtle sense of humour. In "Eighteen Days Without You", she tells her lover "Catch me, I'm your disease", and she concludes this blunt and abrasive poem with

an imperative that leaves us solidly on the side of life:

Lock in

Be alert, my acrobat

and I will be soft wood and you the nail

and we will make fiery oven for Jack Spart

and you will hurl yourself into my tiny jail

and we will take a supper together and that will be that.¹⁴

Love, death, home, mothering, sisterhood and the angst of being are six gray areas staging a Copernican shift after the advent of feminist poetry. Like telescopes that bring distant things closer, feminist writing usually opens with the large historical fact of collective expulsion and exile, alienation and holocaust, and then narrows down to the most intimate personal and family estrangements. This is how personal losses are folded into the collective loss of home, culture, language and identity. Indeed, the fragmented vestigial narrative of women's poetry works through intelligent language games. Woman's actual physical experience in poems like the "Rape", in fact, constitutes a counter-language. All forceful women poets give birth to words flowing in accord with the contractual rhythms of labour. This combats the brutally impersonal authority effects of the magisterial father tongue. Father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected or heard. Because the father tongue is lectures, only lectures, woman's language has got to be a conversation, a word, the root of which means turning together, moving in loops and curves like sparrows glissading, bursting with geothermal energies to establish a full-fledged relationship and burning also with anger, an old anger, which is, in fact, the best anger, the meanest, the freest, and the most intense.

Now a collage from the work of the non-Western women poets to set the tilt right and activate your sisterhood for your vibrant participation in the texts discussed. Each poem is a performance, I suppose, that draws the reader into its fold. It functions the way a group dance or a street play does. The first one has been recast on the basis of informal chit-chat with Mardie Rendon, an aborigine from New Zealand. We met at a conference at Dhaka and the idea at play is basically hers, I have not put it across in the poetic form:

Jesus Christ

Wasn't born a woman
 menstruation
 would have left him out of Temple at age 12
 he would have been
 raped hitch hiking
 From Bethlehem to Jerusalem
 his nursing children would have screamed
 and starved
 without milk for
 40 days and 40 nights.
 He wouldn't have had
 time to be crucified.¹⁷

The second one is by Tory Nicholas, a Black poet writing about the black triangle between the thighs. Because body has been the prime site of women-centric crimes, it appears as a bleeding wound in most of womanist poetry, and how this bleeding wound is converted into a seat of power, a "shakti-peeth" of sorts has been beautifully captured in the poem. The strategy of 'exposure' reminds us of the self-stripping of the raped woman "Dauputi" in Mahasweta Devi's famous story by the same name.

My Black triangle
 sandwiched between the geography of my thighs
 is a Bermuda of tiny atoms
 forever seizing
 and releasing the world.
 My black triangle is so rich
 that it flows over
 on the dry crotch of the world.
 my triangle is black light
 setting on the threshold of the world
 overlooking
 all my deep probabilities.
 All through it spares a thought for history.
 My black triangle
 has spread beyond his story
 and my fear of patriarchy
 spreading and growing
 trusting and flowing,
 my black triangle
 carries the seal of approval

of my deepest self."¹

Good adapters as they essentially are, women poets easily adopt multiple identities and selfhoods. They do so in order to escape from the single national identity and become stateless, even alien, in order to record a history of oppression. However, some of their poems go so very physical in pouring out exquisite details of female body that people call them "essentialist". Menstruation, menopause, childbirth and all experiences specifically related to woman's body are hailed high almost in the tradition of fertility rituals.

Women's groundedness in time and place reminds us also of Kristeva's "cyclic time" and Said's "moral geography". And it can so easily be linked up with each and every departure, each and every turn of the phrase in the feminist mould. Notice the brilliance with which the articles like bucket and chips and cinema tickets, truck and land and pear tree can be metaphorised at the hand of women poets. Equally extraordinary is the push and joy of the language with which they combat the 'poor Liza complex' of the yesteryears. But 'extra-ordinary' is not the right word for the feminist code because it is the ordinary and the marginalized and the subaltern, the poorest of the poor, that women glorify.

What is very striking about the contemporary women love poets is that they are not the grumbling kind. Like the male counterparts, they do not complain of the power of love. On the contrary, like Meera and Akka, Bahinabai, and Janabai, they rejoice in love and boast of the transformation in themselves. Women love poets of the more recent years are, however, more sensitive to the dialectics of love. Swinging between union and separatism, self-surrender and possessiveness, the instinct to gain and to lose, to rule and to be ruled, they are rich and complex indeed. For them love is a quest that fails and the co-existence of all these pressures gets their treatment of love as paradoxical as that of death.

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THE WHITE TIGER : THE ANTI-HERO'S JOURNEY FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT AND BEYOND

Deepika Srivastava

Arvind Adiga, by writing only two books — *The White Tiger* and *Between the Assassinations* —, has become a literary force to be reckoned with. The thirty-four year old Chennai-born novelist is the third debut novelist to have won the Booker in 2008. After winning, the sales of *The White Tiger* crossed 1, 50,000 in India alone. Still, it was never a book Indians wanted to read as they found the tone to be typically Western. Adiga counters the allegations by terming the novel as his fruit of labour as a reporter in India (being a correspondent for the *Time* magazine). His tedious job took him to the length and breadth of a country known the world over for its backwardness. Small wonder the way Indians react after going through the novel is absolutely valid as they find the grim presentation of the 'real' India curiously inauthentic, penned by an outsider for a readership that is not Indian.

In an interview on June 10, 2009, Adiga explains to Brad Frenette:

The White Tiger grew out of a couple of vignettes or stories that I had set down from *Between the Assassinations*. The two played off each other as I was writing them. I always had an idea for two related books on India which would be set on either side of the great divide in modern Indian history, which was 1991 when India opened up its socialist economy to the world. That created what's called "The New India", the India of rapid economic growth and great disparities of wealth, which is the India of *The White Tiger*.¹

What is striking about this novel? Compared with Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*, *The White Tiger* is more lucidly written and is more engrossing. Adiga explains:

I wasn't trying to make a point with *The White Tiger*. It just seemed that the most interesting story... was the story of the people who were invisible in Indian cinema and literature today, which is the servants and the poor who still make up the bulk of our country, even after all these years of economic growth.²

With the focus on the downtrodden, the backwards of India, the novel attracts a wide audience. The servants are as invisible in modern India as African-Americans were in America a few decades

ago. Adiga made it a point not to obliterate their presence. There is a reason for this. While pursuing his Master's Degree in English Literature at Oxford, he vigorously studied nineteenth century French writers, especially Balzac and Maupassant, and deduced that they were relevant to the present-day India since they mostly dealt with a new powerful middle-class or the emerging new self-conscious bourgeoisie. These conditions were resonant to what is transpiring in India today. Later, when he went to New York, he was deeply influenced by James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, who gave voices to people who were unheard in Literature. Adiga carried this trend forward by making the novel a series of conversations with the servants and the lowly class of India. He states:

It is an attempt to capture the voice of the men you meet as you travel across India—people at a train station or a liquor shop. What struck me was how funny a lot of these people were, how similar their voice was, their sense of humour, their cynical intelligence. How similar they were to black Americans.³

The Booker, which had reached out to literary stalwarts like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, goes to the boldest and the most awe-inspiring from the erstwhile colonies of the Empire. Adiga, a born writer with a gift of capturing the essence of India, has ventured out with a bold theme, which has become the recent trend, as seen in Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*.

The White Tiger is presented as an epistolary novel, a series of letters written over a period of seven nights. A quick-reading thriller, it is written in the unique voice of its central character, Balram Halwai. The person, Balram is addressing to, is, of all the people, the Premier of China, Wen Jiabao, who is expected to visit the city Balram is residing in — i.e. Bangalore — in a week's time. It is kept vague what the real motive could be for an Indian entrepreneur, having roots in rural Bihar and currently residing in Bangalore, to write at length to the Premier of China. But there are solid reasons:

Mr. Jiabao wants to meet some Indian entrepreneurs and hear the story of their success from their own lips.⁴

Another being:

Only three nations have never let themselves be ruled by foreigners: China, Afghanistan, and Abyssinia. These are the only three nations I admire. (5)

The third major factor was that

The future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage, and drug abuse, I offer to tell you, free of charge, the truth about Bangalore. (5-6)

In a nutshell, it sums up the enthusiasm of a self-described entrepreneur to acquaint the Chinese Premier with the subject of success. In his confession he tells his life-story, recounting how he achieved success, and conceals nothing, not even about a poster describing him and alluding to his misdeeds. Soon, he unabashedly reveals that he is a murderer.

Illustrious authors have faltered on this theme in the recent past. Monica Ali and Salman Rushdie have dealt with similar themes. Their protagonists live in New York or London, but fail to snap ties with small towns in rural India, Bangladesh or Pakistan. Adiga, through Balram, travels a different track and achieves much. In sending seven e-mails to Wen Jiabao, Balram staunchly believes that the Chinese truly require sound advice on how to achieve success, and no one can give that better than he, having established himself in a cut-throat environment.

Coming back to Balram, alias Munna, son of Vikram Halwai, a rickshaw puller, it is interesting to follow his story as narrated by him sitting in a 150 sq. ft. office beneath a chandelier. Incidentally, he is 'The White Tiger', the rarest creature in a jungle, coming along once in every generation. The school inspector, on a visit to his class, was impressed by him: "You, young man, are an intelligent, honest vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots" (55). While he was attending this so-called school, the nameless 'White Tiger' was given a name:

We'll call you... Ram, wait – don't we have a Ram in this class? I don't want any confusion. It'll be Balram. You know who Balram was, don't you? (13)

Balram gradually introduces himself to the Chinese Premier, but, more importantly, he reveals the hatred he nurtures for his hometown:

You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness.

Please understand... that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. (14)

The area of Darkness is a village called Laxmangarh in Bihar. Though a fertile place, having paddy and wheat fields in abundance, with ponds in the centre of the fields, villagers inhabiting the place, call it the Darkness. It is the description of Bihar and the Ganga, which has irked many Indians. The river, the life-line of not just Bihar but the nation, is labelled the black river or the 'River of Death'. He warns Mr. Jiabao

not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids. (15)

Gradually, he acquaints the Premier with the terrible conditions prevailing in the Darkness, where his clan leads a blissful life of ignorance, worshipping Hanuman, the half-man, half-monkey, because "He is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion" (19). This he attributes to be the reason for the subservience Indians harbour for their employers. Naturally, "how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India" (19).

The bleak darkness of the village is broken by the apparently warm vibes he shares with his father. His father dies of tuberculosis in a government hospital that was dysfunctional because of endemic corruption. The near-feudal conditions that prevail in Darkness indicate the dominance of a few powerful families. Balram gives them apt names — the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boer and the Raven. It is probably their presence which makes life hell for the underprivileged in the village. Balram's schooling gets disrupted in the meanwhile; he is forced to do menial jobs in a tea-shop. There is a marked similarity between him and David of *David Copperfield*, who, too, had to be withdrawn from school and contribute to the family's earnings. However, there seems to be a deeper bonding between him and Pip of *Great Expectations*: both the boys fend for themselves, dreaming of a bright future. As expected, Balram distances himself even from Granny and his brother Kishan, justifying his move:

I don't attempt to hide his role in making me who I am today. But he had no entrepreneurial spunk at all. He would have been happy to let me sink

in the mud. (54)

It is Granny who eventually agrees to invest in his driving lessons and Balram graduates to become a driver and a man. Soon he becomes a driver for Mr. Ashok and his gorgeous wife, Pinky. From here begins a new journey, from Darkness to Light, from Laxmangarh to Delhi. As usual, all meaningful discussion between his employer and his wife, as also their relatives, take place inside the air-conditioned comfort of the Honda car. The real business deals are struck in the car. He imbibes much of his wisdom, driving them around being a mute and obedient employee.

The moral darkness only increases with each passing day. His naive country beliefs are constantly challenged by the cut-throat network of city servants who started off as yokels, coming from various parts of the Darkness, but living in Delhi, they mastered the tricks of the trade. As he discovers the city gradually, he becomes disillusioned and perverted. He realises that there is a vast difference between the Darkness of his village and the Brightness of Delhi. He is also aware that to become a part of the young, vibrant and wealthy India, he needs to peel off his inner self and take drastic steps soon.

For him, to discard his loyalty is not an easy task. He attributes honesty and reliability of Indian servants to their innate cowardice and what he terms in his typical witty manner, the Rooster Coop. No matter what the circumstances and opportunities, a servant will not betray his master: "The Great Indian Rooster Coop. Do you have something like it in China too? I doubt it, Mr. Jiabao" (175). A bag containing millions can be entrusted to him as pilfering the sum would have terrible consequences. The servant may wriggle out but "Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed-hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the Masters-can break out of the Coop" (176-77). Adiga does not convince why so many marginalized Indians get willingly stuck in this Coop, and hesitate to venture on rampages to wipe out atrocities inflicted on them as does the fearless Balram. It goes to his credit that though his amoral attitude is disgusting, his pathetic circumstances create in the reader a feeling of compassion. He has seen it all — be it the callousness

meted out to the poor, or the vote rigging in elections both in rural and urban India, and the double standards of the rich. He is aghast to find out that his trendy, liberal, America-returned employer, Ashok, is no different and stoops to levels of bribing ministers for petty bargains. After a brief stint as a driver, he is determined "to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (521).

The murder of Mr. Ashok was actually premeditated, meticulously conceived, and the readers will solely hold Balram accountable for it. Balaram is literally taken aback when his mistress, Pinky, forces him out of the car one night as she took over the wheel leaving him on the road. Just how little he truly possesses in Delhi becomes tragically evident to him on this relevant dark night. His mistress drives back, picking him up and as destiny would have it, runs over a vagrant child in her totally inebriated condition. What is even more shocking is that his employers coerce him to own up and sign a statement confessing he had killed the child. This is the last straw on his proverbial back and probably triggers off the gruesome act. He refuses to remain in the flock of drivers hanging out by their vehicles outside air-conditioned apartments, waiting patiently for the ruthless masters. He undertakes the risk of being dishonest to escape the rut. His stay in 'Lightness' has enabled him to develop a plan to claw his way out from India's low expectation of him. He has to go Beyond as it is his firm belief that the Tiger can break free from his cage. He realises that he has been a fool to rely on Mr. Ashok who is weak and corrupt like his landlord father. He learns the hard way that his master is not upright and has betrayed his trust. He thinks that he is being held back by his low status and it is time to take over the reins, albeit by murderous means. He sets out on a journey to eliminate his employer. Ironically, the place he chooses for the ghastly murder is not far from "the famous bronze statue of Gandhi leading his followers from darkness to light" (281). He has to do that alone in a dark, desolate corner of Light, so he "rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through to his brains" (285). The depressing saga of his woes and tribulations is over. He

comes out a winner, without remorse, breaking free. It is a brutal dog-eat-dog world, letting only the fittest survive. The White Tiger surely is the fittest.

Displaying coarse pompousness, he justifies the harrowing murder as an act of class warfare, does not look back and heads towards Bangalore. The emergence of Bangalore as a metropolitan is frequently cited as a success story and Balram capitalizes on it. Balram fits in Bangalore as if it was his native village, treating it casually, arguing against the notion of a real Bangalore. The street-smart murderer cautiously works out a plan for reaching Bangalore and had the presence of mind not to reach directly but takes a zigzag route, via Hyderabad. Dharam, a relative from Laxmangarh, accompanies him.

Among the many attractions of Bangalore, the one that could be the most vital one for him is that it draws outsiders in large numbers; one more would not get noticed. Indeed, it surely is a blessing that Balram chooses the right city to take refuge in. Mainly for this reason, he has opted against Mumbai: "everyone goes to Mumbai in the films after they kill someone, don't they" (297)? He innovatively sets up his business, brushing off inconveniences as part and parcel of life, taking challenges in his stride. He starts a new business with his loot and gradually ascends the ladder of success heralding himself as an influential member of the Bangalore power circle, steering his career from one height to another: "All that remains to be told is how I changed from a hunted criminal into a solid pillar of Bangalorean Society" (292). With the right contacts, all his illegal past is condoned. By hook or by crook, he becomes a member of the elite. This he does it soon enough, "I tried to hear Bangalore's voice, just as I heard Delhi's" (297). The voice tells him to bribe the police and he goes to the police station and meets the inspector.

The penetrating piece of social commentary is being stretched to the breaking point towards the final confessions. The readers might have been delighted to see him prosper through fair means. His unfair deals, despite his penury, are colourless and unimpressive. There have been instances where mediocre people make it to

the top by dint of sheer hard work. Balram has no use for it, which is a major embarrassment. Another drawback is that the journey to beyond is hastily told, brimming with idiosyncrasy and cunning, apart from being highly predictable. Balram has nothing original to offer at this point, except reiterating that he has a vision, with or without accountability. What is perplexing is he succeeds where others fail. On the flip side, his crime, his penchant for learning, and his business acumen are adequately presented. The drawback is what suspense he creates early in the confessions, dissipates fast in the last chapter, as does Adiga's attempt to make him both an ordinary proletariat and a White Tiger simultaneously. The muddled mix of letters, should they ever reach the Chinese Premier, would baffle him considerably as they do the readers. The commendable outcome of the success story is that he enters the realm of unforgettable, immortalized raw characters of Dickens as his creations basically rocked to and fro between the extremes of original innocence on the one hand and sin on the other. Adiga's concept, therefore, is neither unique, nor exceptional, in projecting the main character from crushing rural poverty, learning lessons of life on the streets of Delhi and Bangalore. It is just that Balram is as frank and inexorably true as they; not a single detail is false, adding a magnitude to his broodings.

The transformation from Balram Halwai to Ashok Sharma heralds a new dawn for him — a dream he has nurtured all along. His struggle and agony, his options or the lack of them are universal:

I had to do something different; don't you see? I can't live the way the Wild Boar, and the Buffalo and the Raven lived, and probably still live, back in Laxmangarh.

I'm in the Light now. (515)

He has joined the bandwagon of countless men who are entrepreneurs out of necessity, using, banking and thriving on their imagination, ingenuity and wit. So confident is he of the fact he has acted rightly that he has no angst or remorse when he reads in a newspaper that seventeen members of a family (presumably his relatives) are murdered in a North Indian village. He argues that they may or may not be his relatives, and even if they are, they were

faceless people better off dead than alive. It is crucial for him to stay alive, albeit at their cost, which amounts to petty nothing. This hilarious wit coupled with a sardonic flavour has provoked David Malin to comment that his style is "reminiscent of the endless talkers that populate the novels of the great Czech novelist, Bohumil Hrabal."⁵

Balram's meteoric rise to his delusional success unfolds many truths, linked to the numbing social violence in nearly every strata of Indian society. Arch defenders of the nation's claim of being corruption-free, democratic and progressive, might question the veracity of his pronouncements, with many blaming the disenchanted chauffeur for being over ambitious, offensive and crude. Short-cuts do not pave the path to success, they argue. The sordid tale of Balram Halwai is no inspiration for the teeming impoverished millions.

The same is true of the anti-hero, as he carefully builds up a crescendo to strip away the veneer of 'India Rising' or 'India Shining', ending up as the messiah of the underdogs, nonetheless. It is to his credit that *The White Tiger* contains multitudes without being a sprawling epic retaining its tight focus to the very last. Arvind Adiga, too, has certain problems:

... I live in Mumbai, where not many people know of the Man Booker Prize; I'm still standing in long queues and standing in over-packed local trains in the morning and worrying about falling ill from unsafe drinking water. Life goes on as before.⁶

Like Balram, Adiga has rightly earned the title of 'The White Tiger', commenting on the state of affairs. Or is it the other way?

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THE VISION OF DARKNESS IN *ANDHA YUG*

Basavaraj Naikar

Dharmavir Bharati (1926-97) the Hindi author was born in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. He studied there and participated in the anti-British Quit India movement. He earned a doctorate in Siddha saint literature in 1947, and then became a full-time journalist, editing the weekly *DharmaYug* from 1960 to 1989. He was also a poet, novelist and essayist. His two novels, *Gunahonka Devata* (*The God of Sins*) and *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda* (*The Seventh Horse of the Sun*) are classics of Hindi literature. He has published five one-act plays under the title *Nadi Pyasi Thi* (*The River Was Thirsty*, 1954).

He wrote only one full-length play *Andha Yug* (*Blind Age*, 1954), originally as radio drama, now recognized as a classic of modern Hindi theatre. "Set late in the *Mahabharata*, it concerns the eternal values of life that are damaged or broken and re-established again and again. Bharati was deeply perturbed about the perpetual problem of war becoming global and destroying humanity. Obviously reflecting nuclear conflict, his play also interrogated the received wisdom of Krishna's assurances. An epic drama in blank verse, it applied various forms such as folk theatre, Parsi theatre, *Kathagayan* (singing of tales), and Western tragedy as required. The use of symbols and imagery provided a new dimension to the theme. It was a challenge to directors because the text's poetry and dramatic beauty are not easy to convey. Thus the premiere had to wait till 1962, produced by Satyadev Dubey on Theatre Unit's rooftop stage in Bombay. Subsequently the National School of Drama performed it in 1963, directed by Alkazi, and revived it several times. Many directors in other languages, like Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay (Bengali, 1970) and Ratan Thiyam (Manipuri, 1993), also staged important versions."¹

Andha Yug, translated into English by Alok Bhalla, deals with the epical theme of the conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas culminating into climax on the eighteenth day of Kurukshetra war. Although the theme is borrowed from the last part of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Dharmavir Bharati has presented it in such a way that it remains relevant even today. Though the story of

Kauravas and Pandavas is incidental to it, it achieves the universality of appeal by highlighting the metaphysical conflict between Good and Evil.

The play begins with a prologue, which says that it is concerned with the age of darkness as described in *Vishnu Purana* in which there would be a decline in prosperity and dharma and the whole earth would slowly perish; the one, who has wealth, would rule; the one, who wears a false mask, would be honoured; the one, who is greedy, would be a king; and the people, weary of misrule, would hide in dark caves and wait for their days of misery to end. It says further that it was only Lord Krishna, who was dispassionate and detached, whereas all others were blind and self-absorbed and that the play is the story of enlightenment.

The first Act begins with the narrator commenting on the central event and its negative nature, "Both sides in the war/ violated/ the code of honour/ smashed it/ ripped it into shreds/and scattered it/ the Kauravas perhaps more than the Pandavas."² The Kurukshetra war is obviously an archetypal one as it suggests the metaphysical war between Good and Evil. Whereas the Kauravas represent Evil, the Pandavas represent Good. King Dhritarashtra's blindness is indicative of ocular darkness. Queen Gandhaari's voluntary blindfolding of her eyes shows her extraordinary loyalty to her husband. But both of them, in addition to being physically blind (or blindfolded), are morally blind also because of their blind affection for and attachment to their children, i.e. Kauravas.

When Vidura comes to see King Dhritarashtra, the latter confesses that he is afraid for the first time in his life. Vidura reminds the king that the latter had been warned by Bhishma and Dronacharya and that Krishna had also advised him,

Do not violate the code of honour.
If you violate the code of honour
It will coil around the Kaurava clan
Like a wounded python
And crush it like a dry twig. (33)

But King Dhritarashtra had not bothered to listen to this advice. On the contrary his physical blindness was accentuated by the moral blindness caused by his filial attachment to his sons (34). He real-

izes that his attachment to his sons is an extension of his selfishness, which prevents him from understanding the world from a wider perspective. Queen Gandhaari also feels that the ideals like *dharma*, duty and honour are mere illusions, that there is a ferocious beast in each man, and that everyone is hypocritical and self-interested. She does not have any faith in Krishna. That is why she has blindfolded herself. In the seventeen days of war, all her sons except Duryodhana have been killed one by one. Now she desperately hopes that Duryodhana will be victorious in the war.

The second act begins with the chorus, which describes Sanjaya's bewilderment in the forest of doubt and confusion. He is very sad to be alive and witness the defeat of the Kauravas by the Pandavas (48). Sanjaya was about to be killed by Satyaki, but Vyasa had told the latter, "Sanjaya cannot die. He is immortal" (49). Sanjaya was cursed by Vyasa, "You will survive disasters, floods, revolutions, and wars of annihilation so that you can tell the truth" (49). Speaking the bitter truth is indeed a very unpleasant job.

Kritavarma is sad to learn that Duryodhana is defeated by the Pandavas and that only three of them are alive (i.e. Kritavarma, Kripacharya and Asvatthama). Now the scene focuses on Asvatthama and his psychology of revenge. He thinks that his father Dronacharya was cut to pieces by Dhristadyumna when Dronacharya threw down his weapons on the battlefield on hearing Yudhishthira announcing triumphantly the death of Asvatthama, the elephant, but giving an impression of the death of Asvatthama, the man (and son of Dronacharya). Thus according to Asvatthama, his father was killed by the Pandavas immorally and unjustly. Hence he decides to avenge the death of his father by becoming a metaphorical beast, "I decided to turn myself into a blind, ruthless beast" (52).

Kritavarma says that Duryodhana is still alive and intends to look for him. Sanjaya tells them about the whereabouts of Duryodhana, "With his extraordinary powers he has stilled the water of a lake. And there unknown to the Pandavas, he sits strangely still in the floor of the enchanted lake" (57). Meanwhile the Mendicant is rather unhappy to learn that his prediction about the victory of Kauravas over the Pandavas has proved wrong. Asvatthama is

also terribly angry with him and finally kills him blindly, and confesses: "I did not kill him! I was blind with rage. I wanted to annihilate the future, which has been prophesied. Believe me I do not know the old man was killed" (63).

In the third act, the narrator says that King Dhritarashtra and Queen Gandhaari listen to the story of the defeat of Kauravas by the Pandavas. King Dhritarashtra is waiting to hear the news of the last battle between Bhima and Duryodhana. Meanwhile the Guard 1 tells Vidura that an enemy soldier has entered the city. That soldier is none other than Yuyutsu, the son of Dhritarashtra, who has fought on the side of truth and not on the side of Kauravas, though he belongs to their party. He expresses his views as follows:

What is my crime?

That I was on the side of truth?

No other warrior—

Neither Drona nor Bhishma—
dared to oppose Duryodhana.

Only I had the courage

To declare:

I will not fight
On the side of untruth.
I may be a Kaurava
But truth is higher
Than my clan! (71)

Obviously, Yuyutsu is one of the Kauravas, who retains his moral integrity, loyalty to truth and rational approach to life. He has transcended the selfishness, greed and vengeance. He knows that even his mother Gandhaari may not like to see him. When he meets his mother and bows down to her feet, she taunts him about his siding with the enemies and refuses to bless him. Yuyutsu is rather sad about his mother's undignified behaviour. He is immensely desperate, but Vidura consoles him by advising him, "Great suffering must be endured with grace" (75).

Meanwhile the Guard 1 reports that Sanjaya has brought the news that Duryodhana has been defeated by Bhima in the final battle. The Pandavas are blowing the conch-shells and declaring their victory. But Balarama is enraged with the Pandavas because he

thinks that Bhima violated dharma in defeating Duryodhana and Bhima's immoral action was abetted by the 'unprincipled rogue' Krishna known for his holiness and cunning.

Kripacharya and Kritavarma also want to take revenge upon the Pandavas, but not through treachery. But Asvatthama is terribly vindictive and wants to be declared as the Commander of the army in Duryodhana's presence. Accordingly Kripacharya is directed by Duryodhana to appoint Asvatthama as the Senapati of the army. Now Asvatthama decides to wreak vengeance the next morning and orders his soldiers to sleep that night. But he keeps watch by pacing up and down. It is at this time that he happens to see a dance of war between a crow and owl. Then the crow sleeps and the owl watches it nervously. The owl prods him to make sure that he is really asleep and then attacks him. After a ferocious fight between them, the owl kills the crow finally. Asvatthama, who is watching the scene, breaks out of his trance and laughs confidently for having found the truth. He wants to rush to the Pandava camp, where the victorious Pandavas must be unarmed and sleeping, and slaughter them mercilessly in the manner in which the owl has killed the crow. He fastens his cummerbund and wants to attack the Pandavas especially when Krishna has gone to Hastinapur to console Gandhaari. He says, "Like a beast I will crush Dhristadyumna with my feet – like a mad beast trampling on a lotus-flower. I will not even spare Uttara, who is carrying Abhimanyu's son and the future of the entire Pandava clan in her womb!" (88)! Kritavarma and Kripacharya try their best to dissuade him from the immoral and treacherous vengeance, but Asvatthama turns a deaf ear to them.

Meanwhile the Mendicant's ghost appears on the stage and deplores the blindness of the people and their inner contradictions. Yuyutsu's spectre deplores his stagnant life symbolized by a firm wheel fixed to a chariot. Sanjaya's spectre laments his uselessness as a decorative wheel. Vidura's spectre laments his faith in the Lord, who is like a useless axle, which has lost its wheels and cannot turn by itself. The spectral vision acts as a commentary on the overall blindness, darkness and meaninglessness of life. The Mendicant's ghost now happens to descry a peacock feather waft-

ing in the air and understands that Lord Krishna is returning from Hastinapur after trying to console Gandhaari.

In the fourth Act, Asvatthama rushes to the Pandava camp to slaughter them vindictively and mercilessly, but happens to see Lord Shankara, the god of annihilation, standing as guard at the gate and challenging him, "Defeat me before you enter" (95). Asvatthama attacks him vehemently but ultimately accepts his defeat and begs the Lord for mercy. Then Lord Shiva blesses him, "Asvatthama, you will be victorious. The Pandavas have lost their sense of righteousness. Because I loved Krishna, I protected them, gave them victory, renewed their confidence. But they have violated the dharma of war and opened the doors for their destruction" (97). Thus blessed by Lord Shiva Asvatthama reaches Dhristadyumna's tent with the speed of lightning and wrings his neck mercilessly. Then he proceeds to kill the Pandava soldiers and Shikhandi also. Likewise, Kritavarma and Kripacharya also slaughter the children, old men and servants heartlessly. Queen Gandhaari feels happy to learn about Asvatthama's heroic feat. Duryodhana is still alive and wants to tell something his party men, but cannot. Kripacharya narrates to Duryodhana how Asvatthama has slaughtered the important leaders of Pandava camp. Duryodhana dies after listening to it. Queen Gandhaari is so happy about Asvatthama's vindictive heroism that she wants to remove her blindfold, gaze upon Asvatthama and transform his body into a bright diamond. But ironically Sanjaya has lost his vision and therefore cannot show Asvatthama to the Queen. That is because Vyasa has granted him vision only for a limited time of eighteen days.

Now the Kaurava city is desolate and the diamond throne is empty and the people have left to perform the last rites for Gandhaari's dead sons. When Yuyutsu meets his father Dhritarashtra, the latter cautions him against Asvatthama's rage and advises him to hide somewhere. But by that time Sanjaya brings the news of the unexpected transformation of Asvatthama from a hero into a fearful coward. He is hit by Arjuna's arrows. Because of his helplessness, Asvatthama releases his Brahmastra at Arjuna, not knowing the dire consequences of it for the earth and mankind. Vyasa explains

sadly, "For centuries to come nothing will grow on earth. Newborn children shall be deformed. Men shall become grotesque. All the wisdom men gathered in the *satya*, *treta* and *dwapara Yugs* shall be lost forever. Serpents shall hiss from every ear of corn and rivers shall flow with molten fire" (114). Then Vyasa requests Asvatthama to recall his Brahmastra. But Asvatthama pleads his inability and helplessness, "Vyasa, I am powerless! I only knew how to release the Brahmastra. My father did not teach me how to recall it" (115). Consequently, Asvatthama's Brahmastra is about to destroy the child in Uttara's womb. But again a miracle happens. Krishna saves the child in Uttara's womb by exchanging his life for Uttara's still-born child. Then Krishna forces Asvatthama to surrender his talismanic gem in exchange for his life, under the shadow of a curse forever. Now Asvatthama bows his head in defeat and leaves the place.

Queen Gandhaari removes her blindfold and wants to see Asvatthama, but the latter goes away from there. As his body is covered with boils and open sores, he smells worse than a diseased dog. Vidura tells Gandhaari that Krishna has cursed Asvatthama for the sin of infanticide with immortality and condemned him to live for ever and ever. Gandhaari mourns the death of her son, Duryodhana, and is enraged with Krishna for his incitement of Bhima's *adharma* and his vile curse on Asvatthama. She, therefore, curses him:

You may be a god
You may be omnipotent
Whatever you are
Whoever you are
I curse you
And I curse
All your friends and kinsmen.
They shall attack and kill each other.
They shall eat each other
Like rabid dogs.

And many years later
After you have witnessed
Their destruction
You will return to this forest

Only to be killed
 Like a wild animal
 By an ordinary hunter! (122)

Krishna accepts Gandhaari's curse without any grudge and even explains his divine as well as human aspects:

I may be a god.
 I may be omnipotent.
 But I am also your son
 And you are my mother.

.....
 If I am life
 Then, Mother
 I am also death.
 I accept your curse, Mother! (123)

The fifth Act shows the victory of Pandavas and a series of suicides. Though Yudhisthira has won his throne and his kingdom, he is not really happy. He feels lonely and dejected. He is sad to know that his brothers are either ignorant or foolish, either insolent or weary. He trembles to watch the encroaching darkness and hears the sinister steps of the coming age. Yuyutsu, who upheld dharma, is taunted by Bhima and ill-treated by the beggars. He, therefore, commits suicide by plunging a spear into his own heart. Now Yudhisthira's kingdom has grown decadent.

Then, the forest catches fire. Both Gandhaari and Dhritarashtra are consumed by the fire. Whereas the Kaurava dynasty is destroyed completely, the Pandava kingdom also comes to an end. Yudhisthira grows increasingly dejected day by day. Slowly he loses his faith in everything and realizes the hollowness of his victory in the war. He understands that his victory is also a long and slow act of suicide.

The chorus in 'The Epilogue' describes Krishna's death:

He leaned against the tree
 Placed his left foot
 Shaped like a deer's face
 On his right thigh
 And with a sigh whispered:
 'A strange age has passed'. (148)

.....
 Mistaking
 Krishna's foot for a deer

He draws his bowstring
And takes aim. (150)

.....
The stars went out
Darkness covered the earth
And that forest of fear
Became even more terrifying.

The moment Krishna was killed
Dvapara Yug came to an end
And on this god-forsaken earth
Kali Yug took its first step

And that forest of fear
Became even more terrifying. (151)

The death of Krishna represents the beginning of the age of darkness. The chorus strikes an affirmative note that in spite of the overwhelming darkness of Kali Yug, there is a seed of light buried in the human mind and might grow into a big tree of high moral ideals:

And yet it is also true
That like a small seed
Buried somewhere
In the mind of man
There is courage
And longing for freedom
And the imagination to create something new. (161)

The chorus states further that the seed, which is buried without exception in each one of us, will grow from day to day in our lives as duty, honour, freedom and virtuous conduct; it makes us fear half-truths and great wars and always saves the future of mankind from blind doubt, slavery and defeat.

Presenting even a small chunk of the great epic, the *Mahabharata*, in the form of a play is not a joke. It requires a lot of intelligence on the part of the dramatist. He has to present his vision of life through the dramatic medium by showing a few bits of action on the stage, by highlighting the moral ideas through verse, and by linking the events on the stage with the off-stage one through choric narration and comments. Thus the direct (on-stage) and indirect (off-

stage) action is linked intelligently and the authorial comment or interpretation is articulated through the chorus. In his note to the directors, Dharmavir Bharati confesses, "The choric songs are arranged between the acts in a style borrowed from the traditions of Indian folk theatre. The chorus is either used to give information about events, which are not shown on stage, or to underline the poignancy of the action. Sometimes, it also clarifies the symbolic importance of the events" (19). Although the chorus is borrowed from the Indian folk theatre, it easily resembles the chorus of Greek plays and captures the attention of the spectators.

Dharmavir Bharati has shown his dramatic talent in distributing the theme conveniently into on-stage and off-stage action. For example, Duryodhana and his battle with Bhima, the murder of the Mendicant by Asvatthama, the release of the Brahmastra by Asvatthama, the killing of Krishna by the hunter and such other terrible events are not shown on the stage (or in the form of direct action), but are narrated as happening off-stage (in the form of indirect action). Similarly the eagle killing the crow and the cloud-like gathering of eagles waiting to devour the dead bodies of Kauravas are shown symbolically on the stage, which holds mirror to Dharmavir Bharati's experimentation with the dramatic technique. *Andha Yug* easily attains the grandeur of a Greek tragedy and succeeds in conveying its universal message. It teaches the modern man the futility of indulging in selfishness, terrorism, fundamentalism and such other evils, and suggests an affirmative philosophy of life to be followed for the attainment of true happiness. It offers the moral lesson that Truth will be ultimately victorious, although un-Truth may enjoy some power temporarily. In other words, the play is a dramatization of the formula, *satyameva jayate*.

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STRUCTURALISM AS A NEO-SOCIOLOGICAL CHALLENGE TO POSTMODERNISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM : A NOTE

Rambhau M. Badode

I have a feeling that postmodernism and poststructuralism fail to explain social activities, which happen across time and space. I have a problem when postmodernism writes the obituary notes of all *isms* and ideologies in a haste. I am also conscious of the fact that I live in a society and this society is a reality, a reality outside the world of texts and structures. It is indeed hard to digest the poststructuralist and by extension, postmodernist argument that self, society and social structures are mere constructs of language. I propose 'The Structuration Theory' of Anthony Giddens as a viable challenge to postmodernism and poststucturalism. This theory can also be considered as a neo-sociological investigation, which begins with a debate on modernity and postmodernity. It also tries to retrieve the study of social significance of all human activities, including writing and reading.

In his work, *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens objects to the overemphasis of the role of language in the explication of social activities:

European social theory was, and is, not only alive but kicking very vigorously. But what is the outcome of these stirrings? For the loss of the centre ground formerly occupied by the orthodox consensus has seemingly left social theory in a hopeless disarray. Notwithstanding the babble of rival theoretical voices, schools of thought in question — with notable exceptions, such as structuralism and 'post-structuralism' — emphasize the active, reflexive character of human conduct. That is to say, they are unified in their rejection of the tendency of the orthodox consensus to see human behaviour as the result of forces that actors neither control nor comprehend. In addition (and this does include both 'structuralism' and 'post-structuralism'), they accord a fundamental role to language, and to cognitive faculties in the explication of social life. Language use is embedded in the concrete activities of day-to-day life and is in some sense partly constitutive of those activities. Finally, the declining importance of empiricist philosophies of natural science is recognized to have profound implications for the social sciences also. it is not just the case that social and natural science are further apart than

advocates of the orthodox consensus believed. We now see that a philosophy of natural science must take account of just those phenomena in which the new schools of social theory are interested — in particular, language and the interpretation of meaning. (Giddens xvi)

An individual is a member of one's society and in this respect one is expected to carry out social activities according to the norms, values and sanctions of one's society. This is the basic assumption in Structuration Theory. Giddens observes that every individual is an *actor* to one's society. Giddens uses the term *actor* to indicate an individual who has an active and interactive role in the society. Besides, he says, one also reproduces society and social structures in one's activities. When an individual reproduces the society or social structures, it is called *Strucuration* by Giddens. Structuration is a wider process, which allows the actor to follow the traditions of structure and at the same time reproduces or alters the structure.

Anthony Giddens developed the above-mentioned theory in the mid-1980s. To elucidate his theory, he says that the actions of an actor are taken in the continuity with the past. But, in fresh action, the actor also reproduces his existing structure. The continuity of the past and the reproduction of the present structure constitute what Giddens calls *Structuration*. His explanation runs thus:

Every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act, but at the same time all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation. Structure thus is not to be conceptualized as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production, even in the most radical processor of social change which, like any others, occurs in time. (17)

Giddens conceives structure as rules and resources, recursively implicated in the institutional articulation of social systems. To study structures, including structural principles, is to study major aspects of the transformation/ mediation relations which influence social and system integration.

Giddens tries to bring individual back into social theory as he resists classical theories and poststructural theory alike which have put the individual or the actor in margin. Further, Giddens argues that any theory that treats social system as ends in themselves is invalid. He says that it is ridiculous to think like a poststructuralist

who believes that the subject or the individual evaporates into a universe of signs. Honceptione also states that human activities biting into time and space should decide the identity of subject and object in a society. His view is that it is possible to recover the subject or actor without slipping into subjectivism.

Giddens' main claim for his theory is that it draws together the two principal strands of social thinking. In the structuralist tradition the emphasis is on structure (as constraint), whereas in the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions the human agent is the primary focus. Structuration theory attempts to recast structure and agency as a mutually dependent duality.

Giddens talks about a dualism between agent or actor and structure of society. It is this dualism that provides the logic for building the theory of structuration. Structuration Theory is based on the premise that this dualism has to be reconceptualized as a duality — the duality of structure. Although recognizing the significance of the 'linguistic turn', it is not a version of hermeneutics or interpretive sociology. While acknowledging that society is not the creation of individual subjects, it is distant from any conception of structural sociology. The attempt to formulate a coherent account of human agency and of structure, however, is a very considerable conceptual effort.

Giddens also defines structure in the context of his theory. A structure, he says, is characterized by the absence of acting subjects and exists only virtually. Further, he elaborates his notion of structure:

Structure exists only in practice itself and in our human memory, which we use when we act. Structure is not an external frame. Structures emerge in our memory, trace only when we reflect discursively on a previous action. In other words, structure does not exist, it is continuously produced via agents who draw on this very structure when they act. (45)

This view on structures could be extended to linguistics too. If we do that, we could be able to say that language structures exist only in human memory. I won't be wrong to say that structures exist only in practice and that they are produced by agents or subjects. We can also explain the impact of these structures on actors or

writers or readers. Using Structuration Theory we can argue that language structures enable us do actions such as communication, writing and reading. This would also mean that reading and writing could be considered as social interactions performed by knowledgeable agents. Most importantly, we can add the dimensions of time and space in literary studies.

To end, Structuration Theory could be used to analyse the advent of various innovations such as the printing press, electricity, telegraph, mass transpirations, radio, telephone, TV, the Internet, etc., and show how the structures of these innovations penetrated the respective societies, influencing them, and how the social structures of those societies in turn influenced and modified the innovations' original intent. In conclusion, the appropriation process of the Structuration Theory might be a good model to analyze the utilization and penetration of new media technologies in our society.

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BOOK REVIEWS

MARGRETA DE GRAZIA, 'HAMLET' WITHOUT HAMLET

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.267, Rs.1200.00

R.W. Desai

The purview of *Hamlet* encompasses such "large discourse/ Looking before and after" that every reader of the play can feel satisfaction in encountering within its pages "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." The Prince himself taunts the old councillor with a series of hermeneutical possibilities: "*Ham*. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel? *Pol*. By th' mass and 'tis, like a camel indeed. *Ham*. Methinks it is like a weasel. *Pol*. It is backed like a weasel. *Ham*. Or, like a whale? *Pol*. Very like a whale" (3.2.278-83). Margreta de Grazia has been for quite some time writing on the reception of *Hamlet* during the two centuries following its first appearance in the form of Quarto 1 (1603), Quarto 2 (1604), and the *Folio* (1623), and has persuasively shown that Hamlet's subjectivity, his interiority, came to light as late as 1780 after Edmond Malone's close study of the Sonnets of Shakespeare, written around the same time as *Hamlet*, demonstrated that the play reflected similar subjective concerns (See her "The Motive for Interiority: Shakespeare's Sonnets and *Hamlet*," *Style* 23, Fall 1989, pp. 430-44.). Prior to this time, she points out, "Hamlet's deep and complex inwardness was not perceived as the play's salient feature" (*'Hamlet' Without Hamlet*, p.1).

Her present book under review, published 18 years after her essay, is a bolder and more venturesome indictment of the modern image of Hamlet first created by the Romantics, Coleridge especially, and then developed by Bradley and a long succession of his followers who have subjected the Prince to a vast array of critical tools that probe his conscious mind, his subconscious mind, his infantile inhibitions, his parental relationships, his erotic fantasies, and much else besides. This has given rise to the term 'Hamletism' (though de Grazia does not use the term) which invests the Prince

with a life outside of and independent of the play in which Shakespeare has placed him, treating "the plot as inert backdrop to the main character who can readily leave it behind to wander into other and later works, no strings attached" (p.3).

However, quite apart from any link between the Sonnets and *Hamlet*, how valid is de Grazia's argument that the modern concept of Hamlet as a richly complex character is a 19th- and 20th-century creation that has nothing to do with Shakespeare's intent? To prove her stand, for example, de Grazia points out that the question of 'delay' never arose in considerations of the play during the first 200-year span of its history, not even by Dr. Johnson whose comment on Hamlet's sparing of Claudius while he is on his knees, ostensibly praying, does not indicate his seeing this as 'delay' on Hamlet's part but as an expression of diabolical vengeance "too horrible to be read or to be uttered" (p.159). But we tread on slippery ground here: it is equally possible to argue that the 17th and 18th centuries were blind to much else besides the inwardness of *Hamlet*, as may be seen in Nahum Tate's happy ending to *King Lear* which earned Dr. Johnson's unqualified approval (*See Johnson: Prose and Poetry*, ed. Mona Wilson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1951, p.593). A plausible conclusion we may draw is that even Dr. Johnson, like his age, was oblivious of the more subtle features of Shakespearean tragedy to which later readers were sensitive.

Further, seeing the 'delay' as simply a plot device to stretch out the action — as de Grazia does — an instance of this being the gravediggers' conversation which fills up time (p.177), she questions the relevance of their discussion on Ophelia's death by suicide to the theme of the play, concluding that the insertion is merely a device for postponing the play's end:

The text also encourages this kind of bodily slapstick when it calls for Clown 1 to act out, with self-appointed props, his argument regarding Ophelia's drowning. He introduces his presentation, 'Give me leave' and 'mark you that'. And he points to his props: 'Here lies the water [indicating the pit? his coat?] — good. Here stands the man [indicating his spade? a skull or bone?] — good'. No doubt he acts out the two scenarios he entertains: 'if the man go to this water and drown himself' he is an agent and a suicide, and 'if the water come to him and drown him' he is a victim and no suicide.

The play's approaching catastrophe would be further postponed by whatever laughter his skits provoked." (p.177)

For de Grazia plot is paramount; character, secondary.

But a more perceptive reading of the skit than de Grazia offers, of its merely being a device to prolong the action, would be that it has an intrinsic significance in the overall theme of suicide that runs through the play, Hamlet finding it attractive from his initial thought of "self-slaughter" (1.2.132) to making his quietus "with a bare bod-kin" (3.1.76), and then to his acceptance of Laertes' challenge to a duel which is evidently going to be rigged, as both Hamlet and Horatio know only too well: "*Hor.* If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit. *Ham.* Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come — if it be not to come, it will be now — if it be not now, yet it will come — the readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leave betimes, let be" (5.2.215-22). In one sense, as this exchange seems to suggest, Hamlet's "readiness" is a form of suicide not born out of escapism, as was his earlier death-wish, but a determination to confront death by choice, an echo of the Gravedigger's line of argument: "If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that" (5.1.16-8). Far from being a stage device to prolong the action, the Gravedigger is Hamlet's alter ego, in a sense, a facet of Hamlet himself.

Instead of a Freudian, a Lacanian, or a Nietzschean Hamlet, de Grazia would like to substitute a political Hamlet who, she is convinced, is Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Hamlet of the 18th century, a Hamlet who has been dispossessed of his kingdom, of "all those his lands" (1.1.88) that should be his by virtue of primogeniture. For de Grazia it is "the land-driven plot" (p.4) that is the play's nucleus, not the romantic, neurotic, churned-up-inside Hamlet of the last two centuries who claims our attention, the second Hamlet in her book's title. Assembling the many references to "land" in the play, and the many variations of the concept like "estate" (3.2.255), "patch of ground" (4.4.18), and so forth, she maintains that "the language of the play itself upholds the attachment of persons

to land" (p.3). But of course a political Hamlet has never been denied by criticism, and Hamlet's complaint against his uncle for having "popp'd in between the election and [his] hopes" (5.2.65) has never been overlooked. (See, eg, my *Shakespearean Latencies*. Delhi: Doaba House, 2002, p. 254, and "Hamlet and Paternity," *The Upstart Crow*, 3, Fall 1980). Further, the hunt for supposedly predominant disease imagery in the play, as demonstrated by Caroline Spurgeon and Wolfgang Clemen over 70 years ago, while interesting, is also problematic because the interpreting of the evidence concerning imagery is often dictated by the reader's own phenomenological conditioning.

The problem with *Hamlet* — if problem is the right word — is that both play and Prince are multifaceted to such an extent that it has been possible for a journal exclusively on *Hamlet* (*Hamlet Studies*) to be sustained for 25 years, the only journal in the world ever to be devoted to a single literary text. Accordingly, while de Grazia's insistence on a political Hamlet not being ignored is valid, her determination to exclude other aspects is misdirected, for, it is equally true that his mother's sexuality disturbs him greatly ("Frailty, thy name is woman" 1.2.146; "to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets" 1.2.157-8; "Rebellious hell / If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones" 3.4.82-3; "Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed" 3.4.183, etc.), and that this revulsion, allied to his hatred for his uncle, both for seducing his mother and murdering his father, is a strand that runs through the entire play must not be overlooked. In short, by narrowing her focus on one facet and excluding the psychological and related subjective elements constituting the Prince's personality that the past two centuries have recognized, de Grazia has written a good doctoral thesis, but as a book I think she would have done well to have stated in her Introduction that since *Hamlet* can accommodate so wide a range of approaches, her contribution is one among many diverse and divergent views of the Prince. Thus while Dr. Johnson was shocked at Hamlet's determination to send Claudius's soul to hell, as noted above, E.E. Stoll, Bradley's American contemporary, refuted 'character' criticism by tracing the lineage of unruly figures (note, not 'characters') like

Falstaff and Iago back to the Vice-figure of medieval drama, as does de Grazia in explaining Hamlet's hellish intent (pp.184, 192) though, inexplicably, without including Stoll in her bibliography (E.E. Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies: Historical and Comparative in Method*. New York: Macmillan, 1927).

Thus, despite her vast and illuminating scholarship in fields like the play's medieval background, the sister arts, emblematic motifs, textual variants, the language of flowers, and much else, her reductive approach is too blinkered to carry conviction. After all, as de Grazia notes (p.76), if Hamlet's detestation of Claudius was for purely political reasons, what was there to prevent him from orchestrating the kind of coup that Laertes nearly succeeds in effecting (4.5.96-129)? With neither succession rights nor royal lineage, Laertes (a commoner, as both he and his father stress in their joint warning to Ophelia that Hamlet, being a prince, cannot stoop to making her his wife (1.3.14-45, 88-136), seems to have fairly easily got the Danish populace to support his insurrection. In contrast, Hamlet's claim to the throne has not only legal legitimacy but, as Claudius himself admits, "he's loved of the distracted multitude" (4.3.4), and the reason for this — again stated by no less a person than Claudius — "is the great love the general gender bear him" (4.7.18) and, again, the reason for this (stated by Claudius), "he being remiss / Most generous, and free from all contriving" (4.7.134). That the king's recognition of Hamlet's popularity with the masses is not questioned, neither by his councillors nor by Laertes, is sufficient proof of its truth. Why does he excoriate himself for being "pigeon-liver'd" (2.2.572)? De Grazia's explanation is that Hamlet's lethargy is inherited from his father who's fond of sleeping every afternoon after a "rich meal that leaves him 'full of bread'.... Stuffed and drowsy" (p.77). But such an explanation, clearly a sample of 'character criticism', is not born out by Horatio's account of Hamlet Senior's victory in single combat over Fortinbras Senior (1.1.89), or by Hamlet's superiority over Laertes in the final duel, Laertes himself being lavishly praised by the Norman Lamord (4.7.89-91); moreover, when Horatio warns Hamlet of losing the contest, Hamlet's reply is emphatic: "I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have

been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds" (5.2.205-7). Clearly, Shakespeare does not think a philosophic Hamlet and an athletic Hamlet inconsistent, nor does Ophelia who sees in him the courtier, soldier, scholar (3.1.153).

An instance of de Grazia's zeal in pursuing her agenda while ignoring alternative signals that the play sends out is her excellent tracing of religious and archetypal correspondences between the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen.3), and Hamlet Senior being (putatively) stung by a serpent (1.5.36-40), then the murder of Abel (a type of Christ as in Heb. 12:24) by Cain, a parallel that Claudius himself recognizes (3.3.37-8, 44-6), followed by "the revenge command" (p.202) given to Hamlet, and his determination to ensure that Claudius's soul "may be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (3.3.94-5), but unfortunately, at this "turning point" (p.202), she accounts for the postponement of revenge (which she calls "diabolic inquiry") in terms of "the dilational and dilatory parousial structure translated into dramatic form" (*ibid*), thus regarding 'plot' as controlling action, the 'plot' requiring 'delay' and the action therefore slowing down. But from another perspective, in consonance with her earlier insightful religious and archetypal patterning of the play's events, Hamlet's role as Prince and Christ-figure is to ensure the total annihilation of evil through his self-sacrifice, as adumbrated in Rom. 13:3-4 where the "prince" (as in *The Geneva Bible*) has the authority to administer justice, this not being private revenge forbidden in Rom. 12:19, but divine retribution as in II Thess 2:7-12. (For an analysis of Hamlet in this capacity see my "Hamlet as 'the minister of God to take revenge'," *English Language Notes*, XXXI, Dec. 1993, pp.22-7). It seems to me then that by subordinating the play's parousial structure to its dramatic form, de Grazia has diluted her own commendable insight because of its conflicting with her overall thesis.

The 'character' criticism, then, of Bradley and others that de Grazia finds misplaced cannot be shunned even by her, and the attempt she makes to reduce Hamlet to a political pawn in the struggle for possession of land, territory, empire, ignores much else that is going on in the play. This brings us to an important question:

what human need does great literature fulfil? If in some quarters words like 'human' and 'great' have been rendered anathema, then what compels us to return time and again to certain texts and not to others? Two closely related factors are instrumental: the general tendency in universities throughout the world towards embracing Theory and Ideology, to the exclusion of earlier critical approaches that were more inclusive, and the financial support that is more readily forthcoming for trendy projects than for the more traditional ones. And yet, the question persists: why, for example, do critics of our present century choose *Hamlet* as a subject for inquiry and not, let us say, *Antonio's Revenge* by Marston? The latter in many ways closely resembles *Hamlet*, and could, perhaps, yield similar if not more convincing results when subjected to the kind of examination de Grazia directs towards *Hamlet*. The answer, of course, is obvious: if, as Claudius shrewdly discerns (what Polonius does not) that something other than love for Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet's preoccupation ("There's something in his soul, / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" 3.1.167-8), his observation may be modified to 'There's something in the play *Hamlet* that makes us want to read and re-read it time and again' a compulsion that *Antonio's Revenge* does not exercise. What, then, is this "something"? If the cultural, historical, political, ideological, and sociological factors surrounding a text and tethering it firmly to its own time and place are the only determinants shaping its being, then our interest in one text above another must depend upon that text being more representative of the locale, or the context from which it was born, than are other texts belonging to the same period. But this explanation is not substantiated by our experience. We are not captivated by certain texts simply on account of their being more correctly or comprehensively representative of their times than are other texts. For instance, we do not go back to *War and Peace* on account of its accurate portrayal of 19th-century Russian society, but rather, on account of its human appeal achieved through certain uniquely skilful manipulations of form and content that make it a great work of art.

Undoubtedly, post-structuralist modes of literary criticism have opened up refreshingly new ways of looking at texts and contexts,

but overdone, we are in danger of missing the wood for the trees. And a very real danger this is, for once we lose sight of the aesthetic properties of, let us say, the Venus de Milo, we might study the sculpture merely in terms of the quality of the marble, the place from where it was quarried, the cost, the time taken to create it — all very interesting details but not enough to displace our wanting to explore the reasons for our initial mesmerisation by the statue. Without minimizing the impressive and extensive scholarship that has gone into the writing of *'Hamlet' Without Hamlet*, I'd like to conclude with a statement in defense of 'character' by the Afro-American actor Earle Hyman (recognised as one of the greatest Othellos of all time) that, as an actor, he

treated characters in the play as though they were real men and women, flesh and blood creatures. But that is the way of the actor. He or she has to use all of himself or herself to become what *seems* to be a living person on stage or before a camera. ("Othello: or Ego in Love, Sex, and War" in *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*, ed. Mythili Kaul. Washington DC, Howard UP, 1996, p.28)

Of all the arts drama is the most representational, more so than even sculpture which is static (cf. Keats's Grecian urn), and that Shakespeare seems to have thought so is evident from the marvellous statue scene of *The Winter's Tale* (5.3) which hovers over the boundary lines between theatre, sculpture, and real life. And, of course, Hamlet sees the dramatist as one who holds "as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (3.2.22), a passage that has been microscopically examined and variously interpreted in *Hamlet* criticism but which has at its centre, incontrovertibly, the mimetic quality of drama. De Grazia's approach, while disparaging the critical shift that took place "by 1800 [when] the problem had migrated from plot to character" (p.173), nevertheless, cannot help falling back upon 'character' time and again — though she would not have it so — in order to buttress her argument. Perhaps it can be said that an important facet of Shakespeare's dramatic genius is his ability to fuse plot and character so inextricably that their separation becomes impossible. It seems to me, then, that de Grazia's book, despite the considerable light that it sheds on certain aspects of the play, does not justify its heretical title.

O.P. BHATNAGAR, INDIAN POLITICAL NOVEL IN ENGLISH

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O.P. Mathur

Dr. O.P. Bhatnagar was a well-known poet and critic who unfortunately left this world too early, even before he could complete some of his projects, the most important of which was this scholarly book on the Indian English political novel which was also the subject of his Ph.D. thesis. But this book has far greater range and depth of thought than a usual thesis has. Dr. Bhatnagar also left some additional notes and draft which, on the request of his wife, have all been used by Prof. P.K.J. Kurup to finalise the book.

Dr. Bhatnagar had in his mind a vast span starting with the ancient Indian precursors of the novel and coming right upto the nineties of the twentieth century. After evaluating the early Indian novels, especially those written under the enchanting impact of Gandhi and his philosophy, Bhatnagar passes on to the Independence and assessments of the novels on the integration of princely states and then to what he calls 'disenchantment' consisting of the miseries of the Partition, the Pakistani invasion in Kashmir, the loss of Tibet, the rampant corruption and the beginning of regionalism and terrorism in Punjab. This phase of disenchantment has been analysed in detail and with insight, illustrating it by Partition fiction, especially Nahal's *Azadi*, Anand's *Death of a hero*, Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and by Nayantara Sahgal's novels. The frustration caused at the end of *Azadi* and the corruption portrayed in Nayantara Sahgal's novels have been discerningly portrayed. But still I have a bone or two to pick with the author. Firstly, the phase of disenchantment has been delineated at such length that the following phase of 're-enchantment' caused by the 'revival' of Gandhian ideology fails to be even half as effective as the delineation of 'disenchantment' which seems to be the main theme of the work. An important point of 'disenchantment' which the critic has practically skipped over is the period of the Emergency followed by another disenchantment with the government succeeding it.

The political novel, in general, has been, as already pointed out, discussed with impressive insight. But I feel that the author failed to realise the historic importance of two of the landmarks of Indian English fiction of the late twentieth century: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. It is amazing that a perceptive critic like Bhatnagar did not consider *Midnight's Children* fit for a full chapter, but relegated it to a small nook in an unexpected corner — the novels depicting the traumatic reactions to freedom. This novel, in spite of occasional disenchantments, depicts the novelist's repeatedly declared enchantment with the essentially Indian values of tolerance, freedom and humanism. Again, though aware of the deeper suggestions in *The Shadow Lines*, Bhatnagar classifies it among the novels dealing with the partition of India. The fact is that the novel does ridicule the political partitions, but at a higher level it demonstrates all partitions as unnatural, comprising 'Shadow Lines', past and present, memory and imagination, memory and reality, 'coming' and 'going' (the whole world being one) and, above all, murder and martyrdom.

But these minor caperings of an humble reviewer do not take away from the stupendous achievements of the book which mainly lies in the excellent critical analysis of practically all the novels discussed. The concluding chapter traces Bhatnagar's interpretation of the Indian political novel in terms of enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment, though as already noticed, the middle one of these predominates over the others, and the last is too fragile in view of the present depressing political scenario and the python of corruption binding the whole society in its coil. By emphasising the characteristic Indian values, "expressed in an emotionally dialectical way or vice-versa" (293), he provides the reader valuable clues to the interpretation of the novels against the backdrop of culture and politics.

On the whole, in spite of just a few lacunae, Bhatnagar's work is an impressive contribution to the criticism of the Indian English political novel, and I believe it will surely be useful to the scholars of Indian English literature the world over.

BASAVARAJ NAIKAR, *GLIMPSES OF INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION*

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S. John Peter Joseph

The process of translation of the works of Indian literature in regional languages has assumed paramount importance in the post-colonial phase of Indian history. In order to regain our national pride and identity in an era of globalization and westernization people in India have to get back to their traditional roots and partake of the native wisdom reflected in the literature of the regional languages. English translations of the illustrious works of Indian Literature written in regional languages enable people in a multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic country like India not only to comprehend the essence of Indian sensibility but also to develop intellectual and emotional integration. No wonder the art of translating the rich works of Indian Literature into English and the study of literature in translation have begun to attract the attention of scholars and researchers all over India.

As an acclaimed bilingual writer, having authored several books both in Kannada and English, Basavaraj Naikar has made a name for himself both in the national and international literary circles. His recently published book, *Glimpses of Indian literature in English Translation* is an admirable anthology containing twenty-five scholarly articles, which deal with twenty-four regional literary works in translation from thirteen languages of India.

In his article on Nirupma Borgohain's Sahitya Akademy winning novel *Abhiyatri*, Naikar shows how the author depicts contemporary Asomiya life from a woman's perspective. In the essay on *The Partings*, the learned critic analyses Bina Barua's concern with the miserable life of the subaltern in Assam in colonial India. The study of *Mukta-dhara* illustrates how Tagore symbolically portrays the social, economic, political, emotional and spiritual aspects of Indian life. Also, he argues that the play, with its illogical sequence of events, has failed to become popular with the readers. In the article on the poetic and symbolic drama *Red Oleanders*, Naikar elucidates how Tagore effectively brings out the contrast between

the materialistic and spiritualistic values through the use of symbols and images. The piece on Tagore's mystic drama *The King of the Dark Chamber* focuses on the theme of "the mystic journey of the individual soul towards the universal soul." With great critical acumen, Naikar in "Existential Vision in *Evan Indrajit*" examines how badal Sircar depicts the existential dilemma of the middle class youth of Bengal. He also points out that the plot construction of the drama is illogical and "defies the law of probability".

The article on the novel *Earthen Lamps* by a Gujarati writer demonstrates how the novelist artistically brings to light the criminal behaviour of the tribals and the administrative evils of the Imperial government in colonial India. While describing Harindra Dave's *Henceforth* as a psychological and a philosophical novel, in another essay on this novel Naikar explicates how it not only paints the external world but also probes deep into the human psyche. In the critical piece on Premchand's realistic novel, *Nirmala*, Naikar deals with the victimization of a Hindu wife in the Hindu patriarchal society of Bengal. The article on Dharmavir Bharati's drama *Andha Yug* shows how it presents the metaphysical conflict between Good and Evil. Analyzing Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* as an existential play, Naikar points out that it depicts the disintegration of a middle class family in a metropolis due to the transition of values in the changing Indian society. The article "Kanakadas: The golden Servant" illustrates the spiritual growth and career of Kanakadasa, a great saint poet of Karnataka.

In another scholarly article Naikar explicates how Purnachandra Tejaswi, a significant Kannada writer, deals with the element of mystery and wonder in a realistic manner. His study of Girish Karnad's *Hayavardana* is intended to depict man's never-ending search for completeness and other philosophical concerns. Naikar's article on Chandrasekar Kambar's play *Sirisampige* examines the playwright's dramatization of a typical folk myth of North Karnataka using the yaksagana technique of coastal Karnataka in his drama. In the perceptive article on the Goan novel in translation, *The Upheaval*, he focuses on the novelist's depiction of the uneventful life of the villagers of Kolamba in Goa, and their predicament and struggle for

survival against all kinds of odds in the post-colonial era. In the paper on Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's popular novel *Chemmeen*, Naikar expounds that the novelist effectively portrays the different aspects of fishermen's lives in a realistic manner. The essay on Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal* spotlights the playwright's dramatization of "the conflict between power and powerlessness behind the manifestation of historical characters and events." Similarly, in his insightful article on Tendulkar's play, *Silence! the Court Is in Session*, he examines the playwright's treatment of the issue of woman identity against the rigid Indian patriarchal set-up. The piece on Orian novel in translation *Paraja* illustrates how it presents "a realistic ethonological picture of the triballife of the Parajas of the Koraput region of Orissa State." Then, the article on Gurdial Singh's Sahitya Akademi Award winning regional novel *Night of the Half-Moon* concentrates on the novelist's ability to depict the various aspects of the Punjabi ethos and culture. In the article on Sudraka's play *The Little Clay Cart*, Naikar focuses on the writer's originality, contemporaneity, universality of vision and realistic treatment of man-woman relationship. The essay on Neela Padmanabhan's novel *Generations* shows "the interpersonal and inter-familial relationships" within the Chettiar community of Tamilnadu quite authentically. The next piece by Naikar examines how Indira Parthasarathy has excellently rehistoricised in the play *The Legend of Nandan* the conflict between the orthodox Brahmins and the progressive Sudras. Then, "*Kanyasulkam: A Satirical Comedy*" analyses Gura Jada Rao's satirical exploration of social evils such as illiteracy, ignorance, child marriage, bride price and prostitution which were rampant in the Telugu society of the late 19th century.

Patently, the articles in the book reveal Naikar's comprehensive and thorough understanding of some of the well-known works of Indian Literature in English translation. His judicious approach to the texts and impressive presentation of arguments fully bring out his perceptive critical mind. I believe the book will inspire scholars and students to understand the rich treasures found in Indian Literature in the regional languages, and to embark on comprehensive and serious studies in this comparatively new field.

**A.K. TRIPATHY (ED.), ALDOUS HUXLEY:
EAST-WEST CENTENARY ESSAYS**

(New Delhi: Creative Books, 2008), pp.ix+489, Rs.700.00

A.A. Mutalik-Desai

A.K. Tripathy's critical anthology under review illustrates the resurgence of interest in Aldous Huxley since the 1960s. Scholarly approaches in these thirty-one essays vary. His novels are analyzed, on the one hand, for their themes and their narrative strategy and, on the other, for their philosophic, utopian and humanist concerns. His non-fictional works too receive deserved attention.

What Charu Sheel Singh deals with in "Counterpointing the Point: Mapping Consciousness into a Methodology of Nothing" is a difficult path. He brings in the recondite and rarefied systems of Buddhism which, according to him, will help in the unfolding of the conceptual structure of *Point Counter Point*. The frequent delving into Buddhist thought and terms may not be helpful in grappling with the technique of counter-point. His scholarship is, however, impressive. In another piece, "Huxley's Two Biographies as History of Ideas," he discusses *Grey Eminence* and *The Devils of Loudun* and finds "history has been mimetically represented, chronologically assiduously followed, and the biography interpreted from an autobiographical point of view" (319).

In "Aldous Huxley: Search for Silence" Kulwant Singh Gill endorses the author who has identified "noise" as a modern phenomenon and nuisance. Silence can pave the way to meditation, liberation and from time to "nirvana." Gill navigates through these challenging concepts to establish why "noise" and "silence" must occupy all of us. Jerome Meckier's "Aldous Huxley and Utopia: Five Assertions" is five inter-connected statements which bring the story of recent utopian writing to date. With Darwin, Butler and Wells in mind, *Brave New World* turns "global, technologically proficient brave new world a humanist's nightmare," says Meckier (195). Moving between Darwin and Lawrence, he incorporated the bildungsroman.

Bernfried Nugel in his "A Facile Verdict: Aldous Huxley's Alleged Didacticism" responds to the familiar accusation that a Huxley novel is didactic. Then he turns to what Huxley thought about the

function of literature. He believed in "the totality of subject-matter and manner of representation." It was his conviction that "literature should not only evoke aesthetic emotions, but also convey experience and knowledge" (401). It has also been claimed that Huxley changed during the 1930s moving towards mysticism.

In "Aldous Huxley: His Theory and Practice of the Novel" A.K. Tripathy claims that with modernity, a new novel had to be evolved. To the classical, realistic, humanist and romantic traditions, the novel of ideas was added which Huxley adopted. Thus introduced were novelistic practices like musicalization of fiction and a multiplicity of characters and situations leading to parallel and contrapuntal plots as in *Point Counter Point*.

Graham Martin's "The Literary Criticism of Aldous Huxley" starts by stating that "the themes, the ideas, the world-views" (371) commanded Huxley's attention rather than form and style. The evaluation presented is thoughtfully balanced. David Bradshaw's "Open Conspirators: Huxley and H. G. Wells, 1927-35" settles an old argument about the ideological gulf between these near contemporaries. Huxley, the better realist, could not endorse Wells's optimism. It is clear that the affinity and the aversion they felt for each other kept changing. It is also clear that what they advocated, during 1927 to 1935, as panacea was unworkable.

There are two review-articles by Jerome Meckier and A.A. Mutalik-Desai which evaluate Huxley studies respectively from the 1940s to 1974 and from 1974 to the 1990s. In "Mysticism or Misty Schism? Huxley Studies Since World War Two" Meckier has produced a retrospective survey which is original, thorough, wide-ranging, insightful and lucid. He defends Huxley against his detractors, including the harshest one, David S. Savage. Meckier turns to the more recent, sympathetic and wholesome tradition. He shores up Huxley's standing as one who mastered several forms by comparing him with Goethe and Lucretius who excelled as poets, scientists and philosophers. In contrast, Mutalik-Desai's effort, "Aldous Huxley Studies Since 1974" is modest, but it is useful. He introduces fourteen studies on him published in India. A few of these are noted only in passing; others are analyzed and discussed. Eight studies pub-

lished outside India also receive due attention. He finds Chakoo, Gandhi, Krishnan, Ramamurty and Tripathy useful; Bass, Bradshaw, Dunaway, Ferns and Zahner meritorious; Nugel and Meckier outstanding.

Now the rest. Rebecca Haque's "Portrait of Women in *Antic Hay* and *The Waste Land*" asks if Huxley is indiscreet when his protagonist recalls his deceased mother (which parallels the novelist's own life). Is there a "redemptive" female character? Rupendra Kaur's "Is Huxley a Feminist? Women in *Point Counter Point*" leads to the question if *Point Counter Point* published in 1928 may be measured by today's feminism. In "Existential Overtones in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*" G. Rai places Huxley together with Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Did he belong to such a coterie? Is enough attention paid to the claims of existentialism, which is his main thesis? Mohammed Ilyas's "Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence: The Beast Within Man*" states that man, in the midst of the ruins of California, must recover his humanity. Ilyas's look at this work is balanced as it points to its ultimate vision of hope.

Sudhir Kumar examines *Brave New World* as relevant to Mahatma Gandhi's India now in the changing global scenario. But he promises much and delivers little. S.N.D.T. Anbarasi's "The Apocalyptic Vision of Aldous Huxley" notes that apocalypse and utopia are naturally connected. Masoodul Hasan's "Huxley's Island: a Revaluation" sees a culmination into syncretism. Faith is necessary, he admits, but institutionalized religion, indoctrination and dogma are anathema which stir the satirist. In his brief and incomplete "Aldous Huxley's Island: An Utopia with a Difference" K. Chellappan concurs with Aristotle that we must eschew impossibilities. Island, he says, does not ignore the here and now. The utopian vision is such that it accepts reality including the crushing of its dream.

In "Huxley and Reality," Sumita Roy analyzes art vs. reality, but leaves unresolved questions: What is reality? Whose reality? More positively, Roy notes that he was aware of the ever-present dichotomies. In M. K. Choudhury's "Looking Beyond: Aldous Huxley's Idea of Freedom" freedom is analyzed from a Vedantic perspective. It is transcendence which interests R.S. Pathak in "Aldous Huxley's

Odyssey for Selfhood and Transcendence." Astavakra-Bhartrahari-Upanishads path is vital and it is the one Huxley pursued. But Pathak's analysis raises more doubts, resolving only a few. Goutam Ghosal's "The Perennial Philosophy: An Aurobindonian Approach" looks at Huxley's essentially universal-ecumenical thought. But it is too short to do justice to what could be a fascinating study. A.V. Ashok's "(Ever) Green Prophet" is about the misuse of this planet's finite resources. But his essay is short and incomplete. In his "Aldous Huxley: A Study in Human Contradiction and Unity," Subhas Sarkar briefly talks about Huxley's effort to combine the phenomenal and the spiritual.

As literary criticism, Sanjukta Dasgupta introduces "Two Planes of Reality: A Comparative Study of Aldous Huxley and Ernest Hemingway as Novelists." But there is much more ground for contrast than comparison. Observed holistically, one cannot escape the conclusion that the similarities are superficial and the dissimilarities vital. S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal in his "Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*" considers its narrative technique. R.S. Sharma states in his "Aldous Huxley's Poetry" that most critics are dismissive, a few have acknowledged his wit and the humanistic and metaphysical content of his verses, and his prose and poetry are both engaged in the same search. Sharma's second essay, "Huxley's Subversive Art" is on less firm ground. Can the term "subversive" be applied to his work without closely defining its meaning? G. B. Mohan Thampi in his "Aldous Huxley's Literary Criticism" says that he is not a literary critic in the usually accepted way as he always considered science, religion or philosophy. R.P. Singh's "Aldous Huxley and His Letters" deals with his vast correspondence and its relevance. The last essay in the volume, Yashoda Bhat's "Aldous Huxley and India", deals with his lifelong interest in India. That India moulded his thought is part of her conclusion.

Altogether, Tripathy's contribution is commendable. As a reviewer, however, I am obliged to point out that this edited study would have gained much, had there been a more careful classification and arrangement of what is included, avoiding repetition in subject-matter.

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