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# Non-Canonical English Poetry

Quazi Mostain Billah\*

## Abstract

*In this paper I have looked into Non-Canonical English poetry for two purposes: first, to introduce it briefly and secondly, to discuss what possible interests it may hold for us. The poems I have considered here come from the hands of the British expatriates in India during the colonial days. The British, the colonial masters of India for close to two centuries, not only gave us rulers but also some poets, though they are not commonly studied. No one among them was crowned as a major English poet. I myself did not know much about their work until I came across two anthologies titled British Life in India (Edited by R.V. Vernede, Oxford University Press, 1995) and Calcutta: Through British Eyes 1690-1990 (Edited by Laura Sykes, Oxford University Press, 1992). The two anthologies, in addition to a substantial body of prose pieces, contain a good number of poems, penned by British expatriate poets living in India. However, these poems have never found any place in the English syllabi of the English departments of our universities. Neither can they be found in canonical anthologies like The Golden Treasury or Norton English Literature or Oxford Book of English Verse. Considering the general indifference of academics and editors to such poetry, I think it can justifiably be called Non-canonical poetry.*

The poems in Vernede anthology outnumber the ones in Sykes collection. However, a common thread runs through both the anthologies. Pieces include in both works have been grouped under different subjects. While Vernede has organized his chosen materials under as many as nine topics like the people, station, social setting and climate, servants, sports, epigrams etc., birds insects, animals, translations, some portraits and nostalgia, Skyes has raised the number of subjects even further. To group her materials she has chosen as many as seventeen topics. The Vernede anthology covers two hundred years extending from 1750 to 1950 of British Indian life; the Sykes anthology straddles over three hundred years from 1690 to 1990. One could argue that she widened her time span to begin historically at the beginning of the arrival of the British in India and end with the termination of that rule. But what are these poems about?

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In the Vernede Anthology there are poems on each of the nine topics, but the Sykes volume, restricted to sketching a portrait of Calcutta, doesn't have poems on all the seventeen topics itemized in the work. As my first object here is to introduce the Non-canonical English poetry, I will quote from a few poems that I think represent best the spirit of the Non-canonized British expatriate poets. Though Vernede and Sykes have divided the poems into numerous groups, I have grouped them differently for the convenience of my discussion. I think that in view of subject matter and spirit of the poets the poems can also be divided into two groups—poems on the Indians and poems on the British living in India. Principally, the poets included in the two works, either looked outside or within themselves for materials of their poetry, and the poems can be divided on the basis of the choice of subjects. When the poets look outside, they give the readers their vision of Indian life – its manners and morals and flora and fauna, but the poems that deal with the inner life of the poets create for the readers a picture of their own life. The poems belonging to the second category are smaller in number.

The first group of poems helps us to see the Indian life through the British eyes and the dominant poetic inspiration extends from genial amusement to sardonic laughter. To the British poets, Indian life appears strange, comic and often ridiculous. One could argue that love of laughter dominated the poetic inspiration of the British Indian poets when they gazed at Indian life. The poem called 'Vale atque Ave' by Bhusa is an example of how critically the British poets viewed the Indians. The theme of the poem is hypocrisy of the Indians. A farewell is being given to a British Deputy Commissioner who is lionized as the source of their well being:

The welfare of the District was entirely due to him;  
his loss was at par with the amputation of a limb. (Vernede 17)

But the praise, the poet feels, is reduced into a mockery for lack of true emotion and feeling. In the concluding lines the poet notes:

So he was gone—their Cherisher and Friend and Wrong-redresser-  
and a similar *tamasha* was arranged for his successor. (Vernede 17)

Bidding farewell is an emotional event, but here it is a dry ceremony and an occasion to mince sweet but hollow words and phrases. Lavish praise is being heaped on the departing Deputy Commissioner and dark suggestion is that his successor will also be welcomed with identical platitudes. Want of true feelings reduces the entire farewell ceremony into a display of hypocrisy, a *tamasha* or a joke.

Indeed, *tamasha* is characteristic of British expatriate poets' attitude to India and Indian life. Either the Indians become object of *tamasha* or the poets approach their subjects in a spirit of *tamasha* or ridicule. However, *tamasha* needs to be distinguished from humour. Whereas humour allows certain degree

of tolerance of nonsense, *tamasha* has no compassion for the absurdities in its target. With the sharp scalpel of a bitter satirist the *tamasha*-loving poet exposes the weakness of his chosen subjects. The poems found in the two anthologies deal mainly with the life of common people who had to come in contact with the British masters either because they were involved in some kind of administrative tangle or were serving them as *chaprassis* or *khidmatgars* i.e. domestic servants.

Legal fights were characteristics of Indian life during the colonial days. Either people fought legal battles to settle disputes over land or went to court often to fight over trivial issues. Criminal cases were not uncommon. The Indians' love for litigation is possibly the reason for a large number of poems on legal matters. But how did the Indians conduct themselves in the court? The British expatriate poets brand their behavior as thoroughly corrupt and unreliable and find it reprehensible. What these poets found most objectionable was the practice of giving false testimony. In a poem called 'The Day's Work', Nago, Motu, Laxman, Rama and Ragozi, five Indian commoners, all seem to have played tricks with the legal machinery, but do not show any remorse for their misdemeanor. On the contrary, at the end of the day after transacting their legal deal, they are found enjoying each other's company in the peaceful shade of a tree, though a conflict of interest divided them into warring sides earlier in the day:

And Ragozi had impounded  
a couple of Rama's cows,  
diving them off from where they stood  
in front of Rama's house.  
But now in the hush  
when day's distraction cease,  
they sat beneath the papal-tree,  
smoking the pipe of peace. (Vernede 62)

The day is nearing its end and to the surprise of the poet the plaintiff and defendant, sitting together share a smoke. The moral shock is revolting for the poet. Giving false evidence was also a common practice and false witnesses often duped judges in the lower courts. With shame and embarrassment they often had to stomach reversal of their sentences by higher courts. Witnesses and evidences approved by them often proved false and the judges to their mortification discover that they had failed to sift the true from the false. In the poem 'Heresy on High' Vernede writes:

His judgment had been over-ruled  
because the man he'd tried  
been condemned on evidence  
of witness who'd lied. (Vernede 64)



In all the poems centering on legal matters the poets find the Indians untrustworthy and often they are portrayed as culpable forces trying to subvert the course of justice. The judges are warned against possible deception at every step by their Indian subjects. In general, it is not uncommon for people to stoop to wiles and guile when they are engaged in tussles to assert their positions or protect their rights. But in every legal battle as there are people acting from pernicious motives, so also there are people who champion the truth. The British poets never mentioned Indian honesty as they were too keen on portraying them as mischief-makers.

But what with people who didn't have anything at stake, and had accepted domestic work as loyal servants under the British masters? Did they endear themselves to their masters? They didn't enjoy their masters' respect either. In the eyes of the poets an aura of inscrutability hung around their figures and the masters didn't refrain from laughing at them and their vanities, though their service was indispensable for them. In the poem "Khitmatgar", the *khitmatgar* stands as a symbol of mystery:

Therefore, O white-robed khitmatgar  
clean, silent, self-contained, quick-seeing'  
I often wonder what you are-  
inscrutable and sphinx-like being? (Vernede 132)

No spiritual depth makes him mysterious; rather, his dress and pose make him unrecognizable and incomprehensible. Inscrutability, a mark of his impenetrable 'otherness', makes him a suspect.

The *chaprassi* doesn't fare any better. The master doesn't understand his tricks, but sees how he uses his employer's authority to inflate his social ego among his fellow villagers:

Chaprassi, peon we call him knave  
too often, yet a useful slave,  
whose tricks we never see;  
to simple villagers a lord,  
whose word unlocks the village hoard  
of milk and flour and ghee. (Vernede 133)

In the poems of the anthologies I didn't find a single Indian figure that received the admiration or sympathy of British poets. It looks as if they are obsessed with the ugliness of Indian life.

Now let us look at some poems focusing on Indian landscape. The Indian sights and sounds didn't gratify the British taste either. The sounds in general repelled them. The weather, specifically, the heat was intolerable and one comes

across detailed accounts of the trials of Indian summer and the suffering it thrust on the British and how they yearned to escape into the cool hills during the summer. The Indian flora and fauna do not appeal to the British sense. However, game birds or hunting expeditions stirred a lusty appetite in the British mind.

In a poem called the “Calcutta in the Rains” the poet notes:

Where insects settle on your meat,  
where scorpions crawl beneath your feet,  
and deadly snakes infest;  
mosquitoes’ ceaseless teasing sound  
and jackals direful howl confound  
destroy our balmy rest. (Vernede 90)

In another poem called “Noises at Night” the poet complains:

Nor is this all, for troops of mice and rats  
Squeak out a shrill concert to the cats,  
Bothering me more beneath the shades of night  
Than fifty Box *wallahs* by morning light. (Sykes 136)

It appears rather strange that not a single poem in either anthology recounts the fragrance or charm of local flowers or landscape. The poets possibly never unwound their British taste and in general disregarded the possible beauty and charm of the Indian flora and fauna.

How did the British expatriate poets regard the fellow British? They also provided targets for criticism. For example, the doctors cut sorry figures in their eyes. Roger O’ Ticklem in his poem “Doctors” writes: “Some doctors in India would make Plato smile.” The smile is derived from the grotesque methods of treatment and diagnosis practiced by the doctors. The feeling was that a visit to the apothecary would only hasten one’s journey to the next world. The social life of the *sahibs* is also viewed cynically. The British women formed a special class of their own known as the *memsahibs* who were objects of awe and ridicule. The mingling between the British and the Indians was not viewed positively. In a poem recording the event of an Indian woman giving birth to a child by her white master, the reaction is shame and envy.

That Qui Hi’s creature, it is said,  
The other day was brought to bed.’  
‘Oh Heaven!’ exclaimed Miss Indigo  
‘And could he then have used me so? (Sykes 96)

Now, let us look at the poems where the poets look within themselves to record their feelings and emotions. As I pointed out earlier, there are not too many poems dealing

with the inner life of the British. For example, the British were in exile in India. Exile usually stirs deep questions about self, identity, belonging, etc. But the theme of exile barely received any attention from the British Indian poets. There are a few poems that deal with their general unhappiness for choosing India to come to. Let's consider two examples. In an 1820 poem titled "Fool's Gold" by an anonymous poet the speaker laments his decision of coming to India. The speaker moans :

Now, sad rivers! the rich delusion flies,  
Hose, park and carriage vanish from my eyes!  
Condemned, alas, twelve years to burn'  
Nor dare the vast expenses of return,  
When all the savings of attentive care  
Would scarcely buy a cabin of eight feet square. (Sykes146)

In another poem called "An Army Cadet's Lament", the speaker narrates how difficult it has been for him to survive in India on the meager ninety-five pounds he makes :

Oh ! had I chose the better way , and stayed at home to thrive,  
I had not known what 'tis to live on scanty ninety-five. (Sykes147)

However, the general feeling was that life in India was debilitating for the British. It affected their health, manners and morals. The general sentiment is voiced in the poem "The Mark of the East" which relates the effect India had on its British residents. When Gertrude, the sweet British angelic girl returns home after living in India she is woefully transformed:

When Gertrude comes from India,  
the schemes I lately planned,  
they fade and die, and that is why  
I loathe that selfish land,  
that drains the West of all its best  
to keep an atlas red;... (Sykes 30)

To the British expatriate poets, India was a 'selfish land' and took away the 'best' from the British. They condemn India, but also refrain from alluding to the anguish that must have burnt the heart of an exile. Were they rather shy of demonstrating their feelings publicly? The achievement of the poets does not measure well against other Indian English writings when it comes to dealing with issues that touch feelings and emotions. One could accuse them of not being open enough. For example, what Macaulay wrote on 'Homesickness' excels in depth and feeling anything that the poets had left behind on similar theme. Recording his ardent desire to return home, Macaulay wrote: "I have no words to tell how I pine for England, or how intensely bitter exile has been to me, though I have borne it well. I feel as if I have no other wish than to see my country again and

die” (Sykes 136). He is no poet, but the anguish he captures expresses the agony of an exile better than what the poets said about it. Why did it happen like this? A possible answer can be found in the introductory note in the Vernede anthology. To explain why the British women living in India did not write much, Vernede suggests: “They were not well educated, at least in skill associated with Latin and Greek and English verse, and there was still a very Victorian tradition that women should content themselves with writing letters, diaries and perhaps some romantic poetry” (Vernede 23). He argues that “a very large proportion of the items in this anthology are devoted to ridicule and satire” (Vernede 23) which didn’t inspire female creativity. The British women may be congratulated for their circumspection in deprecating the Indians through poetic endeavours of ‘ridicule and satire’ as the achievement of their male counterparts is not quite laudable.

Vernede doesn’t see that what he considers strength is actually a cause of weakness, too. He could have also mentioned that overindulgence in “ridicule and satire” denied the British male poets a depth of vision that would have enabled them to write mature poetry, poetry that would appeal both to head and heart. Poetry, to them was basically an exercise that harnessed words to produce jingling lines, often couplets, to laugh at the follies of their targets. At least in the whole pantheon of British expatriate poets we don’t come across any Keats or Shelley or Tennyson or Browning even in the making.

Now, let’s turn to the question of what possible interests this kind of poetry may hold for us. Do we need to take these poets seriously? Is the interest in them only historical? If we think of forming our own literary canon, should we include them in our curriculum?

First, let’s look at the question of canon formation. M.H. Abrams has defined literary canon in the following words:

In recent decades the phrase literary canon has come to designate- in world literature, or European literature, but most frequently in a national literature—those authors, who by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars and teachers, have come widely recognized as “major”, and to have works often hailed as classics. (Abrams 19-20)

Scholars with conservative taste and principle emphasize the value of literary canon in shaping culture. For example, Harold Bloom kicked off fresh controversy about canon formation when he brought out his book on western literary canon. Many figures respected in other areas were not accommodated in Bloom’s version of the canon. The advent of literary theory has introduced new debates in the question of canon formation, which is “complex and disputed” and “involves, among other things, the wide concurrence of critics, scholars, and authors with diverse viewpoints and sensibilities...” (Abrams 20).

Certainly our viewpoints and sensibilities are different from the English and we read English literature with the interest that does not coincide entirely with the spirit that an English man or woman brings to it. After all, it's not our literature. In recent years, more and more interest is being taken in English literature produced by non-native writers of English. Subjects of local interest create more appeal to us, at least to readers like me. A Dickens or a Hardy will continue to interest us, but an Anita Desai or Amitav Ghosh deals with things that I can relate to. But that does not mean that their appeal is only topical. They have produced works of enduring interest. But the works of British expatriate poets cited in the volumes considered here do not make literature that has enduring value.

Other than producing rhymed lines of jingling versus, the British expatriate poets cannot claim much achievement. Searching through the entire corpus of poems in the two volumes under consideration here one hardly comes across a metaphor or a simile or an image that stands out by virtue of its poetic originality or freshness or aesthetic excellence. The times covered in the two anthologies spread over the period when English poetry experienced several major movements like Romantic, Victorian or Modernism. The British expatriate poets stuck to the worn-out practice of turning rhymed lines to create laughter and ridicule. No interest in experimentation or innovation can be found in their poetry. Obviously, the British had exported administrators, not poets. One may come across some wit and fun in the expatriate poets, but I didn't find any work that touched the heart or intellect.

Therefore, it would not be possible to give them a place in the canon if we want to form one separate from the English literary canon. After all, they do not make what we call good poetry. But they may hold other interest for us. But before I take up that point I should mention another matter. There are some pieces that were composed with a poetic aim in view. For example, there are some Indian tales that were rendered into English and some English nursery rhymes that were translated into Hindi. One such tale called 'The Orderly's Tale: The Counter of Bubbles' recounts the story how a pauper climbed to prosperity by manipulating his official position and the power during King Akber's time. Again in telling the tale the poet targets the Indians as material for laughter. The wily Indian figures prominently in the tale.

However, the translated nursery rhymes bear instances of experimentation, especially in the choice of words. The well known Humpty Dumpty rhyme in Hindi translation from an expatriate poet stands as follows: "Hamti Damti chargaya chat; / Hamti Damti girgya phat, / Raja ka paltan, Rani ke ghore / Hamti Damti khobe na jore" (Verne 214). The rhyming of *chat* with *phat* is noteworthy. The choice of the word *phat* which means sudden end, indicates the prospect of the creation of a new vocabulary in dealing with Indian life. One comes across words like *phat* and many indigenous words in recent non-native authors writing about India in English. They have given a new flexibility to

English language, which is missing in the expatriate poets. May be they were too keen in preserving the purity of the English tongue. Though an opportunity to mix east with west linguistically was created, the expatriate poets chose to ignore it. Even the prospect of a bold experiment did never stir them. The word *tamasha* I mentioned before was used to deprecate the Indians; no spirit of experimentation characterizes its choice.

Now, we can consider the other possible interests this poetry may have for us. Obviously, the first one is historical. These poems make up a different map of English poetry. We come to learn that some of British expatriates in India also wrote poems though they are light in nature. But without an awareness of their existence, I think our knowledge of English poetry remains incomplete. We remain mere followers of the English literary canon if we deny any place to them in our critical awareness. Secondly, the knowledge of this poetry will help us to learn how others saw Indians, i.e. that is how they were constructed, rightly or wrongly, by their one-time masters. Thirdly, the poems provide us a picture of the time and culture these poets talk about, though they can be accused of drawing only skewed portraits of the Indians.

The most interesting feature of the Non-canonical poetry is that it reveals the colonial spirit at its purest. Colonialism breeds a kind of self-righteousness and encourages the assumption of inordinate moral superiority among the masters over their subjects. Perched at an assumed moral and political height and hugely fed by their ego of being above the subject race, the masters gleefully take to denigrating the subject race. The spirit of British expatriate poets epitomizes the colonial judgmental spirit. The legal poems can be seen as illustration of their deep cynicism about the Indians. In their poems the worst side of the Indian behavior is brought out. The Indians are condemned for their cunning nature but there isn't a single poet who tries to probe into the question why the Indians did what they did.

Hypothetically speaking, the Indians possibly resorted to playing tricks with the law because there was a gap between their language and of the masters'. I do not want to claim that the Indian honesty was spectacular and they were above all moral scruples. But that they could have failed to understand the language and took to unfair means to secure their interest is never considered. The poets never try to come to the level of understanding others – the other side of the story. I think this unwillingness to understand the subject race or the country itself denied them the scope to cultivate any spirit of compassion for their Indian subjects and consequently they kept on churning verses that only aimed at amusement through “ridicule and satire”. They were drawn by the dirt and muck of Indian life because that is all they wanted to see; its beauty or glory or resistance never inspired them. However, a question becomes unavoidable here. In spite of the limitation of this poetry, doesn't an ignorance of it make our knowledge of English poetry partial?

I have argued that the dominant spirit of the British expatriate poets was to belittle India and Indian life. But there are some exceptions where the mood and tone are different and a spirit of love is revealed. For example; Vernede in a poem written in 1950 concludes his piece saying:

Though oceans divide us and memories fade;  
I still see your mountains in glory arrayed;  
though Time that old robber has torn us apart,  
your magic, Gurhwal, is secure-in my heart. (Vernede 259)

But this poem was written in 1950, three years after the end of colonial rule in India. The old relationship between the ruler and the ruled had changed. Moreover, there are not many poems of this kind from the British expatriate poets. Finally, the nostalgia is genuine, but the poem does not rise much above the ordinary as a work of art.

True, the British Indian landscape of poetry does not record any prodigy like a Shelley or a Keats, but it produced poets like Kipling, who is an arch embodiment of the colonial spirit. He is safely placed in the English canon and therefore, remains outside my consideration here as I have chosen to discuss only non-canonical English poetry produced by the British expatriate poets.

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# Keats's "To Autumn": Links between Forms and Meaning

Sujit K. Dutta PhD\*

## Abstract

*A poet makes effective use of patterns of language available on various levels, such as lexis, syntax, imagery, rhyme and meter which interact with each other to help convey and reinforce the meaning in a text. An analysis of the language the poet uses, therefore, not only shows how meanings are encoded in the discourse world of the poem but also helps us understand the poem better. The present article attempts to show, through an analysis of formal features, how converging linguistic and rhetorical patternings used in the text contribute to develop the theme of change and transience in John Keats's last major lyric "To Autumn".*

We read to understand and understanding is what enables us to provide interpretation which, it is said, "is the key to reading literature" (McRae and Vethamani: 1999: xii). But understanding is not an 'all or nothing' process. In performing the act of reading, we try to comprehend what the writer has tried to convey through the words on the page. Whatever we make out of our reading, we cannot claim to have exhausted all the meanings. Reading, therefore, may be said to be a struggle at understanding. In other words, we can say that it is a psychological 'guessing game'. But the question one might ask is, "is the guessing arbitrary?" The answer is emphatically 'no'. Far from being random or whimsical, the guessing is highly disciplined as it is often conditioned by our socio-cultural background, our general world knowledge, as well as our emotional and intellectual make-ups.

A literary text, which is 'meaning potential' and made up of several layers of meanings, appeals to different readers in different ways. Viewed from this perspective, a text looks like a fathomless ocean in which every explorer, depending on their objectives, discovers a fresh stock of resources. As readers, we "understand a text differently according to what we bring to it; we cannot assume that it has a single, invariant meaning for all readers" (Black:2006:2). Emphasizing the role of the 'readerly experience', McRae and Vethamani (1999) argue that what the reader brings "to the text is every bit as important as what the author brings to the text: the author depends on the reader to *make* the text come to life" (xii). Readers' responses to a given text, therefore, are very likely to differ depending on their viewpoints as

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the “respective belief worlds of readers affect the way the discourse world is constituted” (Stockwell:2002:148). However, one important first step towards getting at the primary meaning of a text is to come to grips with its language, i.e., the medium through which meanings are encoded in the discourse.

An author makes effective use of patterns of language available on various levels, such as lexis, syntax, imagery, rhyme and meter which interact with each other to help convey or reinforce the meaning in a literary text. It is therefore important that we read and reread a text until we think we have formed a clear idea of its language. Thorne (1988) has argued that since our special attention to language is often rewarded by extra meanings, we feel encouraged to make an effort in the expectation of a reward.

An approach to the study of literary discourse through the tools of linguistics and poetics, usually called stylistics, is indeed a useful practice as it fosters a genuine reader-text interaction without which any meaningful appreciation of literature seems impossible. “Stylistics is essentially a bridge discipline between linguistics and literature” (Carter:1997:192) and “stylistic analysis which attempts to relate linguistic description to interpretation, is part of the essential core of good criticism, as it constitutes a large part of what is involved, say, in supporting a particular view of a poem or arguing for one interpretation as against another” (Short: 1998: 6).

This essay intends to make a stylistic analysis of “To Autumn” which is usually described as Keats’s “highest achievement” (Abrams:1998: 45), his “most perfect poem” (Bush1957:242), or, his “masterpiece” (Hewlett:1938:273).

#### “To Autumn”

I

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
lose bosom-friend of the maturing sun,  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;  
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
10 Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For summer has o’er-brimmed their clammy cells.

II

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,  
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;  
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
 20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

### III

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too -  
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue:  
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
 30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from the hilly bourn;  
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.<sup>1</sup>

The poem, as Keats's final lyric, has, in fact, called for so much critical attention that anyone attempting to write on it often encounters difficulty in absorbing the existing body of divergent, and at times, conflicting critical pronouncements. To mention only a few, M. R. Ridley (1933) expresses the view that "To Autumn" is "the most serenely flawless poem in our language" (289), and a somewhat similar view is expressed by W. Jackson Bate (1963) when he says that it is "one of the most nearly perfect poems in English" (267). Although modern criticism "now sees the poem as a central text of its period" (Creaser:1988:191), some critics even go to the extent of treating the poem as "a picture or nothing more" (Lowell:1925:338), or dismissing it as a pretty trifle saying that it shows "no intellectual advance" (Chew:1950:1250).

Critical utterances such as the above ones, being mostly subjective in nature, are usually arrived at intuitively by critics on the basis of their immediate emotional and intellectual reaction to the poetic discourse and more often than not, they remain unsupported by verifiable linguistic and formal features. It is at this point that we feel the necessity of stylistic analysis which, according to Stanley Fish (1973:58) "purports to substitute precise and rigorous scientific description for the appreciative raptures and intuitive perceptions of literary scholars."

"To Autumn", as the title suggests, is a poem about season. The overall context of the poem's discourse is that of an addresser who describes the functions, sights and sounds of autumn as he finds and hears them. The poem thus deals with a single topic and each of its three sections contemplates on one dominant aspect of the season which may be outlined as follows:

the first section expresses the process of fruition and ripeness; the second section locates autumn on earth in different human embodiments; and the final section concentrates on the music of autumn.

Written at a time when Keats “was possessed by a premonition, little short of conviction, that he had himself less than two years to live” (Abrams:1998:52), we find a reflection of Keats’s awareness of impending death in the poem in which, as Unger (1956: 36) has said, “the latent theme of transitoriness and mortality is symbolically dramatized by the passing course of the day”. The present article tries to show, by an analysis, how converging linguistic and rhetorical patternings used in the text contribute to develop the theme of transience and mortality. Such an exercise not only leads us to a deeper understanding of the poem but also helps us to support or refute an interpretation or at least part of the interpretation by establishing a form-meaning link. The analysis of the text here will be restricted to those formal features which, for some reason or other, are considered to be stylistically important.

The poem begins with an apostrophe in which the addresser describes autumn as a *Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness*. The addresser’s choice of the abstract word *fruitfulness* instead of the more usual and concrete ‘fruit’ or ‘fruits’, is said to be foregrounded here as it tends to instill the state of fruition into the very existence of the autumnal environment. Thus, the two things—autumnal nature and fruitfulness are so inseparably blended together that one is unthinkable without the other. The idea of fruitfulness is further supported by the cluster of Noun Phrases used to describe autumn. The structure of the Noun Phrases are shown below (where D stands for all the words including articles, quantifiers, adjectives) that appear before the Headword (the main word), and Q stands for all the words (adjectives, prepositional phrases, adverbs and adverbial phrases) that appear after the Headword.

Determiner (D)	Headword (H)	Qualifier (Q)
	Season (1)	of mists and mellow fruitfulness
Close	bosom-friend (2)	of the maturing sun
the	Vines (4)	that round thehatch-eves run
the mossed	cottage-trees (5)	
all	fruit (6)	
the	gourd (7)	
the hazel	shells (7)	
later	flowers (9)	
	they (10)	
warm	days (10)	
	Summer (11)	
their clammy	cells (11)	

FIGURE 1. STRUCTURE OF THE NOUN PHRASES OF SECTION 1

Of the 12 Noun Phrases used in this section, only two *they* (10) and *summer* (11) are 'generic' in their structure having no determiner or qualifier, while all the remaining are 'lexicalized' terms with either determiner or qualifier or both. The preponderance of lexicalized Noun Phrases suggests a descriptive richness which characterizes the 'fruitfulness' of autumn. The Noun Phrases with modifiers and/or qualifiers, like *Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness* (1), *close bosom-friend of the maturing sun* (2), *the vines that round the thatch-eves run* (4), and *the mossed cottage-trees* (5) together create a lexical field that signifies a common scene in a countryside orchard during autumn. Moreover, the addresser's frequent use of the definite article "the" in *the vines, the thatch-eves, the mossed cottage-trees, the gourd, the hazel shells, the bees* tends to present a familiar world and draws the reader's attention to a mutually known and shared context of autumnal environment.

What appears to be more striking in the opening section is its unusual syntactic pattern. The whole stanza is just one extended sentence elaborated with a number of subordinate clauses. It is, however, the lack of a principal verb which deprives the structure of the status of a "prototypically actualized sentence" (Stockwell:2002:62). Although, in this section, there are four finite verbs—*run* (4), *think* (10), *will never cease* (10), and *has over-brimmed* (11), all of them operate at the level of the subordinate clauses. The lack of the principal verb is a violation of consistent syntactic rule and hence is said to be stylistically deviant. The absence of the main verb, is, however, substituted by the *-ing* form *Conspiring* (3) without any auxiliary, a more regular form of which would be 'is conspiring' or 'has been conspiring'. The union of autumn and the *maturing sun* presents a metaphor of sexual recognition establishing autumn as a reproductive agent. The analogy here is that as the sexual act causes the enlarging of the womb with the fetus, so the union of autumn and the sun causes the swelling of the fruit with the kernel. But what is the addresser's attitude to this union? The answer is suggested by the verb he uses to describe the function of the union. Since the purpose of the union, as the addresser states, is to *load and bless*, we are led to form the impression that his attitude to the union is positive because the *load-ing* is not to be regarded as a burden but as a blessing. Moreover, it is also evident from what we say *she has been blessed with a child* when a lady gives birth to a child. Thus, the conspiring of autumn and the sun, as Creaser (1988) puts it, "is no conspiracy, but an intimate sharing of breath for the benefit of man (199).

The verb *conspire* involves the presence of two agents, autumn and the *maturing sun* whose union may be looked upon as an ethereal phenomenon taking place beyond human control. It is from this union that all other activities mentioned in this section emerge. The activities that the *-ing* form causes to happen are all expressed in the parallel structure of "how to + a series of operative verbs". Thus the verb phrases *to load and bless, to bend, (to) fill, to swell, (to) plump, to set budding*—present a catalogue of activities, not caused by human efforts but taking place according to the law of nature.

In the parallel structure each clause receives equal weight and each piece of information claims equal consideration. Moving from one image to another as in a kaleidoscope, we realize that what the addresser achieves by this parallelism is not a linearity but a simultaneity of impressions because the images are presented “as parts not so much of a continuum of successive impressions as one complex manifold of simultaneous impressions” (Barrell:1972:129). The simultaneity of the images presented leads us to hold that the addresser is concerned not so much with the images themselves, as he is with the reproductive process which causes autumnal activities to happen. Although the verbs the addresser has used are ‘dynamic’, they suggest a prolonged and on-going process of natural growth and transformation, a sort of ‘automaticity’.

The idea of the continuity and on-going process established by the choice of verbs is further reinforced by syntactic peculiarities. The participial adjective *maturing*, (which is formed from verb), and the verbal *conspiring*, with their present participial form, place the reader in a world characterized by a state of flux which “conveys a feeling of things continuing endlessly, or, at least, without any clear end” (Carter:1997:195). Thus the opening section presents before us a rich vegetative world where things grow and change following a slow and steady natural process. Referring to the slow process of change in the poem, Creaser (1978) states that

the time is almost annulled, the lack of a main verb deprives  
the verse of syntactic impetus, and we are allured into  
lingering on detail after detail. (198)

Another key structural feature that supports the slow natural process of growth and transformation is the transitivity of the verb cluster. All the verbs used in the parallel structure are transitive and they present a ‘container-content image schema’ expressed in the structural pattern “to+verb+with+Noun/Noun Phrase”, which parallels the process of filling something (container) with something (content). In this schema the object of each verb serves as a container of autumn’s achievement. Thus, the *loading* and *blessing* of the vines with fruit, *bending* of the trees with apples, *filling* of the fruit with ripeness, *swelling* of the gourd with flesh, and *plumping* of the hazel shells with kernel refer to the process of the container’s filling in with the content, which may be viewed as a natural process of attaining heaviness, as suggested by the verbs *load and bless*, but not as a burdened state of being heavy with an imposed load of weight.

But the question that may be raised here is “does the process refer to an endless state of growth? Or, how long will the process continue? It is certain that the process cannot go on for ever. The state of growth is never an unending process and it must come to an end, sooner or later. So all the on-going activities—*loading and blessing, bending, filling, swelling and plumping* will

continue as long as the vessels have space to accommodate substance; once the vessels are filled in, the growth will stop and the transformation will take place. This is clear from the last verb phrase in this section *has ov'r-brimmed*, which with its perfective structure stands as a binary to the infinitive verb cluster signaling a shift in the on-going process of growth. The *clammy cells* of the bees, which *Summer has ov'r-brimmed*, have no space left for holding any more content; they are not full to the brim, they are now over-full as they have already exhausted their containing capacity. The perfective structure refers to the perfective time of Summer which is over. Although what the bees think *warm days will never cease*, strikes a note of contrast to the idea of growth and change already established by the earlier lines, it, being the reverse of truth, only emphasizes the futility of such erroneous assumption. The implication here is that as summer has disappeared after overbrimming the clammy cells, so autumn, too, after filling the fruit with ripeness, must go following the steady course of the annual cycle of seasons. Our attention is also drawn to the patterning of sounds which, in conformity with the syntactic structure, further upholds the slow process of growth and transformation. The synaesthetic effect created by the frequency of long vowels in *season, thatch-eves, cottage-trees, sweet, bees, cease*, along with the formation of the couplet in lines 9 and 10, as Sheat (2001) says, "prolongs the stanza's closing cadence" (98).

Having explained how the process of autumnal activities take place in a slow moving time, we now look at the movements in space which autumnal activities involve. Considering the spatial movements in "To Autumn", one can easily discover a journey image schema, an almost usual characteristic of English Romantic Poetry. Even a cursory glance reveals that most poets of the Romantic Revival have used the journey image. For instance, in the course of his journey through the highland way, the speaker of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper" views the highland lass, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is based on the Mariner's experience of his sea-voyage, Shelley's "Ozymandias" is itself a traveler's tale, and Keats uses the journey image in his "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn", and in "To Autumn" the journey image is integrated to the theme of the poem.

The setting of the opening section, as we have observed, is an extended earthly spot—a cottage-garden with trees laden with fruit. But the expression *the maturing sun* at once draws our attention towards the sky above where the conspiracy, an ethereal phenomenon beyond human control and the cause of the fruition in the vegetative world takes place. After the conspiracy, autumn as a reproductive agent, is found to follow a downward movement to the orchard where the trees, plants and creepers are waiting to be loaded with her blessings. Thus we discover a journey image schema in autumn's downward movement from the space to the surface of earth, and with autumn, as Blackstone (1968) points out:

we descend into a lower circle, in which human and vegetable meet in the vines that run round the thatch-eaves; lower still is the circle of the orchard trees; whence we descend to the ripe gourd creeping on the ground; and finally, at the centre of this little cosmos, the clammy cell of the honey bee. (93)

As the poem proceeds from the first strophe to the second, the addresser moves from one state of absorbedness to another, deeper and more intimate. The strophe here begins with a different syntactic device, a rhetorical question and draws our attention away from the process of fruition to the physical presence of autumn, personified in the embodiments of human beings. The rhetorical question *Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?*(12), without the usual interrogative force of a true question, does not aim at eliciting an answer from the addressee. Moreover, in a negative rhetorical question like the present one, the addressee, as we know, choosing to be non-committal, refrains from participating in the discourse and hence provides no reply. Then, what does the addresser gain by using this device? The use of the rhetorical question places the addresser face to face with autumn and also it gives us the impression of a “dialogic” (to use Yachting’s term, Bakhtin:1940) discourse involving two participants, the addresser and *thou*, the addressee, although the latter does not participate in the discourse. Besides calling our attention to the conspicuousness of the point being made, the device indicates the addresser’s deep involvement in the human images of autumn he himself creates with his imagination. He is no more interested in the reproductive role of autumn, he now concentrates on locating autumn in her earthly existence. He is so deeply involved in the images that like “a painter he loses himself in the contemplation of what he is describing” (Jack: 1967:119). As we move on, we discover autumn as personified human figures in several postures and settings enjoying different phases of harvesting activities.

The Noun Phrases in this section present a familiar and uncomplicated list of lexical items. Of the total 10 Noun Phrases, six are pronominal, the predominance of which refers to the fact that the discourse here is the addresser’s vocation to the season he has personified. The other Noun Phrases *thy hook* (17), *the next swath and all its twined flowers* (18), *thy laden head* (20), *the last oozing* (22) are in some way or other, related to autumn, and together, by association of meanings, they present a picture of autumn engaged in different harvesting activities. Of the six verbs in this section, four are verbs of visual perception. The addresser’s choice of verbs—*seen*, *seek*, *find* and *watch* confirms his position as an observer. The high incidence of verbs of visual images are in conformity with the addresser’s purpose of locating and identifying the earthly presence of autumn.

Adverbs or adverbial phrases, as modifiers of verbs, play important roles in determining the semantic implication of verbs by referring to the aspects of actions—*where*, *how* and *when*. Sometimes verbs take no modifier, sometimes they take one, two, or three modifiers. The density of modifiers adds to the

specificity of verbs. Thus, the meaning of a verb in a given context, is determined by *where* the action takes place (the spatial aspect), *how* the action takes place (the manner or procedural aspect) and *when* the action takes place (the temporal aspect). The syntax, like the lexis, is simple characterized by co-ordination. The opening rhetorical question is followed by an extended sentence, strung with a bundle of predominantly co-ordinate clauses joined by *and*, or by *or* which present a comprehensive picture of autumn's world. A number of clauses are heavily loaded with adjuncts of adverbial or prepositional phrases giving elaborate details of the images described. The structural pattern of the second section is shown in Figure 2: [Here, (P) stands for modifier of place, (M) stands for modifier of manner and (T) stands for modifier of time]:

ADJUNCT	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	ADJUNCT
	Who	hath not seen	thee	oft (T)
				amid thy store (P)
Sometimes (T)	whoever	seeks		Abroad (P)
		may find	thee	sitting careless on a granary floor (P)
				thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind (M)
		(may find )	(thee)	Or, on a half-reaped furrow (P)
				sound asleep,/ Drowsed with the fume of poppies (M)
				while thy hook /Spare the next swath and all its twined flowers (T)
(And) sometimes (T)				
like a gleaner (M)	thou	dost keep	thy laden head	Steady (M)
				across a brook (P)
(Or), by a cider press (P)				
With patient look (M)	Thou	watchest	the last ooziings	hours by hours (T)

FIGURE 2. SYNTACTIC PATTERN OF SECTION 2



Syntactically, since the first and the second images share the same subject, verb and the temporal adverb, they can be regarded as the parts of the same structural unit. The last two images, with their respective subject and verb are separate structural units joined by *And* and *or*. What these entire clauses share in common is the adverbial fronting which, as a foregrounded syntactic feature, emphasizes the semantic importance of the place, manner and time of the actions described. While in the first section autumn's tangible presence manifested as a reproductive agent in the process of fruition, in the second, she descends...into this world" (Blackstone: 1968: 94) in the embodiments of human figures. From the compound of the cottage-garden, the setting is now shifted to a much wider horizon. In his search for autumn, the addresser locates autumn on different earthly spots in four separate postures all of which reflect the theme of change and mutability established in the opening section. First, the addresser locates autumn '*amid the store*' on a *granary floor* inside the farm-house; then outside the farm, away in the field on a *half-reaped furrow*, and *across a brook* flowing by the cornfield and finally *by a cider-press* beside the road. The picture we get connecting all these spatial references is that of an extended autumnal landscape stretching from the farm-house through the cornfield traversed by the brook to the cider-press situated near the cottage-garden.

Like the vocational adverbs, the adverbials of manner deserve special attention. The adverbials *sitting careless* (14), *thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind* (15), *sound asleep*, *Drowsed with the fume of poppies* (16, 17), *Steady* (20), *with patient look* (21) describe actions which, just before their completion, have come to a state of temporary suspension. The harvester is relaxing on the granary floor while the winnowing is lifting her hair softly, the reaper has fallen asleep while she is half-way through her reaping, the gleaner is held in the middle of her crossing the brook with the load on her head, and the cider-presser is stationed for hours in her watching of the dripping out of the final drops of juice from the squeezed fruit. The clauses, the addresser uses to describe the autumnal figures, being broken over a line break and extended by lengthy adjuncts packed with adjectives and adverbs, make the reading slow down and run over the edges of the lines and thereby reinforce the lingering nature of the suspended activities and the imprisoned time.

All these activities share in common a listlessness referring to some kind of non-completion; these are activities where animation "remains suspended; the embodiments of Autumn, sit or sleep, carefree or inviolably patient. Even when active like a gleaner, 'she' is arrested in motion, her head kept steady" (Creaser:1978:199). The active autumn of the first section is now characterized by "wise passiveness". Losing her dynamism, she has now become an object "acted upon by the forces she has herself set in motion" and is surrounded "with past-participles which are reduced passives ("soft-lifted", "half-reaped", "draws", "twined", "laden") (Freeman:1978:11). Thus the frozen activities of this section stand in sharp contrast with the dynamic activities of autumn we saw in the first

section. The point here is that as the process of growth has culminated in ripeness, what follows next is the harvesting. So from her pre-harvest stage of growth, autumn in this section has now moved into the whilst- or mid-harvest period.

What do the temporal adverbs suggest? The frequency adverbs *oft* and *sometimes* (used twice, 13 & 19) refer to “iterative actions” which take place more than once or repeatedly (Leech:1971), while the other temporal adverbs *while* and *hours by hours* denote actions which continue for a considerable period of time. Going back to the adverb *oft* in the rhetorical question, we can say that the addresser thinks these are the usual postures of autumn one can find during the harvesting period. Here we are given a vision of autumn, more concrete than that of the first section, caught in a particular state of stasis characterized by a leadenness of mood. The harvester, the reaper, the gleaner, and the cider-presser—all are captured in a frozen moment. The phonaesthetic effect created by the frequent use of long vowel sounds in *seen, seeks, thee, granary, half-reaped, asleep, gleaner, keep, steady, brook, oozings* and the repeated occurrences of diphthongs may be said to reinforce the mood of leadenness established by the lexical and syntactic patternings. As Short (1996) puts it,

Here readers intuitively perceive the relationship between the drawn-out nature of the process described and the high incidence of long sounds as being appropriate. (117)

The process mentioned in this section, however, presents a binary to that of the opening section which filled the fruit with ripeness. Binaries are helpful in understanding the writer’s thought pattern and they often serve as “a vital tool in seeing how a text works” and in “examining the themes and contrasts in any text” (McRae:1988:16). Thus, examining the binary relationship we can say that *Harvesting, reaping, gleaning* and *watching* as human activities follow a process that may come to an end at any point in their course while the natural process of fruition steadily continues without any pause until it reaches its completion. Despite the apparent contradiction, the underlying similarity, however, is that both the processes assert the idea of the fleeting time and mutability. Referring to the drawn-out nature of the process, Unger (1956) states that the images in the second stanza present

the paradoxical qualities of lingering and passing. Hence it is with *patient look* that she...watches the last oozings hours by hours. Oozing or a steady dripping, is, of course, not unfamiliar as a symbol of the passage of the time. (184-5)

The actions which did not “find completion in a finite verb” (Sheats: 2001:97) in the opening section, have now reached their end in the harvest. The fruits which were swelling and plumping in the opening section, have now matured and they are filled with ripeness. As the clammy cell was filled with honey, so the vessel

containing the dripping juice at the cider-press is going to be filled with the last oozings. The containers we come across here are all full; the granary is full of barn, the furrows (reaped or un-reaped) are full of crop, the load on the gleaner's laden head is full of corn. Autumn is very much 'amid her store' which is being preserved for human consumption. Thus the on-going process of growth of the fruit has completed its full circle and the "container-content image" has come to its fulfillment.

While the second stanza begins with a rhetorical question, the third opens with a couple of questions, one immediately followed by the other—*Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they* (23). Let us first try to find out who the questions are asked to. Are they addressed to autumn? Are they addressed to the reader? Or, are they addressed to the addresser himself? As we go through the next line, we get clues to our answer. From the imperative *Think not of them*, we come to know that the questions are addressed to the grammatical subject of the imperative clause the implied 'thou' referring to personified autumn. The questions connote a sense of loss caused by the absence of the songs of spring. As Davenport (1959) puts it, they may be taken to express a "sad longing for what was lovely and is gone" (97). The second question, uttered in quick succession to the first, may be, in a sense, taken to be the answer to the first as it concedes the implication that it is not possible to hear the songs of spring in autumn.

The two questions help us to understand the heightened emotional state of the addresser and the amount of tension mounting in his mind not because of the non-availability of the songs of spring but because of autumn's probable reaction to the idea of this loss. Sensing autumn's reaction, the addresser, in his attempt at consoling her, indulges in an intimate utterance and consequently "any feeling of sad longing is immediately overcome by the contumacious imperative *Think not of them...*" (Rudanko:1997:319). He also tries to convince her that she is no less musical with the emphatic assertion *thou hast thy music too*. In the annual cycle of the seasons, spring being a younger one, appears and disappears much earlier and therefore, one cannot expect to hear the songs of spring in autumn. The addresser looks upon the absence not as a loss but as a natural process, a course of action he already discovered in the fructifying images in the first section. The questions, the consequent tension and the subsequent assurance together tend to give us an impression that the addresser is not distanced from what is being seen, but he views all things in the foreground and gets deeply absorbed in the things and persons he watches. Commenting on the addresser's absorbedness in the images, Ward (1963) argues that the speaker "is completely lost in his images, and the images are presented as meaning simply themselves" (322).

The rest of the final section presents a series of visual images which primarily draw our attention to the music they compose. But what exactly is autumn's music made up of? Autumn's music consists of sounds of insects, beast and mainly birds. In this context it will not be out of place to mention here that birds

appear again and again in English romantic poetry although they are not always mentioned for their songs. Some of the commonly mentioned birds, for example, are the albatross, the nightingale, the cuckoo, the skylark, the curlew, the robin, and the swallow. What are the qualities of autumn's music? Where, how and at what time of the day do they sing? And, how do they compare with the song of the cuckoo in spring and that of the nightingale in summer?

The music of autumn is sung by the small gnats, the *full-grown lambs*, the *hedge-crickets*, the *red-breast* and the *gathering swallows* who, together, represent the entire animal world. Let us now look at the verbs used to denote the different music of autumn. The first music mentioned in the list is the *mourning* of the gnats in *wailful choir* which tends to create an atmosphere of gloom and despair. Since *mourn* denotes lament for the dead, the reader, says Bate (1963) "is free to associate the wailful mourning of the gnats with a funeral dirge for the dying day" (583). The gnats mourn

*While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;*

The time of their mourning, as expressed in the above lines, is twilight, just before the evening. The *soft-dying day* points our attention to the changing phases in the 'diurnal course' since the opening of the poem. Considering the movement of the sun in its diurnal course, we can say that *the maturing sun* in the first section indicated the height of the day. In the second section, from the reaper's falling asleep in the mid of her work through the gleaner's crossing the brook to the cider-presser's watching the last oozings hours by hours, we came very close to the end of the day. Finally, in the third section, the mourning of the gnats and the blooming of the soft-dying day point to the death of the day. The idea of transience and death is further upheld by the 'flower' metaphor, suggested by the verb *bloom*, foregrounded with transitivity. The 'flower' that the *barred clouds bloom* will soon fade away with *the soft-dying day* as the twilight deepens. Moreover, the complex syntactical pattern with the temporal adverbs *while...then...and now* and the present participial form in *soft-dying day* and *gathering swallows* suggest a fleeting time which stands in contrast to the frozen moments of the second stanza.

On a larger scale, the autumn that caused the fruit to grow heavier, stands for the pre-harvest period of growth, and the autumn with her granary and cider-press represents the whilst-harvest period of stagnation and with her "stubble plains" autumn indicates the post-harvest barrenness. Thus we find the presence of two parallel cycles of nature, the 'micro' cycle of the day within the 'macro' cycle of the seasons, which together uphold the theme of transience and mortality. Both cycles indicate the end of the current phase—as the dying day is going to be immersed into night, so the departing autumn likewise is going to be followed by winter, the next season in the cycle. The changing phases of the day and the

season are indicative of the fact that nothing can stay the same for long and everything must come to an end following the natural course of growth and decay. The imagery of the brook in the second stanza *across a brook*, and that of the river in the third section *among the river shallows* further reinforce the natural process in that the tides, like the day and season, follow the natural process. The day and the wind, being natural phenomena, are immortal and they do not die. Therefore, their death in the poem (*soft-dying day*) and (*as the light wind lives or dies*) does not mean physical death, it points to the end of a particular phase in the natural cycle.

*The full-grown lambs loud bleat from the hilly bourn* to draw the attention of the shepherd who will drive them back home before nightfall. The compound adjective *full-grown* is significant here because like the ripe fruit and corn, the full-grown lambs are now ready for human consumption. Hedge-crickets sing and the red-breast whistles from the garden-croft before returning to their nests and the swallows twitter as they are gathering in the skies for their flight. The use of the present participle *gathering*, foregrounded against a series of the simple present form, conveys the idea of the on-going process of the swallows' gathering together for their flight for a warmer place before winter sets in. The underlying semantic feature among the images in this section is one of a transient state of existence. The dying day's rosy hue, the gnats' mourning, the sheep's bleating, the hedge-crickets' singing, the red-breast's whistling and the swallows' twittering, being at the final stage of their stay, indicate an approach to the end. "They", it is said, "are redolent of death and suggest the theme of transience and mortality" (Creaser:1978:204). The soft-dying day will soon come to an end with its journey into night, the lambs are full-grown to be butchered for their meat, the hedge-crickets and the red-breast will soon retire to their nests after their day's flights, and the swallows, gathering in the skies, will soon start their flights for a warmer place. The departure of the migratory swallows, 'the guests of summer' heralds the advent of winter.

The locational expressions *among the river shallows*, *from hilly bourn*, *from a garden-croft*, and *in the skies*, indicating the places of origin of the sounds, present a varied space stretching both horizontally from the *river shallows* through the *stubble plains* to the *garden-croft*, and vertically from the *stubble-plains* through the *hilly bourn* to *the skies* above. Spatially, we are still moving around the familiar surroundings of the first and the second sections. The reaper's half-reaped furrows have now become the *stubble plains*, the river shallows from where small gnats are mourning reminds us of the gleaner's crossing the brook, and the red-breast's whistling from the garden-croft takes us back to the cottage-garden. But the landscape now further extends up to the hilly bourn from where the lambs are bleating. What, however, is more important here is the twittering of the gathering swallows that draws our attention towards the skies. With the swallows' upward flight we come to realize that the journey that started in the space after autumn's union with the maturing sun, railing through the cottage-

garden and to the cornfield traversed by the river, and extending up to the hilly bourn, now completes its circle being in the sky again. The spatial movement of the journey may be diagrammatically shown as in Figure 3.

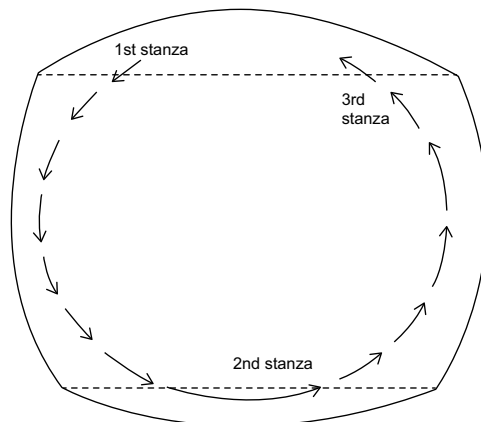


FIGURE 3. SPATIAL MOVEMENT OF AUTUMN'S JOURNEY

Beginning from the space where the union of autumn and the maturing sun took place, the journey in the first section reaches earth's surface via tree-tops in the cottage-garden. In the second stanza the horizontal movements extend from the granary through the corn-field to the cider-press and in the final section, with the gathering fallows' twittering in the skies the journey completes its circle following an upward flight to the space from where it started. Thus the spatial movements in the final stanza, as Blackstone (1968) puts it, evidently stand in sharp contrast

to the strong earth-ward thrust to the laden trees and swollen gourds of strophe one, and to the wide horizontal sweep of the blown hair and the steady gleaner of the strophe two. Here we are borne like gnats themselves, in a wavering rhythm, resolved only in the last line which plumps for departure; and the poem achieves its final acceptance, which is the acceptance of Winter, of seasonal death. (95-6)

The *maturing sun* of strophe one is now about to set with its *rosy hue*, the earth-ward journey of autumn is now reversed with its sky-ward movement, the dominant audio-visual images will lose their visibility with the deepening of the twilight, and we will soon be left in the company of darkness on an earthly spot from where we will only hear the farewell songs but will not see the 'departing' singers. "Recalling the bridging", as Stewart (2001) suggests, "of earth to the sky in the opening stanza, where the curving land is pictured as "close bosom-friend

of the maturing sun”, the space here is spanned by sound waves rather than solar warmth.” (145). Moreover, autumn’s journey through earth, besides bridging earth to space, links, with the great chain of being, the cosmic world consisting of three kingdoms—the vegetative, the human, and the animal, all of which are governed with the same principle of growth, transience and mortality.

Within the discourse world in the final stanza our attention is drawn to an implied *into image schema* which can be worked out by the imagery of ‘departure’. The sun’s departure into the horizon, the day’s departure into night, and the swallows’ departure into a warmer place suggest a *deictic* shift from *here* of the discourse world to *there*, outside, from the proximity of a known world to the distance of an unknown zone. Thus, the emptiness of the stubble-plains, the gnats’ dirge for the dying day, the living and dying of the light wind, together with the imagery of ‘departure’, symbolically tend to create an impression of our final departure into the unknown world of death. Connecting the images of death suggested in the last stanza to Keats’s own death, (taking place one and a half years after the composition of the poem), Ward (1963) argues,

the premonition of departure that concludes the poem, the hint of colder and darker days to come, was prophetic. (322)

Thus, the movement of autumn from one section to another, besides showing the progression in the affairs of autumn, reflects the course of the fleeting time. The pre-harvest state of growth which, in the second stanza, reaches its culmination in the ripeness in the whilst-harvest period, finally, in the last stanza, comes to the end of its cycle in the post-harvest period of emptiness and decay suggesting the onset of the cold days of winter, a new phase in the annual cycle of seasons.

## Notes

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# Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*: A Collage of the Latin American Dictators

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## Abstract

*Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been a major exponent of Latin American syndromes in fiction. His major works, in some way or the other, record the miasma of the old colonial days, critique the depletion of postcolonial dreams and negotiate with the emerging neocolonial realities. The Autumn of the Patriarch is a phantasmagorical portrait of a Latin American dictator who rules and tyrannizes over his people for a magically real period of more than two centuries, and after multiple fake deaths, he finally dies in a most ignoble manner, his dead body being feasted over by vultures. This paper will examine how a nameless archetypal dictator rises from the state of an unrecognized bastard to a man of unyoked power, launches a nightmarish reign, preposterously assumes the role of a mock-Christ and makes use / abuse of religion only to prolong his regime. The paper will then zero in on the mimicry of independence in an ironically decolonized space sandwiched between pro-colonial outrages and neo-colonial campaigns, all to bring home Garcia Marquez's repudiation of the both.*

In his Nobel Address Garcia Marquez bitterly recalled: "This independence from Spanish domination did not save us from this madness" – the "madness" of the European whims and brutalities bequeathed to the Latin American dictators (Nobel Address 1982). He catalogued their lunatic excesses elaborately:

General Antonio Lopez de Santana, thrice dictator of Mexico, had the right leg he lost in the so-called War of Cakes buried with all funeral pomp. General Garcia Moreno governed Ecuador for sixteen years as an absolute monarch and his dead body, dressed in full-dress uniform and his cuirass with its medals, sat in a state upon the presidential throne. General Maximilian Hernandez Martinez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador who had thirty thousand peasants exterminated in a savage orgy of killing, invented a pendulum to discover whether food was poisoned and had the street lamps covered with red paper to combat an epidemic of scarlet fever. (Nobel 208)

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Military dictatorship has been a common feature of postcolonial Latin America. As a matter of fact few Latin American countries were spared of dictatorial regimes. To name a few instances, three Somozas in Nicaragua consolidated dynasty rule from 1936 to 1979. In Chile General Pinochet, in a US-backed bloody coup, overthrew the first Marxist elected president Salvador Allende in 1973. Alfredo Stroessner, the second longest serving dictator, ruled Paraguay for 35 years. These and many more were the regimes who brutally repressed, exiled and killed millions. The archetypal Caribbean tyrant we come across in *The Autumn of Patriarch* is a composite monster drawn from the livid memories of all civil and military dictators who ruled the postcolonial Latin American countries.

A despot without a name in a nameless Caribbean country, the patriarch is as hyperbolically old as Christopher Columbus and as contemporary as General Franco of Spain ruling his country for a fabulous length of time and living more than the magic-real figure of a double century. He rules his people with an iron hand, re-colonizing the already colonized subjects, exterminating all enemies, real or imagined, in bizarre and brutal ways driven by the philosophy: “I am going to rule alone with no dogs to bark at me” (27). The 228 pages of the novel produce a tyrant who shares the highest degree of tyranny with all despots, yet surpasses them all in everything. Both semiotically and symbolically the novel re-creates the patriarch’s mythos of spring, summer and fall, out of the relics of all dictators irrespective of time and space.

### **A Glimpse into Geneology: Birth of a Bastard Dictator**

The official version of the president’s life has projected him as one “very big”, larger than life. History has been re-written to fit him into it: “official schoolboy texts referred to him as a patriarch of huge size who never left his house because he could not fit through the doors” (39). He has been raised to the status of god who “knows the language of certain animals”, is able “to anticipate the designs of nature, can even change them and so on” (40). But the official portrait leaves out “all trace of his origins” installing the fabricated ones (40).

The patriarch is “a man without a father like the most illustrious despots of history” (40). But his historians have formulated an altogether different, almost sacrilegious myth to glorify his bastardity. The myth tells us, his mother Bendicio Alvarado “conceived him without recourse to any male” inferring a religious parallel to Christ’s mother virgin Mary. What is more, his mother herself is again “a strange woman of uncertain origins” (40). “At the dawn of other centuries”, she was known far and wide as a bird woman selling chicks painted as nightingales and peacocks. On the funeral Sundays of upland fairs she used to sit there “waiting for someone to do her the charity of going to bed with her” “in order to eat”, “only in order to eat” (125). As no one would buy her birds, “she had to use her lower parts in order to eat” (126). She went to bed with “so many back-trail fugitives” that she cannot recall who actually the patriarch’s father was.

The boy was born malformed with a flattened, dragging leg, and “his right testicle the size of a fig” (112) or as described elsewhere “the size of an ox kidney” (5) which in latter days required “the aid of a small orthopedic cart” (37) to carry it when he walked. Everything about him is hyperbolic and supersized. At the time of birth “he relieved himself like a bellows and exhaled a bagpipe sigh with his breathing” (112). A circus fortuneteller, noticing the new-born baby’s palm with no lines on it, predicted that “he had been born to be a king” (112). Indeed he becomes a king of the kings his country’s history has ever produced – the most ill-begotten, perverted, demonic and pitiless of all.

In sublime response to his hybrid lineage the patriarch explores the utmost depth of hybridity making the whole country a warehouse and a ground for breeding bastards. The text offers a precise figure: “It was calculated that in the course of his life he must have sired five thousand children, all seven-monthers, by the countless number of loveless beloveds he had who succeeded each other in his seraglio until the moment he was ready to enjoy them” (40). The presidential house is proliferated with concubines. “In the mortal hour of siesta” or any other time he suddenly thinks fit, he takes refuge in the concubines’ quarters, “choosing one by assault, without undressing her or getting undressed himself, without closing the door” (7). In his mother’s suburban mansion he is found chasing after the maids in the shadows of the bedrooms while his mother forces the caged birds to sing so that her neighbours do not hear the sounds of the attack. His underlings fix up harlots dressed like school girls, a new one everyday, to entertain the general in his forlorn siesta time. Beyond the palace or his mother’s mansion, the whole land turns out to be his hunting ground. Whenever he comes in sight of a lovely woman or hears about one, his desire becomes an order of the state. If the patriarch intends to have, for example, Francisca Linero to himself, no Poncio Daza can save his own wife or his own head (80-81). Rape, if viewed from colonial context, might connote forced impregnation of land and women / people that always leaves hybridity in the wake. The patriarch’s tireless fertility rites have not only produced a vulnerable line of bastards but also engineered a miasma of hybridity across the nation. This is how Garcia Marquez critiques the moral premise of the dictator’s power which is irremediably rotten at the roots and which corresponds to colonial hybridization of a conquered land and people.

### **His Rise to Power: A Colonial Model**

The Patriarch’s rise to power and presidency follows the colonial thumb rule of installing a mimic ruler on behalf of the colonizers. In the highly elastic time and space of the text the patriarch is projected as a contemporary to Columbus, the archetypal colonizer, and to Admiral Higginson of the US Marines, a latter-day colonizer. It is Admiral Higginson who, as the chief of the occupation forces, picks up the young patriarch to crown the post of the Head of the State at a ridiculous monthly salary of three hundred pesos. The text further discloses that

he has been placed there as the “mariners’ prat boy” (42), quite in line with the orthodox colonial modus operandi.

The long history of revolutions, counter revolutions, insurgencies and civil wars in Latin America gave rise to a home-spun structure of irregular Armed Forces resulting in a proliferation of self-styled generals. In such an unearthly military chaos, anyone with an ox-kidney testicle and elephantine leg can grab the rank of a general, and can even be bestowed with the flamboyant presidency of a banana republic. Interestingly enough, with all these gross disqualifications the patriarch has already managed to serve as an artillery lieutenant in the third civil war (137). No literacy is expected of him to serve the nation in multiple capacities of a lieutenant, general and president of a republic for he governs orally and physically, and if needed, with a thumb print. Only his mother whimpers and exclaims in front of the diplomatic corps: “if I’d known my son was going to be the president of the republic I’d have sent him to school” (41). So the illiterate, hyper-deformed patriarch is set to rule his land without any power under the umbrella of Admiral Higginson or whoever replaces the admiral in future. But his luck has more surprises in store for him. At the time of plague the frightened occupation forces pack up everything and leave the country. Before leaving they make him perfect dummy of a surrogate ruler: “they decorated him with the medal of the good neighbor, rendered him the honors of chief of state, and said to him a aloud so that everybody could hear we leave you now with your nigger whorehouse so let’s see how you could shape things up without us” (43). In the changed scenario the patriarch discovers in him a new man: “for the first time since the head-down days of occupation ox” he goes up the stairs “giving orders in a loud voice” to reestablish cockfights, kiteflying and many other diversions prohibited by the marines. Convinced of his indisputable power, he inverts the colour of the flag, shield and so on. His realization—“after all we’re our own dogs now”, and the tangible and unique presence of power “like a little glass ball in the palm of the hand” (44) accentuated by the departure of the marines – clearly foreground a picked-up ruler’s rise to dictatorship.

### **Unyoked Power: A Myth without Frontiers**

The accident of being picked up as a rubber stamp president, all the more accidental departure of the occupation forces and his sudden rise to and consolidation of power follow an enigmatic route to evil eminence which the patriarch justifies in his almost never-ending tenure as a tyrant. The de facto ruler in his chance to rule de jure summons up a reign of absolute power that can be felt from the peripheral and subterranean belts of the land by the living inhabitants within. His initial visibility, gradual disappearance and withdrawal into a mysterious citadel of power, his concurrent presence everywhere and nowhere, the undraped gospel of his debauchery, brutality and killings, moreover his proclaimed control over natural and preternatural objects strongly formulate a myth of nondeliverance . “[T]he dictator’s absence”, Mayder Dravasa rightly

argues, “does not constitute a deliverance from the chains of the authoritarian dictatorships. On the contrary, it allows the voice of the people to continue to believe in and reiterate his presence” (Authority and Dependence 400).

His impossible length of life, that too punctuated by a fake death and a re-birth, has added aura of a myth to an otherwise crude tale of a tyrant. His physical deformity and formalin freshness through all these years, his notoriety in proliferating the whorehouse of a country with bastards, the tireless pampering of swarms of military and civil underlings bestowing divine power upon him, everyday cannon salute of a kneeling press, and more importantly, his image of a cool assassin have gone into the making of a fecund myth. The narrators report, the patriarch has “kept on growing until the age of one hundred, and at one hundred fifty he grew a third set of teeth” (39). The legend goes around that “a bullet shot into his back would go right through without harming, and if shot from the front it would rebound off his body at he attacker” (39). It is ludicrous to believe such trash but in the patriarch’s domain it is the prescribed truth. This granite old man has been raised to a divine height by his sycophants; he is labelled as “the undoer of dawn, commander of time and repository of light” (58) as he reverses the order of the day and night at his sweet will. He announces dawn at three in the morning when the whole country, hearing the reveille, jumps out of sleep; roses hurry to bloom two hours before dew time. He is so prodigious a commander that even the animal world obeys his command instinctively; hens are found laying Monday’s eggs when the Sunday’s eggs are still lying in the presidential file drawers. He is “the oldest ancient on earth, the most fearsome, the most hated, and the most pitied in the nation” (63) presumably because his life is reportedly not “controlled by human time but by the cycles of the comet” (68). The myth is orchestrated to such a height that he is believed to have given life to drowned hens after the great cyclone, though humans prove unfit for his grace. Furthermore, when he orders “the waters to recede”, the order is carried out in urgent humility (86). Just by spitting words he reverses the course of a river; his engineers perform this divine miracle on his behalf. In line with his dictatorial tradition, the few newspapers still publishing play the role of a pied-piper in fabricating the patriarch myth, proclaiming his eternal rule and daily recreating his old days of glory and ecstatic times. The newspapers report, at the farthest end of life, his death will be the end of everything: “On the day of his death the mud from the swamps would go back upriver to its source, that it would rain blood, that hens would lay pentagonal eggs, and that silence and darkness would cover the universe once more because he was the end of creation” (106).

The patriarch-myth is inextricably linked with his display of power: personal, divine and governmental. His authority lies on his strategic understanding of people that ensures a reign of whims and the phobia generated thereof. As he says: “the less the people understand the more afraid they will be” (207). He alters the time of the day and the calendar of the legal holidays to flood the country with holidays. Like all bonafide dictators he realizes: “the trouble with

this country is that the people have too much time to think on their heads” (31), and so he tries to keep his people busy. He restores March Poetry Festival, Annual Beauty Queen Contest, builds the largest baseball stadium in the Caribbean and a free school in each province to teach sweeping. Apart from these paraphernalia of personal whims, he strictly follows the dictum of iron-handed governance. He arranges a bloody attack on the Senate and the Supreme Court “with the cooperative indifference of the armed forces”, and “the august home” of their patriotic forebears is burned to the ground (77). He liquidates the legislative and judicial apparatus of the old republic and heaps honours and fortune upon the senators, congressmen and magistrates, finally exiles them to “happy and remote embassies” to rule alone for ever in the style of a prototype dictator (77).

### **Nightmarish Reign: Infinite Recipes of Death**

It is the fear of losing power that drives all despots to madness. The smell of treason makes them killers. Triggered by the phobia of retaliation and death, and driven by the desire to change the irrevocable doom they recourse to further tyranny and brutality. The patriarch’s reign of terror is dotted with deaths of all kinds and recipes from the grotesque to the improbable, involving people of all stations from the military rivals to the harmless husband of the young wife he rapes, from children to the sibyl old woman. In a country where he trusts very few or none, all are apprehended as his enemies and conspirators. So all his people are open to his strange recipes of death renewed every time with inventiveness beyond human imagination.

Besides his council of governments, minister, generals and perverse civil servants, he runs a parallel network of mercenaries and spies to ensure that no dog barks at him. He is incorrigibly right in smelling conspirators, be it the Pope himself or his close friend General Rodrigo de Aguilar. A master of unique operational skills, he rarely does the business of extermination himself; in most cases he just spits out orders, and in matters of the high-ups he relies on strategic deployment of one against the other to kill and get killed. When in the diplomatic party celebrating the tenth year of his rise to power General Adriano Guzman, in a fit of drunkenness, unbuttons his fly and stales away “the perfumed décolletages of the ladies of the ambassadors and ministers with his musty old nose of a buzzard’s tool” (46), the old granite man’s “chaste woman’s hand” does not tremble on the hilt of his saber that noon of horror. When General Narciso, in a fit of sodomy, hauls “a cadet of the president’s guard into a toilet”, then impales him with a plainsman’s lance, the patriarch makes sure that his former comrades in arms exterminate each other before they hatch plots. In accordance with his invisible scheme the members of General Jesucristo Sanchez’s escort beat him to death with chairs on the plea that he has had “an attack of rabies from a cat bite” (47). General Lotario Sereno tastes a strange recipe of death when he drowns with his drowned horse while it is fording a river. Innovative are the ways of putting them to death, so are the patriarch’s ways of making them heroes with

posthumous honours of martyrs because he officially believes “a nation without heroes is a house without doors” (48). He does all this to force his people to believe that he has nothing to do with these “infamous deaths” (48). The old man invites all the six remaining combat generals to his presidential palace to celebrate his birthday, and gets them all killed except General Saturno Santos who manages to escape. The official note that follows condemns it unequivocally saying that “the last heirs of our war” have been assassinated by their “own maddened escorts” (50) who are subsequently killed to wipe out any evidence of presidential involvement in it.

His official imposter, Patricio Aragonés has been forced to have his feet flattened out with a mallet, his testicles pierced with a shoemaker’s awl and swallow a drink of turpentine to forget how to read and write. All this has been done to make him a perfect double of the patriarch. The dummy has already survived several assassination attempts but he fails to survive the poison dart of the patriarch. When he grows taller than the original, the old man mutters: “after all I am what I am, and not you” (20), and then he cuts him short. This leads to the patriarch’s first death. Before the dummy dies he tells the dictator that his people detest him so much that if they find him on the street dressed as a mortal, they will fall on him like a pack of hounds. Predictably enough when the dead body of the dummy president (original to the people) is placed for rituals, the drama of so called eternal allegiance goes reverse: the jubilant crowd drags the corpse leaving “a trail of medals and epaulets, dolman buttons” (25) and other left-overs of bygone power and glories; the residue of his body is quartered and devoured by dogs and vultures; delirious howls of fireworks accompany the carnival of his death (26). Undaunted by the horrible end of his dummy, the stony old man appears before the plotting generals and ministers, and before they have a chance to leave the palace they are all mowed down by machinegun bursts at the command of still loyal General Rodrigo de Aguilar. But the unfortunate general cannot save his own skin. He is suspected of treason and is killed in an unbelievable way: he is roasted alive, stretched out full length on a silver tray, “ready to be served at a banquet of comrades by the official carvers to the petrified horror of the guests” (105).

His uncanny killing methodology is directed not only against his rival generals but also against all assassins, insurrectionists and dissenting voices. He hangs the leaders of the civilian opposition “one from each lamppost in the main square” (99). The assassin in disguise of a leper is quartered and sliced up; his head is displayed in the main square, his right leg in Santa Maria del Altar and the left leg in the saltpeter deserts, “one arm on the plains, the other in the jungle” (101). His unfathomable monstrosity leads him to throw the prisoners into “the moat of the harbor fort to be eaten up by crocodiles” or to skin people alive and send their hides to their families “as a lesson” (22). In order to quell the insurrectionists he explodes the whole of the Conde barracks with six barrels of dynamite killing fifteen hundred rebels in addition to eighteen officers who are



“shot in double rows in order to save ammunition” (100). He suffers from no qualms at all when at his command 2000 children are carried in a barge loaded with cement and dynamited on the territorial waters. The three officers who carry out his order are instantly promoted two grades and decorated with the medal of loyalty but then he has them shot on the strange logic that “there were orders that can be given but which cannot be carried out” (96). He is shrewd enough not to keep alive any witness to his crime. Even when his power is not at stake, his ruthlessness goes beyond any historical parallel. He goes like a gallant and rapes newly-wed Francisca Linera in broad daylight on her dining table, and gets her husband Poncio Daza cut up in thin slices to be distributed to the hogs (82). He strangles the old sibyl woman after she has foretold the way he will die, and he does so “like a master executioner” (80). Since the day he is left by Admiral Higginson to rule, and till the day he dies his final death, he has committed every perverse crime within the reach of human imagination in unthinkably macabre ways. He transfers a theoretically postcolonial country into a neo-colonized one with recycling evils of cosmic proportion.

### **A Mock-Christ: His Anti-Christ Manoeuvre**

Bendicion Alvarado gave birth to the patriarch “in the entrance way to a convent” (111), she wrapped him with the charity – the rags given by the novices. When that illegitimate boy grows to rule his country, he neither remembers the charity nor practises Christianity, rather entangles himself in a dialectical role of a mock-Christ and a crusader against the church. It might be a piece of irony that “at the end of old age” the papal nuncio deigns to visit the patriarch with the mission of converting him to the faith of Christ. Since the nuncio’s God cannot rid him of the buzzing beetle in his ear or deflate his herniated testicle, he has no business with Christ or God. He tells him pointblank: “Don’t waste your gunpowder on buzzards, father, he told him, why, should you want to convert me since everything I’m doing is just what you people want” (60). This shows how preposterously he projects himself as an equivalent to church in the service of mankind. At the height of indisputable power he assumes the stature of a dummy Christ. Lois Parkinson Zamora calls him “a political anti-Christ”, and “the arid wasteland that he creates with his brutality corresponds to the world of the pre-apocalyptic stage called the transition” (Myth 71). He is shown in the text “besieged by mobs of lepers, blind people and cripples who begged the salt of health from his hands” (7). He has been presented by “lettered politicians and dauntless adulators” as one who can cure lepers as did Christ, again as “the corrector of earthquakes, eclipses, leap years and other errors of God” (7). At the time of cataclysmic hurricane and flood he appears messianically with “the sign of the cross of blessing so that the rains would cease and the sun shine” (86). For his limitless hypocrisy and blasphemy he raises himself to the level of “the eternal one”, an equivalent to God. He is posited in the text in terms of divine comparisons either as “God’s enemy or his replacement” (Zamora 72). He brands the Roman church as “bandits of God” (148). His presidential palace is replete

with litters of profane transgressions: “heroic portraits of saints and soldiers thrown to the floor among broken furniture and fresh cow flops” (3), a cow “putting down the canvas with the portraits of an archbishop so that she could eat it” (73) etc. His order replaces God’s order when he declares: “It’s eight o’clock God damn it, eight o’clock, I said, God’s order” (88).

Like all despots he makes political use of religion. His antagonism with the church turns into war when the latter disoblige the patriarch’s request of conferring sainthood to his prostitute mother. He invites the apostolic nuncio, and sends his ministers to Rome to attain the canonization of his mother. The nuncio, finding no base of this blasphemous offer, refuses to grant sainthood to the president’s mother. It follows the president’s vengeance: “the mobs of hired fanatics” storm the palace of the Apostolic Nunciature, sack the museum of historic relics, then drag the nuncio naked, parade him “through the business streets on a donkey under a downpour of dishwasher thrown onto him from balconies” (121). His chosen mobs finally puts him on a cruise ship “so that the world will know what happens to foreigners who lift their hands against the majesty of the nations” (121). He sends his message to Rome clear and loud: ‘The Pope will learn now and forever that he may be Pope in Rome with his ring on his finger sitting on his golden throne, but here I am what I am’ (121). The patriarch is so dauntless in his campaign that when the case of Bendicion Alvarado is suspended by the Papal authority, he proclaims the civil sainthood of his mother “by the supreme decision of the free and sovereign people” (133). At the same breath he orders immediate expulsion of the archbishop primate, bishops, priests, nuns and “all persons native and foreign” having “anything to do with the business of God” (133). He expropriates all goods of the church, its houses of worship, its convents and schools etc. And as a final showdown he forces them all, nuns and priests alike, to leave the country naked, without a strip of cloth to hide their hidden places. Years after “the bandits of God” however return, and the old order is repealed by a confidential order issued under the strongest persuasion by his ex-nun wife Letician Nazareno at the time of “cavernous love-making” (148). So the patriarch’s war with the papal kingdom issues merely from a despot’s whim of glorifying his infamous mother, and his truce is induced by an equally notorious episode of indulgence ; both the extremes highlight the moral aridity of a postcolonial Fisher king and his wasteland.

### **Colonialism within Postcolonialism: A Mimicry of Independence**

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* Garcia Marquez postulates a complex shift of power from colonialism to postcolonialism, then again to a domestic brand of colonialism followed by a mimicry of independence with strong overtones of neo-colonialism. Repeated textual references to Columbus and the Spaniards, and the overwhelming presence of the US marines as occupation forces prior to the dictator’s rise to power foreground a serious colonial backdrop. The sudden departure of Admiral Higginson and his marines opens up a theoretically

postcolonial era which ends up in a brand of indigenous colonialism under the dictatorship of the patriarch. During his autumnal days he virtually mortgages every inch of the country, and just days before his death he sells the sea accepting the re-appearances of neo-Columbuses of late postcolonial world order.

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* Garcia Marquez rewrites “the narrative, descriptive, and linguistic details of Columbus’s discourse” (Palencia-Roth, Prisms 144) and posits other comparable colonizers – the Spaniards and the US marines. Through the patriarch’s reference to both Garcia Marquez suggests a subversive reversal of the colonial perspective. Columbus is reportedly the first historical colonizer who has been given in the text a strange contemporaneity with the patriarch. The despot’s tenure seems to be so spacious and elastic that it can comfortably go back to accommodate a 15th century explorer-colonizer like Columbus, and go forth to accommodate a 20th century dictator like General Franco. The fallacy of the patriarch’s proximity to and admiration for Columbus is ingrained in the despot’s delirious memory: “I had a tomb built for an admiral of the ocean sea who did not exist except in my feverish imagination when I myself with my own blessed eyes had seen the three caravels anchored across the harbor from my window” (104). In contradiction to the physical non-presence of Columbus except in the old man’s feverish imagination, the explorer is said to have personally known the patriarch. We are told, Columbus presented the old man a golden spur to be worn on the left heel as a sign of highest authority. Both semiotically and symbolically this is significant in two ways: first, this is a gift of gold from the explorer of gold to the despot of El Dorado, and secondly, it is a transfer of power-culture from the Europeans to the conquered other. The involvement of Columbus goes deeper than this. The patriarch, in a superb anachronistic way, claims to recognize Columbus in the native crowd “disguised in a brown habit with the cord of Saint Francis around his waist swinging a penitent’s rattle” (227), a description that historically matches Columbus’s dress after his second voyage and just before his death (Palencia- Roth, Intertextualities, 44). So quite nostalgically the old man keeps on hoping that “he (Columbus) would return during the last extreme of his (Patriarch) old age” (218).

The text, fitted into a shifting colonial space, retrieves Columbus from the archives of history and myth – as a man of flesh and blood and as a product of the patriarch’s hallucination. Columbus and his co-colonizer sailors are the “strangers” (35) who, equipped with colonizers’ arrogance, make fun of the natives. They don’t understand the natives’ language as Prospero doesn’t understand the language of Caliban. They are amazed to find themselves unhurt and welcomed by the “well-formed”, “painted” and “thick-haired” band of natives (35). They are furthermore shocked to see them all naked to the counter-shock of the natives to whom their nudity is as normal as the day their mothers bore them (35). At the other end of the spectrum the myth of European suzerainty undergoes a therapeutic reconstruction. When the natives swim to the Spanish ships, the sacred sailors climb up onto yardarms and shout at each other like

“wet little parrots” “in Christian tongue”. These are the legendary explorers and traders who trade their trash for valuables. They buy everything in exchange of their useless birettas and strings of glass beads. What is more disturbing, “they even wanted to trade a velvet doublet for one of us [the natives] to show off in Europe land” (36). This trading of natives for a velvet doublet is a bitter reminder of the slave trade of the following centuries in the heyday of colonialism. Against this silhouette of colonial memory there loom large three caravels of Columbus, anchored in the shadowy sea, just behind the American warship (36).

Postcoloniality remains an unattainable reality in the realm of the patriarch. The withdrawal of the Spaniards and of Admiral Higginson and his marines ironically prepares the passage of the patriarch’s home-spun colonialism. It entails inconceivable political repression, wiping out of the opposition, dismantling of the Senate, the Parliament and the Constitution, farewell to democracy, foreign debt, economic bankruptcy, widespread corruption, finally virtual leasing out of the whole country – its land, water and resources to foreign powers. This native brand of colonialism via dictatorship both thrives and withers under the patronization of the neo-colonial powers. The country is run down to the skin like most third world countries caught up in a pernicious political economy. The patriarch’s experts inform him:

we had used up our last resources, bled by the age-old necessity of accepting loans in order to pay the interest on the foreign debt ever since the wars of independence and then other loans to pay the interest on back interest, always in return for something general sir, first the quinine and tobacco monopolies for the English, then the rubber and cocoa monopoly for the Dutch, then the concession for the upland railroad and river navigation to the Germans, and everything for the gringos...(189)

The gringo-business has been so subtly conducted by the diabolic American agent Jose Ignacio Saenz dela Barra that the land is virtually emptied of people through systematic secret killings, and the whole country, by his secret arrangements, is sold out to the Americans “down to drawers” they are wearing (189). The sedimentary sovereignty slips out of the dictator’s hands under the mortal threat of foreign debt: “a moratorium was declared on the obligation contracted from the bankers of Hamburg, the German fleet had blockaded the port, an English warship had fired a warning shot that opened a breach in the cathedral tower” (189). The European ambassadors begin vying with one another for the residue of the resources. The Americans top them all in their demand for “a right of lifetime exploitation” of their subsoil (189). The gringo-threat is explicitly neo-colonial: ‘Your Excellency, we’re on the final curve, either the marines land or we take the sea, there’s no other way” (208). In the patriarch’s soliloquy the “implementation of the theft” is recorded in a tone of utter exasperation: “so they took away the Caribbean in April, Ambassador Ewing’s nautical engineers

carried it off in numbered pieces to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of Arizona” (208). The theft, preceded by threat and followed by implementation, is an American imperialistic intervention Latin America is exposed to, and through this Garcia Marquez shows how the possibilities of postcolonial future have lost track under indigenous dictatorship and neo-colonial aspirations of foreign powers.

Throughout the novel the American presence is found to neatly counterpoise the patriarch’s autocratic rule. The American hegemonic interference makes the patriarch’s pseudo-postcolonial country a recolonized one. The old despot remembers, and reminds us, these are the people who “brought the Bible and syphilis”, who taught that “everything is gotten with money”, who tried to convince his soldiers that “the nation is a business”, who believed “this country isn’t worth a plug of nickel, except for the sea” (209-10) which they grab out of his hands in his autumnal days. It is the American summer that overtakes the patriarch’s autumn and rewrites the destiny of his nation. As things turn out, independence or postcoloniality becomes only an empty rhetoric in the new global scenario. Garcia Marquez precisely suggests so when he fixes up the US Marine battleship anchoring in the shadowy Caribbean sea, and the three caravels of Columbus beyond the battleship (36).

### ***The Autumn of the Patriarch: A Novel of Political Indignation***

“There’s not a single line in my novels which is not based on reality”, Garcia Marquez states unequivocally in *The Fragrance of Guava* (36). Again there is not a single line in his novels that does not come from politics every Latin American is born to and lives with (Garcia Marquez, 2003:206). *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a strong condemnation of regional dictatorships and American imperialism. In one sense the novel is a farewell to repelling autocracy expressed through a montage of dictators in all imaginable excesses and extremities. But the geo-political reality of Latin America does not allow us to conclude that the patriarch’s death bids a lasting farewell to dictatorship. It rather subversively raises the question: Where does it end and who are to rule next? The narrative provides a very disconcerting clue in moments after his fake death.

The first death of the patriarch rehearsed through the killing of his dummy Patricio Aragonés befools the aspiring heirs to the power. The old man watches the funeral disgrace from a hiding place and decides to reassert himself. He pushes open the door of the cabinet room and sees:

all the ones he wanted to be there were there, the liberals who had sold the federalist war, the conservatives who had bought it, the generals of the high command, three of his cabinet ministers, the archbishop primate and Ambassador Schontner, all together in one single plot calling for the unity of all against the despotism

of centuries so that they could divide up among themselves the  
booty of his death...(26)

So the traditional beneficiaries of power are all there: politicians, generals, ministers, clergy and king-maker mission heads. The unholy alliance of these diverse groups does not guarantee the proclaimed abolition of “despotism of centuries” or inception of brave new days of democracy as the characters have already testified against such optimism. All the plotters except General Rodrigo de Aguilar are either machine-gunned or gutted. If this proves the strength of a dictator’s guile, this also proves the conspirators’ trademark greed for dividend of power, and in both cases the peripheral people have really nothing to benefit from. The death of a dictator does not necessarily imply the death of dictatorship which, as a political system, putrefies the other circles of power. In his autumnal days the tyrant feels himself dispossessed of power. He learns by now that “he had never been master of all his power” (228). Without great surprise he arrives at “the ignominious fiction of commanding without power, of being exalted without glory and of being obeyed without authority” (228). It, therefore, suggests a parallel growth of other shadowy dictators along the line of power which, through the death of one, will lead to the rise of another.

The death of the patriarch is an epitaph to the moribund political culture that ravaged Latin America since independence. It is only a humane way of relieving a nation of a morass of prolonged despotism. Politically feasible or not, the novel rightly condemns and bids farewell to tyranny of all nomenclatures through the phantasmagoric life and death of an archetypal dictator. Precisely from this point of view *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a serious postcolonial critique on de facto colonialism and neo-colonialism, dictatorships and hegemony.

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# Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*: A Study of Evils

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## Abstract

*This study aims at investigating and analyzing one of the major underlying issues of Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie (1936)—exploitation of the evil forces. Anand's novels decipher the themes of poverty, suppression, discrimination and unending curse of colonial rule over Indian downtrodden and have-nots. He unfolds the results or the consequences of two kinds of evils—'social evils' like-caste system, class conflict, religious fanaticism, bigotry and 'organized evils' i.e. colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, industrialism, feudalism etc. Coolie reveals a tragic story of an orphan hill boy Monno, who travels from Bilaspur, his own village to Sham Nagar to Daulatpur to Bombay to Simla and has had varied experiences, ranging from a domestic servant to a factory worker to a coolie and to a rickshaw-puller to serve as an illustration of the exploitation and suffering in a capitalistic society and ultimately he embraces unacceptable premature death. This study, intends to focus how the lives of the common people like coolies in Coolie become a confluence of a thoroughgoing result of the evil forces.*

## Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand's (1905-2004) novels demonstrate the lives of the oppressed, despised and downtrodden of Indian society and through his novels he establishes his belief – “the novel should interoperate the truth of life, from experience, and not from books” (Verma “The Social Exploitation” 49). His works were inspired and informed by the lives of real people in unspectacular situations, unequal wars, untouchability, and poverty. The living conditions of the people—a cleaner, a coolie, a peasant, a laborer etc. are aptly displayed in his novels. Anand's novels are “a reaction against the socio-politico-religious and economic injustice that has engulfed the people of his time” (Bhoi 98). His characters live with pain and they suffer from social injustice, humiliation and insult in an enormous way and are surrounded by colonialism, capitalism and feudalism. *Coolie* is “a powerful social tragedy due to the artistic treatment of cruel, inhuman social forges of

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poverty and exploitation” (“Social Realism”) where Munoo, the hero, instead of living a peaceful life, dies of the mentioned causes. As Bhoi rightly says: “Through him, Anand has focused attention on the wretched plight of the millions of subalterns in India who are toiling, suffering, starving and dying of bitterness and despair-unable to express their sorrows and burden of life-long sufferings” (102). This study draws a framework analysing the impacts and actions of the social and institutional evil forces. The following discussion is set to achieve the objectives of this study through logical, theoretical and methodological analysis.

### **Objective**

The general objective of this study is to examine the causes and the effects of the evil forces in *Coolie*.

The specific objectives are:

- i. To show the major concerns of the author as a novelist in relation to *Coolie*.
- ii. To analyse the effects of the social evils as exposed in *Coolie*.
- iii. To examine the exploitation of the organized evils as found in *Coolie*.

### **Methodology**

This paper is conducted and developed mainly through content analysis. The information are taken from both primary and secondary sources, which are qualitative in nature. Primary source refers to the author’s own writings, whereas the secondary source refers to the works done on the author. The novel *Coolie* has been found as the primary source. A number of relevant books, research articles and some web sites have been used as the secondary sources for collecting information which have been analyzed and presented through logical interpretation.

### **Anand’s Conscience and Concerns**

Mulk Raj Anand concerned over social, political and cultural issues of India and “drew a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor of his country” (Pattnaik 15). Anand narrated:

My novels were intended to be different from those of others, departures from the upper and middle section fictions. I wished to recreate, the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed, [and] repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature except in Sarat Chatterji, Prem Chand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and Maneck Bannerji. (Qtd in Verma “The Metaphor” 34)

Anand's bitter childhood experiences, poverty, some painful family issues, and his sufferings at the hands of the police during the Jalianwala Bagh came to him as fuels for future writings. Pattnaik remarks on Anand's concerns:

Indian society is his prime concern and his characters, with all their authenticity, represent the most fundamental pattern of Indian society that charged with the evil of untouchability, communal disharmony, caste compartmentalisations, and appalling economic differences. (16)

Anand opposes the "exploitation of the poor by any class" (George 17) and this includes the Imperial masters, the village money-lenders, the unscrupulous traders, the native rulers, priests and tea planters. Anand's characters are born and bred in poverty who "grow in an unhealthy environment of fear and fire but that does not negate their potential" (Verma "The Social" 46). In this connection Bhoi supplements: "His characters are ordinary men chosen from the common rungs of society who embarrassingly articulated the meaning of ordinary despair" (98).

Anand's novel depicts the inhuman plight of the oppressed Indian masses typical of which are sweepers, a coolie, a peasant, a tea-plantation labourer, a road maker, a village charmer who are agonized victims of capitalistic exploitation, poverty, problems of untouchability, social injustice and cruelty squalor, class-hatred and race hatred. About his own technique, Anand said:

When I began to write about India, though I took Joyce's 'streams of consciousness as my method, I had to apply it to a different situation, revealed to me by my upbringing in a province of the British Empire. I had hunch that man's in the world, his relationship to the universe and to himself, were important if one wanted to see the meaning of life. (Qtd in Verma "The Social" 46-48)

Anand's novels are "a true representation of diverse complexities of Indian life ranging from casteism to capitalism and colonialism" (Kakoti 93). Thus, his novels are considered to be the epics of misery and categorically *Coolie* attains the same form where sorrow and sufferings are synthesized as a result of the evil forces from inside and outside of the society to create a current of endless desolation.

### ***Coolie: A Study of Evils***

*Coolie* uncovers Munoo, an objective orphan who represents all the children subjected to tyrannies of social evils and organized evils. The novel is "dominated by action and the too many scenes and episodes introduced in the novel prevent the author from concentrating on the characterization of Munoo"

(George 62). The novel pictures colonial India within its 282 pages divided into five parts, where the protagonist travels through five different places facing incompatible events in his short period of life. In one hand, the deep rooted social stigmas like poverty, caste system, class conflict, feudal system and communal disharmony as newly emerged under the umbrella of colonialism, and on the other hand, the brutal exploitation of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism as a form of ruling became the major factors of the irreparable misery of the common people like coolies. Munoo's sufferings result from the social evils like poverty, caste and class conflict and "the combined forces of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and feudalism" (Verma "The Metaphors" 43).

Munoo, an orphan, hill boy of fourteen is compelled to move from place to place against his will or expectation in order to earn his living. His father dies of the feudal exploitation: "Munoo was young he had more than a vague idea of how Jay Sing's father was responsible for his impending misfortunes" (Anand 2) and mother of poverty and hunger in his village-Bilaspur. He faces domestic exploitation at the hands of his uncle and aunt as the persuasion of a poverty stricken family: "My aunt wants me to begin earning money....My uncle says I am grown up and must fend for myself" (2).

Munoo's uncle sends him to work as a servant in a middle class family in a small town-Sham Nagar. Here he is exploited by the wife of his master. Munoo can no longer bear the cruelty and slips out of the house. Here at first he felt, "How lucky I am (21)", but later he had to know and learn all unlucky things as a result of class conflict: "What right has he to join the laughter of his superiors?...Your place is here in the kitchen....What is your status that you should mix the children of your superior!" (22-57). Regarding class division of the society, Leo Tagore says:

Thus the novel seems to be Anand's perspective on the question of social justice in the Indian context as verified in the life and lot of a poor hill boy. Munoo is a microcosmic reality reflecting and signifying the larger reality of the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have not and the mechanisms that operate in our society in favour of the rich and the powerful and positively hostile to the marginalized and the poor. (Qtd in Paul 83)

Anand penetrates deep into the social system and identifies the causes of the social evils: "Our inability to evolve a wide, generous and fine civilized order is to a large extent due to past repressions of our emotional life, the hangover the petty restraints imposed by the old system of life" (Anand, "Apology" 156). Shanmugam opines: "Munoo is posed that he is suffering although he belongs to one of the highest castes, and that another boy who he belongs to the higher-caste namely; the Brahmins are occupied on a higher position than that of a domestic servant" (12).

After an unfortunate leaving from Sham Nagar, Munoo meets Prabha Dayal, an owner of the pickle factory in a neighboring town-Daulatpur, feels a strange affinity for this orphan boy and takes him home as an errand boy. Fortunately, the kind hearted wife of Prabha gives him love of his mother. But Ganpat, the partner of his master, treats all the workers mercilessly. Ganpat betrays his partner by spending the clients' money extravagantly on drinking and whoring. Thus, the partner's treachery not only ruins him but also breaks him completely. Munoo works as a coolie not only to earn his living but also to help his master, but Prabha has to leave Munoo alone and getting no alternative, returns to his native place.

While wandering to get a job, Munoo meets an Elephant driver who takes him to Bombay. Here with the help of Hari, a mill worker, he gets a job and shelter. At this stage he is compelled to work for eleven hours a day on meagre wages. Here Jimmie Thomas, the head foreman, whom labourers call Chintia Sahib makes his life miserable. He treats the factory workers as animals. Ratan, a co-worker protects Munoo from his exploitation but pays the penalty by losing his job.

The workers go on strike to protest. But instead of reinstalling Ratan, the management gives them a notice of reducing their working hours. To divert the attention of the agitators they spread the rumour that the Hindu child has been kidnapped by a Muslim. The workers enraged with the communal frenzy, spread riot all over the city. Munoo gets hurt in it and cannot return home. In the morning he meets with an accident: a car knocks him down. Mrs. Mainwaring, the owner of the car, takes him to Simla. Munoo recovers soon and starts working as a domestic servant and a Riksha-puller for her. The arduous work deteriorates his health. The disease turns out to be tuberculosis and causes his unexpected and unacceptable death.

A number of social factors push him into the active mode of life and he asks himself "What am I – Munoo?... I am Munoo Babu Nathuram's servant" (Anand 34). He accepts his identity as a servant or a slave in the very beginning of his saga of miseries. In the story, Munoo receives inhuman and repelling treatment from his Indian masters, the foreign mill owners in Bombay and his compatriot coolies. Thus, Anand presents a vibrant picture of human misery—poverty, exploitation, hunger and disease: "*Coolie* amplifies the view that poverty is the worst crime of all and its eradication is the prime task of any socialistic society" (Kakati 40). Besides, Iyengar rightly praises it for its unparalleled amplitude and power of narration, and calls it "a prose epic of modern India" (7). Munoo realises that the root cause of his tragedy is poverty as he feels:

I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Verma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the Sahib-logs, and all servants look alike: There must only be two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor. (Anand 56)

In this connection, Cowasjee writes: “What Munoo suffers at the hands of his master is no more than what he suffers at the hands of fellow workers as downtrodden as himself who are capable of cruelty and callousness born out of a savage struggle for survival” (35).

The important theme of the novel is the exploitation of the poor by the rich, of the ‘have-nots’ by the ‘haves’ of the society. Rajan observes:

It is an individual’s quest for freedom in a social system of ruthless exploitation....The society of coolie is one in which chief form of exploitation is capitalist though the feudal exploitation still remains, Munoo, in his quest for freedom, is squeezed dry by the machinery of capitalist exploitation until he meets his tragic end. (15)

Munoo symbolizes all those coolies who are victims of industrialization and victimized by the exploitative capitalist system. Khan says:

He is one among the millions of coolies tested and formulated by myriad forces of class distinction exploitation and dehumanization.... The story of Munoo is quintessentially the story of every exploited individual in India and the pattern of his life is intended to show the pitilessness that lies imbedded in the lives of millions of people who are condemned to lead a life of an unending saga of social depredation. (30)

Anand has presented the misery of socially backward class and coolies in India in *Coolie* that portrays “the sufferings of an individual coolie in a class ridden society” (Kakati 39). Machine, which represents industrialization, is shown as a discarding force. Machines are compared with monstrous animals and devils, “many-headed, many armed chuckling machine god” (Paul 82). Desan analyses the cause of exploitation and its results upon Munoo:

Munoo’s plight in *Coolie* is a symbol of societal negation of life, love and natural affection. Death versus life is the predominant emotion of the artist in the novel. The reader is given to understand how terrible and tragic the divide between the rich and the poor is. The reiterated emotion is that the poor belong to suffering by virtue of the divide created by the power of money which, Munoo comes to realize as everything on life. (97-98)

*Coolie* not only represents one coolie but all the coolies in India through Munoo who is made aware of the social discrimination in the early stage of his life: “There must only be two types of people in the world: the rich and the poor” (Anand 56). In the first phase, his uncle and aunt make his life miserable; in the

second phase his master's wife makes his life hell and in the third phase his master's partner deprives him of the stable life he wishes to lead. In his Bombay phase, a number of exploiting forces make him spiritually die and finally his last master Mrs. Mainwaring's acts of exploitations kill him physically. Rickwork rightly observes:

With *Coolie*, Anand's second novel we are plunged into much more complicated world, a world where apparently everyone is free to move about and earn his living at whatever trade or craft he pleases; but which actually imposes an even more rigid discipline than the old. For the untouchable may be chided or kicked, if he offends the laws of caste, but he has his place in the system....That is what Munoo, the central character of the *Coolie* learns in his short life. And in his drifting from job to job, from his native hills to plain, we get the most vivid panorama of life in India today. (Dhawan 78)

It is found that within his unpleasant journey from Bilaspur to Shimla, Munoo "felt a strange emptiness in him, a kind of embarrassment" (Anand 13) because he "could not realize the significance of this world" (9), so that he "wished he could disappear from the world somehow" (17).

## **Conclusion**

This paper begins with the concerns and creations of Mulk Raj Anand and ends with the examination and results of the issues as depicted in *Coolie*. As an exposition of social protest, *Coolie* illustrates the widening gap between the haves and have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, and the rulers and the ruled. Anand shows the destructive power of the two evils—social evils and organized evils, and suggests that one can survive the severity of caste but not that of money. Anand portrays Munoo's sufferings as a direct expression of his love for humanity and disapproval of socio economic inequality and religio-cultural stigma of Indian society. He focuses on the exploitation of the neglected and exploiters' greed, selfishness, hypocrisy, corruption, industrialism, capitalism and communalism. All these evil forces create endless sorrows and unbearable sufferings to the commoners like coolies. As a result, the coolies have to believe that they are destined to suffer. Revolving within this circle, the lives of the coolies become a hell and their death becomes a release from hell. In this context, Munoo is not an exception and his life turns into an example of a veritable struggle. He endured almost constant tension, trauma, pain, and penury. Thus, coolies' lives in *Coolie* can be remarked as an unrestrained confluence of two evils—social and institutional.

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# Arundhati Roy's *Power Politics*: Dams and the Dangers of Privatization

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## Abstract

*Arundhati Roy's Power Politics is a scathing polemic of privatization. Considering the process of privatization as a malicious process, in her book, Roy censures privatization, because, for her, it "is a process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has no parallel in history" (43). In response to Roy, this paper will examine the ways in which Roy uses the case of dam construction in India to illustrate the dangers of privatization of public resources, especially for the adivasis (native/aboriginal) and the dalits (lower caste) of India. While focusing on Roy's criticism of privatization as a violation of human rights and a demolition of democracy in the biggest democratic country in the world, this paper will also question her position against the dam constructions discussed in her book, particularly her confusing suggested solutions and also the seemingly exaggerated dangers that she attributes to privatization as a form of globalization.*

Privatization is "the transfer of ownership, control, or operation of an enterprise or function from the government/public sector to the private sector" (Seidenstat 464). William Megginson, however, sees privatization in contemporary Indian contexts as a representation of "an ideological and symbolic break with a history of state control over a country's productive asset" (14). Critics like Vernon-Wortzel and H. Wortzel argue that privatization is problematic because it "is no more a solution to the problems of SOEs [state-owned enterprises] than SOEs were a solution to the problems they were created to solve" (633). In *Power Politics*, Roy views privatization as a wicked practice, a pseudo promise of development. Considering Roy's polemic stance against privatization, this paper will investigate the ways in which Roy positions the construction of dams in India to critique privatization of public resources that especially endangers the *adivasis* (native/aboriginal) and the *dalits* (lower caste) of India. By taking into cognizance Roy's critique of privatization in relation to human rights violation and flattening of democracy in the biggest democratic country in the world, this paper will also problematize Roy's stance against the dam constructions argued with blurrily in *Power Politics*.

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Arundhati Roy is a polemic writer writing in English. She writes about the misfortunes of the common people who are victimized, displaced, left with nothing for a kind of development agenda—the construction of dams by multinational corporations—which has very little or nothing (in most of the cases) to do with the improvement of the lifestyle of the poor. Due to Roy’s social privilege and class, as well as her critical understanding of socially important contentious subjects, she is an often visible person in the publishing world. Her illustration of the *adivasis*, the *dalits*, and the marginalized voices is strong, bold, reliable in its apprehension and sarcastic in its censure of political organizations. Her questions speak for the *adivasis* and the *dalits*, who are the oppressed people of the Indian society, displaced as a result of the construction of dams. In showing the displacement of the poor, Roy exposes the reality of corporate organizations, the true nature of the regional and the world politics, and the exploitation of natural resources.

In *Power Politics*, Roy questions the logic and value of the corporatization process, considering the social, historical, and economic contexts of India, by invalidating the plausibility of arguments in favour of it:

Is the corporatization...of agriculture, water supply, electricity, and essential commodities going to pull India out of the stagnant morass of poverty, illiteracy, and religious bigotry? Is the dismantling and auctioning off of elaborate public sector infrastructure, developed with public money over the last fifty years, really the way forward?” (14)

Roy explains that privatization is a form of globalization, and that globalization is a global disenfranchisement of the poor: “[Privatization] is presented as being the only alternative to an inefficient, corrupt state. In fact, it’s not a choice at all. It’s only made to look like one. [She claims that]...privatization is a mutually profitable business contract between the private (preferably foreign) company of financial institution and the ruling elite of the third world” (60). Condemning privatization, she argues that “[i]n a private project, the only things that are better managed are the corruption, the lies, and the swiftness and brutality of repression. And, of course, the escalating costs” (75). She further goes on to say that due to the “push for privatization, the customary depiction of the corrupt, oily, third world government official selling his country’s interests for personal profit fits perfectly into the scheme of things” (48) and concludes thus: “Corporatizing India is like trying to impose an iron grid on a heaving ocean and forcing it to behave” (31). The metaphors of “iron grid” and “heaving ocean” are indicative of the chaos that privatization is inviting in India. She claims that dams are the development projects “done in the name of Progress, in the name of National Interest” (“The Greater Common Good”) are in reality a kind of development fairytale that only displace, and marginalize the poor, the indigenous, the *adivasis*, the *dalits*. So, privatization is a wrong choice for bringing development in India, in her view.

Roy focuses on the sufferings of the common people due to the construction of dams in India. In *Power Politics* she discloses the flawed state of government policies for the construction of dams in India. Although the construction of big dams has almost been an obsession of the Indian government as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister (1947-1964), made the famous statement that dams were “the temples of modern India” (63), the reality for Roy is that “fifty-six million people [have been] displaced by Big Dams in the last fifty years” (67). As a result, the people, mostly poor low caste Indians, the *adivasis*, the *dalits*, lost their homes and livelihood. The profits go specifically to the rich and the poor are usually ignored. According to the Narmada Valley Development Project, the biggest dam project in India, there will be 3200 dams on the Narmada River that flows through the three states in western India. Roy notes that this project will destroy the eco-system of the river basin, risk 25 million people’s lives living around the valley, and submerge 4000 square kilometers of forest. In addition, another great concern is the issue of relocation and the compensation for the people who are to be dislocated due to the project (39). Roy also notes that the gigantic irrigation plan based on dams will benefit only one out of the three states; all sacrifices are to be made by villagers in the other two states. She questions the dams’ contribution to India’s food sector and claims that “there is no estimate for exactly what the contribution of Big Dams has been to overall food production in India...there hasn’t been an official Dams audit, a comprehensive, honest, thoughtful, post-project evaluation of a single Big Dam to see whether or not it has achieved what it set out to achieve? Whether or not the costs were justified or even what the costs actually were?” (27). Although the policy makers and the planners of the big dams in India are dreaming (in fact boasting!) of food security for India through the implementation of more dams, Roy questions the authenticity thus: “The India Country Study section in the World Commission on Dam Report...deduces that the contribution of large dams to India’s food grain produce is less than ten percent” (65-66). So, she is questioning the applicability and the efficiency of dams towards economic growth in India.

One of the most troubling revelations in *Power Politics* against dams is the way Enron, the Houston based natural gas company, robbed billions of dollars out of the Indian state of Maharashtra for a power plant, which was the first private power project in India, that the local industries cannot even afford to tap and “Enron [is] hanging like an albatross around [the State Electricity Board’s] neck” (57) resulting in the closure of hundreds of small industries as they cannot afford Enron’s produced expensive electricity: “The power that the Enron plant produces is twice as expensive as its nearest competitor and seven times as expensive as the cheapest electricity available in Maharashtra” (56). And in case of the Sardar Sarovar Project the scenario is more horrific as “[a]ccording to the NBA’s calculations, the cost of the electricity at the factory gate will be 13.9 cents per kilowatt hour, which is twenty-six times more expensive than existing hydel power in the state, five and a half times more expensive than thermal power, and four times more expensive than power from the central grid” (75). Furthermore,

she claims that the “Sardar Sarovar Dam has become the showcase of India’s Violation of Human Rights Initiative. It has ripped away the genial mask of Dams-as-Development and revealed its brutish innards” (72). So, in Roy’s view, the construction of dams is unrealistic and devoid of morality.

Roy argues that the privatization of natural resources like earth, water, air, and forests means “the transfer of productive public assets from the state to private companies” (43) and that this development will deprive seven hundred million people of India of access to such natural resources. To privatize these natural resources means to ask for a price for every drop of water the poor drink, for every breath they breathe and for the natural products of forest which they own. And “[t]o snatch these away and sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has no parallel in history” (43). Roy specifically explains the dangers of the privatization of an essential part of human life like water by stating what happened in Bolivia (one person got killed and US engineering firm Bechtel had to leave the country) when the Bolivian government tried to privatize the public water supply.

Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electronic (GE) in the speech on his visit to India shows extreme interest in the privatization of the power sector in India and says: “Don’t do it for GE’s sake, do it for yourselves...[because] privatizing the power sector [is] the only way to bring India’s one billion people into digital network” (45). However, the power politics underneath his statements is, which is same in regards other private companies, that there are four big private corporations in the world that control the production of power generation equipment. Their goal is to sell equipment that can generate 20,000 megawatts of power. And since there is no need in their home countries for such equipment, the only option they are left with are countries like India and China who need 10,000 megawatts of power per year (46). The excitement of privatization in India is designed to serve personal, private or corporate interests. And Roy questions thus: “Is the World Bank a dispassionate observer of the global situation? Are the studies it funds entirely devoid of self-interest?” (26) Jawaharlal Nehru in 1948 while speaking to the villagers who were to be displaced due to the Hirakund Dam said, “If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country” (qtd. in Roy, “The Greater Common Good”). However, Roy after visiting the Narmada Valley notes that surely the poor are not the beneficiary. In that sense, it is important to assume that the meaning of “the interest of the country,” as the poor people, who are also the citizens of India, are deserted with their fragile homes and dark futures.

One of the most frightening facets of the dams higher than fifteen meters from the base to the crest is that they are extremely dangerous to the ecosystem and cause the displacing of poor communities, destroying their livelihood and future. In spite of the hazardous environmental, economic and social impacts, the construction of dams is justified on paper. But there is a big gap between the actual and the projected as Roy observes the displacement of 114,000 people

more than the estimated (The Narmada Control Authority) 70,000 and they are displaced without any rehabilitation (71). This downplaying of the numbers of lives of the poor affected is the habit of the corrupted politicians in India as “the policymakers [always] go along with the interests of the dominant classes and region” (Judge 848). In fact, big dams in India are a western style development agenda which is established for the elites’ benefits. The supporters of the dam projects assured (orally!) for a better life for the affected people, but unavoidably and unsurprisingly they were unsuccessful in considering the rights and future of the poor people whose land they acquired for the development project. About this connection, while pointing to Roy’s arguments in regards to the dreadful condition of the poor, Bishnupriya Ghosh in her essay “Tallying Bodies: The Moral Math of Arundhati Roy’s Non-Fiction” notes that “[j]ustice is privilege of elites: by contrast, the poor are offered “human rights” that are seldom legally enforced either by nations or by the international community” (136). The issue is more complicated as Alessandra Marino asks: “what does it mean to belong to a state, or to a free country, when the right to land and the livelihood of hundreds of Adivasis in the Narmada Valley has been ignored for almost 30 years?” (705). In fact, Roy is complicating on the implication of dam construction incorporating the politics of poor elimination in India.

Roy expresses her dismay over the irrational attitude of several governments of India as they do not ask for any kind of consent from the poor inhabitants of the dam construction areas. She notes that “the reservoir of the Maheshwar Dam will submerge sixty-one villages. Thirteen will be wholly submerged; the rest will lose their farmlands. [However,] none of the villagers were informed about the dam or their impending eviction” (76-77). She claims that it is an irony that the poorest people of India are sacrificing themselves and their belongings for a so-called development agenda that only benefits the elites. Roy is sarcastic while she says, “We [the elites/rich] pollute, you [the poor] pay” (23). Roy, pointing to the dangers of privatization, notes that privatization works in a corrupted state like India as “the transfer of assets and infrastructure from bribe-taker [corrupt officials] to bribe-giver [selected multinational companies], which involves more bribery than ever” (52). And as “[p]rivatization seeks to disengage politics from the market” (51), the poor people are left with no choice but leaving their own living places towards a bleak future.

Moreover, the environmental impacts of dam constructions are massive as Roy notes, “[t]oday there are more drought-prone and flood-prone areas in India than there were in 1947. Not a single river in the plains has potable water...two hundred million Indians have no access to safe drinking water” (69). Roy in her essay “The Greater Common Good” censures the impacts of dams furiously: “Big Dams are to a Nation’s ‘Development’ what Nuclear Bombs are to its Military Arsenal...both weapons of mass destruction...both malignant indications of civilisation turning upon itself” (n. p.). Here, Roy shows an all-inclusive description of the issues that result in the marginalization of the *adivasis* and the *dalits*.

In *Power Politics*, Roy questions modern democracy's deceitfulness in always ignoring the actuality of freedom, while working as a mask for the elites and for the corrupted politicians to hide their greed for wealth. It legitimizes a so-called progressivism that erases the civil rights and denies justice for the poor marginalized people. While the Indian government rejected the report of the World Commission released by Nelson Mandela in 2000, Roy questions the Indian form of democracy thus: "Does this sound like a transparent, accountable, participatory democracy?" (20). She further goes on to say that "[i]n the poorest states, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa, more than eighty-five percent of the poorest people, mostly Dalit and Adivasi households, have no electricity. What a shameful, shocking record for the world's biggest democracy" (59). She indicates the subterfuge and hypocrisy of the government officials, rendering India into a kleptocratic state.

Roy's dismissal of corporate globalization is because it wipes out the universal concept of democracy due to its demands for an international alliance of loyal and corrupt governments, particularly from poor countries. These authoritarian governments, under the mask of development agendas, in fact serve their own and the corporate interests. And in case of any resistance from the poor *adivasis* and *dalits*, the respective authority comes up with horrible mutinies as Roy notes, "[w]hen they [the twelve families, mostly Dalit] protested [against the dam construction in the village of Jalud in 1985], cement was poured into their water pipes, their standing crops were bulldozed, and the police occupied the land by force" (79). Roy censures the Indian democratic machinery of judiciary, administration, and police because of their silent role in regards to the criminal acts by the elites and the corrupted politicians. She notes that "the police have been privatized" (82) and become a killing apparatus while the multinational corporations are destroying the ecosystem and displacing minorities. By violating basic human rights, dams, which are the elites' tools for making money, are constructing a world of infinite discrimination.

Critics' arguments on globalization and privatization support Roy's position in regards to the construction of dams and her thoughts and questions in relation to it. Critics like Bruno Amoroso, Alessandra Marino, Giorgio Agamben, and Wiebe E. Bijker argue about how privatization is the elites' way of earning money and leaves the poor out of the development debate (although the poor are present in paper!). They contend that during the height of privatization the world has experienced a flared distance between rich and poor. Poverty level increases although the world total income rose during the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They also show how dam construction turns democratic states into totalitarian policies, how under the veil of democratic development project dam construction is a capitalist scheme that tries to exclude the poor people from their livelihood, altogether how dam construction promotes dirty politics in a country (Amoroso 15, Marino 710, Agamben 101, Bijker 123). According to the Argentine sociologist Francisco Suarez the destructive effects of dams are: "coercive

displacement of large numbers of poor people, siltation in reservoirs leading to economic inefficiency, salination and waterlogging in irrigated areas, and the creation of health hazards” (qtd. in Goulet 883). Furthermore, the World Bank funded report *Dam and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (2000) shows that “the construction of large dams implicates high-cost overruns and considerable delays in their completion; 55% of dams generated less power than predicted and they are often counterproductive in relation to flood control” (qtd. in Marino 709).

Roy, in arguing about the impacts of the construction of dams, a project resulting from globalization and which has been handled (and will be in future as well) by private corporates, has come up with subjects like the displacement of the *adivasis*, the *dalits*, the corruption of the governments and the elites, the privatization of natural resources like water, the production of food and the gap between anticipation and product, the deterioration of democracy, etc. Although there could be little to disagree with Roy as a whole in these matters, she, however, presents privatization and globalization as negative extremes in themselves. Privatization and globalization have apparent vices in the way they have been appropriated by governments and corporate bodies for the benefit of the few, but are privatization and globalization devoid of any positive values? Is it not the corrupt ways in which governments and corporate organizations execute these privatization and globalization policies and not really as a result of the negative values in these policies that should be blamed?

Moisés Naím in his article “Globalization” debates that globalization is not only for the rich people of the world but for the middle class as well. He presents India as a “paradigmatic” example of growth as a result of globalization and claims that “the Indians...owe their recent success to trade and investment booms facilitated by globalization” (32). Roy misses the point of power that the marginalized gained from their reactions to the dams-related development agendas which is noted by Sahoo thus: “The democratic upsurge of the hitherto marginalised and their ability to vote out an insensitive government has destabilised the historically rigid hierarchical structures and forced that state and political actors to be more responsible to the interests of the poor and marginalised populations at the grassroots” (500). Roy is also one sided in her arguments on the construction of dams and misses (perhaps intentionally!) the positives that others like Bhalla et al. note that “the success of the big dams in generating a return in the range of 9%+ has serious implications for the government’s privatization programmes. None of the other wings of government enterprise, including those involved with infrastructure development, has been able to produce such performance” (95). They go on saying that “[t]he key element in the movement against big dams—the ‘human costs’—are actually considerably lower than activists or ideologically driven celebrities would have us believe. By all accounts, the number of people displaced by dams in India has been in the region of 3-4 million and not the outlandish 50 million that is quoted

in support of the activists” (97). Roy does come up with her solutions against globalization and privatization. She puts it thus:

What we need to search for and find, what we need to hone and perfect into a magnificent, shining thing, is a new kind of politics. Not the politics of governance, but the politics of resistance. The politics of opposition. The politics of forcing accountability. The politics of slowing things down. The politics of joining hands across the world and preventing certain destruction. In the present circumstances, I'd say that only thing worth globalizing is dissent. (33)

Here, Roy's intention is clear. In fact, she is questioning the socio-political model of India and is looking for an alternative. But she fails to provide that alternative approach that should bring better development. Countering an existing politics is needed through opposition but how that opposition can be created and sustained is a more significant question that should not be left unanswered. And could it be possible to create the “politics of joining hand across the world” without globalized and privatized efforts? If yes, then how? Overall, her thought of dissenting globalization seems arrogant to some extent as she fails to come up with realistic suggestions or counter arguments. Roy forgets that “[g]overnments pursue privatization in order to promote increased efficiency, introduce competition, expose SOEs to market discipline, encourage foreign investment, foster wider share ownership...and raise revenue for the state” (Megginson 17).

Lastly, in this globalized world it would be impractical condemning privatization, and in India, the biggest democracy in the world, where people have the right to do private business, it would be impossible to ban it. Rather, as “poverty is not a purely economic problem but a function of socio-structural factors that leave the poor excluded from the development process” (Sahoo 495), India may look forward for an alternative option that seeks a balance between private and public investments through a sustainable development focusing the socio-economic development of the present time but not overlooking the safety of the Indians' future.

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# Delusion of Success Myth and Its Demonic Essence in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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## Abstract

*Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize winning drama Death of a Salesman was written on the context of the Great Depression of 1930s. The stock market crash in 1929 had caused serious suffering to so many lives in America. Miller, in this play, very skillfully portrayed this suffering of human life in the American society. American society believes in the ideals of success, money and social status. These ideals of the society come up with a short phrase 'Success Myth'. The present paper aims at showing the delusion of success myth in the life of Willy Loman, the central figure of the play. The study also shows how the myth of success demonically makes a sense of disillusionment in Willy, works against him and thereby leading him to the path of self-destruction.*

*Death of a Salesman* (1948) by Arthur Miller is one of the most commended and performed plays in the history of American theatre. Arthur Miller, in this play, disparages the strong existing social force- 'Success Myth' which has a downcast impact upon the inhabitants of the American society. The success myth has a transcontinental history. It came to the land of America with the Puritan settlers from England and later on got popularity with the Franklin image of 'hard-working' and 'self-disciplinary' person. The American myth of success assures money, status, advantages in life and thereby has a great influence upon the Americans. The conviction is that success is available to all according to his/her ability. So, the myth ensures success to all the self-helped persons. Success myth is a belief in individual's potentiality and effort by which a person can be successful. The belief regarding the myth also includes the pursuit of money and of business success with the pursuit of happiness. Richard Weiss said: "[t]he belief that all men, in accordance with certain rules, but exclusively by their own efforts, can make of their lives what they will has been widely popularized for well over a century. The cluster of ideas surrounding this conviction makes up the American myth of success" (03). The myth embodies the American creed-life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by securing democracy and equality of

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opportunity in the society. It emphasizes on the individual's attempt and prospects to reach the land of great success. Americans believe "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Baym 8). But the myth turns into illusion after the World War I and the Great Depression of 1930s. After the World War I, the farmers and the factory owners went bankrupt since the surplus production during the WWI remained unsold. Consequently, there started the economic recession, and the great shock was the stock market crash in 1929 that resulted in the Great Depression of 1930s. The Depression caused unemployment problem and severe inflation in the economy. That's why the myth in turn takes the form of a demon which causes distress in different spheres of human life.

Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is essentially an American in aspirations and his story shows the delusion of success myth. To build up his career as a successful salesman is the first dream of Willy. Besides this, he dreams to be a successful man like Ben, and a well-recognized person in the society. He also dreams of successful lives of his sons. Willy accepts 'success myth' as an ideal which pushes him to make a new identity in terms of success in the American society. Success is a key requirement to hold a position in American society. The society develops it in a system that turns men into machines and Willy Loman finds it hard to have his dreams realized. Willy Loman gets himself in a society where success is the ultimate virtue of human life. To get success in life Willy faces many predicaments. Moreover, the society which sows the seeds of craving for success in Willy is indifferent to his distress and the same society along with its ideal- success myth is a powerful background in his livelihood. As an ordinary man Willy has no strong state of mind to stand against a force of the society and thereby creates his own illusory identity. Willy passes his whole life in running after success, money and status but unable to attain these neither in his own life nor through his sons. Willy Loman feels burdened with the constant pressure of obtaining success. Thereby, the myth creates a sense of disillusionment in Willy. Biff and Happy cannot work as ointment in Willy's failure. Being failed to achieve success in his life and to make a better future for Biff, Willy commits suicide. Hence, the myth of success appears to be demonically subversive and with its devilish power it leads Willy Loman to the path of self-annihilation. Like the witch hunting of the 1950s, the capitalistic success myth is also a horrifying experience in the American society and Willy Loman only happens to be a representative of the doomed species.

Deep rooted problems of the American society supply Miller the materials to pen the life story of Willy Loman. *Death of a Salesman* exhibits the conflict between the requirements of American materialistic society and Willy's failure to fulfill the requirements. Willy Loman is permeated with the perception that America is a 'land of opportunity' "in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man" (qtd. in Laitinin 20). Being an ordinary middle class

individual, Willy Loman endeavors to build up a better and richer life in the fast urbanized society of America. Amidst growing materialism Willy incessantly craves for a fine and beautiful life. He has found himself in a society where beautiful life means to get success at hand, become well-heeled and thus have a celebrated position in the society. Instead of embracing the ill-fated people, this success oriented society undermines its dejected inhabitants. Serving for thirty four years in the same Wagner company Willy is told “but there just is no spot here for you” (Miller 62) and “I don’t want you to represent us” (65) only because of the competitive selling business of that society. His dismissal from the firm creates a sense of disillusionment within himself and hence paves the way for creating false impressions like “[t]hey don’t need me in New York. I’m the New England man. I’m vital in New England” (10) to his family and to himself. These self-created false impressions create more disillusionment in Willy. In a commercial society, the machine that performs well in terms of making profit can only hold on to a creditable position. This is the mechanization of the business world that Willy is unable to perceive. The company makes use of all his power and energy for thirty four years and then discharges him first with no salary and then with no pension. The firm utilizes Willy’s labour but makes him separated from the fruits of his labour. Hence, Willy’s situation reminds us the Marxist view that “[c]apitalism alienates us from the products of our labour, from the things that we make, because they are not ours. They belong to capitalists to sell profitably for themselves” (Woodfin 62). Willy’s discharge from the firm sketches the breakdown of his first aim of being a successful salesman. So, Willy is deceived by the business enterprise of a capitalistic society. He becomes disappointed thinking the maintenance cost of his family. Therefore, his sudden termination from the job makes Willy completely disillusioned.

The success myth plays a powerful role in shaping the life of Willy Loman. Willy believes in the norms of success, eminence and affluence as most of the Americans did at that time. Once upon a time in his early life Willy met with a salesman named Dave Singleman who was capable of maintaining his livelihood by selling merchandise even at the age of eighty four. Dave Singleman telephones the buyers from the hotel room he lives, and gets the products sold even without leaving the room. Hence, Willy becomes magnetized with Singleman’s fame, success, personality and well-liked look, and thus dreams to have the similar advantages of the life of Singleman. Bearing Dave Singleman’s flourishing career in mind, Willy says, “I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want” (Miller 63). Moreover, salesmanship was an admired employment during 1940s in America. Consequently, Willy decides to build up his career as a salesman instead of going to Alaska. Therefore, it is the success oriented society that makes up Willy’s mind to be a successful salesman. But Willy’s excessive value on personal attractiveness: “[b]e liked and you will never want” (25-26) works against his dream. Therefore, he is again shattered by the ‘charismatic gifts’ (personality, well-like look) of success myth.

Dave Singleman's death became memorable as we find Willy saying thus: "hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral" (63). Singleman might prove some exemplary traits in salesmanship and that's why he is remembered even after death. Willy pleads to die a death as memorable as that of Singleman. So, Willy nourishes the dream to be a salesman. Subsequently Willy rebuffs his own talent in craftsmanship and pays no attention to his skill. Willy belongs to a society where skill of a draftsman is considered to be substandard to that of a salesman. We must remember it was a time when "people quickly lost their optimism about the future. They stopped buying things that they could not afford" (Crothers 201). The time along with the myth makes Willy bewildered at his position. As Willy could not be a successful salesman and was fired from the company so he remained unknown to the buyers and died a very pathetic death. Willy glorifies personality, well liked look, good appearance and having contacts with others, and executes these propositions into action but fails to reach the ultimate goal. It is a matter of great regret that Willy is imprisoned by his self created illusions: "Business is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course" (Miller 40) and at the end of the day he finds that his illusions come to nothing nearer reality. His excessive value on 'well liked look' rather than hard work makes him disillusioned which directs him to the path of self- destruction. His dream of a magnificent funeral of him attended by many people remains a dream as is evident in Linda's uttering: "Why didn't anybody come? ...But where are all the people he knew?" (110).

The American success myth fails to bring individual success for Willy. He desires for recognition, for a place in the society and thereby to be respected and to be loved. He thinks of a secure future: "someday I'll have my own business and I'll never have to leave home any more" (23). Willy presumes that Ben has attained the ultimate goal in life and he strives to follow Ben in his dream to be a successful man. At the age of seventeen Ben enters the jungle and comes back at twenty one. After that he declares "by God, I was rich!" (41). Ben's achievement in the jungle influences Willy to a great extent. Willy wishes to be rich within a short period of time. Yet he never finds the 'acres of diamonds' and adopts a low man's life. Willy is discontented with his professional life. In comparison with Ben Willy is an unsuccessful man in that society. Besides, Ben's success cannot drive Willy to the right way rather deludes him as Willy says: "[t]hat's just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right!" (Miller 41). Ben's achievement, instead of motivating Willy in a positive way, works against him. It is because Willy starts to believe in luck and pluck theory observing Ben's short time achievement of success. The society shapes Willy's thought and imbues a sense of attaining success at any cost. For this reason, Willy becomes obsessed with the myth. However, the society does not show him the right way of executing success. Rather the strain of money-spinning acceleration in the society makes Willy bewildered. Having failed to achieve the diamond from the land of salesmanship, he becomes a victim of the American success myth. Seeing Ben's victory and

good fortune Willy pretends to be very happy in his job and certainly this is an illusion he has created for himself. Finally, he proves wrong as we find Willy saying: "Charley, I'm strapped, I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired" (76). His well liked look cannot safeguard him from losing the job. Conflict between Willy's principle of well liked look and the reality leads him to the path of self-destruction. Thus the myth is so forceful that it destroys Willy's identity. Willy spends his whole life in worshipping the goddess of success but fails to get it because of the financial crisis of the time. The economic difficulties Willy undergoes in his life represent the after effect of the Stock Market Crash in 1929. He becomes unable to maintain the cost of his family and at the same time his two sons cannot turn round the condition of the family.

This is a general human nature to dream of a better life for his/her offspring. Willy is no exception, too. After his dismissal from the farm Willy has no hopes apart from transposing the aspirations into his two sons- Biff and Happy. He desperately tries to infuse his success oriented dreams and ambitions into his sons. He wishes them to bring about a great success in their lives which he himself has been unable to do. Unfortunately, Willy's excessive concern about his sons restrains him to let them find out their own ways of success. Willy tries to build up his two sons in the mould of success myth which he himself has cherished in his entire life but the two sons never make any effort to explore their father's dream for them, even they have no dreams in their own lives. Biff tells his father: "I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!" (104). Therefore, there is no natural continuation in father-son relationship. Mittapalli rightly argues: "When the continuity from one generation to another 'is not organic but mechanical', it leads to undesirable consequences" (204). Disintegration in the family relationship becomes evident with the progress of materialism in the society. Materialism reduces human values and disintegrates traditional family values. Willy becomes obsessed with this materialism and his notion of success has a negative impact upon his two sons. To train up his sons, Willy applies a wrong method like his own career. His high evaluation about his sons makes their ways more difficult: "you're both built like Adonises" (25). The susceptible philosophy of life- 'being well liked' does not lead Biff or Happy to a great fortune that can be measured as an achievement from the materialistic point of view. Biff holds each and every values of Willy but doesn't develop any one of these in his own way. The beliefs and values of both Biff and Happy are formed in terms of success myth. But they cannot be successful in their respective fields. They fail to fulfill their father's dream which makes Willy more frustrated.

Undoubtedly, Willy lives for his family since he commits suicide for the betterment of his family. He calls for a humanistic and kind atmosphere in the American business world which he is deprived of. It seems to Willy that Biff and Happy are a kind of good material to fulfill his dream by achieving success in their lives. The sons make Willy disappointed in this respect. At the early stage of life,

Biff shows his extraordinary talent at sport. The ordinary performance of Biff in the school can be mitigated by this heroic achievement on the sports field. Biff pays little attention in his prospect rather constantly reiterates on his father's self created 'being well liked' philosophy. Infusing wrong values into his sons, Willy creates false impressions about themselves in his own mind. Willy's words, "Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him" (25), "He's liked but he's not well liked" (25) and "[c]oach probably congratulate you on your initiative!" (23) make Biff bewildered in his situation. At the age of thirty four, he feels aimless and accuses himself of failure to create a self identity: "I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life" (17). Biff subsists in a time when "[m]illions wandered the country in an abortive search for work" (Bradbury 220). He spends the most valuable times of his life in vain searching job after job in the country: "I stole myself out of every good job since high school!" (Miller 104). The vision, Willy nourishes in respect of Biff has been traumatized. Therefore, in respect of Biff's career, Willy is again deluded by the success myth.

The most immoral character, Happy lacks the sense of morality. To become the manager of the firm, Happy wishes his boss to be dead. He is unwilling to recognize his father at the restaurant: "[n]o, that's not my father" (91). He clutches the false values of Willy forever. Taking no aspiration from the success myth, Happy loses everything except his father's 'phony dream'. He resolves to go on with his father's system of beliefs and thereby turns into "a marked-down version of his father" (Koon 37). Thus Happy has gone off track with the forceful blow of American success myth.

Above all, Willy dreams of a happy family where he desires to play the role of a loving husband, a good father and a man of social status he utterly fails to play such an envisaged role. Hence, Willy's life becomes futile and the only "way he can make his life pay off is by self-destruction" (Porter 149). Through his death, Willy wants to ensure a kind of freedom from the economic burden to his sons and wants to restore harmony in the family. To afford an improved fortune and to make out a way of success for Biff, Willy commits suicide. He assumes that through his suicide he could have a great contribution to Biff's successful career. The insurance money turns out "like a diamond" (Miller 100) for him since Biff can start over the new business with this money. Within a few minutes of contemplation, Willy commits suicide in a car crash. Willy's death is not a natural death but a suicide so he left no chance for them (Biff and Happy) to get the insurance money. So, "in the end the myth defeats him" (Porter 151). Willy Loman can be a very ordinary person or he may be unsuccessful but his death in this way can never be expected. Willy Loman is obviously a victim of the American success myth. Charley's remark "[n]obody dast blame this man" (Miller 111) at the death of Willy manifests that Willy is not responsible for this death since "Willy had no chance against the capitalistic system" (Koon 34).

Willy's disillusionment and subsequent suicide signify that the ideals of success myth have enormous flaws. It is not an easy task to turn down the false ideals of the society especially by a person like Willy who craves for a humanistic environment in the materialistic world. Certainly, Willy imprisons himself with the romantic illusion of success and eminence. Yet, Willy alone is not responsible for his illusory dreams; very logically these dreams are shaped by the myth of the society. Finding no other means to get success in life, Willy chooses the last way (suicide) to attain it at least for his loving son, Biff. So, it is evident that the demonic power of the myth of success deludes Willy Loman not only in his life but also in his death.

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# Voice of God and the Spirit of One's Own in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night at the Call Center*

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## Abstract

*Chetan Bhagat in One Night at the Call Center, through the exposure of recurrent problems faced by the Indian youth, has created a philosophical room centering round the inner voice of an individual. As Bhagat seems to be more concerned about self-realisation and self-understanding than religious morals and customs, it becomes important to think whether the inner voice of a person is the voice of God Himself. Apart from incorporating the distinct philosophical dimensions in the religious scriptures and the different ideological stances of some explorers of God in human souls, this paper suggests a space for rethinking 'realizing the existence of God' and 'the rise of one's inner-self'. Through initiating the telephonic conversation of God where He advocates some psychological notes for a group of young people in India, this young novelist opens up a bunch of debates amidst many a significant but unanswered questions: How does a materialistic being feel the touch of God? How can one feel the spirit of one's own? Is it allegorically represented as the 'sense of conscience'? Is it self-understanding or self-realisation through which breeds self-resistance, self-respect and self-confidence? This paper throws light on such queries and tries to arrive at an understanding of how 'the study of self' becomes the answer script for many up-to-the-minute problems.*

Anselm's ontological argument demonstrates the reality of God where he distinguishes the existence of God considering the term 'most perfect conceivable being' in the mind and in reality (qtd. in Neal 1). From this view to the most popular theistic arguments, there has been a series of efforts to strengthen the ground on the existence of God in reality. Taking the word 'probable' into consideration, it becomes impossible for the scholars to establish either the existence or the nonexistence of God by recognized and logical arguments based on universally accepted infrastructure. A lot of concepts and rational belief dig up their end in the very personal feelings and perceptions of one's own. From the ancient time to today, people haven't found any carriage except the 'very

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understanding of self' to reach the apex regarding this concern. When one is in danger or in complexities, s/he tries to hear the voice of his/her own and act accordingly. Bhagat's easy-going narrative, where he apparently addresses a lot of tribulations of Indian new generation, leaves a theoretical frame by interpreting the spirit of one's own as that of God.

While discussing the pragmatic arguments in the chapter "Belief in God," Abdul Matin in the book *An Outline of Philosophy*, states that "the existence of God is proved by the fact that belief in God is highly useful in our life" (313). Matin further argues: "Ideas are verified by their workability or practical satisfactoriness. The idea of God is a great source of satisfaction and effective stimulus to the struggle for noble living. The idea of God, therefore, works. Hence God exists" (314). Religious scriptures and religious customs encompass the concept of God and His revelation. The way God and His features are presented, clarified and explained in the prevailing doctrine of religion is prominently dependent on some beliefs. Actually, the system human beings live in is two folded: one is physical body and the other is a kind of subconscious area of thought whose perception is only felt but cannot be described perfectly (many psychiatrists, philosophers have tried and are still trying to explain this in different ways). We feel that the thoughts and the sense come from somewhere 'inside' which we can only realize but cannot grasp the origin. God is prominently remembered when one does not have anyone to rely on. While speaking deliverance from hardship by praying to God, people generally try to get closer to God by exploring God's prevalence over human minds. So, when people look forward to God's aid, they subconsciously look into their own minds. The 'inner self' is formed with the surroundings, thoughts, their core beliefs, and the environment they live in. The 'spirit' of one's own is formed in such a way. Landau says, "The knowledge of oneself is the knowledge of the world inside us and the road to truth and thus to God is shortest when we search for Him within ourselves" (291).

In Bhagat's story, God doesn't come in reply to the prayer of an ardent devotee. Rather He appears (through telephonic conversation) before a group of people who are indulged in ways of life not strictly religious. The novel implies a sense that it is not religious customs or something like that but through spirit or deep meditation God can be attained. No prayer is as effective as the prayer before death. But in the true sense, when one reaches the dark end, he has to rely on the decision of his 'own'. Bhagat's story suggests that if God really exists, He speaks at this stage. Whether this 'own' is 'self', 'soul' or 'spirit', they work together and get unified as a distinct form. The 'spirit' which is felt at this stage and the long reliable 'God' have mixed up and emerged as a unified source of solution which is perhaps the best ever solution for a man's life.

Being a student of IIT, Chetan Bhagat is presumed to be a man of science. His characters do not seem to go to temple or perform religious rites but surprisingly,

his story is flavoured with God and the beginning, ending or even the segments of his story revolve round God. This is a sort of anti-foundational idea of exploring God. It is apparent that Bhagat is not the one who searches the indication of God in traditional and established manner. This is interesting to note that there is no ardent devotee, not a single indication of temple or religious customs but God is the 'center' of the story. What Bhagat has done is that he has made a relationship between materialistic way of life and manifestation of God. He shows that dress or way of life can't be an obstacle to reach that superpower. Even for American transcendentalists the fundamental objection to the popular belief of the existing religion is that everyone does not need to go to the church or temple or mosque to feel the touch of God. Rather they emphasize on the principle that every individual is to be valued because everyone has a portion of the 'oversoul'. This concept of 'oversoul' is directly linked with that of God in the sense that human souls and other souls must return to this soul after death.

As a backlash of capitalism and globalisation, the potential young men and women get attracted to the over-materialistic lives. Multinational companies and thousands of firms continue alluring them. The materialistic trends of the present world occupy the little space one has for self-exploration. Almost all the major characters in *One Night at the Call Center* suffer from such confinement of thoughts. Here all the characters are covered with a kind of canopy which hides their real identity. Bhagat carefully depicts a wall between the inner intentions of Shyam, Vroom, Priyanka, Radhika or Esha and what they have to do in reality. Bhagat's suggestion is to take off the shawl and try to find the 'own' of them. There should not be any wall between their inner-calling and their activities. The generation is fully obsessed with outward materialism. Their tendency of being focused leads them to a total destruction.

The novel starts with a significant nightmare of Shyam Mehra. The youths are pushed down in the darkness where there is no room of free-thinking just as Shyam is submerged in water by the hands of Bakshi. This 'nightmare' is the 'nightmare' of a generation out of self-judgment, self-assessment and self-exploration. In this 'drowning' situation, there can't be any 'rising of self' or no 'spirit' can come into being as there are series of materialistic obstacles which hinder one's 'self' from manifestation. Shyam is presented as an obedient employee who spends most of his innovative power to pay for Bakshi, his boss in the call center. He has already failed to survive in love. He doesn't know what is in store for him for the future days but still waits for 'a break' gifted by Bakshi. Whatever the cause is, the world of Shyam deadly lacks in self-respect, self-control, self-realization, and self-confidence. Bhagat detects in Shyam a strong craving for 'getting established in life', which, for him, implies two things: one, a spontaneous flow of love, and second, a liberated soul.

Vroom, as he dominates the novel at the last phase, plays an important role in the setting of the novel. In fact, he leads an extremely materialistic life. Vroom

possesses a bold personality with sheer frustration at the personal as well as professional level. He doesn't like what he is doing right now. Vroom says, "I want to have a life with meaning, even if it means a life without Bed or daily trips to Pizza-Hut. I need to quit this call center. Sorry, calling is not my calling" (205). He, as it appears from the lines cited above, has unfolded the hollowness of his dreary corporate life which has depleted his vigour and vivacity. Life is not all about chasing the mirage of professional goals and monetary boom—this truth finally dawns in his mind which is why he feels the compulsion to leave his job at the call centre.

Radhika sacrifices her state of comfort for the sake of her in-laws' family as she tries her best to convince them. At one stage, she comes to know that her husband cheats her. Though she leaves no stone unturned to retain her relationship with her husband and his family, nothing can make it stable. Esha's thoughts always center round her career but she is not concerned about her ultimate goal. Her realization comes at the great sacrifice to life. Priyanka loses her ability of justifying herself for the excessive influence of her mother on her own life. Just before beginning of the text, Bhagat asks his readers to write down something that they fear, makes them angry and they don't like about themselves. He has not cleared the purpose of this exercise but any thoughtful reader smells the exploration of one's 'own self' as it takes one to the deep down of one's 'own' to some extent.

Though Bhagat's characters live in a senseless materialistic society, they seem to experience different roles in their 'inside' and 'outside'. They undergo a range of torments owing to the society they live in; they struggle for self construal; they desire directly or indirectly to break free to become 'well thought of' individuals. Bhagat deliberately shows his characters rebelling against the customs and pretensions that confine their individual freedom of picking up the meaning of life. An internal collision is manifested in the contradiction between their thoughts and actions, imposed sense of youth culture and nationalistic attitude, consequentiality and inconsequentiality.

Bhagat senses that the generation is highly obsessed with some imposed cultural traits of the west. Reminding the glorious history of Indian subcontinent, he calls upon Indian youth to rise above the level of this obsession. To ensure it, Bhagat depends on the spirit of the youth which is mainly derived from the individual spirit of the inner-self. At the last stage of the novel *One Night at the Call Center*, Vroom's inspiring speech includes:

And then big companies come and convince us with their advertising to value crap we don't need, do jobs we hate so that we can buy stuff—junk food, colored fizzy water, dumbass credit cards and overpriced shoes. They call it youth culture. Is this what they think youth is about? Two generations ago, the youth

got this country free. Now that was something meaningful. But what happened after that? We have just been reduced to a high spending demographic. The only youth power they care about is our spending power. (226)

For this disaster-prone generation, Bhagat feels the necessity of a guide who, importantly, has to show the conduit of reaching their goal as his sense of optimism results from extreme pessimism. Bhagat rejects the self-revealed guides, therefore, doesn't conceal his disgust over politicians:

All kinds of people—students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars—commit suicide. But politicians never do. That tells you something. Suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt. This means they feel something. But politicians don't. So basically this country is run by people who don't feel anything. (42)

Bhagat, tracing out no other way, brings God as He, according to the belief of billions of people, is the ultimate resolver. Bhagat's art of depicting God is suggestively unique in the sense that He appears in a telephonic conversation and approaches one of the most desired queries of human beings—'how to feel the existence of God'. The leading characters not only seem to be very frustrated at the beginning of the novel but also remain unconcerned about 'what they actually want in their life'. Though they seem to be smart enough to handle some white-coloured sensible individuals, they are as if they were floating in an aimless boat. They actually want to get rid of the clutches of materialistic outcome but what actually happens is that they cannot hear the inner voice, as Bhagat marks, the voice of God.

Bhagat emphasizes on 'self-guiding' with a sense of stability of thoughts and patience. So, one has to be guided by oneself. Our inner voice can instruct one to move forward and to lead a decent life as it is something which has the ability to guide one. Reality is structured with the way one thinks as Arberry says, "It is the thought that brings us. The thought of a garden brings us to the garden. The thought of a shop brings us to the shop" (13).

The spirit of one's own links the idea of 'self' in many respects. The term 'self' has different layers of connotations. Critical study of 'self', most commonly, conceptualizes one's own insightful realization and its projection always seems to be incomplete and dubious as there is an existence of self-accepting as well as self-defying inner configuration in every human being. As the source of cognizant acuity, one's 'own' actually governs unique nature of his or her feelings and actions. In his book, *Neurosis and Human growth*, Horney refers to an instructive idea of 'self':

The actual self is an all inclusive term for everything that a person is at a given time: body and soul, healthy and neurotic. We have it in mind when we say that we want to know ourselves as we are. The idealized self is what we are in our irrational imagination, or what we should be according to the dictates of neurotic pride. The real self, which I have defined several times, is the “original” force toward individual growth and fulfillment, with which we may again achieve full identification when freed of the crippling shackles of neurosis. Hence it is what we refer to when we say that we want to find ourselves. (158)

Religious exemplification creates a notion that the existence of self in human beings helps them to work out even on the bits and pieces prevailing in the universe. One’s ‘self’ cannot step properly if he or she turns out to be a part of a group or becomes predisposed by the group directly or indirectly. It is just like as the situation when many of our friends speak at the same time, we don’t hear anyone’s voice clearly. As the characters in *One night at Call Centre* are influenced by the group, their steps are not proved right.

Self, which is often regarded as personal identity, surrounds the level and scale of consciousness that exists in one’s own. A series of recent studies have showed that self-awareness is such a level of one’s mental state which generates competence, functions like carrying out recollection, dealing out speed and way of thinking. From the concept prevailing in *The Geeta*, Lord Krishna emerges as the transcendent structure of all stuffs and all immaterial individual selves as the one unifying absolute self. In the chapter “Spirit and Matter” of *The Geeta*, Lord Shrikrishna tells Arjuna: “The body of man is the play ground of the self; and That which knows the activities of Matter, sages call the self” (84). From this point of view, the concept of self-control, self-realization has been derived. Bhagat actually emphasizes on self-realisation which actually interlinks the ‘inner-voice’. True self-realisation comes with the help of God. While analyzing ‘self-control’ in *The Geeta*, Lord Shrikrishna further suggests that “Let him seek liberation by the help of his highest Self, and let him never disgrace his own Self. For the Self is his only friend” (42).

What needs to be pointed out is that the link between ‘immaterial’ and ‘self’ is very significant in the sense that material view limits the modern beings to take notice of any inner omen. It would be a worthwhile study to find out how the concept ‘self-knowledge’ is embedded on a specific question ‘what am I like?’ As for psychology, the idea of ‘one’s own’ can be expounded with cognitive self, affective self and executive self. Self-thoughts or self- instructions are derivatives of one’s cognitive self and cognitive self is formed and guided by a mental framework governed by a superpower. Bhagat indicates this superpower as God. Landau in his *God Is My Adventure* puts forward:

Only through self-knowledge can we hope to understand the world as it actually is and not as it appears through the veils of our imagination. The Greeks with their distinctively spiritual consciousness clearly perceived the reason for that paramount truth. In their opinion, Only One Being exists always and fills eternity—that is God, who gives life to all things and who dwells within man. This is why Apollo says to his worshippers “Know thyself”. (291)

At this point, the notion of ‘thyself’ points forward in many ways to the subject of many proceedings in the ‘inner-self’. To hear the voice of God or to be instructed by inner-self, one has to exclude all the links of material obsessions so that the sound can become clear and unrestricted. Materialism, lack of commitment etc are the conspicuous obstacles of this journey. To pick out the guidance of God, we have to make our ‘own’ clear and transparent. God in *One Night at the Call Center* tells:

Yes, the little voice inside that wants to talk to you. But you can only hear it when you are at peace – and then too it is hard to hear it. Because in modern life, the networks are too busy. The voice tells you what you really want. Do you know what I am talking about? (203)

God continues:

And the voice is easy to ignore—because you are distracted or busy or just too comfortable in life. Go on, ignore it—until you get tangled in your own web of comfort. And then you reach a point like today, where life brings you to a dead end, and there is nothing ahead but a dark hole. (203)

Heidegger, one of the prominent German existentialists, indicates that one can understand his or her ‘own self’ when s/he comes very close to death. Bhagat indicates the same path to hear the voice of one’s ‘inner self’.

The quest of humans for tracing the image of God and for a deeper understanding of the bonds between God and mankind has been going on since time immemorial. To quote a few words said by Heraclitus (540-480 B.C), as found in Jostein Gaarder’s *Sophie’s World*, “God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, hunger and satiety. God can be seen most clearly in the constant transformations and contrasts of nature” (35). These lines endorse the idea that God exposes Himself through everything He has created and since humans are created by God, delving deep into human mind can unlock the gateway to a more transparent perception of God.

The efforts to uncover the confusions encircling the origin, existence, surviving, objective, destination of human beings were started even before ancient civilization. These efforts, in fact, contributed much regarding the development of modern thoughts. The incomprehension also includes the mystery of shaping the body of human beings and their relationship in terms of life and the world. Lack of transparent evidence leads to the dissatisfaction regarding human beings' thirst for knowledge. Ultimately, people don't have any choice exploring such questions except depending on his or her deep inner-feelings. Correspondingly, God's revelation or His instruction can only be sensed through the profound inner-feelings, not by customs or rituals.

The demand for the fulfillment of human necessities derives from the instinctive impulses and strong desires. Bhagat clearly shows that if one can successfully understand himself, he/she can get the meaning of life. For Bhagat the desired tone of the story is generated through the voice of God as He tells: "Knowing what you want is already a great start" (206). Bhagat's easy-going narrative ends with a deep moral note. The identification of the girl, who coordinates the story, remains undisclosed until the last phase of the story. The way Bhagat brings God as a character in the novel and makes use of language to weave the string of the story and deals with psychological shape of the characters clearly rejects excessiveness of customs and values than the beliefs on God Himself. In *One Night at the Call Center*, God appears more as an instructor than as an expected figure.

Presentation of 'God' as a character in the fictional work is always a challenging task considering His dialogues and the way of movement as it appears to be the most sensitive issue to most of the readers. The concept of God as well as religion has its praxis based on some particular beliefs of the people. So, putting dialogues in God's mouth in the novel is quite difficult to consider. However, Bhagat seems to be willing to take this risk. He personifies God in this novel and makes God speak. However, he upholds God's invisible identity while doing so. Showing God's image in a concrete or vivid way might lead to adverse reactions from some readers—Bhagat was quite aware of this while writing the story. Making reference to God is too abstruse a task to do without linking up the point with theology. Bhagat does not make explicit allusions to theology in this book but he does not place a great deal of importance on the theme that God is not an unfathomable and remote dimension of actuality. The readers smell that He resides very close to His creations, to humans and deep and reflective self-inquisition may further boost the vicinity between God and mankind.

The ending of the novel imparts a complete sense of mystery circling round the essence of God and His existence. The narrative development of the novel gets its ending with a symbolical image of the girl who carries forth this 'breath-taking' story and sets the focus of the narrator on a few lines on the page that lay open.

Always think of Me, become my devotee, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. (257)

The girl telling the story at the outset of the novel is not identified by the author in any part of the book. This is one piece of ambiguity the readers come across in the novel. Bhagat's idea leaves a controversy in the sense that the idea of God residing in the minds of humans is not a universally accepted notion. Lots of people uphold this thought while a huge portion of people across the world don't believe in anything like this.

A person's drive to untangle the puzzles of life lies in his/ her capability to demystify the ambiguity that riddles his/ her notions about selfhood. One has to rise above the level of all sorts of material obsessions and meaningless roaming for ensuring the absolute indication of the 'self'. To realize this fact is not by any means to be in possession of ethical concepts or religious customs but of a deep meditation. In the course of presenting the characters in *One Night at Call Center*, Bhagat stresses on detecting the instruction of God through sensing one's absolute 'self'. His claim is that this spirit renders manifestly worthwhile all the pain and travail of the long journey of human life. It helps an individual to make himself/ herself free from inner-segmentation, to be confident and to feel the heart's content about taking decision.

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# ***The Inheritance of Loss: An Exposition of Entrapped Identities***

**Sanjida Chowdhury\***

## **Abstract**

*The Inheritance of Loss is a lucid portrayal of immigrants' life, colonial hangover, ethnic and racial conflicts and domination of imperial forces. Kiran Desai has taken her characters from different corners of the society and thus opened the way to see life from different stances. But most notably, almost all her characters share a similar condition in their respective lives; they are entrapped within their identities. Being trapped, their individual hopes, always unfulfilled, slowly wither away. This paper aims at showing how the major characters of The Inheritance of Loss are entrapped within their identities in terms of colonial hangover, legacy of colonial education, subaltern identity, economic supremacy over the third world countries, and several other forces. It also tries to disclose the way in which their hopes have turned into mirages.*

*The Inheritance of Loss*, the prestigious Man Booker Prize winning novel, explores the economic supremacy of the new imperial forces, colonial hangover, the subalterns' struggle for equal rights and many other issues of the present world. Desai enters into the life of each character and thus portrays the lives from diverse stances. The characters of this novel are diverse in social rank and in their identities but they share a similar situation in their respective lives since all the characters are entrapped within their identities. Desai presents her characters as shuttered within their own shells and unable to escape.

The colonial hegemony of Europe over the colonized countries has long been over but still the ex-colonized countries, suffer from a hangover of the colonial rule. Amartya Sen, the noble laureate, in his book *The Argumentative Indian* says, "...the self identity of post-colonial societies is deeply affected by the power of the colonial cultures and their forms of thought and classification" (139). The protagonist of *The Inheritance of Loss*, Jemubhai, a former judge and British ICS member, represents the Indian born anglophiles who are still hankering after their colonizer's world. Jemubhai left his family, friend, child, and above all, his Indian

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society only to keep his British given identity unstained. His colonial hangover leads him to a self-imposed entrapment which cannot be resisted or he has no instinct to resist it. Besides the colonial hangover, the forces like economic struggle, dream of a better life, ethnic conflicts, class discriminations and legacy of colonial education have left their impact upon the characters like Bizu, Gyan, Sai and Panna Lal and driven them to confinement. Though these characters have their own barriers around them, they all are nursing their individual hopes. To the judge, it is the hope of holding his British given identity without any disruption; to Bizu and his father, it's the hope of a better life. Gyan's hope is to liberate his kinsmen from the legacy of subaltern identity and Sai wants to fulfil the hope of life through her love. Let us now closely examine the forces which work behind the entrapment of these major characters and responsible for the devastation of their hopes.

The setting of the novel is at Kalimpong, a district of Darjeeling near the Indo-Nepali border. The time was 1986, during the revolt of ethnic group Nepali Gorkha for the demand of a separate land. The author has given a panoramic description of the natural view of the setting which has touched the foot of Kanchenjunga. The setting stands in opposite to the lives of its characters. The setting indicates a free life in the laps of nature but the lives of the characters are not free; they are bound and confined by so many social and personal forces which lead them to creep inside their own shell. Their home cannot touch their heart in distress, and a sense of detachment can be seen between nature and its inhabitants and also inhabitant to inhabitant. The novel starts with an atmosphere where the judge is sitting at the far corner of the veranda with his chess board but he has nobody to check his king. Kiran Desai symbolizes this one sided playing as the judge's reluctance to violate fixed adopted values. Sai, sitting on the veranda is reading an article about giant squid and the cook is trying to light the damp wood. This damp wood is the symbol of their cold relationships with each other which cannot be warmed or they have no instinct to make it warm. They all have invisible precincts which resist them to keep a friendly relationship with each other and these restrictions have come from their own identities they bear.

The words 'entrap' and 'identity' have been used, in this paper, to denote a condition of the individual in which s/he is not free, rather she is confined within ancestral or acquired or imposed identities. The protagonist Jemubhai has become the subject of "colonial hegemony" where colonizers lead the colonized to believe their native ideals, culture as uncivilized and inferior. Franz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin White Mask*, depicts the colonized people who were the subject of French imperialism and were bound to hold a 'traumatic belief' about their own inferiority. They had only one way to quit from this traumatic experience and that is to hold those colonizers' ideals. Jemubhai also has no other way but to embrace the colonizers' world. His first attempt to throw out his cultural identity started from the day of leaving his motherland, when he denied throwing the coconut into the sea. He ignored his ancestral values and made himself ready to accept the upcoming identities. Whenever he threw the packet

with “Indian love” he felt one kind of loneliness which continues till the end of the novel. The more he has tried to be like his colonizers, the more he has found himself gripped within himself. Jemubhai’s adaptation to the colonizers’ world was not easily attained. He was a stranger among the British, an unwelcome, untouchable stranger:

For entire days nobody speak to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the helpless – blue haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins – moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it wasn’t even remotely as bad as he had. (Desai 39)

Jemubhai’s traumatic experience evokes Franz Fanon’s remembering of how he felt among the white French people, “on that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed and made myself an object” (85). Jemubhai, like Fanon, discovered himself as an object among the whites. In a diasporic situation, he continuously fought to establish his new identity, and at the end when it came, he grabbed it and till the last part of his life he struggles to hold his identity as a former judge and British ICS member. In this post-colonial world, Jemubhai and his colonial glory turns to the subject of ridicule but Jemubhai’s colonized mind is not ready to accept the post colonial situation. Post colonial critic Asish Nandy, in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) says thus:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds. (xi)

As the West has crossed the barriers of borders not only of lands but also of minds, it has also possessed Jemubhai’s mind and transformed him into a representative of the colonizers. To erase the smell of nativity Jemubhai has left his wife and kept himself in far distance from his predecessors even when there is no one to give him company. Furthermore, the replacing of his native language with that of the colonizers distracts Jemubhai more from the natives. As the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiongo has expressed, “For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature and conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer”(16). The protagonist Jemubhai has become the subject of this

domination where he fixes his language as inferior and uncivilized. By speaking in English, his colonizer's language, and adopting the new world's culture Jemubhai denies his native heredity. Thus, Jemubhai has gradually disowned his own world and invited his self-confinement.

The only hope which works behind the judge's secluded life is to embrace his newly formed identity till the end of his life. He has left his family, his society and leads a life of self banishment in a remote corner of India. The judge lives here "with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country" (29). In spite of all his efforts he is unable to keep himself secure as he faces severe disgrace in the hand of Gorkha boys. At the end of the novel this anglophile is about to compromise with his old custom as his only friend, Mutt, the dog has been lost. Only for the dog he is ready to bow in front of his old God and promises to retreat, he prays, "if you return Mutt, I will acknowledge you in public, I will never deny you again, I will tell the world that I believe in you—you—if you return Mutt" (301). This submission to God and his old customs indicates the lost hope of holding his long nursing identity.

Economic supremacy of the first world countries over poor countries creates a new kind of imperialism which leads the people of poor countries to think themselves as inferior. This economic force not only governs the people's mind but also directs them to be migrated into different first world countries. Kiran Desai has shown Indian suitors of American visa who are ready to sacrifice their honour only to get a visa, as one of them says, "I'm civilized sir, ready for U.S. I'm civilized mam" (Desai 183). Desai has exposed the way how economic forces work over poor countries as one of the Indian passengers on her way to India expressed anguish by saying, "we are paying as much as the other fellow. Foreigners get more and Indians get less. Treating people from a rich country well and people from a poor country badly. It's a disgrace" (298). This disgrace went further when the NRIs treated in dissimilar ways with the same coloured passport holders: "Americans, British and Indian passports were all navy-blue, and the NRIs tried to make sure the right sides were turned up, so airline officials could see the name of the country and right away whom to treat with respect" (299). Here economic condition works as a measuring kit of people's value.

By the portrayal of Bizu, the son of Panna Lal and an Indian immigrant in the U.S.A., *The Inheritance of Loss* has paved the way to see the dismal lives of the immigrants. Bizu wants to upgrade his as well as his father's pathetic economic condition which has driven him to go to America. In a conversation with Noni, Sai says about the cook and his son as "the poorest family of the village" (67). Bizu, being a poor boy of a poor father has gone to the U.S.A. with a dream of a better life. But, his as well as his father's dream of a better life becomes the first step towards entrapment. Bizu represents so many poor Indians who want to improve their condition by going to the western countries. Kiran Desai is fully aware of the fact of Indian immigrants who are in diasporic situation almost for

their whole life. They have one and only desire to settle themselves even by humiliating their position. In this process of upgrading their economic condition, they not only lose their honour but also hold their own country as an inferior one. This notion of self inferiority has its roots in colonial period which taught the colonized to think them as inferior and uncivilized. In consequence, it is evident that not only the economic force but also the 'colonized mind' has worked behind the notion of self- inferiority. The people who were colonized by the white people and who now become the subject of new imperial forces and hegemony think that America is a land of prosperity and success. Our characters Bizu and his father also had the notion that only by going to America they could liberate themselves from the economic and racial suppressions.

The concept of America as a dreamland has not been formed in a day. To form the concept the myth of American dream has played a vital role. James Truslow Adams, the coiner of the word 'American dream' has characterized this dream thus: "[T]hat dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability and achievement" (qtd in Laitinen 20). He also added, "...but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (21). Adams stressed on recognition by others which indicate one's identity but in case of Desai's immigrants, they lack any fixed identity except their identities as immigrants. Hankering after "American Dream" has proved to be a mirage to Bizu like many other dreamers. Bizu has wandered year after year, from one job to another job, one kitchen to another kitchen, from one owner's hand to another owners hand but he is unable to get a green card. Without green card he cannot go back or if he goes back, he cannot return. He is trapped within his illegal immigrant identity. If he throws it, he will at the same time throw his father's as well as his long cherished dream. Entrapment leads Bizu to restlessness. "Sometimes, it was impossible for him to stand to stay in his skin. He walked to far end where the homeless man often slept in dense chamber. He saw a homeless chicken lived among the homeless people. Bizu saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life" (Desai 81). Desai symbolizes Bizu's situation by this homeless chicken's condition, both of them long for their village life but unable to escape.

The refusal to accept new culture is another vital issue which works behind Bizu's entrapment. Unlike the other immigrants, he is not ready to sacrifice his culture and religion. Bizu and Saeed, the two immigrants see their respective identities from two individual stances. The same immigrant identity has been treated in two different ways by these two characters. Saeed seems to be more pragmatic while Bizu is a sort of idealist as he resists the western culture and denies working in restaurant in which he has to cook meat. He even avoids going to the whores where other immigrants try to get pleasure from it as one and only

means of their amusement. Grabbing of “desi ideals” entrap Bizu more within his immigrant identity which does not happen to the same identity bearer Saeed. To get a green card Saeed is ready to do paper marriage; he does not give priority to his culture or religion. The only aim is to stay in this so called dreamland, which marks the difference between these two persons and their long cherished words ‘live’ and ‘leave’. Saeed wants to live by getting green card but Bizu wants to leave by getting it. Bearing his father’s dream, grabbing of “desi ideals” and failing to adopt new culture have entrapped Bizu within his immigrant identity.

The economic struggle accompanied by the class conflicts resists the cook, Panna Lal, to break his boundary. The class discrimination in India is clear in the speech of Noni, as she says, “it was important to draw the lines properly between class or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide” (Desai 67). The class discrimination between the cook and the judge is visual when “the police collected their umbrellas and went tramping across the cook’s hut, extra careful, extra suspicious. Everyone knew it was the servant when it came to robbery” (12). For the last twenty five years, the cook’s salary has not changed; the judge gives only “pocket money” which is a clear indication of suppression over the cook. The cook’s position as a servant and the Judge’s position as master create a huge barrier between these two persons and entrap the cook in his lower class Identity. The deprivation leads the cook to be a dreamer. He has got the only way to break this social discrimination by upgrading his economic condition which has driven him to send his son, Bizu, to the U.S.A. Moreover this deprived man can’t drop his fascination for western people and culture which is an outcome of colonial hegemony. He thinks that his position is inferior to his father as his father worked under British man where he is working for an Indian man. From this stance, the cook also bears the title “anglophile” like the judge. He is proud of his son as he cooks for the English. Kiran Desai observes, “The cook had thought of ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, khari biscuit pie, and was sure that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian” (17). The impact of American dream is also much prominent in the character of the father Panna Lal rather than in Bizu, as the cook says, “My son works in New York”, the cook boasted to everyone he met, “he is the manager of a restaurant business.” “New York. Very big city,” “the cars and building and nothing like here. In that country, there is enough food for everybody” (84). This dream of “all men are equal” and the hope of a better life have turned into a mirage at the end. The father wants to see his son’s success in America but the son tries to find a new hope of life by coming back to his native land. Both father’s and son’s hope of new life has turned into ashes as Bizu has lost his last means of hope at the hand of Gorkha boys. Both the father’s and the son’s dream of a better life remains a mirage.

Kiran Desai has taken her characters from different strata of the society and each of them is suffering from his/her own identity crisis. To depict the oppressed Nepalese Indian community, she has revealed a historical fact, a revolt led by the

ethnic group Nepali Gorkha for the demand of a separate land. By portraying the revolt, Desai shows the reason behind the entrapment of a Nepali boy as well as his ethnic group. This discussion demands to convey the backdrop of GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) movement and the reason behind it for which Gyan has suffered confinement within his ethnic identity. After the Anglo-Bhutanese war in 1866, Kalimpong was transferred to Darjeeling District. The population of the Darjeeling consisted of Lepchas, Nepalese and Bhotias etc. Presently, Nepalese are the majority group of population. By the emergence of tree plantation, the British government encouraged the Nepalese to settle in Darjeeling. The Nepali immigrants along with Nepali language created a separate cultural space in the district. With the passage of time the demand of a separate land has been craved by different groups or unions though in different forms. From Hillman Union, All India Ghorkha league to GNLFF, all have the similar demand, a demand for separate land. The reason behind this demand is multidimensional. The Indian Nepalese have been suffering from nationality issue for generations. The Indian Nepalese were often considered foreigners and identified with Nepal. It is traumatic for someone, whose birthplace is India and who considers India as his\her motherland, to accept the identity of a foreigner. Finding the solution of the problem of identity and citizenship were the main objectives of GNLFF movement. After two years of violent separatist movement, in 1988, Shubhash Ghising on behalf of GNLFF and the Central Government of India came to an agreement and by this agreement Ghising agreed to withdraw the demand for a separate state. Kiran Desai has set her plot in this political turmoil and thus placed her characters as bewildered and confined.

There is a similarity between the two characters Gyan and Biju. Both are rearing their parents' dream and both are worn out and try to come out from the imposed bindings. "Gyan was angry towards his family. He was angry that his family hadn't ban him, keep him home. He hated his tragic father, his mother who looked to him for direction, had always looked to him for direction, even when he was a little boy, simply for being male" (Desai 260). Being a Nepali in India, a member of ethnic subaltern community, Gyan is surrounded by lots of bindings which lead him to join in GNLFF. To recognize Gyan's identity it is essential to understand the scope of the word 'subaltern'. "Subaltern is a term by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling classes" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 198). Ranjit Guha, the leader of the Subaltern Studies Group defined 'subaltern' as a social group that "...represented the democratic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as elite" (Guha 44). By the word 'elite' he means "...dominant foreign groups included all the non-Indians, that is mainly British officials of the colonial state and foreign industries, merchants, planters, landlords and missionaries" (44). The rest of the population including tribal groups, lower class and ethnic groups are all components of the subaltern. The Nepalese of India, as an ethnic group, deviated from the mainstream Indians. Their deprivation is cleared by the speech of Nepali leader: "We are labourers on the tea plantations,

coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. And are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No! We are kept at the level of servants” (Desai 158). The Ghorkha leader adds a question, “Can our children learn our language in school” (159)? This question is a clear note which carries their identity as subaltern.

Gyan, in order to hide his pathetic condition, has lied to Sai. He has no other option but to give wrong notion about himself and his forefathers. Being obligated to his Nepali ethnic identity, he has felt a new force within him, the force of liberating himself and his kinsmen. He avoids Sai and feels ashamed of his childish love with her. He discovers the huge difference between him and the convent girl which cannot be mitigated. Gyan shows a shift of attitude concerning his duty towards his ethnic group. Being motivated by his liberating force he has informed the Gorkha boys about the Judge’s house and his guns but in the later part of the novel, it is found that Gyan feels guilty for this action. He realizes that it is not he who is ready for taking challenge. As Desai expressed: “there were those who were provoked by the challenge, but Gyan was finding that he wasn’t one of these” (260). On one side, his infant love with Sai, on another side the harsh reality of deprived Nepali life make him ambivalent. He becomes enchained by his subaltern ethnic identity which does not allow him to engage in childish love but to fight for his kinsmen. He feels uneasy as a member of a Nepali family and is confused of his responsibility towards his ancestors. This feeling of uneasiness entraps him more within his identity. Gyan’s love with Sai and the hope of liberating his kinsmen both remain as elusive dreams to him.

The consequence of colonial education in post-colonial India has been portrayed in a lucid way through the character Sai. In case of Sai, her entrapment is not self-imposed or ancestral. The word ‘victim’ is more appropriate referring to her condition. The cold relationship between this sixteen years old girl and her grandfather has led her to grab someone who will be her means of survival but in the way of dreaming a new life, her convent education creates a huge barrier. Sai becomes the victim of colonial education in post colonial India. Her frail love affair with Gyan is caused by her lack of Indianness. The colonial education which begins its mission, as John Macaulay says, “to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” has still been working even after so many years of colonial reign (qtd. in Alam 2). Sai, being a convent educated girl has been taught to behave like English, and “[s]he only knew the English way” (Desai 6). Being educated in a convent, she is habituated with spoon or fork but Gyan, being a poor boy of a poor family knows only the Desi ways, as we find, “...Gyan had used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table—a tablespoon, rolling up her roti on the side and nudging the food onto the spoon with it” (140). Sai has learnt to think a cake as better than laddoos, knife spoon or forks as better than hands, Christ blood as more civilized than garlanding a



phallic symbol and most notably English as better than Hindi. She does not know any other way to survive which creates the contradiction between her and Gyan. She has been taught about Indians as “Dirty people”. Sai realizes the social and cultural difference between Gyan and herself as she says: “You hate me... for big reasons that have nothing to do with me” (260). The convent education, which teaches only the ‘English way’ entraps Sai and her love. She has got her only hope in Gyan but unable to fulfill as she does not know the way to resist the barriers of British education and Gyan’s subaltern identity.

To sum up, the vibrant New York or the alluring Kalimpong, no place can unchain their inhabitants from their individual entrapment. The unbroken chains of identities make each and every character lonely in his respective surroundings. By the end of the novel, every character loses his/her last hope and thus begins the journey towards a more isolated life. Jemubhai loses his only friend, the dog. Sai and Gyan lose their love, Bizu loses his last savings of harsh immigrant life and through this loss he loses his hope of beginning a new journey. Panna Lal loses the faith of his long obeyed master. Amidst these shattered conditions, Kiran Desai has concluded her novel with a pleasant sight for the readers by the reunion of father, Panna Lal and the son, Bizu. Nevertheless, their reunion does not bring a new beginning; rather it marks the end of their enchanting dreams.

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# Memory, War and Trauma in Shaheedul Jahir's *Jiban O Rajnoitik Bastabata*

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## Abstract

*The present study is on Shaheedul Jahir's Jiban O Rajnoitik Bastabata (Life and Political Reality), a novel based on two different times: one before the independence of Bangladesh and the other after its independence. Set in liberation and the post-liberation time, the novel narrates the story of Abdul Majid who survives the war, and passes his life with the inescapable war memories in the post war period. He had a sister named Momena who was raped and killed towards the end of the war, and her death haunts him in the present—so much so that he finds his sister's image in his wife, Yasmin and names his daughter after Momena. The article shows how trauma, memory and war are interconnected in the novel. It also sheds light on the way Abdul Majid's individual memory is transformed into a collective memory, and then into a history which never gets dated but remains.*

War has a great impact on the memory of an individual. There are many people who are haunted by the war memories. Though the outcome of their experiences is different, they have one thing in common—the trauma of war affects all of them. Shaheedul Jahir's *Jiban O Rajnoitik Bastabata* is concerned with the impact of war memories on an individual as well as on a society. The narrative starts abruptly, in a way that it takes the readers immediately into the tunnels of Abdul Majid's memories whose past and present are intermingled; his present self is fused with his past self—so much so that it is hard to trace which time his consciousness exactly belongs to. It may be that his conscious existence is split into two: one walking along the street of present day Nababpur Road while the other rummaging through memories, going fifteen years back in time. And when this journey, although metaphorical in nature, from past to present goes on at the back of his mind, Abdul Majid unconsciously ends up into a connecting figure between 1971 and 1985, passively strolling down the memory lane. Passively because the recollections of events, though vivid, are not active; rather, they come on to surface even when Majid does not want them to remember at that moment. He then experiences a world, a blended world of magic and reality where time and observation are distorted together. For example, a few lines from the text in translation will suffice in this regard:

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On his way to Raisa Bazar, when he reached Nababpur Road just past Karkun Bari Lane, the lace of his flip-flop is torn away, and he stops walking. ... He is pulled into the world of deafening noises other than those the traffic and passers-by make, of which people are not always conscious. He sees that the gloomy afternoon sky over Nababpur is studded with retreating termites while numerous crows are frisking behind them. A feeling of quiet terror in the dying afternoon of Nababpur Road seems to be spread out through the scream of crows and the attempt of silent retreat of the termites. ... Abdul Majid sees that Abul Khayer, sitting over a rickshaw, is speaking into the microphone, and the sounds burst out of a hollow metal tube fixed over the hood of the rickshaw....Abdul Majid thinks his heart is long since torn, but today, the gloomy afternoon marked by the carnage of termites, his heart string is again torn like the lace of his flip-flop after the voices of Abul Khayer reached his ears. [Author's translation] (11-12)

Here, what happens to Abdul Majid is quite exceptional because when he stops walking after the lace of his flip-flop is torn apart, his mind is in action, going beyond one reality after other as if he was passing the moments in a flashback, living the present with the essence of past. He stops, thinking that the lace is disjointed from the sole the way once the thread from his heart was disjointed fifteen years back. However, this breach in his physical movement is not intentional; rather, it has to do something with his psychosomatic feeling, a kind of feeling where fears of mind can affect the body or vice versa. The instant, therefore, the sudden rupture happens, it cuts him off from the present, triggering memories of the past, fifteen years back from now when the war breaks out in the country. He is in between the transition of past and present, and this transition distorts his observation, too. He looks at the sky of today with the eyes of yesterday. He looks around him and sees the crows running after a group of termites, and relates the event with an event of past when Pakistani army, like a group of crows, attacks a village, and all people, like the tiny insects, are retreating. He observes his surroundings deviantly, like one with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which Cathy Caruth defines as:

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with the numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (3-5)

When the memory of an incident comes on to the surface belatedly in the form of dreams, flashbacks, imagination and all other intrusive elements, the insistent return constitutes the pathology, a traumatic pathology which is not fully

understandable and definable in relation with a particular event or time. Therefore, when the lace is disjointed, Abdul Majid feels a physical inertia. In fact, it is not an ordinary incident to him, and so out of its triviality a metaphorical meaning crops up. Here, the strap's separation from its joint acts as a catalyst reminding him of a fracture, a fracture onto his psyche that he carries since the war. This fracture is a sort of traumatic gap in his memory and experiences, surfacing over again and again on his consciousness when the external signs symbolize the events of the past. So all — the disjointed lace, the crows, the termites — herald the telltale clues of the past. Nigel C. Hunt in *Memory, War and Trauma* draws a distinction line (between a person affected by war trauma and a person who is not) to define the deviant observation of the former in whose experience the brutality of a war is not a new phenomenon: “the findings indicate that people who are traumatised are more likely to pay more attention to, and be more perceptually aware of, environmental stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event than people who are not traumatized” (61). The post traumatic stresses of war are so rampant in him that he connects the events that happened in 1971 with a workaday happening in one afternoon of 1985 and fixes the connection in a way as if he were reliving his past.

Majid's attempt at reliving the past makes him a split personality: one being in the present while the other rummaging through the traumatic past. It is clearly seen when he, listening to Abul Khayer's thanks speech while going towards Raisa Bazar, unconsciously dredges up the days of 1971 when Bodu Maolana in the same way once delivered thanks speech to the people who gathered in front of his home. Abul Khayer is the son of one Bodruddin Maolana alias Bodu Moulana who was a collaborator in 1971. Here, Abul Khayer's voice again churns up the past in Abdul Majid in a way that the former's voice reminds him of the voice of his father, the voice that the latter loathes most. It is a kind of psychological distress which appears after one's exposure to internal or external cues that resemble an aspect of the traumatic past one wishes to forget willingly, but is unable to do so because “the choice that we have is not between remembering and forgetting; because forgetting can't be done by an act of will, it is not something we can choose to do. The choice is between different ways of remembering” (Todorov 2003). He remembers those days of war when Bodu Moulana used to entertain the crows with human flesh. Now all those who are still alive, and who used to live in Lokkhibazar, know Bodu Moulana's pathological love for crows. Like Abdul Majid, they also remember how he gave soft smile, and then stood on his rooftop in the afternoon with his sons to give the flesh to crows. The pieces of flesh he lobbed at the crows with morbid pleasure were the flesh of the people who were tortured and eventually killed. Their knowledge about this obsession becomes more certain when the thrown pieces that the crows could not catch fell down one day on the roof of Khwaja Ahmed Ali's house, and the other day on a washing pot of rice.

Khwaja Ahmed Ali, the head of the oldest Muslim family in the community, said to the people that one day when he was on the roof found out a fallen piece of flesh near his foot. He took it and carefully observed that there was still a

smooth human skin at one side and a little piece of stone jewellery attached to it. He understood what he revealed: it was not of an animal; it was of a girl instead and the piece of ornament that he found attached with the skin let him think so. It is, therefore, not Abdul Majid's experience only; rather, it is the experience of those who survived and lived through the war. It has become a common experience of the community when all people, who were familiar with Bodu Moulana's intimacy with crows, shared with one another what and how they had seen things during the war. By doing this, the people make up different versions of stories. Moreover, all their fragments of memories then shape up a completed story which integrates into Abdul Majid's version of the narrative after the war, giving it a historic-cultural identity and representational dimension. This is how an individual's experience of war becomes the part of a collective memory which Duncan Bell defines in a very precise way:

Collective memory – or one of its many cognate terms, including social and cultural memory – refers, again in a general sense, to widely shared perceptions of the past. It shapes the story that groups of people tell about themselves, linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative. It is what keeps the past – or at least a highly selective image of it – alive in the present. (2)

His individual memory thus alone gives a perception of the impact of war on one region in Bangladesh only when it borrows memories from the groups of people. What Abdul Majid recollects, apart from his family's individual history, records the history of a social and cultural memory of a war which is concerned not with the past as such, but with the past as it is remembered. As a result, when Abdul Majid talks, he does not talk alone; rather, he ventriloquises the knowledge of many. He — though an individual — can represent the voice of a community, and hold the collective identity into his individual self. A completed history of war, therefore, requires the observations of many.

Escape from memory is impossible, and it is also true in case of Abdul Majid who has a traumatic past regarding war. The day after March 25, 1971, the Pakistani troops first invade Lokkhibazar, Bodu Moulana aids and abets them in breaking into the houses of all residents, and in killing seven men and raping three women. Although the residents after a while hear the names of those who are shot dead, they never hear the names of the three women from anybody. They are only aware of the fact that three soldiers rape three women of Lokkhibazar. They feel shocked when they get to know this, but they cannot forget anything happened on that day, and neither can Abdul Majid. Therefore, the day he sees Abul Khayer near Raisa Bazar delivering thanks speech to the people, he can no longer move forward to do shopping. He can no more bear the idea of seeing him in the same long-skirted tunic after fifteen years. Immediately, he comes back home, the flip-flop in his hand, and his mind remembering the tormented face of his sister Momena who is raped and killed. Towards end of the war, he finds his sister lying

on the riverbank, killed and assaulted, and he also sees a deep wound on her neck caused by inconsiderate bayonet charges. He remembers the day when Bodu Moulana's sidekicks pulls her away from the hideout his mother has kept her in. He is traumatized by the memory of her killing, and haunted by the wide opening on her neck caused by bayonet charges of the Pakistani army. Abdul Majid is engulfed by the event's horror—so much so that he searches for Momna's image in his wife, Yasmin, and he even names his new born daughter after Momena. By naming her daughter after his sister, he takes an effort to relive the past. It seems that the traumatic history repeats itself through metaphorical reincarnation of Momena, transforming the sister Momena into a daughter Momena, and linking the *then* (past) with *now* (present). It resonates with what Nietzsche said: "everything becomes and recurs eternally - escape is impossible" (545). From the memory of an individual family, Momena now becomes an indelible name in the history; from the past now she reincarnates in the present, thereby being eternal.

He is engulfed by the memory of Momena as he never makes up for the loss—no mourning is enough for it. Therefore, he finds solace only in the memory. Returning home, he keeps looking at his wife, and sees a vein near her throat throbbing. The throb reminds him of a wide opening on Momena's neck which he sees last when he finds her corpse with her neck bent at one side, and with a wound the pain of which is immeasurable to him. Momena's killing fills Abdul Majid's responses towards the war with horror, fear and helplessness. Whenever he thinks about Momena, the image of deep scar evokes the memory of the day when he finds her dead near a riverbank. Even long fifteen years after the liberation war, he fixates on the memories of Momena, the memories of pain which stay alive within him even now. M. J. Akbar, a leading Indian journalist and author, in one of his articles explicates the idea: "Life's most traumatic cemetery is surely the memory of pain, for it is buried but not dead. Neither amnesia nor vengeance is a solution, although the timid find solace in the first and the violent seek options in the second" (9). The experiences — one goes through during war — leave such a strong mark onto one's memory that elision of these memories is nearly impossible. A war might be meaningless, but when it comes to the evasion of war memory, it is an impossibility for one like Abdul Majid who experiences, witnesses and is confronted with the trauma of war, with feelings that still follow him like his own shadow even after the war is over. Maja Zehfuss comments that it is not possible to look away from the ineluctable memory. In *Remembering to Forget/Forgetting to Remember*, he puts: "Looking away is always already a looking somewhere else: there is no escape from memory as such" (219). Abdul Majid suffers from a war trauma because the experiences he had during the war gives him a bunch of traumatic memories that haunt him. He has no control whatsoever over the belated returning of the past memories of war. Hence, whenever he turns back to see the war he helplessly ends up in the grip of his memories, the traumatic past.

The killing of Momena is the traumatic event around which all his dark memories about the war are moving. It is a traumatic memory for Abdul Majid

which he cannot express in language, so he comes back to the trauma over and over again, and this incessant coming back of him is manifested in the narrative of the text, too. The narrative has a circularity which gives the impression of inertness instead of a flux. This is the sticky nature of the trauma. The narrative is circulatory, so we are coming back, not progressing, and the story of Momena, therefore, is always entwined with the main stories. In addition to the fact, it is also impossible for him to turn this traumatic memory into a narrative one. Because if narrative memory is continuity, then trauma memory is discontinuity which does not move on. It just digs in and in and it does not have any literal movement. It is like an axial moving which is going on while the audience can only see the axial without seeing that it is going deeper and deeper in the psyche. This un-assimilability of trauma is best expressed in Cathy Caruth's words: ...[T]he event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4-5). Here, Majid is possessed by the image of Momena which he cannot remove from his head, and his situation is like the speaker of Jibanananda Das' poem *Bodh* translated as *An Overwhelming Sensation* by Fakrul Alam:

I try to shake it off;  
 I want to grab it as I would a dead man's skull  
 And dash it on the ground; yet, like a live man's head,  
 It wheels all around my head!  
 How it dominates my field of vision!  
 How it possesses my heart!  
 If I move, it moves along with me.  
 If I stop –  
 It stops too; (28-36)

This suggests that a traumatic experience cannot be integrated with its exactness into memory; rather, it produces a dilemma where to live with it is impossible, and not to live with it is impossible as well.

The violence and the atrocities that happened in 1971 constitute the darkest history of human civilization. It will prevail in the memory of the people like Abdul Majid only to recur throughout history in different modes and forms and to haunt us eternally as a nation and as a part of traumatic history. In fact, war can give nothing to a civilization, except for some haunting memories. In the history of war of independence, there are many survivors like Abdul Majid who continue being invaded by the memories of their past experiences. They cannot evade the traumatic past; rather, they are possessed by the vivid image of the traumatic reenactments. In line with these vital points, Shahidul Jahir's *Jiban O Rajnoitik Bastabata (Life and Political Reality)* depicts the psycho-social impact of the Liberation War in Bangladesh on a community as well as on an individual. It also shows the way an individual memory of war becomes history, which is not past but eternally present.

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