
Editorial

In Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika* the young untouchable girl asks her mother in despair and anger, "Why did you bring me into this world, where I am subjected to ignominy all my life? What crime have I committed?"(translation mine). Untouchability is not the sole example of discrimination, nor is India the only society where people have historically been denied their due. Structures of society across the globe have perpetuated hierarchies of power and privileges, which undermine the kind of liberal humanism espoused by Tagore.

"Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought", said John Rawls in *Theory of Justice*. Yet, at every step in our lives we see this principle, which should ensure dignity and equity to everyone, being violated in the most blatant manner. And even in this age of information, we protest but sporadically, going back quickly to our individual illusions of the pursuit of happiness in a world which is connected more through technology, than through empathy.

This volume of *Colloquium*, the journal of the Arts section of The Bhawanipur Education Society College, is devoted to the theme of 'marginalisation and basic human values'. It comes at a time when images of hunger, oppression, racism and misogyny are rampant. In an age of unprecedented accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few, not many of us are willing to question if our social and economic fabric rests on a shaky foundation which is endangered by the continuing existence of the poor, the dispossessed and the marginalised, who in the words of Tagore, will drag down the mighty even as they themselves are trod down. Marginalisation is the greatest failure of our social values. It implies the failure of the very

first virtue of social organisation enunciated by Rawls. The arbitrary and unjust denial of basic human rights like self-esteem and the benefits of community to a segment of a population arise out of entrenched stigmas, prejudices, the arrogance of power, and plain and simple greed. To those oppressed, it denies the right to self-actualisation through self-enhancement, social mobility or pleasure. For the oppressors, it becomes their failure to transcend the self and realise human being's noblest ethical potential for benevolence and justice. By condemning some to lifelong ignominy, the powerful themselves become slaves -to hedonism, egotism and paranoid fear of those they regard as their 'other'. The cultural and psychological aspects of altruistic or transcendental motives as against aggressive egoistic attitudes have recently been the subject of systematic research on basic human values. But, down the ages, prophets like Buddha and Christ, political philosophers and men of letters have given the call to embrace our fellowmen for the ultimate good of humanity. In India, the concept of *Sadharana dharma* which was prevalent since ancient times emphasised the pre-eminence of the general good as opposed to individual interest. Such values served to check the unbridled march of narrow self-interest and group identities. Paradoxically, the galloping pace of globalisation in our present times has not seen a proportionate rise in universalism. In fact, it has been fuelled more by exploitative, monopolistic practices accompanied by a corresponding rise in right wing politics which use 'identity' not to empower, but to exclude.

The Humanities departments of academia, themselves fighting many battles to resist marginalisation, have a moral duty to be the conscience-keepers of society. It is from this conviction that the articles in this volume have been chosen for their reflections upon how literature has narrated the various forces operative in our understanding of the self by interpreting the ways in which texts deal

with the problem of bringing those on the margins to the centre-stage of the readers' consciousness. We begin with an article which shows how the categories of the centre and the margin, the self and the other, the body and the part, are themselves rendered elusive in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In Gargi Talapatra's reading of the tale, titled *Negotiating Differences: The Fabular Fabric in Alice in Wonderland*, Alice's childlike curiosity which is unhindered by adult definitions of cultural affiliation, offers freedom from the regressive bonds of rigid identities which give rise to strife and tragedy in the modern world. The subversive possibilities inherent in destabilising identities and established orders give rise to pleasure in the story, but it may lead also to paranoia. This idea is discussed in the following article, *The Marginalised Memories of Westeros and the Liminality of the White Walkers*, written by Debojyoti Dan. In this fantasy saga, which is yet unfinished, the White walkers are potentially the discarded forms of memories, whose very language is outside the hegemonic sphere of the Anthropocene. Created by the Children of the Forest, out of natural phenomena, they are meant to protect the forest resources from the civilizing project of Westeros. Their bid to claim the centre of power is thus a frightening prospect for the people of Westeros, resulting in the creation of the myth of uncanny beings. In the present essay the plot is discussed through the lens of Jungian psychology as well as Deconstructionist discourse. The next essay by Sonal Kapur, deals with the quest for a centre of gravity for the self, which is depicted in Gita Hariharan's writing. In *Between the Margins and the Centres: The Liminal Self in Gita Hariharan's Fugitive Histories*, Kapur analyses how the desire to escape a circumscribed identity plays out among the characters inhabiting Hariharan's novel. Contrasting the Buddhist notion of the self as a process of becoming, with the current theoretical approaches to selfhood, Kapur demonstrates how

liminality itself offers a chance of freedom to be something other than what society might expect one to be; the chance to inhabit an intersectional space, a hybrid identity.

The next two essays, *Does 'Dalit' include the Mangs: Contextualising Limbale's The Outcaste, and Marginalisation, Human Rights and Literature: Exploring Three Marathi Dalit Stories*, the authors, Saloni Walia and Saikat Guha take up the depiction in Marathi literature, of the inhuman treatment meted out to India's 'outcastes' by caste society as well as Dalit groups themselves. What emerges from both these essays is the way in which any conception of the 'Dalit' as a homogenous group empathising among themselves is presumptuous. The same prejudices regarding 'unclean' occupations and food habits which lie at the heart of untouchability, is replicated by the marginalised communities themselves, creating further divisions in Indian society and politics. Movements like the Dalit Panther movement therefore, represent the interests of only a small percentage of the socially oppressed and the fissures within themselves sometimes result in further deprivation, which even a stalwart like Ambedkar is not entirely able to understand. In fact, in Walia's essay the discussion centres on how the call for abolition of Watan Inam which Ambedkar perceived as perpetuating the bonded labour of the Dalits, actually impoverished the Mang community even further. The essay calls for a closer look at the sub-categories among the Dalits and the problems unique to each one. Guha contextualises the rise of Dalit activism by dealing with examples in Marathi literature which reflect the plight of those to whom society has denied the basic human rights.

The article by Rimjhim Bhattacharjee titled **A Mirror that shames (?): Mahasweta Devi's 'Daini'**, complicates the categories of marginalisation even further through an analysis of Mahasweta

Devi's story. Bhattacharjee shows how Somri, the 'daini' of the story, is victimised through the multiple disadvantages of low caste/tribal identity, gender and disability. Her history challenges the overarching narrative of the Indian nation state and exposes the limits of our ideas of a nation. Interestingly, Bhattacharjee concludes the essay by drawing our attention to the impossibility of narrating the histories of those like Somri through a discussion of contrasting urban interfaces presented in the story. If the clichéd western depictions of caste and poverty deal only in stereotypes, genuine hardworking scholarship dwelling on the subaltern experiences, also fails to actually enter into the subaltern space. The centre, represented by Sharan Mathur, the well-meaning scholar is finally seen to be a domain which runs parallel to the one in which the 'daini' lives. The most disturbing question in the context of this volume, regarding the breach between academic researches and effecting real change is uttered in this essay.

The volume ends with an essay which reminds us of the possibilities which may lie in re-discovering the idea of 'Sadharana Dharma', or the principle of transcending narrow self-interests for the good of society in general. In *Understanding Universal Dharma through the Mahabharata*, Nitin Malhotra reminds us of the distinction between Dharma and religion, and how the stories in the epic represent 'Dharma' as the values by which one lives. These include empathy, charity, co-operation, non-violence and love. In these violently competitive and combative times, it comes as a timely reminder that by upholding these principles in our daily lives we may recover a common humanity which connects high and low, weak and strong, rich and poor.

The fourth volume of *Colloquium* is the first one to be published online. As we attempt to reach out to the widest possible readership,

our responsibilities have also increased immeasurably. We must thank the editorial team for their sustained efforts in making the journal a serious academic journal. For this volume, Rimjhim Bhattacharjee and Neetisha Jha, both teaching in the Department of English, have worked hard on copy editing the entire volume. A few deficiencies in formatting references have been due to circumstances beyond our control. However, we shall definitely persevere to minimise such lapses in future volumes.

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Negotiating Differences: The Fabular Fabric in Alice in Wonderland

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The present era, in terms of existence, seems to be operating upon a strange principle of paradoxes, vacillating within the extremes of globalization on one hand, and marginalization, on the other. Just as the technological revolution over the last few decades has transformed the world into a global village, quite so, the rapidly increasing accessibility to a wide range of contrasting and at times, contradictory, forms of life and culture also seems to have taken a toll on the basic human principles of tolerance, inclusion and accommodation.

The complexity associated with the term ‘identity’ in its multiple manifestations across diverse geopolitical areas has sought to be explored, investigated and theorized on one hand, while it has also been the cause of an exponential rise in the processes of Othering, exclusion and dismissal on the other. Wars have been numerous, violence and bloodshed, rampant, so much so, that grieving death has featured far lower on human agenda when compared to the urgency of obliterating differences. It is in the bleakness of the present context that Alice in Wonderland invites a new reading, not only as a classic, a landmark in Children’s Literature, but also as an intriguing metaphor which abounds in questions related to logic, culture, identity and inherent differences, and the manner in which they are negotiated.

First published in 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, emerged as a tale of fantasy written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson after a boat trip with the three daughters of Henry Lidell, the youngest being Alice. Ever since its publication, the book has been enormously canonized as a classic and the popularity of the tale across age groups has inspired translations of the story into several other languages, as well as multiple television and cinematic adaptations. Against this backdrop of a diverse, multicultural, multilingual readership/ viewership transcending cartographic lines of division, *Alice in Wonderland* now seems to hold within itself not just the fantastic story of a child's adventures in dream, but also at the allegorical level of interpretation, the seeds of a possible approach towards the largely dominant and volatile clashes of identity and culture in the present context of a global diaspora.

What drives Alice down the rabbit hole is the basic principle of human curiosity as she sees the White Rabbit take a watch out of its waistcoat pocket and hurry down a large rabbit hole under the hedge. The narrator notes, "In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (Carroll 07). Mario Livio observes in his book entitled *Why? What Makes Us Curious* (2017), that "several "types" of curiosity – that itch to find out more – exist" and along the lines of Daniel Berlyne, the British Canadian psychologist, divides it along "two main dimensions or axes: one extending between perceptual and epistemic curiosity and the other traversing from specific to diversive curiosity" (Livio 04). Of perceptual curiosity he notes that it "is engendered by extreme outliers, by novel, ambiguous, or puzzling stimuli, and it motivates visual inspection" (ibid).

While acknowledging the complexity of curiosity as a human response to the world around, it may be seen that perceptual curiosity is what leads to exploration of diversity. However, curiosity of this

kind has seldom implied conflict or violence. As Alice exclaims “curiouser and curiouser” about the increasing astonishment of her continuously altering identities, the narrator notes in parentheses, “she was so much surprised that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English” (Carroll 13). It is worth attention that despite the essential spatiotemporality inherent in the semiotic structure of languages, Alice’s encounters with the inhabitants of the world down the rabbit hole rests on verbal exchanges in a common language.

Often though, she seems to be coining new words and suffering a loss of memory in being unable to articulate the rhymes and the songs as she had known it before venturing into the rabbit hole, the prime prerequisite of communication, i.e. the basic tenets of encoding and decoding of message through structured signifiers is allowed to remain constant in the text. On one hand, as it may be argued to be an authorial decision in the interest of the text making sense to the readers and thus a requirement of the genre, on the other, this fact of endowing the inhabitants of the Other world with a basic form of expression similar to Alice might as well be interpreted as sharing of a universal language despite the difference in structured articulation conveying familiarity of concepts and meanings.

The question of identity is one of prime importance in the process of negotiating differences. The self becomes the lens through which the world is perceived, and which then draws a response in the form of assimilation or rejection. It is the conviction of being oneself and the rigidity or fluidity associated therewith through the process of acculturation that an individual derives a sense of affiliation or alienation with the surroundings. Amartya Sen observes in *Identity and Violence* that “the sense of identity can make an important contribution to the strength and the warmth of our relations with others” (Sen 02). In a children’s narrative, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, identity cannot be an abstraction and yet the plurality is

beautifully articulated throughout the text.

As Alice reaches wonderland, her initial problem is dealing with her physical size. She is too large to step out into the garden and the next moment, having consumed the magic potion after much deliberation with herself, she becomes too small to reach the key she had left on the table. As she cries and scolds herself, the narrator notes “this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (Carroll 12). A little later, Alice wonders “was I the same when I got up this morning?”, and further, “who in the world am I?” (Carroll 14). The narrator adds “she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them” (ibid). This may be read as an indicator of fluidity of identity, inherent in the very fact of it being a social construct of one’s own perception of oneself and perhaps also as a point where the plurality of human existence intersects to facilitate an overlapping of distinct boundaries of Otherness.

The question of identity is further problematized as Alice meets the hookah smoking caterpillar in the course of her journey through the wonderland, who asks her a simple question –“who are you?” (Carroll 34). Alice responds saying, “I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then” (ibid). This articulation, though apparently comic, might be interpreted as the very dilemma of existence in the multicultural context of human lives in the present times. The context of division of the world in terms of insulation of individual identities in to collective representations in terms of race, culture, religion, civilization presupposes a deliberate unidimensional affiliation to a singular aspect, denying the multifaceted nature of identity.

When Alice speaks about her inability to determine who she is, it

voices, as an allegory, the existentialist confusion of a human individual to be able to assert a singular choice and categorize oneself into the preexisting mould of channelized identity. The question gets more interesting as the caterpillar asks Alice to repeat the rhyme ‘You are old, Father William’ when she complains of having suffered a loss of memory and refers to the previous rhyme she had tried to recite, “but it all came different” (Carroll 35). It is here that the role of memory in determining one’s identity is brought into focus. Every known rhyme or song that Alice utters in wonderland, comes out as different from what it used to be in her own world. Memory, here, as a constituent component of one’s sense of identity is given an ephemerality which does not stay constant.

Plurality of existence penetrates the being of Alice. Her mixing up of words and phrases in known rhymes and songs implies a component of challenge to the hegemonic mainstream notion of knowledge as inherited from one’s known terrain in the altered contexts of space and time. After her recitation of the rhyme as instructed by the caterpillar, the latter observes “it is wrong from beginning to end”, and leaves Alice to determine her size according to her desire with the aid of the mushroom, one side of which would make her grow taller while the other side would make her shorter (Carroll 38). Alice comes to terms with the complexity of her physical size as per her requirements in the present locale. This might be read as a metaphor of making existentialist choices pertaining to harmonious survival in an unknown territory.

Conflicts based on identity, arise from nowhere, as for instance, the one between the pigeon and Alice as the latter grows large and has a long neck while trying to adjust her size with a bite from the caterpillar’s mushroom. The pigeon mistakes Alice for a serpent and “starts beating her violently with its wings” (Carroll 39). As Alice engages in a conversation with the pigeon who fears serpents eating

up her eggs, and desperately tries to introduce herself as a “little girl” but at the same time admits the fact of little girls eating eggs “as much as serpents do”, the pigeon concludes, “then they’re a kind of serpent, that’s all I can say” (Carroll 40). This brief episode quite distinctly brings out the irony of difference inherent in identity as real and identity as perceived, and the desire to categorize individuals into known compartments created through limited knowledge and lack of faith.

The fragmented and playful nature of identity as opposed to the socially prominent act of construing it as a constant is further re-emphasized with the portrayal of the Cheshire cat, introduced to Alice as well as the readers as a large cat “grinning from ear to ear”, which can vanish at will, sometimes completely and sometimes in fragments, “ending with the grin which remained some time after the rest of it had gone (Carroll 50). The Cheshire cat introduces into the text not just a spectacle, but the larger question of identity as a component of imagination – at times fragmented, and bordering between the thin demarcations of presence and absence.

This fluidity poses a problem to authority when the Queen of Hearts orders the execution of the Cheshire cat and the executioner argues that “you couldn’t cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from” (Carroll 66). It is interesting to note here that the body might as well be read as symbolic of not just physicality but the historicity of an individual existence, both in terms of *pastness* as well as *presentness*. It is the body which is the source and the domain of violence. It could be interpreted as the entire volume of what perpetuates notionalities of convictions, beliefs and perceptions regarding one’s own self and the world.

Contextually, the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* is symbolic of authority. Represented as a card amidst the pack of cards

that she governs, the Queen of Hearts has often been read as a metaphor for blind exercise of power. The space occupied by her in the text is full of commands for execution. Interestingly, of the four variants available in a deck of cards, Carroll opts for “hearts”. Here, the choice may be interpreted as an implication of absolute power indulging in acts of tyranny completely at the command of instinctive narcissism, devoid of logic or rationality. The satirical implication emerges clearly in the trial episode of the knave of Hearts where the Queen supercedes the jury and the witnesses with her famous command “sentence first – verdict afterwards” (Carroll 98).

Interplay of differences abound the realm of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. There are differences of opinions, as well as thoughts. And yet these differences do not lead to violence. Though the Queen of Hearts frequently lets out her famous cry, “Off with their heads!”, the domain of her power is restricted to a pack of cards – devoid of weight, and executions are mostly put off by perpetual confusions amongst the pack (Carroll 62). Alice, despite her state of confusion regarding her identity, is quite certain about her strength as an individual, and when introducing herself to the Queen of Hearts in the Croquet Ground, she tells herself, “Why, they’re only a pack of cards, after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!” (ibid). In this understanding of her difference from the subjects of the Queen, lies her sense of integrity imparting to her a freedom from the fear of the Queen.

Characters do not sympathize or empathize with each other and there is no utopian element of an all-pervading happiness. Differences permeate the fabular social fabric, at the visible as well as verbal and ideological levels. There are even junctures where the characters are offended with each other, for instance, Alice is offended by the curt comments of the caterpillar or the complete mess she lands into at the mad hatter’s tea party. There are contradictions at every step, never

quite amicably settled, but there is no violence. The secret perhaps lies not only in the fact that it is a children's story but also that the place is called 'wonderland'.

Wonder as a feeling of amazement is integrated to childhood. It is innocence which encounters the unknown mysteries of the world with wonder, as a state prior to cultivation of socially acceptable and construed notions of knowledge and the gradual shaping of the same into concrete prisons of the mind in the process of crystallization of identity. Difference, perhaps, before the process of systematic acculturation breeds wonder, while in the adult world difference becomes a source of isolation, alienation, insecurity, animosity and hostility, leaving little space for the feeling of wonder anymore.

Stephen Hawking in *A Brief History of Time* begins by relating a public lecture delivered by Bertrand Russell on astronomy and a lady who replied in response to his lecture, "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise" (Hawking 01). Despite the fact that the world rests upon the principles of relativity of truth and perception, the persistent struggle nonetheless remains to arrive at absolutist conclusions and judgments. Dismissal as an integrated part of Othering leads the world to stand where it stands at the moment.

Interestingly, in the case of Alice too, her adventures in wonderland come to an end and she returns to the real world only when she finally dismisses the people at the trial saying, "Who cares for you? You are nothing but a pack of cards!" (Carroll 100) It is at this point that she realizes she had been dreaming and returns home. Her return is symbolic of her assimilation into the world governed by opinions and values, bereft of acceptance or acknowledgement of differences. It is an indicator of perpetuation of a process where children are trained to believe in truth and reality as absolute concepts ingrained through

structured paradigms of knowledge, which confirms concretization of identity.

The readers are, however, left to contemplate upon possibilities. The allegorical worth of *Alice in Wonderland*, perhaps, lies in the manner in which it negotiates the question of difference within the fabular fabric of an imagined society replete with differences. When compared to the present world, it is not a very distant cry as Cheshire cat declares, “We are all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad”, hinting at the coexistence of multiple worlds within the single structure of a geographically recognized world. The idea is not to trivialize the nature and extent of human loss the world has witnessed till date, but rather to seek a renewed understanding of where can this journey culminate without further violence caused by absolutist stances on the natural phenomena of differences.

To question the historicity of conflicting differences, the extent of violence and bloodshed, the intensity of trauma and seek solution in asserting identity through means of imposing oneself on the Other is not the acceptable route for sure. A captive at the Auschwitz concentration camp and a psychiatrist, Victor E Frankl writes in his book entitled *Man’s Search for Meaning*, “since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake” (Frankl 154). The world of Alice intervenes here and issues a warning to the bleakness of the world we create in the memorable episode where Alice, having cried enough over her plight, slips and falls into salt water upto her chin. She soon realizes it as a pool created by her own tears into which she herself and several others had fallen, and regrets thus “I wish I hadn’t cried so much! I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears!” (Carroll 17).

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The Marginalized Memories of Westeros and the Liminality of the White Walkers

Debojyoti Dan

In the post anthropocene era, George R.R. Martin's 'White walkers' in his epic saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*, belong to the threshold of values where Renaissance humanism of Vitruvian Man becomes a decentered cogito. Martin's 'White walkers' present the quality of ambiguity/disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of ritualistic conversion from human to post-human, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. They are between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which the ritual establishes.

'White walkers' are 'the discarded forms' of our memories, which haunt us because they generate a tension between what has been repressed and what has been surmounted. That is why it is very difficult to kill the 'White walkers': only fire can purge the memory, so only fire can destroy the 'White walkers'. Another way to destroy them is weapon made of dragon glass, as Samuel Tarly discovers. Thus the 'White walkers' are a threat to the civilized world of Westeros. But they also reflect the memory of violence inside Westeros.

Michel Foucault in his essay, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' had said: '[W]e do not live in a sort of a vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located, or that may take on so

many different fleeting colors, but in a set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed.’ (Foucault 331) In the poststructuralist discourse, the site of one’s identity has been continually revisited by critics and the simulation of singularity and stability interrupted, resulting in the vacuum to be filled with signifiers that celebrate the plurality of identity. Similarly the ‘White walkers’ occupy an ambiguous space which lacks closure through Cartesian philosophy, instead, in Derrida’s expression we have ‘difference as the affirmative elusion of presence.’ (‘Différance’ 3)

The marginalised status of the ‘White walkers’ create anxiety and the fear psychosis is built up in the very prologue of the series, in *A Game of Thrones*, where the ‘White walkers’ are ‘white shadow in the darkness’ (8). Their entry is marked by the alienating coldness and they are like ‘patterns’ of ‘moonlight’ (8). The physical dynamics retain the ability to terrify the readers and so is their sword, which is completely unlike to those forged by ‘homo sapiens’: ‘It [the sword] was alive with moonlight, translucent, a shard of crystal...a faint blue shimmer’ (8).

Violence is the principal coordinate in the ontological cartography of the ‘White walkers’ in Martin’s biosphere. The comprehensive impact of the racially ‘Other’ on Martin’s mind helps him to create an aesthetic sphere in his saga *Song of Ice and Fire* where he can encrypt the politics of margin taking violence as its cultural ethos. Their negotiation with the Anthropocene world is in the absence of placental presence and becoming the Heideggerian ‘unheimlich’. Repeatedly Heidegger connects angst with feeling uncanny. The German word for "uncanny" is ‘unheimlich,’ the literal meaning of which is "not-at-home." Heidegger deliberately trades on this literal meaning: he wants to stress that in angst we feel profoundly dislodged from our ordinary positions, connections, and orientations

in life. It is this angst that drives the ‘White walkers’ from their marginalised position to discourse with their victim in terms of Thanatos.

Plurality of descriptions marks the existence of the ‘White walkers’ as the embodiment of both the marginalized as well as demonized. Martin makes a brilliant attempt to expose the psychosis and anxiety associated with them in the chapter twenty four, where the Old Nan says:

Oh my sweet summer child ... What do you know of fear? Fear is for the winter, my little lord, when the snows fall a hundred feet deep and the ice wind comes howling out of the north, when the sun hides its face for years at a time, and little children are born and live and die all in darkness while the direwolves grow gaunt and hungry, and the white walkers move through the woods.... In that darkness, the Others came for the first time ... They were cold things, dead things, that hated iron and fire and the touch of the sun, and every creature with hot blood in its veins. They swept over holdfasts and cities and kingdoms, felled heroes and armies by the score, riding pale dead horses, and leading hosts of the slain. All the swords of men could not stay their advance, and even maidens and suckling babes, found no pity in them. They hunted the maids through the frozen forests, and fed their dead servants on the flesh of human children. (*Game of Thrones* 233)

She is unable to complete her anxiety-ridden lullaby, for Maester Luwin interrupts her. But what cannot be dismissed is the accumulation of fear psychosis which has begun from that moment and we are embraced by the phobia of the long winter, which will unleash this terrible force of darkness. Here Martin opens up the archetype of phobia to soak us in the ‘collective unconsciousness’ of Jungian psychology. Sigmund Freud proposes that literature and

other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms consist of the imagined or fantasized fulfilment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by social standards of morality. Thus the creations of Others like ‘White walkers’, who are ostracized by society, are necessary to reflect the image of the Martin’s latent imagination.

However, Jung differs from Freud in viewing literature as a distinguished form of libidinal wish-fulfilment, paralleling the fantasies of neurotic personality. Instead, Jung regards ‘great literature as like the myths whose patterns recur in diverse culture, an expression of the archetype of the collective racial unconscious’. (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 43) The concept of ‘collective unconsciousness’ (43) constitutes a difference between Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis, the latter denying its existence. Jung holds that beneath the ‘individual consciousness’ (43) which stores ‘repressed personal memories and desires’(43) lies a ‘collective unconsciousness’(43), which contains ‘memories from the history of mankind and recurrent life-experiences, such as birth, death, fear, anxiety’(43). These recurrent collective experiences are referred to in ‘primordial archetypal images, related to mythology and symbols to which all human beings have accesses’ (43). Steven F Walker presents the view that Jung’s work theorizes about myths and archetypes in relation to the unconscious, an inaccessible part of the mind. From Jung’s perspective, Walker writes, myths are the ‘Culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recess of human psyche: the word of the archetypes.’(4)

The ‘White walkers’ are the archetype of the post anthropocene being who produces the phobia. They inhabit the margins, both in terms of land and their position in the book itself. We find them in lands where there is always winter, something alien to human survival, their

glowing blue eyes and mummified appearance is enough to create them as the Other. Racially different from others, they are the most feared creatures, posing threat to decentre the power structure of the Westeros. They are the creatures of Night, yet they are not called 'night' walkers or 'dark' walkers, rather 'white walkers' showing their racial status to belong to a higher hegemonic system of the dominant rather than dominated and they have a king and a queen too. What Martin writes is still not finished and hence we can see that their system of governing is yet to be illustrated. They wear reflective armour that shifts colour with every step – an alternative version of the stealth armour worn by the children of the night. They are not only the Other, but superior in their skill of swordsmanship in comparison with the homo sapiens. Their movements are lightning fast and their language is outside the hegemony of the seven kingdoms and beyond. We also get to know that they are different from the 'wights'. The White walker has the power to reanimate the bodies that are dead, and these reanimated forms are called 'wights'. Old Nan calls them 'hosts of the slain' (*Game of Thrones* 233) 'Wights' are not as powerful as the 'White walkers', though they are also difficult to kill, they are the 'dead servants' of the 'White walkers'.

'Wights' are culturally represented forms of an Old Norse 'draugr', a Zombi, a dead man whose body is not completely destroyed after death and that therefore became an animated corpse able to haunt the living by walking about, usually at night and in the mist. Thus Tormund says to Jon:

when the white mists rise up ... how do you fight a mist crow?
Shadows with teeth ... air so cold it hurts to breathe, like a knife
inside your chest ... you do not know, you cannot know ... can
your sword cut cold? (*Dance with Dragons*, 1061)

Such ‘draugr’ are frequently encountered in the Old Norse sagas: thus there is one named Agnarr in the Halfdanar Saga, Eystemssonar and another of the same name in Gulporis Saga. More pertinent to ‘wight’ is the ‘draugr’ called Ogmundr in Orvar Odds Saga, who like the ‘wight’ is invulnerable to iron weapons.

Now the intriguing thing about the existence of the ‘White walkers’ is that they are initially created by the Children of the Forest to protect them and the natural resources, like the ancient trees and hence they are made of natural phenomena that is ice. People of the Westeros founded their civilization by utilizing the natural resources and hence are perceived as threat by the Children of the Forest. The Children of the Forest were marginalized and ostracized. They created the ‘White walkers’ to restore authority back to them. Their land was gradually colonized by the First Men of Andals, as Nan tells Bran in her stories: ‘the First Men, who had taken these lands from the children of the forest’ (*Game of Thrones* 233). ‘White walkers’ functioned initially as a weapon of resistance. But with time the ‘White walkers’ get out of the control of the Children of the Forest and begin territorial expansion. The ‘White walkers’ are therefore the ancient Natives who have been ostracized outside the wall during the War for the Dawn, are now the ones who seek to take control, like they had eight thousand years before Robert’s Rebellion, when the longest winter fell on Martin’s world, lasting a whole generation, trying in a way to make the colonizers, colonized under the hegemony of the Night King and his Queen.

Thus I would like to conclude this study of ‘White walkers’ saying that Martin creates the archetype of marginalised entity and their telos to seize the centre of power from the kings of the Westeros.

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Between the Margins and the Centres: The Liminal Self in Githa Hariharan's Fugitive Histories

Sonal Kapur

"...all of us, individually and culturally, live in the mappings of our imagined landscape, with its charged centres and dim peripheries..."

(Diana L Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* 40)

The most fundamental question about human existence is, possibly, *who am I?* The question has remained an elusive site of inquiry across time and space, resisting any lucid understanding or fixed definitions. Repeated attempts at decoding this puzzle has almost invariably led to the concepts of Self and Identity, "terms that seem inevitably to spin in elliptical orbits around any attempt to conceptualise human beings" (Eakin 9). Often conflated, the concepts of self and identity have been pivotal concerns since the beginning of human civilisation and in the past two decades of the 20th century, these have come to occupy the centre of intellectual debate in the humanities, the social sciences, as well as the natural sciences. While there is a lack of consensus among researchers on whether the terms 'self' and 'identity' mean the same and can be used interchangeably, as concepts these are mutually inclusive and function as interface between contemporary theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism, cultural studies, feminism and queer theory, among others as well as between the philosophical trinity of ontology, epistemology and axiology. This persistent preoccupation with the self and identity has led to the emergence of a new

multidisciplinary and eclectic scholarship concerned with the nature of the self, personal identity, and its relationship to and understanding of the world. Such a scholarship acquires profound significance in the present times with its increasing tendencies to eschew or even reject the inherently fluxional nature of self and identity in favour of blinkered notions and stringent codification/categorisation of ourselves and others. As a consequence, humanity finds itself beleaguered by strongly entrenched notions of centres and margins and a vociferous resistance to the co-existence of fragmented, multiple and conflicting 'selves' or 'identities'. There is, then, an acute necessity to reassess the concept of self and, by implication, identity, for what it is: a process', a constant, ever-changing and ongoing reflexive engagement with the 'I' and its perception of others. In fact, most theories of the self, both western and eastern, use the prisms of religion, psychology, philosophy, science, anthropology, literature and history (to name a few), in myriad ways, in order to underscore how and why the self is not a fixed, stable category but a shifting, ambiguous interplay of experiences, undulating emotions and contexts governed or disrupted by the time-space continuum. It is this essential liminality of the self which forms the crux of Githa Hariharans poignantly subtle novel, *Fugitive Histories* and this paper will attempt to examine how Hariharan posits the self and identity as liminal in order to draw attention towards the fallacy of absolutist notions/points-of-view of our contemporary times and thereby, makes a plea for basic human values in lieu of prejudices and insular thought-processes.

Set in post-2002 India, the challenging narrative of *Fugitive Histories* interlaces three sections titled Missing Persons, Crossing Borders and Funeral Rites; oscillates between three cities- Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad- and three generations mapping the

microcosmic throes of the Indian society etched upon the macrocosmic landscape of humanity and; negotiates with multiple, intersecting voices through spatial and temporal shifts to unravel the insidious forms of prejudices arising out of a misplaced sense of the self which perceives oneself as a fixed centre with the power and agency to decide and define what/who would constitute the margins. This complex web of spatio-temporal voices include: Mala, left with only her late husband, Asad's sketches and memories to make sense of “what happened to that reckless old dream, the dream in which two different people can collide to partake of each other” (197); Sara, their daughter, struggling to understand the complexity of her identity and aspirations; Samar, their son, longing for the certainty of a single identity; Yasmin, a young girl Sara meets at Ahmedabad, trying to re-build her life after the Gujarat carnage; Bala, Mala's grandmother, the “beloved lunatic” (24) subversively transcending the boundaries imposed on her and Asad, the artist and liberal humanist unable to come to terms with the loss of the ideology that had once sustained his perception of the self, a loss which made him wonder “if [he] was only playing a game all this time-painting, playing at being a committed citizen of a larger, braver world” (237). The novel begins with the recently widowed Mala, alone at her home in Delhi; going through her late husband's sketches until she stumbles upon a particular image which fine tunes her memory, and she is borne across in time to a life without Asad. The narrative shifts to Mala's childhood in her ancestral home where, standing at the threshold of self-concept, “she knew it wasn't enough just to be her. She needed to find someone else, someone who could enlarge the small space she occupied as Malathi, Mala for short” (14). This subliminal desire to be someone else reflects Mala's first awareness of the need to transcend a predetermined concretised identity. The only other person who seems to understand her struggles to make

sense of a self occupying a realm of in-between-ness is her grandmother, Bala, who “was subject to a mysterious women's ailment called hysteria”(15). Married to a patriarchal bully, she lived most of her life following the rules he made for her which included never stepping out of his house or making everything about her “as neat as he wanted and tied into a hard little ball” (25). Later, Bala's mysterious ailment becomes a subversive means for her to create a space of alternative ordering and possibility where the limits of the periphery are extended and the centre reclaimed. She would collect anything sharp-edged and cut off some of her hair, which he insisted must be hidden away in a tight bun, and her final act of defiance was the day she chopped all her hair off with “*His pair*, [of scissors] so desirable because they were his, but also because they glinted at her, boasted about how new, how sharp they were” (26). At this point, the narrative eases into the space where Mala and Bala's individual yet collective quest to comprehend the nature of their selves finds a new embodiment in Asad: Bala tells Mala- “you and I beat them; you married him. I couldn't escape this place but I've lived longer than that old bastard boss. We've won” (76). Poststructuralist perspective considers identity as multiple, shifting, and in conflict; identity as crucially related to social, cultural, and political contexts; and identity being constructed, maintained, and negotiated primarily through discourse (Varghese 21-44). On the other hand, in Buddhism self is regarded as an aggregate of five constituents- Form (body), Feelings, Perception, Consciousness and Fabrication-and interdependence of these makes the self a process of becoming rather than a stable, fixed form (Thanissaro, 2). Mala and Asad's interfaith marriage in the face of family prejudices and societal opposition is, thus, more than an act of defiance, a re-creation of the self and identity beyond “those usual [socially given] signposts: born in, born on, born to, married on, had a son by, had a daughter called” (5). It is a

reaffirmation of the self as a shape-shifting, fleeting space mapped by complex fluctuating identities. It is an acceptance of humanity as a “chain story” constituted of “all those fragments that pass for different lives [forging] a cunning chain” linked to and “changed by other people's stories” (13). It is an attempt to comprehend the 'I' in relation and through the 'Other' .

As the diverse narrative strands unfold further in a retrospective mode, we encounter Asad's children, Sara and Samar whose struggles with the hybrid nature of their social identity as someone born out of interfaith marriage in a society where one is ultimately diminished to a community identity, began when they were school-going children. Being repeatedly asked “So what are you then?” (179), made to feel different from their classmates, they grew up with an abstruse yet quietly visible “thin clear glass window slid into place between them” (179) and the world which relegates them to its peripheries as fugitive others. Picking up the pieces of carefully cultivated human values, in the wake of the carnage and their fathers subsequent death, Sara and Samar undergo pronounced identity crisis and conflicts with the self. Identity has two contradictory features: it can both, unite and assimilate individuals, as well as divide and differentiate people, marking them as different (Kouhpaenejad and Gholaminejad, 201). Both, the assimilating and divisive roles of identity emerge from social identity markers that create a discourse of control and domination. The individual is not the vis-a-vis of power; it is one of its prime effects (Foucault, 214). The carnage proved a culmination of the lurking prejudices and fears. The steady polarisation and community specific profiling of an individuals identity disillusioned Samar. Tired of being different or trying to be like everyone else, Samar later discovered that there was another way he could turn difference into sameness. “He resurrected his comatose Muslim self, embraced it” I finally know what I am,

[he] said gloatingly to Asad, which is more than I can say for you (205). Samar is unable to reconcile with the hostility towards the in-between-ness of his self. He seeks refuge in the notional security of a presumed monocultural, unitary sense of selfhood. Samar's response symbolises the de-centering of the self as an embodied agent repeatedly "structured in and through discourse without being reduced to it" (Dunn, 695-96). Sara, on the other hand, besieged with self-doubts and scepticism about the relevance and pragmatism of her parents ideals in a world of rigid, parochial perceptions and violent prejudices, embarks on a journey to understand who she really is through a process which involves both continuity and difference, instability and constancy of the self. Working on the script for her friend Ninas documentary on the Gujarat pogrom of the year 2002, she travels from Mumbai to Ahmedabad carrying along with her uncertainties, the memory of Laila, her childhood friend who was burnt to death during the Mumbai riots of 1992. She begins to document direct individual accounts of those affected by the carnage, unsure whether she will be "able to pull out the answers that lie curled deep in this city's core, or herself" (107). Among her interviewees, she meets Yasmin, a seventeen year old survivor of the riots across a lately created border, called by some mini Pakistan. With her life completely shattered in the aftermath of the mayhem, Yasmin still dreams of college and the return of her brother, Akbar missing since the carnage. In the midst of the horrid, graphic accounts Yasmin's undaunted spirit stands out as a beacon of hope yet, Sara struggles to lend coherence to the consequences of prejudices. She wonders if Asad's dream which made him say it was enough just to be you was a mere delusion: "Cut and burnt, cut and burnt. It's a shorthand chant, a chant that echoes in Sara's ears because it's trapped there" (163) and she has no idea "how to let all these stories, other people's stories that are becoming hers, teach her

who she is, what she is” (234). Gradually, towards the dénouement of her narrative thread, she becomes conscious of something being left out- the transitional space of being and becoming. She recalls Asad's words to her: “Dont be ashamed of who you are. Dont be ashamed of who you are not”. It is the moment when Sara crosses a personal border, becomes aware and accepts the hybrid, liminal nature of the self, split up into the knowing and the known, into object and subject, with each of its fragments facing each other inseparably and irreconcilably (Schopenhauer, 6).

Fugitive Histories is a novel where multiple selves collide, shape and are shaped by each other continually. The multiplicity of its apparently disparate narratives that merge, ramify and disrupt linear trajectories is a symbolic representation of liminality. Akin to the narrative strands, the novel's characters and by implication, the concepts of self and identity remain text(s) in the making. Each of them moves through an endless sequence of thresholds to the self much like Mala's chain story with no closures. They reveal that even at the level of self-meanings, self-image, and self-concept, where the historical, cultural, and political particulars of identity are exposed, the self remains dynamic and open-ended (Callero, 125-28). It is best represented through Asad. Possibly, the most profound and palpable character in the novel, Asad symbolises the intersection of the personal and the social, the romantic and the radical, of art and reality, of the past, the present and the future, the multiple voices and myriad stories which constitute the novel as well as the text, subtexts and context. His lifelong resistance to be put into a small box, to be labeled and delimited, thwarted by a world given to distorted notions and debilitating prejudices, deeply affects him and he pours out his hurt, anguish yet persistent hope for an inclusive, egalitarian world space into his sketches. The sketches depict different selves, all interconnected with the same burning desire to know the Self, to find

an answer to the unfathomable questions, who am I? Who are we? How do we know ourselves and others? His conscious choice to defy prejudiced points of view, whether camouflaged as traditionalist, religious or purportedly progressive lies at the essential core of the novel around which revolves the lives and stories of the other characters. They attempt to define themselves through or against who he is: a liminal self. Consequently, each character represents the fragmented, fluid dimensions of an ever-evolving ambiguous self occupying the spaces in-between. According to Verse seven of Isha Upanishad:

“He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, he never turns away from It (the Self). /For he who perceives all beings as the Self, how can/there be delusion or grief, /when he sees this oneness (everywhere)?” (Muller, 314)

The Self thus interpreted is inextricably linked to multifarious identities and both are contingent upon each other in their search for coherence and meaning. Daniel C. Dennett, in his essay titled 'The Self as a Centre of Narrative Gravity', draws a rather intriguing analogy between the well-known concept in Newtonian Physics- the centre of gravity- and the self. He describes both as an abstraction and states “each person has a self (in addition to a centre of gravity). In fact we have to posit selves for ourselves as well. The theoretical problem of self-interpretation is at least as difficult and important as the problem of other-interpretation” (<http://cogprints.org/266/1/selfctr.htm>). He quotes David Hume to further substantiate his theory: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.... If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I

must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular.” (*Treatise on Human Nature* I, IV, sec. 6.) Hariharan, through *Fugitive Histories*, thus, explores this multiple, layered, multi-dimensional fluidity of self and identity and, in the process, appropriates these as conceptual tools to foreground the essential liminality of our lived realities wherein fear, prejudices and the divisive binaries of perceived centres and constructed margins can only be overcome through “desiring the difference” (74).

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Does 'Dalit' include the Mangs? : Contextualizing Limbale's *The Outcaste*

Saloni Walia

Once, in summer, as usual I was playing with Arjya, a Mang. Thirsty, we entered my house and I drank water first before giving the cup to Arjya. Sanatami shouted, 'Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he will defile it. Go away.' I was upset because I couldn't give water to a friend. Is one's caste more important than one's friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Wasn't Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it? Arjya and I kept walking towards the river. The ground was too hot to walk on and we felt as if our hearts were being roasted. Different parts of the river bank were reserved for Mahars and Mangs. Where were we to drink water from? Even water was its own enemy here. Our minds were divided like separate reservoirs of water. No, our minds were not only divided they were also contaminated. (Limbale19-20)

The extract above is picked up from Sharankumar Limbale's novel *The Outcaste* originally published as *Akkarmashi* (Marathi) in 1984. Throughout the text, Limbale talks about the injustice meted out to the *Dalit* or untouchable by those superior to them in the social hierarchy as laid by the 'Varna' system. The dominant narrative in the novel depicts the discrimination faced by an illegitimate child born out of the union between a Lingayat Brahmin and a Mahar woman.

But the excerpt forces the reader to reconsider his opinion. It is also a scathing attack on the internal fissures among the Dalits. It raises suspicions over the assumption of 'Dalit' as a unified identity. While sympathizing with the Mahars as they endure various hardships, Limbale has also simultaneously critiqued the treatment received by the *Mangs*, who are at a lower rung in the social order. Mangs were traditionally rope makers. In this view, one observes that the novel is also the author's plea for the Mahars to be self-reflexive.

In addition, one cannot but ignore that this malady of casteism is sown in innocent minds right from childhood. This rearing is a part of the social conditioning children are subjected to. It also calls for serious thinking over methods of parenting which encourage inequality. Children also have minds of their own and have their own way of analysing things. Though the protagonist, now a grown up man, is looking at his childhood in hindsight, he still remembers this minute incident and the discomfort this scenario brought is clearly expressed. Even a small child finds it illogical to deny water to a friend simply because he is born into a lower caste. This is a slap on the centuries-old tradition which claims to follow the revered scriptures suggesting such prejudice. Here, Professor Paul Ghuman¹ can be quoted:

Infact, children learn at an early age (1-8 years) not only that they are black, white or brown (Asians), but also the rank ordering of ethnic/racial group to which they belong. Likewise, in India, caste consciousness is instilled in children from the day they are born through religious rituals and later on in childhood through special initiation ceremonies. (564-7)

¹Paul A. Singh Ghuman obtained Bachelors in Panjab and M.Ed, and Ph.d from Birmingham and D. Litt from Wales, U.K. He has practiced as a psychologist. His area of interest has been childhood studies in the realm of caste and diaspora.

There are other sub castes among the untouchables apart from the Mangs, like the Dhors or Chambhars, but since Mangs are specifically referred to in *The Outcaste*, hence their issue would be addressed here. The paper would try to locate the place of the *Mangs* among the untouchables and try to find the reason behind a huge gap.

Let us begin by tracing the history. The Dalit Panthers was a social organization founded in 1972 comprising Marathi literary figures like Namdeo Dhasal, Arun Kamble and Raja Dhale. They came out with Dalit Panthers Manifesto in 1973 claiming to be the representative of all the exploited sections of the society like agricultural workers, industrial workers, small peasants, the unemployed and even women. But according to an article, “Dalit Panthers: Another View” (1974) published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, “There is a yawning gap between what the Dalit Panthers claim to be and what they actually are. Right now they are quite simply an organization of the Mahars, which is one of the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra.” Dr B.R. Ambedkar was a Mahar and his efforts could only politically assimilate the Mahars among the untouchables. The divide between these two sub-castes was pretty evident when the call of denouncement of the Hindu religion and subsequent conversion to Buddhism in 1956 was followed only by the Mahars. This proved that Mangs did not feel their inclusion among the Dalits as they felt it did not represent their cause. What is more noteworthy is the fact that now these neo-Buddhists have formed the Republican Party of India (RPI) which is active only in Maharashtra and particularly among the Mahars. The resentment among the Mangs grew further as the educational benefits in Maharashtra among the Dalits have been availed mainly by Mahars while the Mangs were left far behind. This made other political parties gain support of the Mangs which, over the years, has weakened the Dalit Movement.

Furthermore, educational backwardness persisted among the Mangs which meant that they also lagged behind in obtaining job opportunities under reservation. Thus, Mangs became the ‘Dalits’ among the Dalits which has continued till today. Mangs were also classified as a criminal tribe under the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) of the British Raj. This stigma is still attached to them. This taint also adds to the various reasons why the Mangs do not easily get jobs apart from their caste imposed profession.

The Dalit Panthers was initially formed as a rebel force against the corrupt and nepotistic politics of the Republican Party of India (RPI). But one observes that it failed to benefit the Mangs. They feel detached from the ‘Dalits’ as a unified community due to the belief that Ambedkar favoured only members of his sub caste and left out the other sub castes. This meant that the Dalit cause lacked solidarity.

Reference to NeeraBurra’s article “Was Ambedkar Just a Leader of the Mahars” (1986) is crucial to the discussion at this point. She elaborated on the WatanInam Issue. Ambedkar’s efforts towards the abolition of the ‘Watan Inam’ added to the woes of the Mangs. This was a gift of land given to the village servants in lieu of their services yielded to the state. Ambedkar revealed how it drastically affected the Mahar community as he or his entire family could be called any time of the day to offer his services. According to Burra,

The first source is the *Inam* land and the second source is what is called the *baluta* or collection of grain by the Watandar Mahars from the villagers. These Inam lands were not given by British government but they were given to these Mahars by the ancient Emperors of this country... The Mahar population has increased enormously and the land assigned to the Mahars is divided and sub divided to such an extent that the income these people get from the Inam lands is absolutely not worthy of being taken into

consideration. The main part of the remuneration which these people get comes largely from the second source, namely, the baluta (429).

In this view, the socio-economic position of the Mangs was slightly better than the Mahars as they seldom confronted upper caste Hindus. Ambedkar talked about the economic exploitation of the Mahars at the hands of the *zamindar*. Ambedkar emphasized that the abolition of the Wataninam would emancipate the Mahar from the slavery of the landlords. Mangs felt that Ambedkar never stressed upon their economic liberation as they too were forced to live in penury. Rope-making was not a lucrative profession and never became one. Apart from Mahars, few Mangs also were involved in the watandari system. Abolition of the watandari rights meant that lands would be snatched from the Mangs too. They wanted to hold onto it as even after economic exploitation as for them it meant some kind of income even though it was inadequate. Mangs could not afford total economic liberation.

Moreover, Burra also mentions the eating of the dead animal, an issue taken up by Ambedkar which was particularly a Mahar activity (as also described about by Limbale in *The Outcaste*). This was abhorred by the other untouchable castes including the Mangs who stayed away from this activity. Ambedkar continuously accentuated the need to consolidate the 'Depressed classes' and the relevance of integration among all the untouchables but it failed. He constantly warned the Dalits that the upper caste Hindus might take advantage of their internal conflicts which eventually did happen as the Republican Party of India has split into various factions today. It went unheeded as the distances between these sub-castes kept increasing. This distance is pretty obvious as Mangs (also called as Matangs) began forming their own associations like the Matang Society (1923) and the Matang Samaj (1932) to voice their problems.

In order to ameliorate the alienation among the Mangs from the Dalit cause, Ambedkar used to attend various Mang conferences to gain their support. Burra talks about how Ambedkar had attended the 1936 Bombay Presidency Mang Conference. He had assured them equality by offering 15 percent reservation among the seats allotted to the Dalits by the Bombay Presidency. He even opened hostels for them and strove to secure government jobs for them.

The question of conversion further complicated the caste politics. As mentioned above, Mangs had refused to adopt Buddhism after Ambedkar. They believed that conversion would not yield equality for the untouchables. They would still be looked down upon by high caste Hindus. They even appealed to bring together all the distinct sub-castes among untouchables.

Thus, Ambedkar's notion that Buddhism would make untouchables escape the perils of casteism since centuries has actually widened the chasm. Even after converting to Buddhism, the Mahars, like the Mangs, are labeled as the Scheduled Castes. Though both are united by the governmental recognition 'Scheduled Castes' but interaction among these communities is restricted and they still maintain this distance. Dalithood therefore, is a complex identity. To get a complete insight into the Dalit life means to inspect each and every sub category of this caste. *The Outcaste* has unveiled this mistrust amongst these sub groups and forced us to confront this ambivalence. These endeavours need to be followed up by interested litterateurs to present a reliable analysis of the Dalit selfhood.

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Marginalisation, Human Rights and Literature: Exploring Three Marathi Dalit Stories

Saikat Guha

The category “Harijan”, and later “Dalit,” have been terms of much critical contestation since the middle of the twentieth century in India, especially since the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970s. Dalit is the name given to those who come within the caste-ridden system of Indian society and who are placed in the lowest rank in the hierarchy of caste. Religious scriptures such as *Manusmriti* (*The Laws of Manu*) developed the idea of the social hierarchy according to which society is divided into four castes—the Brahmins who are associated with religious rituals and education, the Kshatriyas whose noble duties are warfare and maintenance of state policies, the Vaishyas who are associated with business and the Shudras whose sole duty is to serve the other three classes. The Shudras, according to *Manusmriti*, were born of the intimacy between some fallen women and out castes, and hence, they are untouchables. It is deemed that the Shudras are impure and they must be avoided. The untouchability which qualifies the Shudras is an attempt to exploit them and exclude them from the facilities of societal-political-economic rights. The Shudras were forbidden the teachings of the Vedas; let alone the scriptures they were even denied basic human rights, like decent food and proper dresses.

The inhumanity of the caste system has been a strong mechanism under which the Shudras suffered since ancient times. It was only in

the later part of the nineteenth century that a surge of protest gathered within the Shudra community with the able leadership of people like Mahatma Phule, and thereafter, Dr. B R Ambedkar. It was Ambedkar who was the central figure in the movement against the caste system. In a number of important writings he waged his objections against the oppressive and exploitative mechanisms of the caste system. Ambedkar was not an armchair scholar, but an energetic social activist. He was critical of Mahatma Gandhi's views on caste. Saytanarayana and Tharu sum up the conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi in their introduction to the anthology *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*:

Gandhi described the varna order as an ideal system of ancient India and wanted it to continue. The only aspect of it that he opposed was untouchability, which he looked at as 'inhuman' and 'a blot' on Hinduisim, a religion he upheld. Ambedkar disagreed with Gandhi and gave a call for the annihilation of caste. For Ambedkar, caste as a system and as a practice is undemocratic. It does not allow for interaction, communication, unity or societal mobility of people. Caste is sanctified by Hinduism. (11)

The term "dalit" was introduced later to include all those who come under the caste system. The dalit movement which received impetus since the Independence is mostly concerned with the rights of the untouchables. Maharashtra was the place famous for Dalit Panther Movement which was the first considerable organized movement against the oppressive caste system. The famous "Dalit Panthers' Manifesto" (1973) was an angry and revolutionary call against the loopholes of Indian democracy and party-system. It is a well-known debate in Indian nationalism that the very structure of this nation is based on the legacy of the colonizers. The nationalist power block operates on the exclusion of the lower class, lower caste, tribals and

women who are dominated, exploited and repressed. They were pushed to the margins of the Indian nation-state, exploited and suppressed in the new system which Pramod Nayar calls “postcolonial subalternization” (99). Real power of India’s apparent “democracy” does not lie in the hands of the common people, but those of the elite leaders. “Dalit Panthers’ Manifesto” hits hard at the core of the faulty system:

The present Congress rule is essentially a continuation of the old Hindu feudalism, which kept the dalits deprived of power, wealth and status for thousands of years. Therefore, this Congress rule cannot bring about social change. [...] because the entire state machinery is dominated by the feudal interests, the same hands who, for thousand years, under religious sanctions, controlled all the wealth and power, today own most of the agricultural land, industry, economic resources and all other instruments of power, therefore, in spite of independence and the democratic set-ups the problems of the dalit remain unsolved. (56)

It is worth noting in this regard that most of the figures in Dalit Panther Movement were writers. Their writings are quite different from most of canonical Indian literature—characterized by aesthetic flourish, romantic imagination and so on—which is understood broadly as the body of writings produced by upper caste people. Dalit literature, on the other hand, is the literature of the humiliated, oppressed, exploited, repressed section of people. This literature is goal-oriented—its goal being the achievement of the basic human rights. As such, there is little or no scope of exercising imaginative exuberance or expert craftsmanship. Dalit literature is closely connected with the dalit rights movements whose motto is to achieve freedom from the strictures imposed on the grounds of so-called lower caste. B. Krishnappa, an important figure of dalit movement in Karnataka, charts out the characteristics of dalit literature thus:

Dalit literature has a different stand on creativity on literary excellence. It is inappropriate to look for refinement in a movement's reactionary literature. That kind of art can only be found in a literature written in luxury. Refinement cannot be the mainstay of a literature that has revolution and change as its goal.

[...] As dalit literature is addressed more to labourer, the farm hand toiling in the fields, the unfortunate living in hell, suppressed by the caste system, it has to be unadorned and fresh.

When the purpose is to provoke people against injustice, there is no scope for old aesthetic pleasures or artistic creativity or, indeed, abstruse similes and metaphors. Dalit literature is not the literature of those whose stomachs are full. (109)

In the story "Poisoned Bread", Bandhumadhav has presented a conflict of attitudes between an oppressive landlord and the grandson of a Mahar old man. The young boy, Mhadeva, who is educated can no longer be pursued with the age-old system of caste which he now realizes as artificially fabricated with the intention to exploit a section of people. Mhadeva asks a series of questions to the landlord, Babu Patil, which the latter is unable to reply to:

"Patil, will you kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion, abandoning our caste and of polluting the god? And if religion can't tolerate our human being treating another simply as a human being, what's the use of such an inhuman religion? And if our mere touch pollutes the gods, why were the Mahars and Mangs created at all? [...]" (Bandhumadhav 148)

The landlord gets infuriated with such "impertinence" of a Mahar boy who has just learnt to read and write, and questions the age-old customs. He replies caustically, "And mind you, even if a Mahar or Mang gets educated, no one will ever call him a Brahmin. A Mahar is

a Mahar even if he passes L.L.B. and becomes a barrister. [...] One should always keep to one's own position" (148-49). This is the closed-door system of caste—the change of one's status, even with education and refinement of judgement, cannot change his position in the society. A so-called lower-class man or woman is always denied entry into an "upper-class" domain.

In the story, the old man, Yetalya, begs pardon for his grandson's audacity a number of times and he is employed for a day's work in the farm. Completely exhausted, Yetalya goes to a fellow's home nearby to fetch a tripod. It is a coincidence that Babu Patil comes to supervise their work just at that moment. As he does not find Yetalya, he starts abusing him and his grandson, and even deprives them of their rightful share of corn at the day's end. Out of utter helplessness the old man begs for the morsels of rotten bread from the cow-shade which were not even devoured by the oxen. The young boy whose mind has started to be illumined with education has developed a sense of self-esteem and he is acerbic of the inherent inferiority of his grandfather: "It's rightly said that the Chamar has his eye on the chappal, so does the Mahar on stale bread" (151). Yetalya, instead of protesting against the heartlessness of the landlord, accuses his grandson for engaging in an argument with the landlord which the old man holds responsible for losing corn or even a small quantity of jowar that day. He collects the rotten pieces of bread which were smeared with dung and urine. The grandson mockingly tells his grandfather: "We'll gulp down the crumbs you collected. Haven't we got these rotten pieces as a reward for labouring all day long? A good exchange indeed! Are we any better than cats or dogs? Throw a few crumbs at us and we are happy" (151).

As the horrible incident suggests, the poor Mahar people cannot arrange their daily meals without the mercy of the landlords who control the process of production. This is a kind of bourgeois-

proletariat relation, according to the general Marxist view, in which the dalits are the proletariat party who contribute their labour-power to the production, but do not enjoy the fruits of their endeavour. The bourgeois party which invariably ascends to power in a postcolonial nation wipes out the history of the oppressed. In his adaption of Louis Althusser's theory of the function of the "ideological state apparatuses," the dalit-scholar T M Yasudasan says that these apparatuses silence the voice of the dalits and exclude the truth of oppression on them. "The task of dalit studies," according to Yasudasan, "is to release the counter-hegemonic forces of critique in order to facilitate the eruption of dalit voices and truth, breaking the silence and darkness in the midst of the prevailing politics of knowledge" (150).

The young boy in Bandhumadhav's story is the voice of revolt who pursues his grandfather to forsake the habit of begging and to live proudly as human beings by claiming their basic rights. His solution is that "we must stop begging under the pretext that we are getting our rightful share of corn. And instead of enslaving ourselves to lifelong labour in exchange for that right, we must free ourselves from the land-bondage and learn to live independently" (152). They are denied a bit of decent meal and they are bound to eat rotten, dung-smearred morsels of bread cooked with *dulli* (large pieces of meat, probably of dead, abandoned animal). The old man is afflicted with violent dysentery and vomiting because of the "poisoned bread" which ultimately kills him. At his death-bed, however, conscience dawns in the old man, probably influenced by his grandson who is the hope of a better future. He utters before breathing his last: "I can only say: never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars. This poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man" (153). Education is the prime means of

knowledge which is the greatest weapon to fight oppression and injustice. All the dalit leaders right from Ambedkar insisted on the right to education for the development of the downtrodden community. The Manifesto of the Dalit Panthers announced “All dalits must be given free education, medical facilities, housing and good quality cheap grains” as part of their programme (64).

While dalit men carry on their backs burdens of humiliation, exploitation and repression, for dalit women the burden is twofold because of their gender. In any patriarchal society women are considered inferior to men—women are always the “other” or the “second sex” whose position is next to men. In the case of the dalit women they are victims of both casteism and sexism. Dalit women are often tortured, sexually exploited, raped or even murdered on various false allegations, for example, for being sexually promiscuous or “witch”. As Meena Kandasamy observes:

The helpless ‘witches’ are hounded and punished by being stripped naked, paraded around the villages, their hair is burnt off or their heads tonsured, their faces blackened, their noses cut off, their teeth pulled out (they are supposedly defanged) so that they can no longer curse, they are whipped, they are branded, sometimes, they are forced to eat human faeces and finally, they are put to death. (“Dangerous Dalit Women”)

In Baburao Bagul’s moving story “Mother”, the protagonist, who is referred to throughout the story as “Pandu’s mother”, bears the brunt of ignominy. Pandu as an untouchable is regularly ill-treated by his classmates who suddenly turn to disgracing his mother. They allege his mother is a “whore” who indulges in a “business” of selling her body. It is based on assumption rather than on any empirical proof. The lady is widowed, and earns her livelihood, toiling in construction sites. As a vulnerable and easy target, she becomes victim of the lust of a lewd neighbour called Dagdu.

Pandu's mother was ill-treated by her husband when he was alive. He was a drunkard and an invalid person who was living on the labour of his wife. Even then, he used to torture her and doubted her chastity. Later, the wretched lady is suspected of having secret affairs by her dear son for whom she sacrificed her life. When the neighbours abuse her with coarsest slangs, Pandu too believes that his mother is an unchaste lady living on the treasures of her body. When she gives new cloth to Pandu, he leaves home abusing his mother which only increases her misery:

‘Whore! I spit on your clothes,’ he shouted and ran out of the house. Her pain knew no bounds. [...] She had spent ten long years as a widow, and had tried so hard to love Pandu, she'd lived only for him, till the overseer came along last year. She had lost her husband, and now her son had turned against her. She started crying helplessly. (Bagul 189)

There are hints that Pandu's mother has developed a sort of attraction for the overseer of the construction site where she works. But is it unnatural for a young widow to seek love and support of a man when she is sunken in poverty and insecurity? She is accused of selling her body because the upper-class people are jealous that she is wearing new clothes. It is most pitiable when a dalit lady is robbed of even the right of choosing how to conduct her personal life.

“The 1930s saw the organisation of independent meetings and conferences by dalit women in the Ambedkarite movement,” writes Sharmila Rege, where “dalit women delegates passed resolutions against child marriage, enforced widowhood and dowry, critiquing these practices as brahmanical. [...] Women's participation in the Ambedkarite movement must be read in the context of the fact that in Ambedkar's theory of caste there is also a theory of the origins of sub-ordination of women and that he saw the two issues as

intrinsically linked” (41-42). But, according to Rege, the question of oppression on dalit women waned at subsequent movements of dalit rights, including Dalit Panther Movement. As such, the social condition of dalit women is more depressing than that of dalit men.

The condition of dalits in Indian cities is no less abysmal than that of the dalits in villages. Anna Bhau Sathe’s “Gold from the Grave” is a nightmarish story in which Bheema, a dalit man, is forced by his misfortune to become a gold-burglar who digs out graves to collect gold ornaments from the corpses. His helpless condition which makes him choose the ghastly job under the veil of night is described in these words:

Bheema was from a village on the banks of the river Warna. His great strength was of no help to him in finding a job in his own village. He has strayed over to Bombay in search of work. He had searched for a job all over the city in vain and finally moved to his suburb on the fringe of the jungle. [...] He hated the city of Bombay which offers you everything except work and shelter. (Sathe 210)

After settling in the suburb, Bheema gets a job as a stone quarry worker but the quarry is soon closed down. He is unnerved with poverty and hunger. Out of his profound concern for his family he starts his nightly adventures in cremation grounds from which he sometimes manages to collect a few golden ornaments. With these little ornaments he manages to run his family. He is very well-aware of the dangers of his “occupation.” As an outcaste, his company is avoided. He is well aware of the dangers—if the upper-caste, rich people come to know about his hideous activities to disturb the graves he is to face the worst situation as a lower-caste man. But he is driven to this work out of hunger.

This story of Sathe can be metaphorically analysed as a lower-caste man digging the grave of the age-old culture of India for his fundamental human rights. The gold is Bheema's basic rights as a human being which is buried deep within the socio-cultural landscape of India from which he is excluded. He is not allowed to go to the graveyard because his caste prohibits him from it. He can earn his rights in the form of gold only at the stake of endangering his life. At the end of the story, Bheema is seen going out in an unruly weather to dig out a new grave. There he is attacked and badly bitten by a host of jackals as he tussles with them to reach the corpse. He cannot earn the gold without getting hurt. The upholders of caste-system will not grant him his rights easily. He must bleed in his journey to earn his basic human rights which suggests the sad predicament of a dalit man.

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A Mirror that shames (?): Mahasweta Devi's 'Daini'

Rimjhim Bhattacharjee

Cultural materialism as a theoretical approach seeks to undertake a critical analysis of culture, cultural forms and their relationship with nationhood and nation formation. Raymond Williams in his 1973 work *The Country and the City* elaborated on the central concerns of this approach. According to Williams, cultural forms and particularly literature, reflect and consolidate social norms and realities. As Hywel Dix explains, “Williams emphasized the fact that nationhood had originally been imagined into existence in part through its literature and cultural forms. Accordingly, to produce a different kind of literature is to imagine a different kind of nation.”(3) Similarly, Benedict Anderson’s seminal work *Imagined Communities* talks of the convergence of capitalism and print culture as central to the creation of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. Cultural forms and particularly printed texts help reflect and generate social order. In doing so, they help create the identity of a nation. When certain texts then, subvert this overarching social order by presenting narratives of liminal, marginalised (non) identities, they problematize the notion of a unified nation and help generate a more nuanced understanding of the same. This aspect of cultural forms, particularly writing, would be examined in detail by Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* where he builds upon the work of both Williams and Anderson. In the words of Dix, “Bhabha refers to Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* in which Rushdie gives fictional realization to the kind of working class Indian community that had previously made little impact on the novel tradition in Britain. This is not, Bhabha points out, because such communities had not previously existed but

because they lacked access to the means of representation. Bhabha says that by writing a novel about a community of people previously excluded from the literary record, and explicitly in opposition to the dominant political tones of the period, Rushdie enables us to imagine ‘how newness enters the world.’” (23)

The political and cultural space of India houses several varying groups of people and therefore some community or identity category is constantly under threat of being stifled and marginalised in the grand narrative of the nation. Literature, as a cultural form, has time and again sought to give voice to and rebel against such injustice and hold itself up as the repository of human values and ethics. The writings of Mahasweta Devi can be regarded as representative in this concern. In her novels and short stories, writer and social activist Mahasweta Devi has always sought to give voice to some of those communities in India that have remained on the margins of literary and political society and have been denied access to the ‘means of representation.’ This paper shall examine one such short story, ‘Daini’ which has been translated by Ipsita Chanda as ‘Witch’ in the 1998 collection *Bitter Soil*. In reading the text, it shall strive to see how categories like tribal identity, caste, gender and disability can oppose or throw into question notions of modernity and dominant social and political processes.

Raymond Williams in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* has noted that “in certain areas, there will be in certain periods, practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize.” (43) Mahasweta Devi’s 1979 story ‘Daini’ or ‘Witch’ addresses one such area of practice, namely the witch hunt, which is still a social reality in many parts of India but which discursive traditions of the ‘modern’ Indian nation find difficult to accommodate.

The story ‘Daini’ is set in Palamau, a tribal-inhabited district in Jharkhand where Mahasweta Devi lived for a number of years. She covered the expanse of the district on foot, living with the tribal population of the district, communicating with them and thereby gaining insight into their difficult lives. Her pain and outrage at the social injustices she perceived during her stay at Palamau compelled her to pen the stories in the collection *Bitter Soil*— ‘Noon’ (‘Salt’), ‘Bichhan’ (‘Seeds’), ‘Shishu’ (Little Ones) and Daini (‘Witch’).

In the Introduction to *Bitter Soil*, Mahasweta Devi writes, “I believe in documentation. After reading my work, the reader should be able to face the truth of facts, *and feel duly ashamed of the true face of India*...I say ‘India’ though the location of these stories is Palamau. *Palamau is a mirror of India.*” (emphasis mine) (vii) Thus, in Bhabha’s terms, Mahasweta Devi attempts to give voice to a section of Indian society that lacks means of representation which leads to a newer understanding of India as a nation. According to Devi, the understanding thus generated is not a happy one.

In the story ‘Daini,’ when famine struck the villages of Kuruda, Murhai and Hesadi, the stricken tribal people approached Hanuman Misra, a Brahman and worshipper at the Shiva temple. After performing necessary rites, Mishra informs the villagers that the famine has been caused by the presence of a ‘daini’ who was wandering around in those villages.

The ‘witch’ in the story who is hunted down and forced to flee the village ultimately turns out to be a low-caste hearing-impaired woman who also cannot speak. She had been sent to work at the house of Hanuman Mishra where she was raped by his son. Once it transpired that she had become pregnant, she was thrown out and the rumours of the presence of a witch were spread among the people of the village:

The pahaan of Tura addresses the floor. Then, lifting his eyes in the darkness- she's is dumb! She can't speak. Her body grew but not her brain! I sent her to the house of Hanuman Misra in Tahar, to work in the cowshed.

-When?

-A year ago. For the last five months there's been no news of her. Misraji says she's gone away, who knows where? I've searched high and low; I haven't been able to find her. Later I learnt that the thakur's son had spoilt her. I went to ask, and got a shoe in my face. Daini, daini, the thakur spread these stories about a daini! I never knew my Somri was the daini! I never knew!

-She's not a daini....

Go ask in Tahar. They got their son to rape the dumb, slow witted girl and threw her out. Then they spread the daini alarm, saying, don't kill her, just stone her. (Devi, 120-121)

What with a famine already raging in the village, superstition had found strong hold in the minds of the people imbuing them with a perverse violence against the witch. The pregnant girl Somri is therefore forced to live in a cave in a forest, hunting dogs and wild birds for food.

In a way, Somri is an embodiment of the tribal community of Palamau- victim of local superstition and exploitation at the hands of the upper caste. Her hearing impairment, muteness and mental retardation can be read as symbolic of the unquestioned internalisation of discriminatory caste norms and exploitation thereof by the tribal people of Palamau. It is when she decides to live in defiance of exploitation, despite being forced to recede more and more into the margins that she becomes dangerous. Her screams, an agonised language of affect, as a counterforce to the absence of the language of speech that has been denied to her, terrorises the tribal

people and Hanuman Misras alike. Such a figure must needs be controlled, ‘stoned, not killed,’ allowed a bruised, silenced existence because India of course, is a ‘unity in diversity’ and progressive laws of a modern nation do not allow for overt murder. The materiality of disability in a narrative like ‘Daini’ however, should not be overlooked at the expense of its symbolic potentials. In a narrative where caste and gender figure as ‘emergent’ categories that challenge the nationalistic rhetoric of a glorious unified nation to make one ‘duly ashamed of the true face of India,’ disability as another emergent identity category further problematizes matters. It brings to light the triple marginalisation faced by some women in districts like Palamau—by virtue of gender, caste and disability. It thereby draws attention to the disabling politics of society where the impairments of a woman who is otherwise perfectly capable of work render her vulnerable to exploitation. Somri’s story reveals a society created by the able-bodied for the able-bodied. It is this exploitative society that transforms Somri’s impairments into disability and denies her access to the basic amenities of food, living and shelter. If Palamau indeed is a microcosm of India, then the story draws attention to the reality of several marginalised communities and the layers of marginalisation even within those communities—stark reality but no solution. Although at the ending of the story, Somri is retrieved by her community and the people shun Hanuman Mishra, such a conclusion hardly seems satisfactory. As Rekha observes,

However, [after] the retrieval of Somri, now a mother at the end of the story, the tribal (sic.) are ultimately able to see through the oppressive and hegemonizing discursivity of the like of Hanuman Misras. They also resolve not to work in his brick-kilns. But this optimism is very fragile. The confrontation still lurks beneath the calm surface. Even when Somri is ultimately retrieved and reclaimed by the tribal of Tura village, she is

reclaimed more as a mother than as an autonomous individual. Woman's destiny is still bound with the destiny of patriarchal norms. Still she is treated as subaltern and a non-entity in the male dominated society. Further the upper class people think it to be their right to exploit the downtrodden. (147)

Jyoti Syal, in her reading of the story further notes:

The voice of the narrator becomes the voice of the collective conscience which asks us all to confront what it means to be a low-caste dumb (sic.) woman in a society dominated by the rich, and the powerful...Finally, the author declares that this is nothing less than a war for the rights of the dispossessed which has to be fought on all fronts: social, economic, as well as political and this war is also for liberation from all types of fear, which is the right of every man, woman and child:

We are fighting a great war. War against superstition (you see, the society thinks of them as criminals); war against atrocity (because police and public both kill them cruelly); war against a system which allows these things to happen. So, this is really a war of liberation. My reading is, India cannot be called really independent because these people have been kept in bondage. Also because this basic war was not fought. That is why this so-called image of India is crumbling down on all fronts. That's all.(151-152)

That this war shall have to be fought by the tribal people of Palamau themselves is also made clear by Devi as she ruthlessly satirizes the European social worker and critiques the well-meaning Indian intellectual. In the hands of one Kurt Muller in the story, the tale of the Indian 'daini' "turns into a lurid tale." Several photographs are attached with the article penned by Kurt Muller. The photographs are of 'sevika' Aileen Bharati, who had been 'painted black' and was

photographed holding a roast chicken in her hand. The photographs were so realistic that she landed a lead role in the movie *The Witch* that was to be made based on the article. Characters like Kurt Muller, Aileen Bharati and Peter Bharati in the text are caricatures of Edward Said's orientalist— creating for their own benefit an exaggerated, distorted 'reality' of the oriental (here, the tribal population of Palamau) in which the voices of the orientals themselves are silenced. Mahasweta Devi leaves no stone unturned to expose the elaborate hoax such Europeans undertake in the name of social service, their dishonest means of data collection and unethical yellow journalism. As opposed to this, the figure who represents the Indian intellectual in the story, Sharan Mathur, "is extremely honest, hardworking and ambitious." (Devi 88) He is a schoolteacher who is also working on the Kol rebellion for his doctoral thesis. As he roams from village to village in search of material, he is well aware of the social and geographical dynamics of the villages mentioned in the story. However, despite being respected by and friendly with most of the tribal people, Sharan Mathur is sensitive to the fact that being caste Hindu, there existed an interminable divide between them and him. For him, the difficulties of the lives of the rural tribal people, their hunger and anger were not lived experiences. This perhaps causes deep anxiety in Sharan and the narrator alike regarding the use of tribal stories and history for the purpose of a degree, a doctoral thesis. The narratorial voice evocatively offers insight into Sharan's psyche:

Suddenly Mathur understood. These people have no niche in the man-made economic cycle. Brick kiln-*colliery*-Bokaro steel-timber industry-railroad-crops, fields—everything has made them redundant—

Nature is their only hope. If it rains, crops grow, the forest flourishes, roots and tubers are available, there are fish in the

river. Nature's breasts are dry with no rain. So they hold the *daini* responsible and are angry. The people of Bharat don't want them. If nature, too, turns away, they will be wiped out...

Mathur understands why they are angry. Despite this knowledge, he won't be able to meet them as an equal on their mental plane. Like them, he is a local boy. But Mathur holds the butt of his gun in his hands. Its barrel aims at their chests. Caste Hindu versus adivasi. It is impossible for the killer to drop the gun, link hands and become one with the *target*. (Devi118)

As an academician, Sharan arrives at a theoretical understanding of the social, political and economic reasons behind a witch hunt in a place like Palamau. The tribal population has been relegated to the margin in all these three spheres. They have been denied a voice and means of representation. They have no other way but to take recourse to superstition in order to explain the wretched condition of their lives. Just as they are attacked by the powerful dominant structure of the nation, they in turn, unleash their violence on people more defenceless than they. As a responsible intellectual, Sharan is aware that he is complicit in this politics of marginalisation.

In a cultural materialist approach to reading the text, passages like this rupture the rhetoric of glorification and unity that governs nationhood and an alternative picture of India—the India inhabited by tribal populations, by the disabled—enters into discourse thereby throwing into question terms like 'modern' and 'developing' that are often used to describe the nation today.

By the end of the *Daini* episode, something changes in Sharan, a change that he cannot articulate but can only express through tears. This change makes him realise that his academic pursuit, his life as an intellectual made his feelings run 'parallel' with the feelings of people like the *pahaan*. While there would always be camaraderie

and mutual respect, ‘Mathur and *pahaan* are like the river and the railway line, if they meet at some point, disaster is inevitable.’ (Devi 116) He continues to teach in Tohri and visit villages like Murhai and Hesadi to bring people medicine and talk to the *pahaan*. His realisation makes him finally abandon his idea of a doctoral thesis and a subsequent career in America. This kind of intellectual pursuit—the milking of stories from marginalised people by expressing transitory solidarity with their cause, the narrator seems to indicate, runs close to being as exploitative as the orientalist pursuit. In doing so, she perhaps questions the ethics of the likes of the social historian, the ethnographer, the student of law and so on. How humanitarian are the tools of research in the Humanities and what does such research translate into in the lives of those researched? These are questions that continue to be asked and sensitive researchers have perhaps arrived at only an extremely tenuous peace with themselves regarding the answers.

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Understanding Universal Dharma through the Mahābhārata

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An enumeration of the types of dharma enunciated in the *Dharmasāstras* (including the *Mahābhārata*) can be a pointer to the aim that the ancient sages had in developing an orderly and non-conflicting, self-contained and stable society. Everywhere it has been advised not to follow adharma. This concept has served as the beacon of hope guiding the lives of the people of the world over millennia and a question is raised as well in understanding what dharma is and what life is. Although it is a timeless and universal concept that evolved in Indian traditional scriptures, the texts of India's intellectual tradition define this concept in different ways. They, in general, help in understanding the question of life, instead of focusing on the issues of dharma. The concept of dharma evolved over time, its meaning shifting from a 'ritual ethics of deed' to a more personal virtue based on one's conscience. British colonialists endeavored to map Indian traditions onto their ideas of religion so as to be able to comprehend and govern their subjects; yet the notion of dharma remained elusive. The common translation into religion is misleading. A religion is a set of belief systems; dharma is more a way of living. A religion, basically, is rituals and practices followed by a particular sect; on the other hand, dharma is abstract. Indian scholars and academicians, after their deep researches, have given several definitions of dharma. In no other culture has a non-scriptural text been so deeply imbricated in the life of the people as the

Mahābhārata has been in Indian life and thought since ancient days. In the knowledge-centered oral Indian culture, like other intellectual texts, the *Mahābhārata* has played multiple societal roles – as source of knowledge and values, as sustainer of the social fiber and fabric, as inspiration in adversity, as entertainer and educator in happy times and as a proto-explanatory model for any number of problems encountered by the society. The *sādhārana-dharma* is *śruti* based, providing the best of everything and impregnated with universal, spiritual and moral teachings, categorically stressing the importance of charity, integrity, non-violence, self-control and compassion for *lokasamgraha* i.e. the good of the society. This dharma teaches an individual to act for the sake of the survival of society, for maximizing possibility of human existence and for maintaining the cosmic balance.

In the *Mahābhārata* the message of *sādhārana-dharma* is imparted through different tales and dialogues. However, the tales of King Śivi, Ṛṣi Dadhīci, a butcher and a brāhmin (*Vyādha-Gītā*), the conversations between Vedvyāsa and PāṚdavas, Yakṣa and Yudhisthira and the teachings of Ṛṣi Sanat-Sujāta are of vital importance for understanding *sādhārana-dharma* in a proper manner.

Before discussing the tales and dialogues imparting the message of *sādhārana-dharma*, let us have a general account of dharma as given in the *Mahābhārata*. As referred to before, the dharma stresses becoming one with the universal flow of life, to maintain the cosmic balance. This obliterates the biased view-point towards others. Explaining it, Bhīṣma says:

It is dharma that leads to the behaviour which promotes harmony in society, facilitates its growth, and ensures its happiness. One should not do unto others which is unpleasant to oneself.

(citation)

He adds:

Whatever one desires for oneself one should desire the same for others. (citation)

This very notion leads to *sādhārana-dharma* in which one does good to all, not with the intention of any ill-will and personal gain, rather one contributes to maintain the balance. Yudhisthira also speaks in the same manner to Draupadī when she importunes him to follow *sādhārana-dharma* and to fight. He says:

I do not act for the sake of the fruits of dharma. I act because I must. Whether it bears fruits or not, buxom Draupadī, I do my duty like any householder... I obey dharma, full-hipped woman, not for its rewards... but by its nature my mind is beholden to dharma. (citation)

Thus cosmic balance is the pivot of *sādhārana-dharma* where every act is performed with a view to maintain a cosmic balance. This dharma is impregnated with different features and characteristics illustrated variously in the tales and dialogues between characters of the *Mahābhārata*.

The tale of King Śivi narrated by Ṛṣi Mārkaṛdeya in “Vana-Parva” exemplifies the virtue of working selflessly. One day, a pigeon falls into the lap of King Śivi. The pigeon requests King Śivi to protect him from a hawk. In a while, the hawk also reaches there. He argues for his own case and urges King Śivito not be an obstacle in the way of getting his food. Now the King has two options—to hand over the pigeon to the hawk or to provide the hawk with the food of his own choice. The King considers the first option as an improper action. He gives a justification for considering this action improper:

He that gives up a frightened creature seeking protection cannot

hope to get protection when he himself needs it—even clouds do not provide adequate rain for them, nor do the seeds, though planted in the field, grow for him. (citation)

The King remains firm in his decision and offers to provide some other food to the hawk. But the hawk does not change its mind and asks for the pigeon. Then the King offers it his own life in place of the pigeon's life. The hawk then asks for an equivalent amount of his thigh's flesh. The King immediately accepts the hawk's demand. He cuts off a piece of flesh from his thigh as may be equal to the weight of the pigeon. But the weight of his thigh's flesh weighs less than the pigeon. Then he cuts off more of his own flesh—from all parts of his body. Finally, the King himself ascends the scale.

Another story is also from “Vana-Parva”. Ṛṣi Lomaśa narrates the story to Yudhisthira when he laments the loss of his Kingdom. The story of Ṛṣi Dadhīci's sacrifice represents a real life situation. Ṛṣi Dadhīci sacrifices his life for the welfare of the society without any grief or pain. Once, *Kālkeyas* (demons with their leader *VṚrāsura*) become equipped with deadly weapons and attack the gods. Realizing that they do not have adequate means to achieve success over *VṚrāsura*, the gods go to Brahmā seeking his advice. Brahmā advises them to go to Ṛṣi Dadhīci and suggests making a request to Ṛṣi Dadhīci to grant them his bones to kill *VṚrāsura*. The gods go to Ṛṣi Dadhīci and beg for his bones. Ṛṣi Dadhīci says:

What is to the good of all of you will be done by me immediately, i.e. I shall give up my body voluntarily (III.100.21).

And then Ṛṣi Dadhīci renounces his life. In this way, the gods are able to kill the demon *VṚrāsura*. The same story is reproduced briefly in the “Śānti-Parva” due to its universal message.

Another example of *sādhāraṇa-dharma* is the direct message given by VedVyāsa to the Pāṇḍavas, when he visits them in the forest and feels compassionate on seeing them looking thin, living on fruits and roots. He says to Yudhisthira that fortune and misfortune comes to all. Fortune does not last forever that is why the wise behave equal at all times, whether in fortune or misfortune. It is best for man to enjoy good fortune when it comes and endure misfortune when that comes. He suggests the observance of *tapas* i.e. austerity and following truth, gentleness, not getting angry, charity, restraint, forgiveness, never being sad at another's good fortune, non-violence, purity and keeping the sense-organs under control. The wicked and foolish do not respect these qualities and do not attain happiness. Therefore, one should strive to perfect oneself in this world through self-discipline.

The story of a butcher and a brāhmin (*Vyādha-Gītā*) narrated by Ṛṣi Mārkaṇḍeya in the “Vana-Parva” also elaborates the *sādhāraṇa-dharma*. In the story, the butcher teaches the brāhmin the universal dharma. It represents a dialogic conversation between a brāhmin and a housewife and then a brāhmin and a butcher. The Vyādha's dialogues with the brāhmin presents the universal message of doing good to all. It is also prescribed that if one is doing good to his family and kith and kin, then in a way, he is also profiting the society. The story goes like this. A brāhmin while performing his ‘yogic-kriyā’ feels disturbed due to dirt dropped by a bird on his head. He looks at the bird with anger and the bird falls down dead. This fills the brāhmin with arrogance. With this feeling, he goes to a house, begging for alms. The housewife who is nursing her sick husband, requests him to wait. The brāhmin expresses anger at which the housewife says that she is not the bird. The brāhmin feels shocked and amazed. So he asks her how she knows about the bird. The housewife concludes with some words of advice to the brāhmin and

says that although he has studied the Vedas, he has not understood the essence of dharma. She describes the virtues of *sādhāraṇa-dharma* by focusing on the harms of anger. She says:

The gods know him for a Brahmana who always speaketh the truth here, who always gratifieth his preceptor, and who, though injured himself, never returneth the injury. The gods know him for a Brahmana who hath his senses under control, who is virtuous and pure and devoted to the study of the Vedas, and who hath mastery over anger and lust.(Citation)

Now realizing the power of the housewife, he requests her to teach him dharma. She sends him to the *dharmavyādha* (righteous butcher) in Mithilā. The brāhmin goes to Mithilā and meets the butcher who is selling meat. The butcher welcomes the brāhmin, giving him the reference to the housewife. The brāhmin is again amazed to hear the reference to the housewife who has sent him to the butcher. The brāhmin asks the butcher why after having acquired so much knowledge about dharma, he still sells the meat. The butcher replies:

O learned brāhmin, my family has been engaged in this occupation (of selling meat) since many generations, so I have felt that this work is suitable for me too, and is not contrary to dharma. Please do not think that I am doing anything improper. [...] O kind hearted soul, I only sell the meat of those animals which have been killed by others, i.e. I myself do not kill any animal. Furthermore, I do not eat meat. (citation)

After hearing such truthful and witty talk from a butcher, the brāhmin asks the butcher to teach him the right conduct. The butcher says that the right conduct is achieved in two ways—

- i. Keeping under control the vices (the most harmful vices being selfishness, anger vanity, greed and crookedness), and

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- ii. Promoting virtues (the most helpful virtues being those that hold the society together).

The butcher says that the said practice is necessary even after attaining the state of perfection. He adds:

AhiṚ sā (non-violence) and Satya (truth) are the two main pillars of dharma through which the highest good of all can be achieved. In fact, a decision on what is true (under difficult circumstances) should be made by sticking to that course of action which leads to the highest good of beings. (citation)

The butcher explains the *ahimsā* and says that one should have compassion towards all beings and one's conduct should be lawful and just. Moreover, the essence of dharma is the desire to do good to all. Above all, it is the service to one's parents, which the brahmin has neglected. The butcher tells him that he should take care of his parents who have become blind. He advises him to go back to his home and serve them. Thereafter he should study the Vedas. He finally tells him to have purity of heart and gratefulness which are necessary for acquiring the ability to distinguish between dharma and adharma. The dialogue between Yakṣa and Yudhisthira occurs in "Vana-Parva" when the brothers of Yudhisthira are lying unconscious because they have disobeyed Yakṣa and drunk water from the lake. Nakula ignores the warning and drinks water. The rest of the brothers of Yudhisthira do the same. Yakṣa asks many questions to Yudhisthira. Yudhisthira answers the questions by explaining the virtues leading to highest dharma.

Here Yudhisthira explains and upholds the universal virtues i.e. charity, skill in action, truth, good conduct, sharing, even-mindedness, compassion, contentment and absence of cruelty as the highest dharma. He concludes by saying:

It is by the (study of the) Srutisthat a person becometh learned; it

is by ascetic austerities that one acquireth what is very great...by serving the old that one becometh wise. The best of all laudable things is skill; the best of all possessions is knowledge: the best of all gains is health: and contentment is the best of all kinds of happiness. (citation)

Yudhisthira's preference that his step-brother remains alive rather than his own brothers pleases Yakṣa, and as a result all his brothers are granted life again. This is an instance of this dharma.

In "Udyoga-Parva", Ṛṣi Sanat-Sujāta upholds this message in a different way. The teachings of Ṛṣi Sanat-Sujāta highlight three characteristics of *sādhāraṇa-dharma*:

- i) Knowledge should not be confined to the words only; it should be the part of one's conduct (V.43.52).
- ii) Spiritual perfection can be attained by self-discipline (dama) and seeking the good of all (hitaṚ) (V.46.20).
- iii) To avoid nṛṣaṚ sa i.e. cruel behaviour (V.43.15)

To conclude, the tales narrated by the different narrators and the conversations of the characters of the *Mahābhārata* are the expositions of *sādhāraṇa-dharma* where one needs to understand the worth of others, considering them as one's own self. One has to obtain virtues and adopt a virtuous code of conduct that may help enhance the sustainability of society. Here the *sādhāraṇa-dharma* has been explained as propriety of action sanctioned not only for the survival of an individual, rather for the welfare of all human beings i.e. *loksamgraha* (welfare of all). The key points that *sādhāraṇa-dharma* discusses are *avibhaktam-vibhakteṣu* (all are one), *praspara-bhāva* (an attitude of mutual co-operation), *praspara-prītī* (to love one another), *mat-karma* (dedicate all acts to God), *sattva-guna* (good values), *sarvabhūtahitam* (doing good to all human

beings), *yathā-śaktidāna* (charity according to capacity), *nirmamo nirahamkāraṣ* (going beyond egotism), *samadṛṣṭi* (even-minded vision) and five *daivī-sampat* —*ahiṛsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *abhaya* (fearlessness), *ānṛśanīya* (absence of cruelty), *adroha* (absence of ill-will). Here it is noteworthy that the common denominator is the approach i.e. performing acts for *loksaṛgraha*, in accordance with the situation i.e. concerning the place, person and time.

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