Saugata Bhaduri · Indrani Mukherjee
Editors

Transcultural Negotiations of Gender

Studies in (Be)longing

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Preface

Transcultural Negotiations of Gender: Studies in (Be)longing comprises revised versions of 20 selected peer-reviewed papers from scholars from India and abroad—both well-established academics and researchers from premier institutes—presented at an international conference on "Gender Studies: Expanding Horizons of Trans/Inter-Culturality", coordinated by the two editors of this volume (i.e. the two of us, both from the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), in collaboration with the Indian Council for Social Science Research, held on 7 and 8 March 2013.

When we decided to organize the conference, we were not very sure where we were headed, or what the ultimate shape of the output of the conference would be like. Committed as we both were to issues of gender and sexuality, and convinced as we both were that gender relations are indeed getting continuously re-negotiated, and corollarily the field of gender studies is itself continuously expanding, in this increasingly trans/inter-cultural world of ours, we thought of simply opening the canvas globally to scholars of literary and cultural studies, to let them etch their own views on the issue, and wait and watch for what shape the final picture was to take. The call for papers (cfp) for the conference stated somewhat tentatively, "The conference intends to bring together scholars, researchers, and students from various disciplines of Comparative "Literature", Translation Studies and Cultural Studies to share their experiences and research covering a wide range of issues related to "women" and sexual minorities as activists, artists, authors, critics and inter-cultural workers. It seeks to dwell on the interstitial spaces of gendered metaphors of inter-culturality as it aims to reiterate and reinterpret the provisional nature of all borders to unfold how the experiences of "women"/gendered identities have resisted normative discourses of representations, reprisals and control".

The response that we received, however, was overwhelming, and though proposals came predictably only from academics of certain fields—English and Hispanic literatures (understandably, given the affiliations of the two of us), Comparative Literature, Media and Culture Studies, and a few other language-specific literatures like French, German and Bengali—we knew that we were probably

on to something more coherent. The sheer diversity of the geographical locations and profile of the participants—their relative uniformity in terms of their areas of affiliation (literature and culture studies) notwithstanding—was very encouraging. There were paper presenters from all the four quadrants of India—North, South, East and West—in almost equal numbers, and also from diverse other countries—Brazil, Ireland, Scotland, Serbia and USA. And, they were of diverse statures too—ranging from senior professors to mid-level academics to young research scholars. It is this diversity that convinced us that we could, after all, have a systematized volume come out of it, which could look more specifically at certain patterns emerging out of the papers presented within the general scope of the conference.

There were three salient features to this emergent "systematization", out of which the third may need a greater elaboration. First, we realized that all the papers (for certain, the ones selected for publication after peer review) dealt with—not just the expanding state of gender studies in the context of trans/inter-culturality, as the conference had originally, and somewhat vaguely, proposed—but how gender actually gets *negotiated* in the concreteness of *transcultural* matrices, leading to our first key phrase, which eventually came to the very title of the current volume: "Transcultural Negotiations of Gender". Secondly, we found that such transcultural negotiations of gender happened on the dual axes of *belonging* and *longing*—the twin desires of being located within a cultural milieu, "belonging" to it as it were, while simultaneously yearning for either what has passed by or what is yet to come, a "longing" for change presumably—leading us to formulate our second key phrase, the parenthetical "(be)longing" which brought out this tension, and came to constitute the subtitle of the volume to come: "Studies in (Be)longing".

Thirdly, we discovered that the transcultural negotiation of gender on grounds of (be)longing that the contributions were talking about could be framed around four interlinked but discrete registers. Usually, when one thinks of transculturality, one automatically presumes interaction amongst cultures from different *spaces*, say between Indian and European cultures. The contributions for this volume revealed, however, that one could (be)long transculturally over *time* too, and even within the same geographical space, say India, one has continuous transcultural negotiations between precepts of the past and the present, between beliefs of different times. This possibility of temporal transculturality led one to a third register too, a specific one at that, that of *modernity/technology*, whose advent seemed to particularly unsettle one's sense of (be)longing to a tradition, leading one on specific modes of transcultural negotiations. And, finally, especially since all this was being conceived in the context of gender, which itself is performative, a fourth specific register that emerged was that of *performance*, or that the transcultural negotiations of gender on grounds of (be)longing often had performativity at their prime means. This third discovery, coupled with the former two, thus gave a structure to this current volume and its primary postulation, as enshrined in its key words/phrases—that *transcultural negotiations of gender* happen through exercising forms of *(be)longing* over *time*, across *space*, deploying modes of *performance* and engaging with *modernity/technology*.

To sum up, the volume that has emerged thus probes into how gender gets negotiated in cultural praxes along the two axes of "belonging" and "longing" [as captured in the cusped keyword "(be)longing"] as one moves transculturally across time, space and changing performative modes, in light of the impact of modernity/technology. Further, it also ends up probing into the category of "transculturality" itself, by examining how not only does the word pertain to the coming together of, or interactions amongst, cultures from diverse *spatial* locations, but how shifts over *time* and with changing *performative modes* and *technological means* of articulation within what may be presumed to be the same culture—inhabit, as it may, a single space—also amount to the "transcultural". Accordingly, while this volume does present accounts of how gender gets negotiated in transcultural articulations across different parts of the world—India, Europe, Latin America, Japan, Mauritius, etc.—it also shows how even within the same space, reappropriations of myths, rituals, religious customs and traditional forms across time, and articulations of gender across different technological means of representation, perform similar transcultural negotiations of gender. The volume thus comprises four parts, devoted respectively to the four coordinates named above—time, space, performativity and modernity/technology—around which transcultural negotiations of gender take place on grounds of belonging and longing, the sections comprising five articles each, to sum up to the 20 articles that the volume is made of.

The articles in the first part "(Be)longing in Time" primarily examine how gender gets negotiated in the temporally transcultural act of myths, rituals and religious practices getting revised and revisited over time. The section begins with an article by Brigitte Le Juez, which probes how legends get reinterpreted over time, especially from a gendered perspective, with the appropriation of Charles Perrault's fairy-tale "Bluebeard" in modern representations of marital abuse as an example. The tone for how gender gets negotiated through transcultural rewritings of myths and legends over time being thus set, the second article, by Metka Zupančič, carries the same forward in a comparatist study of how ancient myths get retold by contemporary women writers across cultures through some instances of such later rendition of legends, primarily of Eurydice, Draupadi and Mahadevi in the works of two female writers of Indian origin from Mauritius and USA—Ananda Devi and Chitra Banrjee Divakaruni—respectively. The third article in this section, by Satish Poduval, similarly takes up three instances of re-reading of the legend of Sita from the *Ramayana* and some related religious practices from a gendered perspective, across three diverse times, but also diverse spaces and media of articulation—a 1919 poem by the Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan, polemical works by the Dravidian leader Periyar from the 1950s to the 1970s, and a 2008 animation film by the American artist Nina Palay—to show how they lead to diverse modes of reinterpretation of the religious in the public domain in negotiating gender. Carrying the argument further, in the fourth article of the section, Abin Chakraborty shows how the noted playwright Girish Karnad reworks classical myths and folktales to subvert stereotypes of the passive woman, and instead creates alternate spaces for gender negotiation. As a cautionary closure to the section, lest it be believed that all reworkings of myths and legends and religious beliefs lead necessarily to enablement of the

woman, the final article by Ratul Ghosh examines how not just traditional religions, but even alternate, hybrid, and reinterpretative—and thus possibly "transcultural"—religious practices like tantric and sufi cults also often retain patriarchal frameworks, requiring a further "de-masculinizing" of their mythologies and religio-sexual rites.

The articles in the second part "(Be)longing in Space" study how transcultural negotiations of gender take place when people from different spaces interact, as also when public spaces and domains themselves become sites of such negotiations. The section begins with Laura P. Izarra's examination of such trans-spatial negotiations in the writings of Irish migrant women in South America, where in an articulation of (be)longing, one sees attempts at re-imagining a "new Irishness" in the diasporic situation. This is followed by Biljana Djorić Francuski and Ljiljana Marković's co-authored article, which examines the representation of gender issues in two diverse cultures—India and Japan, so different and yet so same—through the works of two twentieth-century authors, who themselves are exemplars of such a transcultural negotiation—Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, a European who, having married an Indian, spent more than two decades in India, and Natsume Sōseki, a Japanese whose two-year visit to London proved most influential to his subsequent life and writing. The third article in the section, by Vijaya Venkataraman, specifically picks up for study crime fiction by women writers from India and Latin America to establish a comparatist take on transcultural negotiations of both gender and genre across space. The fourth article in the section, by Ira Vangipurapu, concretizes this negotiation of gender in relation to space to the particular case of the state-scape of Cuba after the 1959 socialist revolution and the physical space of the cinema hall, and in its analysis of the 1983 film *Up to a Certain Point* by Tomás Guitérrez Alea, shows how gender relations got questioned and re-negotiated in the spectatorial space of the cinema in the socialist nation-space of Cuba. Moving to a more literal dealing with "space" and how it becomes a factor in negotiating gender and sexuality, the final article of the section, by Pranta Pratik Patnaik, analyses a particular park in New Delhi, which is a well-known haunt of gays in the city, to show how its demarcated space becomes a veritable site for negotiating one's sexual and gendered identity.

The articles in the third part "Performing (Be)longing" locate such transcultural negotiations of gender in the context of changing modes of performance, considering particularly that gender itself is performative. The section begins not with performance per se, but with Paromita Bose's article on the debates raised by an eighteenth-century text that rewrites the mythical story of Radha from the perspective of female sexual agency, but the fact that its author Muddupalani was a performing courtesan, and that the debates about the text arose in the context of the Devadasi reform in 1911, when another dancer, Nagarathnamma, tried to re-publish the text, makes it an important connection between mythology and performance as registers of transcultural negotiations of gender. This issue of transformation and reformation of performance traditions and resultant redesigning of gender is explored further in the next article, where Kavya Krishna K.R. studies the "re-invention" of the Mohiniyattam dance form in the 1930s, with its own gender, class and nationalistic coordinates of delineation. Taking the analysis of the negotiation of gender through transformative appropriations of female performative

traditions across the transcultural cusp of tradition and modernity further, the third article of the section, by Madhumeeta Sinha, studies two twenty-first-century documentary films by Saba Dewan that attempt a feminist historical recovery of two performative phenomena—the early twentieth-century courtesan culture embodied by *thumri*, and the early twenty-first-century controversy concerning bar dancers in Mumbai—caught amidst debates concerning prostitution, the notion of the "public woman", and a bid for "social reform". The fourth article by Piyush Roy moves directly to the gendered codes that performance bears, and in its analysis of the 1957 Telugu film *Mayabazar*, where the protagonist performs an on-screen gender switch, shows how gender roles are negotiated in it by transiting through a choice of *bhava*-s, or performative codes of human emotions. The final article in the section, in adding a truly transcultural twist to the issue, shifts to Latin America, and picks up the curious cultural institution of "Narco Corrido", or performative ballad-singing dealing with the drug trade, as also the "Narco Novel" literary form that emerges from the same, to show how gender is negotiated through performances in another cultural situation, and in the context of violence and substance-abuse.

The articles in the final part "Modernity, Technology and (Be)longing" further trace how gender gets negotiated in transcultural ways, in a context like India, with the advent of modernity and its companion technology, in extending the issue that was already raised in the previous section, through questions of social reform concerning performative traditions at the turn of the twentieth century. The first article in this section, by Sanghita Sen, specifically focuses on how Tagore's female characters, through their "radical worldview and actions", usher in the "new Indian woman", showing a specific instance of negotiation of gender around the protracted event of passing over from tradition to modernity. Taking this study of the connection between literary modernism and the conception of the "new" inspirational woman further, in the next article, Soumi Chatterjee explores the evolution of the "Muse" in modern Bengali poetry—from Tagore to Sunil Gangopadhyay—as one travels down twentieth-century Bengali modernity, tracing how the role of the woman in poetry changes with modernization from that of an inspiring goddess-like figure in the classical mode to real life-like women, in correlation with changing social situations brought about by events in modern history. The question of technology, that companion of modernity, and how it plays a role in this "trans"-negotiation of gender is discussed in the third article in the section, where Rajan Joseph Barrett, in his discussion of a particular Kannada short story "Gulabi Talkies", shows how technology has changed the woman's life in India, and—in analysing the story of Gulabi, who now has a cinema named after her, and Lillibai, who has become the gatekeeper of that cinema, having shifted from her original occupation of a traditional midwife—shows how women from different strata of society negotiate technology differently, and how technology impacts gender roles. Taking the issue of the role of technology, modernity, liberalization, etc., in the negotiation of gender identity further, the fourth article in the section, by Parnal Chirmuley, studies three popular Indian women's magazines in English—*Femina*, *Marie Claire*, and *Good Housekeeping*—to see the modes of gendering of the "new woman", as India straddles transculturally between tradition

and a post-liberal consumerist modernity. The final article in the section, as also in the volume, by Debra A. Castillo looks at the cultural representation—in cinema, in the literature and on websites—of the role of technology vis-à-vis gender and sexuality, through the increasing global institutionalization of outsourced and assisted reproduction and surrogacy, especially with India and Latin America emerging as sites for the same, the section (and the volume itself) again ending on a cautionary note concerning the fault lines in such attempts at transculturally negotiating gender through technology and modernity.

The articles that comprise this volume thus try to examine how gender gets represented at cusps of transculturation—across time, space, performative modes and technology—through a negotiation between one's desire to "belong" to the cultural mode that one is safely ensconced in, and one's "longing" for the change that gets occasioned through one's coming face to face with the other that such transcultural moments constantly bring one in contact with. The parts, in their organization, also try to cyclically talk to each other, since negotiations of gender, as one moves transculturally across traditions and spaces and times, cannot but entail the realization of the same through the performative and the technological. Further, the parts, in trying to present a good balance to both the sides that such negotiations may entail, showcase both affirmative and subversive, as well as critical and cautionary instances of such transcultural negotiations of gender.

What is also to be noted is that the book studies the interface between gender and culture from both global and local perspectives, bringing together within the same volume analyses that take into consideration diverse cultural locales like Latin America, Japan, Mauritius, France, Ireland, etc., and which yet spirally converge upon India, where the bulk of the studies are based on, thus providing a unique gyrating sweep on the issue, rather than being either narrowly region-specific, or uniformly inter-regional. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, the contributors to this book are also varied. Not only do they come from diverse countries, and from diverse disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, but they are of diverse statures too, and the resultant coexistence of very diverse views is something that we believe adds a freshness to this volume. Most importantly, and to sum up its objective once again, theoretically, this volume tries to make an important intervention in two ways: first, by locating the interaction of gender and culture on the twin axes of "belonging" and "longing", and using the cusped word "(be)longing" to represent the same (rather than the dyad "longing and belonging" which has already been used in diaspora and transnational studies); and secondly, by broadening of the scope of the "transcultural" beyond a mere spatial understanding of the same, and instead articulating the "trans" in changes in modes of articulation of culture over time and technology and media too. It is on the basis of these humble yet significant theorizations and supplementations that, in the final analysis, we believe this collection of essays will prove to be interesting read, and we present it before the reader for approval.

Saugata Bhaduri
Indrani Mukherjee

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New Delhi
July 2015

Saugata Bhaduri
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Part I
(Be)longing in Time

Chapter 1
Curiosity Killed The… Woman: Modern Rewritings of "Bluebeard" in Literary Representations of Marital Abuse

Brigitte Le Juez

Abstract Charles Perrault's fairy tale, ("Bluebeard" 1697) seems to have struck a chord in the global and collective imagination, and has been continuously revisited over time through different genres—fiction, theatre, operas and films. Whilst, like many fairy tales, it is about the rite of passage of a girl into womanhood, the narrative addresses the question of possible abuse awaiting innocent young women entering into early marriage. In modern rewritings of the tale, especially by women, the young female protagonist, who originally needed the help of her brothers to kill her cruel husband, now owes her life to her own wit and courage. However, the story does not fundamentally change if the female protagonist has gained power. The tale's enduring allure shows that psychological and sexual abuse in relationships is a problem societies are still failing to solve successfully. This essay examines "Bluebeard" from two perspectives: first it looks at Perrault's social and historical context; second, through a selection of modern rewritings, it looks at the ways women from different cultural traditions have revisited the myth and exposed its patriarchal and misogynistic undertones.

Keywords Retellings of folktales · "Bluebeard" · Domestic abuse · Angela Carter · Margaret Atwood · Suniti Namjoshi · Sofía Rhei

In the US, February 2013 was the month of a YMCA "Forget the Fairy Tale" campaign aiming to help teenagers in abusive relationships. The title of this campaign indicates that young people are generally fed false notions regarding love, which prevent them from acquiring some wisdom in their choices. The notion of "fairy tale", as a result, is likened to that of a fabricated belief which hinders reality and truth. Indeed, many contemporary textual and visual representations of personal

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attachments are often infused with sentimentality and seemingly harmless sexual encounters, which can be misleading. Yet, this article would like to dispute the assertion, albeit well-intended, that one should "forget" the fairy tale and, instead, argue that one should remember it since it is precisely the role of fairy tales to prepare young people for life, and specifically to enable them to envisage a positive future with the right partner. Fairy tales are not romantic texts; they contain instances of violence before their main situation is resolved, making them ideal formative texts. The characters' ability to overcome all kinds of serious hindrances is part of the empowering quality of such stories.

Amongst them, Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard", although similar to fairy tales already present in the oral literary tradition of many cultures, seems to have struck a particular chord in the collective imagination and has been continuously revisited ever since its first publication in 1697, through many texts belonging to different genres, whether fiction (including graphic novels and picture books), theatre, opera, songs or film (including animation).[1]

"Bluebeard"'s appeal may at first seem quite surprising considering the particularly gruesome details at its core, as this synopsis shows: a young girl is married off to a gentleman old enough to be her father, Bluebeard, who is known to have been married several times before to young women whose fate remains unknown. Suspicion surrounds him, therefore, but he is rich and, since the family finds itself in difficult circumstances, he represents a good match—despite his unusual beard which most women find repugnant. The new bride is content enough at first. However, after a month, her husband tells her he needs to go away on business for a few weeks and recommends she should invite her family and friends, do whatever she likes, but then, giving her the keys of the castle, he demands most threateningly that she does *not* use the smallest of them, which opens a closet at the bottom of the stairs, or else she will be punished on his return. Obsessed with such an interdiction, that very day, the young bride, who had been until then unaware, now cannot wait to open the door of the enigmatic chamber. There she discovers, as she enters it, that the floor is covered with the blood of her predecessors whose bodies, with their throats slashed, are hanging from the walls. Deeply shaken, she drops the little key which lands in the pool of blood. At this point Bluebeard comes home unexpectedly pretexting that his important business no longer requires his attention, and asks for his keys. Noticing that the smallest one is missing, he forcefully orders his terrified companion to produce it, which she does, still stained with the blood which she has not been able to clean, for it is a magic key. Having ascertained that he has been disobeyed, Bluebeard sets about making sure the culprit meets her untimely death in the same way as his previous wives. However, the girl's sister is also in the castle and goes up a tower, as she

[1]Among modern authors: P. Fleutiaux (France), A. Nothomb (Belgium), I. Calvino (Italy), B. Bartók (Hungary), A. Bubnov (Ukraine), M. Frisch (Switzerland), A. Ritchie (UK), P. Bausch (Germany), K. Vonnegut (US), L. Valenzuela (Argentina), C. Fréchette (Canada) and Y. Ogawa (Japan). For more see http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/bluebeard/other.html.

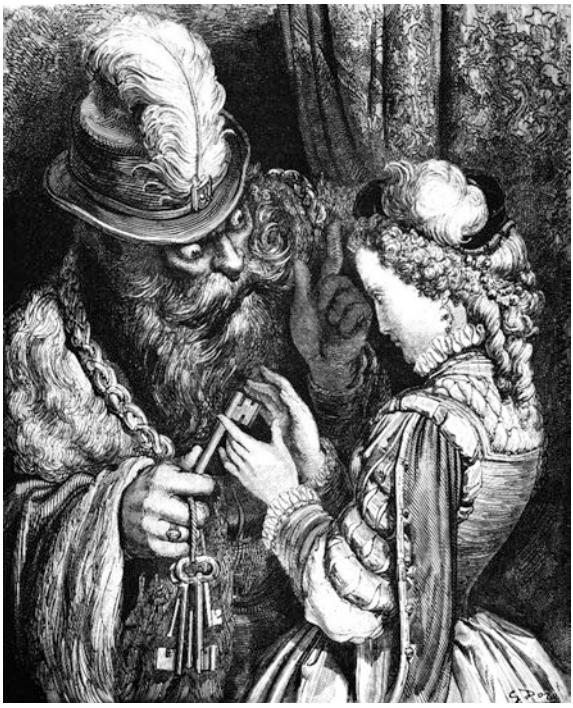

Fig. 1.1 "Bluebeard" by Gustave Doré, 1862 (*Source* http://www.wikiart.org/en/gustave-dore/bluebeard-1862)

knows their brothers are on their way to the castle and she hopes to signal them to hurry. In the meantime, the young bride begs to be allowed to pray before she dies, which allows the brothers to arrive in time to kill Bluebeard before he executes his sentence. Since he had no heirs, Bluebeard's fortune goes to his wife who marries again, but this time a young and honest man of her own choosing.

Despite the customary happy and moral ending of this fairy tale, the fact that it offers few magical elements allows one to surmise that it is in fact quite a realistic story, representing the repeated and mostly unpunished violence of men towards women entrusted to them in marriage—a realism which explains the persistent and global interest in the text. Although, like many fairy tales, it is about the rite of passage of a young girl into womanhood, this narrative addresses the question of possible abuse awaiting innocent young women entering into early marriages. Interestingly, whilst the young woman in Perrault's tale needed the help of her brothers to kill the cruel husband, as time went by and the story was rewritten by women, the young bride, in the end, owed her life to herself only, her own intelligence and courage, sometimes with the help of another female figure (sister, mother, etc.). However, if the story has thus been updated, it does not change fundamentally. For, if the female protagonist has gained power, the tale's enduring allure shows that psychological and sexual abuse of young women in relationships is a problem readers still recognize and identify with because it is a problem societies are still failing to solve (Fig. 1.1).

Perrault's social and historical context is similar to many cultures in relation to women's marital rights. Courtship and marriage in seventeenth-century France followed precise rules. Young women usually had to have a dowry. Those without dowries might never get married, or they might be obliged to marry someone they did not like. Families made it known to friends and relations that a daughter was to be married so that the word would spread. Marriage was a social alliance, not a love match. A husband could throw his wife out at any time if she displeased him. She had no legal rights and generally no other resources. Perrault's "Bluebeard" is based on the understanding and acceptance of such injustices which continue to exist to some extent everywhere in the world.

"Bluebeard"'s subject is not only universal but seemingly timeless. Its roots are to be found in different myths, starting with that of Cupid and Psyche: Psyche was unaware that she was married to Cupid (the god of love) because he had ordered her not to try and gaze upon him when he visited her at night. Her sisters having convinced her that he must be a monster if he imposed such a command, she yielded to the temptation to know and, having disobeyed, was severely punished. We have here the ancestor of the monster bridegroom-type tale, and its associated motif of the failed test of obedience and the punishment that ensues, as found in "Bluebeard". The woman's legitimate need to find out who or what her husband really is was seen as revealing of a bad and typically female fault, curiosity, a sign of independence of mind, deemed inappropriate in a woman. The same fault is also present in well-known ancient myths, such as those of Eve and Pandora.

Like them, Bluebeard's bride is perfidiously enticed to disobey (she is not only given the key but also the exact location of the room it opens) and, at the same time, she is denied any knowledge about the person who defines the most private aspect of her existence: her sexual partner, her husband. Since she is deprived of the choice and knowledge of her spouse, she is placed not only in an inferior position, but also in immediate danger from the person who is supposed to protect her and provide for her. This is the main aspect that allows us to relate "Bluebeard" to contemporary questions of domestic abuse.

Most traditional fairy stories, as mentioned earlier, contain many obstacles to the protagonists' happiness. These allow the characters to test themselves and also each other's loyalty. Then the tales usually conclude with a marriage of love which announces that they will live happily ever after. Significantly, "Bluebeard" *begins* with a marriage which is about to go very wrong because *only then* do impediments begin to appear. In "Bluebeard", after briefly fulfilling courtship duties and lavishing presents onto his betrothed, the bridegroom shows his real personality, that of an authoritarian and psychotic patriarch.

Indeed, if we ponder on the killing of the very first wife, we realize that an important piece of information is missing in the story. The young bride of the tale comes after a number of others and it is implicitly stated that each of her predecessors made the same fatal mistake, that they used the magic key to open the door of the forbidden room, thus discovering the hanging bodies of the others, their throats slashed and blood on the floor. But we may assume that the first wife did not find anything when she turned the key of the closet, that it was only an empty

room, which she was then the first to inhabit. Why forbid someone to enter an empty room, if not to exercise excessive power? Does Bluebeard kill the first bride because she has realized that there is nothing to justify male domination and that his superiority over her is, in fact, unwarranted? The fairy tale, in essence a moral story, seems to encourage this reading, since the bride is saved and Bluebeard is killed in the end. However, and revealingly, this is not the aspect readers remember most about the tale. It is the ruthless figure of Bluebeard which remains present in the modern imagination, and this is clearly because abusive male authority is still the main obstruction to implementation and respect of equal rights.

If Bluebeard is among the most renowned fairy tales, it may be precisely because it has, over time, helped both men and women to reflect on questions of abuse, whether parental, sexual or societal. Indeed, the first abuse of the story comes from allowing a very young offspring to enter into marriage to solve the family's financial difficulties (the father is absent, possibly dead, which leaves them in a precarious situation). This scenario may also ring true to readers familiar with a tradition of arranged marriages; sexual abuse can ensue from situations where family circumstances are not favourable, and where parents try to gain from their daughters' marriages. Social acceptance of the possible consequences of such traditions may seem monstrous in itself.

Further, the mortality rate of women in childbirth in Perrault's times was frighteningly high. One of the interpretations of Bluebeard's forbidden room is that it represents young women having died in labour. This would have been a common fear among young girls entering into marriage with an older man, as remarriage was commonplace for men who had lost a wife (or wives) in this fashion and this would have weighed on many a young bride's mind. The protagonist, by disobeying her husband's orders, discovers and faces the dangers ahead of her as she is possibly too young to conceive, or even to have a sexual relationship. So, not only are young women dying for giving birth too early in life, but this probably takes place as the result of marital rape.

The ambiguities found in "Bluebeard" (inspiring for new writers) are confirmed very clearly at the end of the tale, when Perrault offers not one but two "morals". While he is faithful to the consolatory tradition of fairy tales, his messages are in fact equally inadequate and hypocritical:

Moral

Curiosity, in spite of its many charms,
Can bring with it serious regrets;
You can see a thousand examples of it every day.
Women succumb, but it's a fleeting pleasure;
As soon as you satisfy it, it ceases to be.
And it always proves very, very costly.

Another Moral

If you just take a sensible point of view,
And study this grim little story,
You will understand that this tale
Is one that took place many years ago.

No longer are husbands so terrible,
Demanding the impossible,
Acting unhappy and jealous.
With their wives they toe the line;
And whatever colour their beards might be,
It's not hard to tell which of the pair is master. (Perrault, in Tatar ed. 1999, p. 148)

On the one hand, Perrault scolds women for their inquisitiveness, which does not make sense since the story has just given the female protagonist the upper-hand and a happy perspective after her husband's death, thus justifying that her curiosity was salutary. On the other, he undermines the gravity of the husband's murderous intent by exonerating his male contemporaries of any possible inheritance of Bluebeard's sadistic traits, and even goes as far as to suggest that women actually always get their way with them anyway—no wonder this tale continues to provoke reactions and inspire adaptations from feminist writers.

As established by Hans Robert Jauss in his essay *Toward an aesthetic of reception* (1982), the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader. If readers understand literary works in the contexts of their individual, historical specific position in life, texts cannot retain a fixed value. Moreover, readers have standards and beliefs which play a significant part in the interpretation and potential transformation of a text. For Jauss, a literary work's significance is the result of a chain of receptions. "Bluebeard" is therefore, in essence, a clear example of transcultural response: men and women have recognized the situation which the tale describes, no matter what their backgrounds might have been. As a result, the long line of "Bluebeard" rewritings has combined elements of different cultures and, each time, brought them into contemporary contexts, demonstrating the tenacious validity of the tale's themes.

Moreover, as Chantal Zabus suggests, "Since rewriting aims at redressing certain wrongs, it may be equated with its homophonic counterpart and be read as a re-righting gesture" (2001, p. 191). Indeed, modern female authors have in large numbers revisited the texts they first discovered in their childhood and produced irreverent, witty, empowering tales which can be enjoyed by all generations, but particularly by an adult readership. It sometimes seems that these authors are settling scores with systems of values which have stifled them, and that rewriting for them is a way to conjure old demons. So, rather than "forgetting the fairy-tale", it is a question of reclaiming it.

Rewriting functions within an inter-textual history of artistic creation and acts both as an acknowledgement of its lineage and as a defamiliarizing process. Thus, the theme of curiosity, originally taken as a reproval of the disrespect shown towards the male figure in charge (god or husband) who must be obeyed no matter how absurd or egotistic his wishes may be, in modern Bluebeard-type stories, is sometimes reversed in light of improved social conditions for women, or more equal sexual relations between men and women—yet taking into account, as newspapers and surveys regularly remind us, that a lot of work still needs to be done.

Modern rewritings of fairy tales, in their deconstructive approach, are subversive—as one of Perrault's rewriters, Angela Carter, said: "I am all for putting old wine in new bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (1983, p. 37). This defiant spirit is in line with the need for female disobedience we have identified, and it is also an approach which would have pleased fairy-tale women writers of Perrault's time. In seventeenth-century France, fairy tales were seen as a lesser genre and therefore one that women were allowed to indulge in (otherwise they may find it difficult to be published at all). This allowed them to write tales criticizing men as would-be suitors or husbands, through stories involving offensive bridegrooms: either as monstrously ugly and mean, as in Mlle Bernard's "Riquet with the Tuft" (1696) or as actual monsters, as in Mme d'Aulnoy's "Green Serpent" (1698). Through their work the theme had to be on Perrault's mind, as he was the only man of note producing fairy tales at the time.

Women played a further part in his creation. His collection, *Tales of Mother Goose,* is based on recorded oral tales traditionally transmitted by female storytellers. Despite being placed among them, "Bluebeard" is not a traditional tale. It never appeared in either oral or written form before Perrault, and it seems that many different sources compose it. Besides his mythical connotations, it shares many traits with other monster-bridegroom-type tales, such as the English "Mr Fox", the German "Fitcher's Bird", the Italian "Silvernose" and the Indian tale "The Brahman Girl who Married a Tiger", among the better-known. In every case deception of the male to better marry and murder the female is central. Other male figures, generally brothers, offer a positive masculine alternative, and in all of the versions, the female protagonist is instrumental in her own escape.

These tales also use symbols in similar ways: an egg, for instance, may be used instead of a *key*, which is a significant difference considering the sexual connotations of both. The key, as phallic object, can be combined with another, the knife Bluebeard uses to slash women's throats (it can also be a sword or sabre). *Blood* also is dominant: either as representing the ghastly death of brides, or as a reference to defloration and loss of innocence. Also, since this blood cannot be washed away, it shows that women feel irrevocably tainted by their ordeal at the hands of the multiple uxoricides. Another prominent element these tales have in common is the physical oddity they give to the evil man: the *beard.* While it often signifies wisdom and respectability, here, being blue, it is outlandish, monstrous. As it covers parts of the mouth it may also be seen as concealing the real meaning of words. Generally presented as thick or long in illustrations it seems to reflect the devious and violent nature of the character.

Despite these awful circumstances, that Perrault's young bride should conquer her ignorance and fear, and her husband's criminal nature, and in the end find happiness, indicates that what is right is allowed to prevail. This could not but inspire new views and new ways of approaching the subject. Modern rewritings thus start with an ominous encounter, followed by a relationship in which either damaging

negligence or domestic brutality (both psychological and sexual) soon ensues. The Bluebeard figure no longer necessarily dies, but he is at least severely judged or punished at the end, sometimes by himself. The search for knowledge continues to be irresistible for the female figure, but now the ending tackles ethical issues rather than moralistic ones.

The narrating voice changes too. Whereas Perrault tells the tale as a third-person narrative, the story now often changes to a personal experience type of first-person narrative. English author Angela Carter not only read Perrault but also translated his tales. In her version, "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), her protagonist tells her story: aged 17, she married a Marquis because her widowed mother was poor. She had come from a wealthy family but married for love against her family's wishes, then found herself destitute. She had, however, remained determined to give her daughter the best education possible—she sold her wedding ring to allow her to study music at the Paris Conservatoire. Unlike her mother the young woman of the tale chooses to marry for material reasons, not realizing that the economic imbalance gives power to her husband over her: "His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinary precious slit throat" (1981, p. 11). The proprietorial objectification of the female leads to the murder chamber where, as Aidan Day puts it, "women have literally been denied subject-status and have been turned into objects, dead meat" (1998, p. 153). Patriarchy rules by ownership and through the masculine gaze, so we find that the Marquis' bed is surrounded with mirrors placed by him for his purposes. The bed is thus meant to satisfy his fantasies and the young bride becomes "a multitude of young girls […] identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades […]. 'See', he said, gesturing towards those elegant girls. 'I have acquired a whole harem for myself!'" (p. 14) The girl loses individuality and becomes one of a series of reproduced items, just like the murdered wives in the forbidden room.

While he exploits the innocent girl the Marquis, however, omits to consider the mature and accomplished woman, a formidable role model, i.e. the mother who comes to her daughter's rescue armed with her dead husband's gun. She was let into the castle by a blind piano-tuner whom her daughter employs and who is sympathetic to her plight. This young man eventually becomes the new partner when the story ends. Carter thus offers a fit relationship between the sexes moving away from the aggressive dominator/victimized scenario, in line with Perrault's own ending. The supportive new spouse that the heroine has chosen for herself is not a man who will impose his masculine gaze.[2]

In the same collection of stories, Carter adapts the traditional Indian Bluebeard-type tale as "The Tiger's Bride", but she turns it into a "Beauty and the Beast"-type tale, with the young woman willingly remaining with the tiger in the end (just as her Red Riding Hood figure remains with the wolf at the end of "The Company of Wolves"). This has to do with women asserting their sexuality, no longer being

[2]This ending and the male character's blindness reminds us of another Bluebeard-type story, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)—which was also the inspiration for Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), famously adapted to the screen by Alfred Hitchcock (1940).

inflicted male-oriented fantasies. This approach is also found in the work of American *cantadora*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, who offers her own "Bluebeard" tale, in a collection entitled *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (Pinkola Estés 1993) in which she reinterprets old tales, revealing an archetypal wild woman whose qualities, she argues, have today been dangerously tamed by societies that continue to preach to women the virtue of being "good" and "nice", i.e. as obedient and submissive as their ancestors. In an interview for *The New York Times* she declared that the innate powers of womanhood have been driven deep within, but they can yet be summoned as tools in a fight for survival.

Canadian author Margaret Atwood offered her own version of "Bluebeard" in a short story of the eponymous collection, *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983). Her female protagonist, Sally, from whose perspective the story is told, is a mature woman, married to a man who has been married several times before, and has also had many affairs. Similar to her ancestors, Sally is a little hazy as to the current whereabouts of these women. In fact, Ed, her husband, is a puzzle to her. Here Atwood revisits the symbolism of the beard by playing with his name, Ed, and nickname, Bear, which put together and reversed give "beared", suggesting entangled truths. Indeed, Sally feels that Ed shows "a stubborn determination to shut things out. His obtuseness is a wall, within which he can go about his business, humming to himself, while Sally locked outside, must hack her way through the brambles…" (1996, p. 133). This thought-provoking inversion of the forbidden-room image, where the male character *refuses* to give the key of his secret chamber to his wife, leads her to suspect that he is not what he appears to be. This sense that Ed is hiding something from her, turns into the realization that he may be a calculating womanizer, about to start an affair with her own best friend. So, the conniving husband is no longer an actual murderer of wives, but rather a slayer of relationships, a destroyer of lives.

Ironically, Ed is a heart surgeon and his job is about "cutting and sewing" (1996, p. 142). The image of Bluebeard's wives is implicitly brought back into the narrative, and we fear for Sally when, on one occasion, Ed brings her to his new X-ray room, after hours. It is a room where hearts can be, visually at least, dissected. Sally comes out of it quite disturbed because her husband has examined her heart on the screen as he would have any other, quite dispassionately. She is reminded of the women who, as she once did, "hunt" Ed, the attractive doctor.

One of the aspects in Perrault's tale revisited here is the idea that marriage to Bluebeard was possible because the young woman, like others before her, was seduced by appearances, such as his opulence, which conquered her original feelings of revulsion for him. Like Carter, Atwood breaches the question of women's dependency on their husbands for economic or, from a more modern perspective, romantic reasons, which makes them somehow dangerously accepting of their husbands' faults and therefore, to some extent, complicit in the way they are then treated by them. But this dependency is created in the first place by the way girls are brought up and how society expects them to behave, according to models that make them subservient. For example, Sally buys a desk for their home because she once saw a 1940s advertisement featuring a similar desk with the husband standing behind the chair, leaning over, with a worshipful expression on his face.

Sally is trying to recreate her dreams and seems to be blind to reality, until the last moment, when she suddenly dreads what the egg (there is no key here) might hatch.

Indian writer Suniti Namjoshi denounces the tradition of subservience in her own tale of Bluebeard, "A Room of his own" (1981):

> He gave her instructions, he gave her the key (including the little one) and rode off alone. Exactly four weeks later he reappeared. The house was dusted, the floors were polished, and the door to the little room had not been opened. Bluebeard was stunned. 'But weren't you curious?' he asked his wife. 'No,' she answered. 'But didn't you want to find out my innermost secrets?' 'Why?' said the woman. 'Well,' said Bluebeard, 'it's only natural. But didn't you want to know who I really am?' 'You are Bluebeard and my husband.' 'But the contents of the room. Didn't you want to see what is inside that room?' 'No,' said the creature, 'I think you are entitled to a room of your own.' This so incensed him that he killed her on the spot. At the trial he pleaded provocation. (1981, p. 69)

Namjoshi demonstrates that, if a man has some reason to get rid of his wife, he will do so, violently, whether she is found at fault or not. Like Carter and Atwood, she questions sexual politics, gender roles and the power of patriarchy.

The Spanish author Sofía Rhei joins in with her poem, "Bluebeard Possibilities" (2012):

> She didn't accept the key.
> He killed her anyway.
> The other dead women told her that they had done the same.
> But at last we are seven, they said. Now we can avenge ourselves. (2012, p. 46)

Rhei, like other contemporary female authors, refuses victimhood and encourages women to fight back. Silvina Ocampo in her tale "Jardín de infierno" (Garden of Hell—1999) makes her Barba azul (Bluebeard) into a feminine figure called Bárbara who entirely subordinates her husband. Catherine Breillat seems to support this view as the final image of her film, *Barbe Bleue* (2009), shows: in it, Bluebeard's head is laid on a platter, in front of his young bride, in a posture reminiscent of multifarious paintings representing Judith's decapitation of Holofernes.

The countless rewritings of Bluebeard have progressively offered a universal refutation of any possible justification of violence against women, and they have all in their own fashion demonstrated the expanding horizons of inter-/transcultural gender questions. They have exposed Bluebeard's patriarchal and misogynistic undertones in ways that educate readers (and viewers) and may empower women all over the world.

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Chapter 2
New Feminine Myths as Builders of New Transcultural Horizons

Metka Zupančič

Abstract In contemporary women's writing, mythical models of self-empowerment and personal growth permeate a number of novels from various cultural backgrounds and geographic areas. I will focus on the transformation of a major legend, that of Orpheus, which had influenced all Western literature since Greek and Roman times. Orpheus, the poet, who mourns the untimely death of his wife symbolizes the divide between the male and the female in the West, with Eurydice relinquished to the underworld. In contemporary women's literature, we witness a radical shift from this paradigm, with a new Eurydice emerging from the unseen, in order to expound her vision of the world she wants to live in. This new figure is linked to various other feminine mythical figures of empowerment, including a new Ariadne and even new forms of Mahadevi. From a transnational perspective, women writers contribute to a reinvented transcultural dialogue that better represents the new conditions of our lives, as do Ananda Devi (Mauritius, France and Switzerland), together with Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (a North-American author of Indian descent), both important builders of connections between East and West, especially in their rewriting of the figure of Draupadi and other major mythical paradigms.

Keywords Transformation of myths · Eurydice · Draupadi · Mahadevi · Ananda Devi · Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

In contemporary women's writings, new mythical models of self-empowerment and personal growth permeate a number of novels from various cultural backgrounds and geographic areas. Regardless of the necessary differences in the narratives, style, language or topics, similar phenomena continue to emerge. Old mythical patterns are being transformed to generate new networks of

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interconnectedness. They may merge into new forms with somewhat modified contents: while their basic structure remains recognizable, they carry a refreshing new energy that helps promote new values and new awareness. In this sense, we are definitely positioned in the transnational and transcultural space that echoes Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, in which the author calls for a "larger transnational history" (Casanova 2004, p. 53). The "transnational space" offers in her opinion "a new tool for the reading and interpretation of literary texts" (Casanova 2004, p. xii). This new approach demands that especially gender issues be considered in a new light, through new lenses for which the observation of the new mythical paradigms may in fact be very relevant.

This essay will thus expose a number of hypotheses about contemporary women writers situated at the crossroads of many cultures and interested in contemporary issues such as they pertain mainly to women and their place in the world. I am looking particularly at writers who deliberately choose to be inspired by female mythical figures, mostly those from their own heritage. Yet, in their literature, these mythical figures most often appear as transcultural, already adapted to the new conditions, especially because of various forms of diaspora and global migrations. This pertains especially to the novelists who are directly or indirectly connected to the Indian cultural legacy. Quite frequently and most deliberately, the goal of the authors who rewrite ancient myths is to provide the appropriate literary space for their characters' awareness building. On a larger scale, we may hope that such literary endeavours will have an impact on the collective awareness and will bring about changes in the paradigms of thinking and behaving, both in the East and in the West.

In this regard, albeit largely focused on manifestations of the new paradigms in predominantly French and Francophone contemporary women's writing, my interests do not preclude authors from other linguistic and cultural environments. During these past decades, contemporary literature in general, and novels written by women writers in particular, displayed a variety of modalities by which ancient myths, together with archetypal paradigms, are being reconsidered, reactivated and profoundly morphed. One of the major mythical patterns of the West, related to the figure of Orpheus, has marked its literature from Greek and Roman times onwards. Its most salient characteristic appears to be the separation between the female and the male principle, with Orpheus' wife Eurydice relegated to the underworld, from which Orpheus does not succeed to bring her back to this life. Yet, in contemporary French and Francophone literature, a number of women writers have recreated a powerful new feminine figure. This new Eurydice is not only capable of rising from the underworld but is also a gifted literary persona.

In cultural history, the dismemberment of Orpheus, the last phase in the myth as we know it from the Antiquity, may signify the dismantlement of contemporary values and literary forms (Hassan 1982). The Eurydice of the contemporary women's literature, in conjunction with some other mythical figures such as Demeter and Persephone and in particular a new Ariadne (Zupančič 2010), acts as a connector and a healer. She endeavours to bring together the dismembered symbolic body of the West, thus initializing or rather embodying a new phase in the Orphic

myth. As I have noticed it, the possibility for this new dimension may be considered as somewhat inscribed in the traditional myth. Orpheus' head, after his dismemberment by the wild Maenads, continues to sing as it floats towards the island of Lesbos. It may be conceived that the Orphic voice was meant to pass on to the inhabitants of this island, which stands for the creative community of free women poets (Zupančič 1997). The notion of "rememberment" such as I propose in my research is nevertheless new. It conjoins the notions of memory and the limbs of the symbolic bodies, to be reconstructed through literature, predominantly by women writers (Zupančič 2013b).

The hypothesis about the rememberment as a crucial component of the contemporary women's literature would not be complete without the inclusion of a vaster field of Indo-European mythical patterns. Only some initial postulates will doubtless be possible in the present study, with all due respect to the differences in the functioning of mythical schemes in various contexts. We cannot ignore a number of postcolonial women authors who revert to stories, symbols and especially intertexts that differ profoundly from those we have studied or to which we have been accustomed in the West. In this regard, Julia Waters uses the notion of "non-Western intertextuality", which she connects to the statements proffered by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Waters 2004, p. 52). This type of intertextuality is clearly still not considered in its fullness, both in theory and in practice.

With this particular notion in mind, let me approach one of the central feminine mythical figures from the Indian lore, such as it is introduced to the Western audiences by two very different writers, one writing in French and the other in English. The myth of Draupadi is featured in the very title of Ananda Devi's novel *Le voile de Draupadi* (1993), "Draupadi's Veil". For her part, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) revolves entirely around the character of Draupadi and her story borrowed from the *Mahabharata*. As I will show later, both writers are also interested in other mythical paradigms that profoundly shape their prose writing, consciously from the perspective of gender in an intercultural setting.

Ananda Devi, born on Mauritius Island, with her real name Ananda Nirsimloo-Anenden, is an important contemporary author of Indian heritage who currently resides in Geneva, Switzerland. She holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of London. Her name is an indication of the cross-pollination of cultures, together with her occupation and her literary concerns. As a professional translator, she could have chosen to write in any of the languages from Mauritius Island, yet she decided to compose her literature in French. *Le voile de Draupadi* is one of the texts she situated on her native island, with at the centre of the narrative a female protagonist by the significant name of "Anjali" (explained in the book as "prayer"). Anjali is pressured by her husband and her in-laws to save her little boy, Wynn, who suffers from a severe form of meningitis, by accepting to walk on the coals during the *agni pariksha* ceremony.

The reference to a ritual that we in the West only know from some exoticized accounts could appear as quite natural for Indians who speak French and would eventually have read this novel. Another dimension of this novel might still remain obscure. Why do we see the name of Draupadi appear in conjunction with the

cleansing ordeal, why is it her veil that will protect Anjali and carry her over the burning coals? In just one mythical name, a whole new world comes forth. It challenges our perceptions of gender in conjunction with mythical symbolism and it also questions our capacity to approach it properly and understand its many bearings, multiple layers of significance and multiple interpretations within the culture that generated it in the first place.

In contrast to Ananda Devi's approach, the nonresident Indian writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni certainly brought the character of Draupadi closer to the Western readership, in her novel *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), both in the United States and abroad, thanks to its translations into a number of languages. To mark the difference between the classical epic of *Mahabharata* and this novel, we see here a *woman* placed at the centre of the story, with her joys and sorrows, but mostly with her progressive understanding of life and her own responsibility for her actions, through the multiple challenges placed before her.

In both cases, in Divakaruni's enactment of Draupadi's fate and in Ananda Devi's reference to Draupadi as the protectress of those who seek purification by the fire, Western readers, without much preparation, are exposed to a set of unfamiliar and rather unknown intertextual references. They will eventually take those references for granted and focus on other dimensions of the story, which will often be the case not just in average readership but to some extent also in Western scholarship (see Mathieu-Job 2004). They may also try to become familiar with the vast domain from which these narratives are drawn, and then eventually encounter many contradictory explanations, while also receiving valuable insights that confirm some initial intuitions about these texts.

In my reading of Ananda Devi's "Draupadi's Veil", the most complex issue to apprehend was the appearance of the veil that will protect Anjali during her perilous crossing of the fire. The novel insists on Anjali's loss of faith in these rituals, at an early age of sixteen when she saw her cousin perish in flames. Powerful mystical dimensions clash with the constant reminders of how Anjali deconstructs even her own behaviour, in preparation for *agni pariksha.* As she slowly drifts away from her husband and his entire family, she is painstakingly aware that she will not be able to bring her son back to life, yet she is decided to follow through with her promise and the sacrifice. The novel includes references to Indian (or rather Hindu) rituals and symbolic forces at work, also with mentions of both Draupadi and Sita, with the respective epics to which they belong. Yet, the writer, who grew up listening to stories from these sacred texts, does not engage in long explanations of the importance and the value of these feminine mythical figures. In other words, she does not find it necessary to completely reveal her sources or to explain how Draupadi, in particular, has acquired a new identity of not just a mythical figure from the past but of a living archetype that holds the power to guide and protect her followers. The existing scholarship, for example by a specialist of *Mahabharata* who wrote a number of volumes on the "cult of Draupadi", Alf Hiltebeitel, may not account for the dimensions explored with regard to this myth by contemporary women writers analysed in this article.

The veil of Draupadi that protects the devotees during *agni pariksha* does not seem to be a generally known fact. It is of course Sita, and not Draupadi, who enters into the fire and exits from it unscathed, which proves to her husband Rama that during her abduction and captivity she has remained loyal and faithful to him. During my research stay in Kolkata, Sanghita Sen pointed out that Sita is not really a human being but is considered a manifestation of natural forces. As her sacrifice did not convince Rama of her innocence, she returns to the earth, her true and only mother. Draupadi, born unexpectedly out of *yagna,* is a human being, but this initial fire has already made her invulnerable to flames. Hence the possibility, in the complex workings of the imaginary, that she may indeed protect those who will walk on fire.

Furthermore, it is presumed that over centuries, and especially among Indians in diaspora, both myths, that of Sita and of Draupadi, somehow merged and were transformed into a true cult. Draupadi was thus elevated to the status of a goddess, at the centre of a powerful belief system used in particular for *agni pariksha* in locations such as South Africa, the islands of Reunion and Mauritius, but also in Singapore and Malaysia (see Diesel 1991, especially for "fire walking" in Natal, South Africa). Hiltebeitel, in his second volume dedicated to these rituals, *The Cult of Draupadi* (1991a, b), sees them as a manifestation of popular Hinduism, to be found in Tamil Nadu (also see Hiltebeitel 1999).

What does this mean for other manifestations of gender-based cultural phenomena, in particular for the veneration of female deities as they are described in contemporary novels by women, or may be observed from an anthropological point of view? To revert back to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who did not make Draupadi into a goddess, while taking the freedom to render this character's psyche and her quest much closer to the modern perception of self-affirmation, how does this new archetypal figure reflect the altered perspectives about women in Divakaruni's country of birth? What liberties in rewriting the story of such an iconic character is this writer taking *because* she has lived in the United States since her postgraduate studies? What dangers may there be for a *woman* writer who is reconsidering an ancient myth, for which there exist so many versions and interpretations? The author often cites the anecdote of a thunder that struck the fireplace in her home, in Houston, Texas, while she was in the process of writing the novel (Zupančič 2012): a warning or an empowerment?

When entering into the vast and unchartered domain of archetypal energies, especially when they are being transferred from their initial environment and placed in a new context where they may be misunderstood, made exotic and by this same token foreign, disturbing and thus unwelcome, how much freedom does a woman writer hold, how much is she to explain? I am referring here both to Ananda Devi and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In Ananda Devi's case, her novel *Pagli* deals with the Indian diaspora on Mauritius Island (see Waters 2004), with the title that refers to (feminine) madness that may not be immediately understood by Western readers. The madness here pertains to the imposed or sometimes chosen "otherness", that of being in a world that will consider a woman as unbalanced, weird or particular. A very similar breaking of taboos dominates another

Devi's novel, *Indian Tango* (2007), set in Delhi and disturbingly deconstructing a series of social interdictions. The first-person narrator is a writer from France, but originally from Mauritius Island, "*Mirich Desh*" (Devi 2007, p. 55). With "words of flesh" ("des mots de la chair", Devi 2007, p. 53), the she-narrator underscores her poignant desire to find herself in other Indian women. Within the political background of Sonia Gandhi's election in 2004, Devi manages to paint a vast array of feminine archetypes, with this politician, a foreigner, possibly called to change Indians (Devi 2007, p. 146). The narrator, an intruder in her own way, also hopes to enable transformation: she focuses on a woman of 52, caught in a typical Indian marriage, torn between her children, her husband and her mother-in-law who is pushing her towards abnegation and demise. Yet, this character, Subha, is only discovering the core of her being such as inscribed in her name, "dawn" ("l'aube", Devi 2007, p. 145). For the narrator, this woman is almost a deified reincarnation of Bimala (Devi 2007, p. 32–33), the character from Satyajit Ray's film *The Home and the World* (1986 [1984]). Considering that Ray based his film on Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* (1916), were the two artists aware that their character bore the name of a goddess related to the Shakti worship? Here again, Ananda Devi proves how deeply immersed she is in many aspects of Hindu spirituality, which allows her to rewrite the old mythical patterns and to fully give value to women's energies.

In terms of intercultural interactions, a number of Divakaruni's novels, such as *Sister of My Heart* (1999), its sequel *The Vine of Desire* (2002) and her latest novel, *Oleander Girl* (2013), continue to break social norms. Divakaruni places women in new situations and conditions, between countries and languages. Nothing from the tradition and the upbringing prepares the characters for the necessity to redefine themselves in radically new situations. *Sister of My Heart* depicts a deep friendship, quite typical of relationships in Indian joint families, between two girls, Anju and Sudha, born on the same day, just after both their fathers died in an accident. The girls are raised as sisters by their mothers and a widowed aunt, with the three maternal figures barely able to guarantee the appropriate social standing the fathers might have provided for them. However, Anju belongs to a higher caste and will receive a much better education. She is destined to become an intellectual who will live abroad with an Indian husband chosen for her, but whom she manages to see beforehand and subsequently fall in love with. The other girl, truly the "sister of my heart", as the title of the novel suggests, is very beautiful, but has to accept a much less auspicious union with Ashok, a disturbed man. She becomes a servant to her rather heartless mother-in-law, in a situation that might be perceived as stereotypical, were it not for the richness of Divakaruni's style and of the symbolism she builds in the novel. When after a long period of uncertainty about possible offspring, in a marriage that brings little joy to this young woman, the pregnancy test shows that a girl is to be born, her mother-in-law insists on an abortion. Sudha decides to keep the baby against all odds and to move out of her wedded home. In the meantime, Anju, the companion of her youth, moved to California where she lost a baby boy in a miscarriage that is followed by a deep depression. Although distance somewhat affected the initial

closeness between the two "sisters", Anju hopes Sudha could bring her back to a balanced existence. From a Western perspective, Sudha may be considered as a Persephone or a new Eurydice who rises from her own hell to help others. It would be interesting to find South Asian mythical models that pertain to the help such "sisters" are to provide one another, especially when the foundations of their closeness are being destroyed.

There is a secret that will come to light in the next novel, *The Vine of Desire.* Life is becoming too difficult in Kolkata for a divorcee with a baby girl, and the option of visiting her "sister" in California appears as a viable solution. It turns out that the young husband, Sunil, has been attracted to the less fortunate of the two girls since he first saw her during the marriage ceremony to his wealthier bride. Now that the three of them live in close quarters such as newcomers can afford in California, the young man transfers his affections to Sudha's daughter. But he will not be able to hold back his desire for the young mother and will have a short-lived affair with her, which will of course destroy the now rather frail relationships among the three.

In search of independence, Sudha opts for an illegal occupation in a household where a successful American businesswoman does not know how to deal with her Indian father-in-law. With patience, Sudha cares for the despondent elderly man, a widower whose son felt obliged to bring him into his American home. In this situation, Sudha will be able to play her archetypal role of a guide from the underworld, with the help of her own baby daughter Dayita. This situation leads to new possibilities for Sudha who finds a new father in the old man, but also a grandfather for her daughter: returning to India with him will allow her the opportunity to restore her life in a new context. Here, we may speak of the fire of the emotions that was on the verge of destroying close-knit relationships, but symbolically, there is also the fire of inner transformations between cultures and countries that allows a woman, a mother of a little girl, to rebuild herself outside of the cannons prescribed not just in India but also in the United States.

A similar topic, albeit structured in a very different manner, is at the centre of Divakaruni's 2013 *Oleander Girl*. The only daughter of a venerable Kolkata family, Anu Roy is allowed to study in the United States, where she falls in love with a black man. Expecting a child, but having sworn to her father that she will not marry without his blessing, she returns to India to be freed from her promise. Her father's rage is the probable cause of her premature death. The little girl, Korobi, is raised by her grandparents, and believes her father also died before she was born. When eighteen, on the verge of getting married to Rajiv Bose, from a nouveaux riches environment, she learns about the existence of her American father. Her quest, on a perilous journey to the United States, leaves her shattered: two major taboos were broken, since she is of mixed blood, intolerable in itself, and born out of wedlock. She still decides to return to India, daring enough to face prejudices, mistrust and oppositions (Sriram 2013). With yet another woman at the forefront of her narratives, Divakaruni continues to explore the connections between East and West, in this case seemingly from a more pragmatic point of view. Yet, Korobi, as the characters in Divakaruni's other novels, is an embodiment of the feminine determination to brave the challenges and choose a life better suited for her.

Such is the case in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997). Observations about this novel allow me to draw a number of conclusions about the new transcultural horizons created through the reconsideration of ancient mythical paradigms. Written from a mythical and rather mystical perspective, the novel received the designation of "mystical realism" (Rajan 2002), which does not explain the rituals and the spirituality that define the main character. The suggested exoticism is even more accentuated in the film based on the novel (Nayar et al. 2007), in which the central female character becomes a flamboyant beauty (played by Aishwarya R. Bachchan) that caters to the Western perception of Oriental aesthetics (Zupančič 2013c).

Both in the novel and the film, a key issue that remains unquestioned pertains to feminine spiritual lineage, to the presence of communities that do not seem to depend on male supremacy. These communities nevertheless function on the principles of hierarchical order where a female teacher is the keeper of the tradition and of ethical norms. Such spiritual values permeate Divakaruni's novel, with a young girl who after a number of incidents and experiences, which may be considered as her past lives, finds herself on a remote island. Here other young girls are trained to become healers, under the guidance and strict ruling of a female elder. The girls are to recognize and utilize the non-anthropomorphic powers of spices, divine beings in their own right. The female elder possesses high wisdom and knowledge, but she nevertheless abides by some higher principles, which she passes on without ever questioning them.

Tilo, the central character in *The Mistress of Spices*, is transported through fire to a new location in Oakland, California. The "mother" figure, certainly a manifestation of Mahadevi, remains her distant judge and ultimate authority. The transition from one existence to another in the book is probably more closely related to the *yagna* ritual. In the movie, the opening scenes remind us of *agni pariksha,* with potential familiarity of Western audiences with this practice. In the book, it is through progressive rebellion against the rules previously imposed upon her on the island that Tilo becomes a new person; however, this transformation is rendered less drastic in the movie. In the book, spices are often the ruling forces that impose values upon Tilo. On the screen, we are clearly reminded of "mother's" admonishing when the beautiful young woman starts to question the interdictions, in hopes to reconcile her role of a helper with her personal yearning for love and acceptance.

In the new interculturality, or rather transculturality, are we to understand that the new women who emerge from the transformed, combined conditions, from amalgamated cultures, are to place themselves not only against the prevalent masculine norms, but even against the principles that are passed on to them through the *feminine powers,* as we have seen in Chitra Divakaruni's and also in Ananda Devi's novels? What do these feminine powers convey in terms of social, moral, spiritual or archetypal order that has been maintained so far, and for what reason may it have been maintained? And how is this Mother, such as depicted by Chitra Divakaruni, different from the archetypal Mother represented in so many small or larger temples in India? I am thinking in particular of all the figures of Kali in

Kolkata and of the worship that she induces. Which are the powers behind the Kali that people—women or men—bow down to? What advantages may faith procure to the followers of a particular cult, and what happens to the worship once the foundations of a belief system have shifted?

I presume Kali is not any longer the incarnation of the "fearful strength" (Sarkar 2001, p. 253), such as depicted by Bengali's nineteenth century author Bankim, in his *Anandamath,* where she appears as "a measure of … shame, deprivation and exploitation" (Sarkar 2001, p. 255). She is most probably one of the more positive manifestations of Shakti, of Mahadevi, of the mother capable of sustaining her children. But how will these dimensions be maintained, and how will they be modified in the present and in the future? These are the questions that I would like to explore further, in an open dialogue with other scholars, for all of us to benefit from the intercultural and transcultural interactions.

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Chapter 3
Not By Faith Alone: Religion, Gender and The Public Domain in India

Satish Poduval

Abstract This article examines some aspects of the fraught relationship between the reform/defence of Hinduism and the activities in India's heterogeneous public domain by studying a connected set of texts/issues from three distinct historical conjunctures: (i) the Malayalee poet Kumaran Asan's celebrated poem *Chintaavishtayaaya Sita* [Sita Immersed in Reflection] (1919) in the context of backward caste demands for inclusion and equivalence under colonial rule; (ii) the Dravidian leader E.V. Ramasamy Periyar's polemical interpretations of Hindu epics and patriarchal theism between the 1950s and 1970s in the context of Dravidian counter-nationalism as well as the juridical provisions restricting the freedom of expression in order to protect religious sensitivities; and (iii) the American artist Nina Paley's feminist animation film *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) which was sought to be suppressed by Hindu activists but has been acclaimed widely and distributed for free by the film-maker over the internet. Each of these initiatives involves a "new" interpretation—or what Derek Attridge terms "act of reading"—of the epic *Ramayana* from a gendered perspective; and this article examines how each of them signals transformations in public life and political subjectivities as a consequence of these re-articulations.

Keywords Re-interpretation of epics · *The Ramayana* · Sita · Kumaran Asan · EVR Periyar · Nina Paley

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3.1 Introduction

In what ways are we possessed by religion? Let us provisionally conceptualize the term as referring not merely to varieties of theological affirmation but the extended sense captured by *dharma*—the sovereign/transcendental regulatory ideals for living-together-well, the metaphysical systems (the Spirit of Law believed to be 'enshrined' in constitutions) premised on and geared towards the perfectibility of human existence in this world. It seems worth reflecting how we often find ourselves entangled in the need for, as well as the zeal for, religion. Aspect one: we *have* religion, or we choose to *disown* it, and this relationship to it conjures up an identity which we expect to be recognized by the gaze of the other. Aspect two: the collective identity that convokes or conscripts us also *owns* us in the terrain of demographic-governmental politics, functioning more or less as the subject that predicates our values and actions. This double aspect is exemplified in a notion such as *stri-dharma*, which simultaneously connotes the characteristic property of women and a feminine propriety to be upheld in society. Structured like a Mobius strip, this doubling appears to seamlessly fuse adherence to a transcendental ideal of propriety with a relatively free sense of volition that seems emanate from an internal spirit (to wit, the self as property). In this essay, I attempt to explore certain aspects of this ambivalence (possessing, and being possessed by, religion) through a set of historical intersections between religion and gender in India over the past century. A guiding assumption is that like any other society, we do not live by faith alone but by ways we work out, *in communis*, our relationship to ourselves through a transcendental mediation.

"A new religion" had emerged, observed French administrator Armand-Guy Kersaint as he called for the creation of new public monuments in 1791 and proceeded to name this emergent faith as the "cult of laws": the measure of truth and the objects of devotion were the laws that had been recently declared from the national assembly, and the aim was to bind the spirit of these self-evident yet socially asserted laws "in the heart of the virtuous person" (quoted in Ray 2001, p. 1). The imperatives of rational deliberation and reflexive compliance were to be adhered to by members of the cult, the citizens. The ground, in the sense of site as well as spur, for such binding has since been designated as Culture—which has also doubled as a space for heteronomy, alienation and un-binding. The Malayalam novelist Anand [P. Sachidanandan] has approached this ground of binding/un-binding by emphasizing the difference between the concepts of *sahitya* and literature, rather than their widely assumed similarity: he argues that the former, etymologically derived from *sahit*, connotes "to be together; joining together various *dharmas* in one deed; participation of a large number of people on equal basis in one act; a kind of *kavya* [poetry]", while the latter, derived from *litera*, refers to "the art of composition in prose and verse; the whole body of literary composition universally, or in any language, or on a given subject, etc.;…" (2000, p. 12). Modern Indians seem to have "accepted the conversion of *sahitya*

to literature without a question". Anand views the older Indian epics as the quintessential form of *sahitya* elaborated through the participation of almost every category and class of people: "followers of all vocations, migrants alongside the natives, the settled people and vagabonds, the powerful as well as the oppressed… Like coral reefs, the epics that came out of these people turned into their abodes". The epics initially cut across geographic and climatic barriers, were suffused with irreverence and profane questioning and animated by the desire to document and criticize. Anand reminds us that the compilers of the tales often came from the subaltern level—"*Ramayana* was compiled…by an erstwhile dacoit and *Mahabharata* by a fisherman" (2000, p. 12)—and that their plots revealed how the high-born heroes self-servingly persecuted those they regarded as social upstarts or as threats to their privilege. At a later stage, political and technological changes led to a narrowing of this social archive:

> The aspects of irreverence which provided energy to earlier literatura was [*sic*] lost in the bargain. Blind loyalty and flattery took its place. Heroes and heroines became total héroes and heroines. Coming from the privileged classes, all their deeds and actions were right. Writers worked hard to justify them. When the epic *Ramayana* was reborn in the form of several new Ramayanas, Rama became an ideal hero, the *maryada purushottama.* The activist Valmiki was retired to the background to be worshipped only by the *Doms* and sweepers (Anand 2000, p. 13).

Such efforts at purification have not gone uncontested. Ranajit Guha has shown how, despite the assimilative pressure of upper-caste culture, tribal myths have retained aspects of an 'ancient and unresolved antagonism' under the 'syncretic wrapping'—figure of Valmiki, the reformed bandit-turned-poet, being a case in point:

> If the concept of social banditry may be said to be an acknowledgement of that ambivalent morality that informs the type of subaltern practice stigmatized indiscriminately as crime [by elite consciousness], the apotheosization of Valmiki and a host of delinquent godlings [by subaltern consciousness] must rank as a powerful tribute to that morality and the notion that goes with it. (Guha 2009, p. 253)

The syncretic initiatives from above include not just efforts to depoliticize and assimilate subaltern morality. Guha demonstrates elsewhere how, in order to prevent 'inversions' in real life, the reversal of social positions is condoned, indeed actively simulated, at regular calendric intervals and thereby turned into a sanctioned/sanctified tradition under the aegis of the dominant religion. According to Guha, the antithesis of such prescriptive reversal designed to ensure "the *continuity* of the political and moral order of society and *sacralise* it", is an insurgent subaltern consciousness that seeks to "*disrupt* and *desecrate* it" (1983, p. 36; emphasis in original). In seeking to historicize social conflicts and transformation in India, we are thus confronted on the one hand with a sacralized political and moral order that obliges conformity, and on the other hand with tendencies and efforts to destabilize the prevailing order. In this essay, I seek to examine three moments from modern Indian history during which new interpretations of the *Ramayana* were part of significant social movements to democratize political

existence in India: Kumaran Asan's Malayalam poem *Chinthaavishtayaaya Sita* (1919) written in the context of the reforms initiated by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana yogam, a spiritual and social organization that became active in the southern part of Kerala during the early twentieth-century, demanding inclusion of and equivalence for the backward castes; E.V. Ramasamy's polemical denunciations of the Hindu epics during the 1950s in the context of Dravidian counter-nationalism in Tamil Nadu; and Nina Paley's feminist cosmopolitanism in *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) which sought to accentuate a contemporary—and global—relevance of the epic.

3.2 Kumaran Asan's Re-Reading of Sita

In 1919, when the eminent Malayalee poet Kumaran Asan published his meditative poem *Chinthaavishtayaaya Sita/Sita Immersed in Reflection*, he was not only drawing on earlier counter-readings of the *Ramayana*[1] but also on the political mobilization against the caste system in Kerala by his friends and mentors within the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam [Society for the Propagation of Teachings of Sree Narayana]. Asan's poem consists almost entirely of Sita's extended soliloquy, assessing her life just before she decides to end it. Through her self-reflection, Asan delivers what Paula Richman describes as an "acutely insightful indictment" (2008, p. 65) of how Rama had treated her, accusing him of being in thrall to public opinion and failing in his duty to care for her. At one point she refers to him as "the reigning Sovereign of Manu's dynasty" (2008, p. 68) and complains: "Not without a shudder can I recall/His cruel slaying of the Shudra saint/It seems the king was swayed by the laws/Against women and the Shudras" (2008, p. 78). Such criticisms of the casteist and misogynist aspects of the *Ramayana* are fairly widely debated today, but in 1919 Asan was one of the earliest of the major poets to make these connections and criticize them. His poem eloquently articulated Sita's final thoughts on—if not acceptance of—Rama's commitment to the kingly duty: "True, a King is obliged to esteem/The verdict of his subjects, but when/The public is divided in opinion,/Shouldn't the king assess its clashing views?" (2008, p. 76).

The SNDP-led 'renaissance' in Kerala revolved precisely around the task of assessing the clashing views of the contemporary public, and forming a truthful consensus on what would constitute rightful conduct. The impetus for the transformation was provided by the saintly figure of Sree Narayana Guru and the dynamic organizational skills of Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu, both of whom were the

[1]Notably, the eighteenth century Malayalam folksong 'Sitadukham' (Sita's Sorrow), and Michael Madhusudhan Datta's *Meghnad-Badh-Kavya* (1861), available in English as *The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal* (Seely 2004).

mentors/benefactors of the young Kumaran Asan, and like him from the backward Ezhava caste. The Guru's call for uniting and reforming the community were initially communicated through the journal *Vivekodayam* [The Dawn of Wisdom; this journal was edited by Asan, and its masthead had the English slogan 'God helps those who help themselves'], through a network of teacher-reformers, and through exemplary practices at ashrams and public meetings. The ashrams aimed "to promote and to encourage religious and secular education and industrious habits" among the ezhavas (see Parameswaran and Rao 1903), and inter-caste dining, with food visibly prepared by 'untouchable' companions, was promoted. The SNDP movement initiated the process of remaking of the *bodies* of social subjects, by creating a new logic of interactions through which a public that upheld the right opinion could emerge. Until the end of the nineteenth-century, the caste system was the decisive principle of organizing social life in Kerala. The main concern of the upper/*savarna* castes was the purity of their bloodline, simultaneously keeping the division of labour based on the dividing practices of the caste system intact. The caste of the body thus had to be made known through unambiguous visual markers—the style of clothing, the shape and position of the hair tuft, the differing styles and materials of ornaments permitted to be worn etc. As Udaya Kumar notes:

> Caste provided the primary grid for differentiation in nineteenth-century Kerala. Clothing, jewellery, hairstyle, naming, food—all these constituted an elaborate sign system that had as its basis the system of caste differentiation… The movement of the body in public spaces was regulated through a system of distance pollution—the sacredness of the space and the purity of the body being dependent on restrictions of access to other bodies in terms of visibility, touch, hearing, and clearly specified distances. (2011, p. 215)

Any carelessness, dishonesty or transgression in the matter of signalling one's caste could lead to the worst imaginable fate in this life and beyond it—a contaminated bloodline—and was thus swiftly and severely punished. Drawing on Foucault's thesis that sexuality was the discursive matrix that enabled the formation, in modern western societies, of a self-reflexive subject who could internally relate the conduct of the body to the requirements of the population, Rajeevan argues that such a self-reflexive subject could only emerge in Kerala by liberating bodies from the grip of the caste system into a field of discourses of sexual management. The Christian missionaries in Kerala had started several schools that for the first time provided education for the lower castes but, suggests Rajeevan, they also initiated another significant practice: by segregating students into groups of boys and girls within the classroom, they introduced a new disciplinary concept based on a sexual division over and against the divisions of the caste system. This new division introduced by the missionaries did not seriously affect the old dividing practices of the caste system until Sree Narayana Guru effectively utilized the male-female differentiation for the creation of a new subjectivity. He took this división based on sex to prove the *identity* of all humanity, arguing in his verse *Jathi Lakshanam/The Characteristics of Caste* (1914) that caste was a false principle of social differentiation:

> Those who mate and beget
> Are all in one species
> Those who do not
> Are not of the same species
> And those living with mates
> Also belong to one species (Quoted in Rajeevan 1999, p. 53).

His disciple Kumaran Asan's famous couplet from *Chandala Bhikshuki* (1922) has the Buddha asking "Is the body of the Chandala girl/Barren to the sperm of a Brahmin?" (Rajeevan 1999, p. 45), indicating that bodies belonging to the same species act as sexual opposites *and* companions. It was indeed through this new sexualized division that the SNDP movement introduced the new universal: the category of Man who had one caste, one religion, and one God. The innovative spirituality sought broader social returns, as Sree Narayana Guru made clear through his prescriptions in 'Advaita Jeevitham' while founding the famous Sivagiri Mutt in 1928:

> For a community to achieve prosperity of all sorts—related to the body, the mind and the soul—the religious and moral rectitude of its members can be a source of great help. Temples and places of worship can be useful in developing these qualities in everybody in the community. However, the economic prosperity of the members of the community is equally essential. For this, we need to reform agriculture, trade and technical education, among other things (Quoted in Kumar 2011, p. 221).

The SNDP was successful in getting intermediate castes a greater share in education and employment by displacing the earlier caste-based ordering of society and installing in its place contending population groups made up of politically equal individuals. However, it is increasingly clear that the compass of this social revolution soon became limited: the idiom and practice of secular Hindu spirituality by the SNDP failed to usher in radical gender equality, or justice for dalits and adivasis.

3.3 Periyar's Re-Interpretation of *The Ramayana*

In an article published in the journal *Viduthalai* on 11 May 1953, E.V. Ramasamy [EVR] Periyar urged Dravidians of south India to reject the cultural and political dominance of north Indian Hinduism. Arguing that Hindu gods, temples and religious texts perpetuated the caste system, EVR stated:

> All these must be given a send-off… To do away with the lowliness of Sudras and to claim recognition, education and job opportunities, those that stood in the way are the present system of temples, prayers, festivals and rituals… Therefore, I call upon persons with true spiritual wisdom to join with us to break the idols of Vinayaka (Ganesha). Let this be a prelude to do so with other gods at a later stage. (Periyar 1996, pp. 36–7)

On 27 May, in a public meeting at Tiruchirapalli, EVR reiterated these views and proceeded to break an idol of Vinayaka. A Hindu devotee filed a petition

complaining that this act amounted to an offense under section 295 of the Indian Penal Code, which states:

> Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both.[2]

Undeterred, EVR led his followers in burning pictures of Rama at the Marina beach in Madras on 1 August 1956. Paula Richman explains the significance of the incident as follows:

> This symbolic action would represent a reversal of the culmination of the North Indian performance of the Ramayana during Ramlila festivals, in which the images of the epic's villain, Ravana, are put to the flames as spectators watch in delight. Rejecting Rama as hypocritical and weak, worthy only of scorn, EVR saw Ravana as the true Hero of the Tale. EVR's iconoclastic reading comprised more than just another exegesis of a religious text, however. It was the centrepiece of his campaign against Brahminical Hinduism, in the context of his assertion of Dravidian, that is South Indian, identity. (Richman 1991, p. 175)

His polemical counter-readings of the Ramayana were published as an inexpensively produced and widely circulated book titled *Ramayana—A True Reading* (1957), which was immediately controversial and banned in several parts of India. Interestingly, the sessions judge at Tiruchirapalli hearing the case against Periyar in 1954 ruled that the acts complained of did *not* amount to an offense, since "the particular image broken was the private property of the accused and was not in itself an object held sacred by any class of persons; nor do I think that idol breaking by a non-believer can reasonably be regarded by a believer as an insult to his religion." This view was upheld when the case went on appeal to the Madras High Court which ruled that 'objects held sacred' as per section 295 referred only to those that were duly installed in a temple and from where they were taken out in procession during festivals. The judge maintained: "What was broken by the respondents is nothing more than a doll taken either from a shop or made for the occasion…" But he also added that although this was not an offense, it was certainly imprudent and inconsiderate on EVR's part to have done this in public: "An act like this, beyond producing certain amount of prejudice against the doer, does not serve any useful purpose". These strangely (or strongly) secular judgements of the Tamil Nadu courts were later held to be erroneous by the Supreme Court, which directed on 25 August 1958 that henceforth such acts should attract punishment.[3] However, EVR continued with his public iconoclasm, insisting that his

[2]Several legal controversies (including this one involving Periyar) and the relevant penal provisions are cited in Kapur (2006).

[3]The quotes in this paragraph are from the Madras High Court ruling in *S. Veerabadran Chettiar versus E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and Others* on 13 October, 1954; and the Supreme Court ruling in *S. Veerabadran Chettiar versus E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and Others* on 25 August, 1958, respectively. The details pertaining to this case are taken from http://indiankanoon.org/doc/165707/ (Accessed on 3 Oct 2013).

actions were directed against the hierarchical system of castes maintained by Hinduism. In 1968, Periyar wrote that if a systematic campaign was conducted by his followers against god and religion, then the "portraits of gods and goddesses will not only be removed from the offices of the government and individual houses but also thrown into dustbins" (1996, p. 38). Prior to the 1971 general elections, EVR organized a conference in Salem during which a procession was taken out with pictures of Rama garlanded with slippers. The Congress and some other parties protested against this, and asked the people to vote out the DMK government supported by EVR; but the DMK was voted back to power with a historic record of 184 seats.

Despite such electoral success, however, EVR's political priorities and strategies are currently being critically reviewed by dalit intellectuals. For instance, Ravikumar has pointed to the problematic equation of non-brahmins and the untouchables in EVR's political campaigns:

> The non-brahmin who were described as 'equivalent to the untouchables in social life' by Periyar, never allowed the untouchables to better their lot. They treated them inhumanely. This historical fact is true even today. Periyar led many agitations demanding equality of opportunity. But it was only for those castes described as non-brahmin and not for the untouchables. (2011, p. 292)

EVR's battle for gender reform and equality—as envisaged for instance in a statement in his 1930 article in *Kudi Arasu*: "If atheism and liberty for women are scrupulously followed, the whole of India will become highly progressive" (Periyar 1996, p. 76)—too has not been half as successful as the electoral and social gains for the middle castes in Tamil Nadu.

3.4 Nina Paley's Sita Sings the Blues

American artist Nina Paley's animation film *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) returned to the epic, combining flamboyant visuals and an irreverently chatty narrative style, to reflect Sita's experience for contemporary women and men. Paley drew on several existing (but relatively lesser-known) counter-readings of the epic to construct "a thoroughly enjoyable tale of feminism", (Feeney 2010) interpreting Sita's devotion as "both a romantic inspiration and a feminist cautionary tale". (Scott 2009). The voices of three Indian friends based in America—represented on-screen as Indonesian shadow puppets used for narrating the *Ramayana*—provide information about the plot as well as quirky choric reflections, bringing together a heady amalgam of mythology, history and current politics. Paley animates the narration and the accompanying discussions in a variety of visual styles: popular calendar art, Mughal and Rajput miniatures, cardboard cutouts, photo and video inserts, funky rotoscoped dancing divas, cosmic abstractions and casual squiggles for the self-reflexive authorial parts. The film explores the pathos (and politics) of love and separation, through what Paley describes as her "personal

interpretation" of the Indian epic (quoted in Freed 2009). She had been on a private visit to Kerala about a decade earlier and had begun to read the different versions of the *Ramayana*; then her husband Dave brusquely informed her that he was leaving her, and while trying to come to terms with her heartbreak—the film includes this autobiographical sub-plot—Paley found herself reflecting on the predicament she seemed to share with Sita: "Why did Rama reject Sita? Why did my husband reject me? We don't know why, and we didn't know 3,000 years ago" (quoted in Sayeed 2009). She further says, "Making the film allowed me to get in touch with my inner Sita… A normal, self-assured woman, I related so much to Sita and the Ramayana, and I felt the pain of a failed relationship…" (quoted in Knox 2009). She drew on her personal anguish to make the film, finding inspiration in two primary sources. The first was the large body of critical scholarship as well as folk narratives and counter-myths around the character of Sita produced by women in different parts of India over the centuries. Paley took the cue from Nabaneeta Dev Sen's argument, in her 1998 essay "Lady Sings the Blues: When Women Retell the Ramayana", that

> [t]here are always alternative ways of using a myth. If patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence women, the village women have picked up the Sita myth to give themselves a voice. They have found a suitable mask in the myth of Sita, a persona through which they can express themselves, speak of their day-to-day problems, and critique patriarchy in their own fashion. (Sen 1998)

The second source of inspiration was the Afro-American singer from the 1930s, Annette Hanshaw, whose forgotten songs of love and heartbreak seemed to strongly resonate with what Paley was feeling in 2002 and what she believed Sita must have felt over 2000 years ago. So Paley decided to use these songs to make the point that the Ramayana transcends time, place and culture. As she puts it: "Yes it's Indian, but it's also Malaysian and Thai and Cambodian and Indonesian. Even within India there is no single Ramayana. There are all kinds of interpretations of the Ramayana. There's lots of controversy over the Ramayana already. I'm sort of jumping into it" (quoted in BBC World News 2006).

Sita Sings the Blues received a lot of acclaim and awards, but was also predictably very controversial for two different sets of reasons. Several Hindu organizations in the USA objected to what they believed to be Paley's negative portrayal of Hinduism, which they feared, could cause discrimination and intolerance against them—and they demanded that the film not be screened in public. Many of the scenes they objected to were based on already existing but relatively unfamiliar feminist and anti-brahminical interpretations of the Ramayana (Rama's *dharma* upholding casteist patriarchy; Ravana not being evil; speculations about Sita's 'purity'), the visualization of literal metaphors (the bliss and burden of companionate marriage depicted through Sita carrying Rama on her back; Sita is an 'ideal' buxom woman with her breasts highlighted as attractive 'juicy lotuses' to the male gaze; Rama kicks Sita out of palace and tramples over her abject—and pregnant—body), nonchalant dialogue (Kaikeyi tells Rama after getting him banished to the forest "Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out"; one of the narrators

suggests "If Sita had just gone with the monkey [Hanuman], a lot of lives would have been spared"), and sarcasm (Sita's sons peppily chant "Rama's just, Rama's right/Rama is our guiding light/Perfect man, perfect son/Rama's loved by everyone/Always right, never wrong/We praise Rama in this song/Sing his love, sing his praise/Rama set his wife ablaze/Got her home, kicked her out/To allay his people's doubt/Rama's wise, Rama's just,/Rama does what Rama must…"). There were also viewers who felt that a white American woman ought not to have appropriated the cultural text (and its interpretations from India) as an artwork for western or global audiences and accused her of behaving in a racist manner, or of participating in the logic of neo-colonial globalization.

The second source of controversy was Paley's use of the songs by Annette Hanshaw in the film. These songs, which Paley found personally meaningful and relevant for what she was trying to convey, had been in the public domain while she was making her film but the new Intellectual Property laws introduced in the USA after 2007 made these long-forgotten songs the property of a certain corporation that first demanded a payment of $ 220,000 from her to use the songs (a sum much bigger than what it cost Paley to make the whole film), and later "generously" brought it down to $ 70,000. Paley borrowed this amount to "decriminalize" her film and then decided to "give the film away for free" over the internet through a Creative Commons license (see Bailey 2011).

The combined effect of these controversies was that Paley found it difficult to organize public screenings of her film due to protests from certain Hindu organizations, and she also received take-down notices and faced as yet unresolved legal cases (from the Company that 'owns' the Annette Hanshaw songs, not from the singer's family) for distributing the film for free. But the film has also been phenomenally successful in terms of the number of people—including Indians and devout Hindus—who have seen it at home and written positively about it in their blogs and in journals. Rohan Narine, the Guyanese stockbroker of Hindu origin who had to cancel the screening of the film twice in New York and finally show it at his parents' home, averred: "For the record, I really enjoyed the film, and took the opinion that the West Indian community should see it and judge for themselves, not take another organization's opinión and make it their own. All works of art are open to interpretation." (quoted in Tripathi 2011). And Susan Viswanath, who is a member of the transnational feminist group Women for Afghan Women, reacted to those opposing Paley's film by staking claim to the shared ground of Hindu faith:

> Attacking this film is an act of such ignorance and small-mindedness when Hinduism is expansive and lends itself to unlimited questioning by its adherents. As a Hindu raised by devout Hindu parents and raising three Hindu sons, I have to say that the people who have a problem with *Sita Sings the Blues* do not represent me. In fact, *Sita Sings the Blues* is a wonderful way to keep Hindu mythology alive. (quoted in Tripathi 2011)

3.5 Conclusion

In each instance of the public interventions, or *acts of culture,*[4] discussed in this essay, a prevailing consensual field was opened up for reform through an apparently similar yet also contextually specific re-articulation of Hindu order and democratic politics. The SNDP movement in early twentieth-century Kerala as well as the Dravidian movement in mid-twentieth-century Tamil Nadu attained a fair degree of success in their primary goals of challenging the caste system and securing a share of power for the non-Brahmin castes, but despite their problematization of gender disparity and casteism they did not really bring about adequately meaningful transformations in the lives of women and dalits. Nina Paley's intervention seeks to build on post-national and post-identitarian feminist politics as well as on the possibilities opened up by the as yet relatively 'free' medium of the internet. Such interventions, insofar as they are in sync with larger social questioning and emancipatory striving, have the potential to reach out to—and influence—a range of new subjective constituencies, but the nature of their political effects are yet to be determined.

The study of culture today is complicated by the deep fission in the object-field itself as well as by the dissensions over the aims of critique. Conservative and radical versions of identitarian politics assert purportedly shared values or visions by which a community seeks to realize its destiny; older and newer strands of materialist politics seek to rework the ideological apparatuses/processes through which social relations are reified under capitalism; ranged obliquely to these tendencies are transversal approaches that view culture as a field in which subjectivities are fashioned in response to context-specific political opportunities and the tug of *wirkliche* history. Struggles in the field of culture have been an important aspect of modernization in India—a process involving triangular negotiations between liberal reformers (emphasizing 'secular' principles), spiritual and nationalist leaders (seeking to balance Enlightenment ideals with 'community' interests), and newly-politicized subjects (bending elite projects of modernization towards diversely oriented practices of 'democracy'). The liberals advocated a form of secular salvation, urging a shift in fidelity from religious faith to scientific/technocratic reason. Many of the nationalists tended to veer towards this view, as they exhorted their compatriots to realize the divinity of the human spirit in the

[4]This phrase acknowledges that certain themes animating Jacques Derrida's well-known books on literature and religion echo through this essay. The polysemy inherent in the notion of an "Act" points to (i) a set of legal *rules and regulations* that are in force within a society; (ii) political *actions (or activisms)* that have the power to precipitate events leading to social transformation, or changes in the existing actuality; and (iii) a staged *performance*, or the work done by actors and artists to compel attention to new ideas and pleasures, to create the ground for the emergence of new subjectivities. It is to this complex set of transactions that Derek Attridge (2004) draws attention in his definition of a literary work as an act of writing that calls forth an act of reading.

quest for national glory. An important element of subaltern subjectivity in recent times has been the recognition that democratic agency/efficacy is prompted not so much from individual (ascetic) submission to rationality as from nurturing other forms of interiority and experience that keep the quest for human virtue open and socially grounded. In varying modes and degrees, all the approaches seek to fasten a transcendental vision to an immanent project—confirming Derrida's insight that efforts to dissociate the essential traits of the religious from those of the juridical, the economic or indeed the political are problematic because the "fundamental concepts that often permit us to isolate or *pretend* to isolate the *political*… remain religious or in any case theologico-political" (2002, p. 63, emphasis in the original).

Looking back over the colonial and postcolonial period, it appears quite evident that while these manoeuvres of modernity have broadened the arena of democratic participation they have not been half as successful in creating a radical citizen-subjectivity within the Indian republic. The three conjunctures examined in this essay indicate the cleft character of the traffic. The excavation and critical assessment of the ideological configurations inherited from the past for the purpose of re-orienting communities have been fairly robust and effective. But the corollary task of engaging with the contemporary legacies (sectarian, moralizing and tutelary) and forms (urban, capitalist and mass-mediatized) of these inherited configurations has by and large been avoided or remained desultory at best. This has perhaps less to do with the 'realities' of illiteracy or ascriptive ethnicity, and more to do with the dependence on some lingering variant of the colonially instituted logic of indirect rule over native communities (see Prasad 2011). Acts of culture in contemporary India—including the study of culture—must move beyond the logic of such self-enclavement.

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Chapter 4
Subverting Brahminical Patriarchy Through Myths and Folktales: Karnad's Hidden Polemic

Abin Chakraborty

Abstract The history of India's engagement with colonial rule shows a startling collusion between colonial and nationalist patriarchal discourses, especially with regard to the idea of some lost golden age of brahminical glory, which served to consolidate patriarchal subjugation in post-independence India, especially by erasing the idea of female sexual desire. The plays of Girish Karnad, despite going back to traditional narratives and performance traditions, serve to challenge and subvert such discourses through several dramatizations of myths and folktales, involving adulterous women. While both Sanskrit myths and regional folktales are part of the Indian tradition, they are often entangled in a dialogic relationship in which we see that the pan-Indian, Aryan and Sanskritized myths are interrogated, challenged and problematized by regional folktales that exude a subversive energy of their own. In the process, the patriarchal and brahminical construct of feminine identity, as enshrined through either scriptural diktats or characters like Sita, Savitri or Ahalya, is subverted by the foregrounding of female characters that not only have agency but also display either aggression or sexual vigour to break free from the constricting moulds of sustained misery. While plays like *Yayati* and *The Fire and The Rain* repeatedly emphasize this sense of abject suffering that women are exposed to, by refashioning episodes from *The Mahabharata*, his two other plays, *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala,* based on folktales, radically alter the state of affairs by foregrounding subversive female characters that break free from patriarchal constrictions. These plays, in the process, operate in the form of a Bakhtinian hidden polemic against patriarchal, Sanskritized traditions. The article explores these issues and analyses how they serve to clear the space for alternate paradigms of female identity suitable for the imagined community of a postcolonial nation.

Keywords Rewriting myths and folktales · Brahminical patriarchy · Hidden polemic · Girish Karnad

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Stuart Hall remarks,

> …cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not some fixed origin to which we can make some final absolute Return… The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning* (Hall 2006, p. 113, emphasis original).

This emphasis on positioning is important as traditional narratives and myths are often used to perpetuate hierarchies based on class, caste or gender. This is especially true of India where the mythological characters of Sita, Savitri or Ahalya are consistently used to create a constricting framework of female identity that ensures abject subjugation to patriarchal authority. Re-examination of mythological narratives therefore often involves, in the words of Gilbert and Tompkins, "the specific refiguring of gender roles/identities and the articulation of a multiplicity of feminisms within restructured histories" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, p. 120). This 'refiguring of gender roles/identities' is one of the driving forces of Karnad's entire oeuvre. While on the one hand his plays derived from the *Mahabharata* expose the innate chauvinism of the Brahmanical Sanskritized tradition by representing the original narratives from different angles, on the other hand, the plays based on folktales, undermine those same traditions by operating as examples of the Bakhtinian hidden polemic which paves the path for alternate paradigms of feminine identity.

The principal question which Karnad uses to destabilize earlier narratives is that of female sexuality. Therefore, in *Yayati*, while dissecting the mythological narrative of Yayati who is cursed with senility and how his youngest son accepts the curse following his father's plea, Karnad introduces the character of Chitralekha, Pooru's wife, whose plight becomes instrumental in unmasking the subjugation of women which brahminical discourses indulged in. In the process, the vaunted glory of ancient Indian civilization, something which is reiterated by both Orientalists and Indian nationalists, is exposed as an exclusively masculinist construct, concealing centuries of women's subjugation. This is evident from Chitralekha's own plight, as the young bride suddenly finds herself straddled with a senile husband on the very first night of their marriage, even before its consummation. Pooru's voluntary acceptance of the curse is a result of both the irresponsibility of his father and his own thirst for fame, and neither Yayati nor Pooru ever bother to think of Chitralekha and her needs and desires. She becomes relegated to the position of a compliant spectator and all her desires are instantly erased—a process that continues to be repeated in the lives of many Indian women even now, if recent reports are anything to go by.[1] However, herein lies the relevance of

[1]According to the National Family Health Survey report of 2005–2006, only 36.7 % married women take part in household decisions. See http://hetv.org/india/nfhs/nfhs3/NFHS-3-Key-Indicators-India.pdf.

Yayati and more importantly the character of Chitralekha. Instead of accepting the role of the docile and compliant wife, Chitralekha boldly challenges both Pooru and Yayati and defiantly states, "I will not let my husband step back into my bedroom unless he returns a young man" (Karnad 2012, p. 61). Such an articulation foregrounds the tabooed topic of female sexuality which remains absent from much of the discourse of the ancient Sanskrit Aryan literature where women survive only as objects of desire and not as desiring subjects. Chitralekha's assertion turns this entire discourse on its head, and through her Karnad makes a strikingly relevant post-colonial intervention for the post-independence Indian nation which remains predominated by the same patriarchal discourse that continues to erase the very issue of female sexuality. Yayati obviously serves as an embodiment of such discourse in the play and therefore faces the wrath of Chitralekha who does not spare the narcissistic monarch:

> I did not push him to the edge of the pyre, sir. You did. You hold forth on my wifely duties. What about your duty to your son? Did you think twice before foisting your troubles on a pliant son? (Karnad 2012, p. 62)

Such questions manifest the resolute defiance of a woman who refuses to accept the void into which she is plunged. With a mixture of both agony and rage, she therefore asks, "You have your youth. Prince Pooru has his old age. Where do I fit in?" (Karnad 2012, p. 66). Her voice at this juncture becomes that of the Indian everywoman who, faced with the contradictory pulls of patriarchy, finds herself destituted and abandoned in the void in-between.

A similar fate is meted out to Vishakha, in *The Fire and the Rain*, where she acts as Paravasu's wife, a character who is not even given a name in *The Mahabharata*. Karnad not only names her but again makes her a significant catalyst who proves instrumental in exposing the dark underbelly of that brahminical glory which the corresponding episode in the epic explicitly consecrates. Much like most Indian women, and Chitralekha as well, Vishakha too is married off to Paravasu without any consent: "I didn't want to, but that didn't matter", she says (Karnad 2010, p. 122). Instead, as a wife she is used by her husband for maximum sexual gratification, involving utmost humiliation:

> He used my body, and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer… Nothing was too shameful, too degrading, even too painful. Shame died in me. And I yielded. I let my body be turned inside out as he did his own… I have known what it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot, to fill the world with one's innards. (Karnad 2010, p. 123)

Her misery is compounded by the fact that after a year of such torture she is deserted for 7 years by her husband who remains busy performing a fire-sacrifice. This absence again subjects her to the violent assaults of her father-in-law, Raibhya, who vents out his jealousy and rage against her:

> Something died inside your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest… On the one hand there's his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdled lust. And there's no one here to take his rage out on but me … the wizened body, the scratchy claws and the blood, cold as ice. (Karnad 2010, p. 142)

It is to escape such unbound savagery that Vishakha willingly surrenders herself to the newly returned Yavakri, whom she originally loved, as opposed to *The Mahabharata* narrative where she only flees and cries after Yavakri's failed seduction. Unfortunately, even this proves to be a disaster as Yavakri confesses how he had used her to provoke Raibhya and Paravasu for his own vengeance: "It was fortunate that you yielded. If you hadn't, I would have had to take you by force" (Karnad 2010, p. 131). Vishakha is naturally overcome with 'horror' and warily mourns the agonizing betrayal: "I was so happy this morning. You were so good. So warm. I wanted to envelope you in everything I could give… One thinks one has steeped on to a bit of solid ground—a little heaven—and the earth gives way…" (Karnad 2010, p. 132). This sinking feeling, this sense of betrayal, lost hopes and sheer disillusionment is something that most Indian women would be able to identify with as the discourse that victimizes Vishakha continues to hold sway even today over a large section of our population. However, unlike many such subalternized women, who tamely accept such victimization, either on account of fear or because of their internalization of the hegemonic discourse, Vishakha retaliates. Overcoming her initial horror, she calmly pours out the sanctified water with which Yavakri sought to prevent himself from the wrath of the Brahma-Rakshas summoned by Raibhya and eventually dies at his hands. Despite being unable to make any substantial improvement in her own life, a disillusioned and embittered Vishakha employs the logic of vengeance against Yavakri himself and ensures his death. Unlike the epic which describes this action as being one committed by an illusory female entity created by Raibhya (Basu 2011, p. 200), Karnad gives the agency to the disillusioned and abandoned subaltern woman, who, however, continues to remain a subaltern.

Herein lies again the difference between these plays and those derived from folktales. In the former, while there is no denying of the fact that Karnad does effectively modify the original myths to convey his purpose, it is also true that the concerned female characters remain consigned to a subaltern position. On the other hand, plays like *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala*, because of their reliance on folktales, serve to subvert dominant structures by operating in the form of a Bakhtinian hidden polemic and provide us with glimpses of alternate paradigms. This has much to do with the essential nature of folktales. As A.K. Ramanujan explains,

> Folk materials also comment continually on official and orthodox views and practices in India…here, if we listen, we can hear the voice of what is fashionably called the subaltern—the woman, the peasant, the nonliterate, those who are marginal to the courts of kings and offices of the bureaucrats, the centres of power. (Ramanujan 2012, p. 13).

This commentary acts as an example of the 'hidden polemic' which constitutes a variety of 'double-voiced discourse'. Bakhtin explains

> In a hidden polemic the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as in any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object… The other's discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another persons' implied words. (Morris 2003, p. 107)

The folktales utilized by Karnad follow the same strategy as the sexual desires of characters like Padmini and Rani are foregrounded in such a way that the text manages to implicitly subvert either the canonical examples of Sita or Ahalya or the patriarchal codes of Manu and his ilk. This is evident from the opening female chorus of *Hayavadana* which almost functions as a refrain:

> Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower? (Karnad 2008, p. 82)

Such a song covertly militates against the strictures of such texts as *The Manu Samhita* which states:

> 2. Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.
>
> 3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (Buhler. Chap . 9)

Such statements are representative of the kind of discourses against which Karnad's hidden polemic is aimed. This is further emphasized by the reference to Sita, held as a paragon of virtue and subjected to repeated arduous tests, when the narrator states: "Devadatta—Padmini—Kapila! To the admiring citizens of Dharmapura, Rama—Sita—Lakshmana" (Karnad 2008, p. 90). The invocation of the mythic/epic paradigm introduces us to the sanctified familial structure endorsed by hegemonic Hindu discourses where Sita is posited as an embodiment of purified wifely virtues, evident from her loyalty, obedience and sacrificial temper. We are thus introduced to the dialogic framework within which the play can be read and it is from this dialogic context that we get to analyse how both of Karnad's plays create a counter-discourse to the patriarchally constituted discourse of marriage which demands absolute self-abnegating loyalty without affording either choice to the woman or ensuring reciprocal responsibility on the part of the husband. Padmini, as a character, embodies a transgressive subversion of all such patriarchal codes and it is her agency that provides the play with its driving energy. As opposed to the docile Sita who remains steadfastly loyal and yet suffers miserably, Padmini actively desires Kapila, her husband's best friend and it is this desire that prompts her to change the heads when she attempts to resurrect them after they had both committed suicide on account of the crisis initiated by their shared desire for Padmini. Padmini's deliberate placing of Devadatta's head on Kapila's body and vice versa represents a moment of carnivalesque wish-fulfilment perennially denied to women. As Bakhtin explains,

> Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal … a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by barriers of caste, property, profession and age… *People were, so to speak, reborn for new purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind*. (Morris 2003, p. 199; emphasis mine)

Through Padmini's transposition and the associated divine intervention, Devadatta and Kapila are indeed 'reborn', making possible a new kind of human relation between Padmini and her reborn 'husband' where the 'utopian ideal and the realistic merged'. The subsequent joyous laughter and the song and dances in which the three participate further reinforce this carnivalesque ambience and this strange ménage-a-trois parodically contrasts the solemn sanctification and legitimation of the monogamous bond that marriage is:

> What a good mix!
> No more tricks!
> Is this one that
> Or that one this?
> Ho! Ho! (Karnad 2008, p. 105)

It is this particular brand of carnival humour which gives Karnad's play its unique identity and sharpens its subversive anti-patriarchal stance. And even though we later witness a re-enactment of Kapila and Devadatta's earlier suicide, even the 'Sati' that Padmini performs only reinforces the subversion of orthodox dogma. As an ironic counterpoint to the tradition of 'pativrata' women, such as Sita and Savitri, Padmini remains defiant till the end, and her self-immolation ends up consecrating her extra-marital pursuit of personal sexual fulfilment in defiance of patriarchal norms which demand compulsive adherence with least room for choice. This final act of self-assertion, far from reinforcing tradition, ends up becoming a travesty of the whole ceremony as it becomes a transgressive gesture through which Padmini memorializes her extra-marital desire and announces her fatal triumph over the laws that were supposed to shape and govern her life. Much like Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, she too performs an "ad hoc subaltern rewriting of the social text of sati" (Spivak 1999, p. 307) through the foregrounding of her transgressive desire. It is also important to note here Karnad's ironic glance at the Rajput queen Padmini who led other Rajput wives to commit mass suicide as part of *Jauhar vrata* to preserve their honour from the invading victorious armies of Alauddin Khilji. While the Rajput Padmini became an icon appropriated by the nationalist discourse as an emblem of steadfastness, sacrifice, nobility and courage, Karnad's Padmini mocks that entire gamut of traditional norms and expectations through a subversive sati that commemorates her consciously extramarital quest for that personal sexual fulfilment which remains a bleak silence within patriarchal discourses.

Such subversion attains even greater urgency in *Nagamandala* through the protagonist Rani who is also involved in an adulterous relationship. Married to the insensitive and oppressive Appanna, who even keeps a concubine and subjects Rani to physical abuse, Rani finds escape through an adulterous relationship with a snake who takes on the shape of Appanna and comes to her every night. In the process, the folktale re-enacts the story of Ahalya, who, though married to the celibate sage Gautama, once had intercourse with Indra, who had come in the guise of Gautama. However, Ahalya is turned into stone for her supposed sins while Rani, with the help of the Naga, even manages to convince her husband and the elders of her village, after performing the dreaded chastity test, that not only is she chaste

but she is also the incarnation of some divinity. As Ramunjan, from whom Karnad learnt this story, explains:

> The story also mocks the classic chastity test, the test of truth. In the *Ramayana*, Sita comes through the ordeal of fire because she is truly chaste and faithful. Here, the woman comes through the ordeal of handling a venomous snake only because she has a lover – it is her very infidelity that is used to prove she is a *pativrata*. (Ramanujan 2012, p. 444)

In the process, Karnad's play and the folktale on which it is based operate as examples of potent counter-discourses which shatter either the punitive patriarchal discourse used to frame the story of Ahalya or the consecrated misogyny of *Ramayana*. Therefore, unlike the petrified Ahalya or the Sita who eventually returns to mother earth, signifying suicide, Rani remains undaunted and her anti-patriarchal miracle creates a typical moment of carnivalesque reversal as the husband begs forgiveness and submits to the wife's supposedly divine authority. The gendered subaltern emerges out of her shadow and stands tall by dint of her own previously erased sexuality.

Thus, Karnad's plays rework both myths and folktales to challenge the authority of patriarchal discourses and foreground a space where female identities might find, however tentatively, completion and fulfilment beyond patriarchal diktats. In an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, Karnad once said:

> I used to know a woman who positively blossomed after she had an extra-marital affair. If womanhood finds fulfilment in love that happens to be outside marriage, why should that be considered wrong? (Mukherjee 2007, p. 43)

Karnad's plays, especially the ones that are based on myths and folktales, are a dramatization of such questions that continue to probe and unsettle patriarchal discourses to find new grounds for the construction of female identities.

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Chapter 5
Religion and The Position of Women in Indian Society: De-Masculinizing Mythologies and Religio-Sexual Rites

Ratul Ghosh

Abstract Apparently, it may seem that Hinduism is sincere towards upholding the dignity of women, as its various treatises and mythologies give us some suggestive accounts in this regard. However, behind such a projection, we can find out subtle tricks of socio-religious agencies which work for brahminical patriarchy. The non-mainstream or alternative religious practices like Tantra originated with an aim to challenge and subvert the patriarchal brahminical religious hegemony, and often provide gender equilibrium in the socio-religious space. Nevertheless, such forms were also not free from veiled patriarchal tropes and agendas. In today's society, the baul and faqir sects of Bengal, who formed a folk-oriented *sahajiya*-cult incorporating tantric practices and Sufi mysticism, are internationally regarded as the believers of a de-institutionalized free society with equal religious and social rights for men and women. However, the question is to what extent do women, who serve as the '*sadhan-sangini*' (female partner in sexo-yogic religious practices) of the bauls, actually get equal rights, dignified position and true fulfilment in religious and social life. This article tries to re-explore Indian mythological, classical as well as folk socio-religious texts, treatises and traditions to find out the hidden framework of patriarchy.

Keywords Religion and female sexuality · *Manusmriti* · Durga · Tantra · Baul · Faqir

The history of civilization shows that, in the course of time, religion becomes a social (and often, national) agency of utmost power, encompassing various social institutions to utilize them for executing its own propaganda, or the propaganda of the dominating male constituency of that very society. Hinduism, not unlike

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the other canonical religions, seldom provides socio-normative space for women to manifest and establish their distinct social and cultural identity. Hinduism is seemingly respectful towards dignity of women, but a careful study unveils the patriarchal tropes and agendas of Hindu society. To understand the social context of religio-statutory interference in this regard, one can observe the Laws of Manu (*Manusamhita*). These laws were considered as the social codes and norms, authenticated by the Brahmins, the top religious representatives of 'Hinduism', who essentially belonged to the apex position of the social hierarchy, to make sure that the patriarchal interests of the society are fulfilled.

Apparently, the *Manusamhita* or *Manusmriti* indicates that Hindu women have a respectful position in the household as the laws say: "Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law who desire (their own) welfare". (Buhler 1886, p. 85).

However, there is another face of this proposed honour. One has to bind herself mentally and physically under the household territory, apparently protected by its male members. Only then, in exchange for her freedom and considering her obedience, the society will provide that bit of domestic dignity. The Laws of Manu dictate: "In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent." (Buhler 1886, p. 195).

So we can say that an intense reading of *Manusmriti* shows us the treacherous nature of Hindu social law, authenticated by the patriarchal agencies of brahminical Hinduism. Even the mother's claim on her child has been denied by Manu as he affirms that the seed is more important than the receptacle of the seed (i.e. the womb or the mother), because "the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed". (Buhler 1886, p. 333).

In case of marriage, there was a time when Hindu women apparently had some sort of freedom. There are references of widow-marriage and remarriage of women. However, these incidents should not be taken as the evidence of an egalitarian society that had compassion for women. These sympathetic gestures concealed some utilitarian values for patriarchy. At first, let us look at the brahmins' point of interest. *Atharvaveda* clearly states that a woman can get a second husband if she donates an amount of money and other offerings to a brahmin (Datta 1888, p. 89). Not only material gains, this agenda also helped the brahminical patriarchy to satisfy its lust without being questioned. The same social agency dictates that if a woman takes a brahmin husband while having ten other husbands already, that brahmin would be considered her true husband; not the kshatriya (people who protects and governs the country, like kings or members of other governing position of the state, or the soldiers) or the vaishya (businessmen) husbands.[1]

[1]Obviously it would have been thought that mentioning Shudra-s (the lower caste people whose duty was to serve the other three castes) would be unnecessary because Shudra women were easily available as they were at the lowest level in the conjugal hierarchy operated by the brahminical society. Manu's law states after the *Smritikaras*: "It is declared that a Sudra woman alone [can be] the wife of a Sudra, she and one of his own caste [the wives] of a Vaisya, those two and one of his own caste [the wives] of a Kshatriya, those three and one of his own caste [the wives] of a Brahmana" (Buhler 1886, p. 88).

Actually, at the primary stage of agrarian civilization, more manpower was needed for labouring and protection. Thus, in that age, the only considered usefulness of a woman was the fact that she could beget children, more precisely, sons, who would fulfill that very need. So, society could not afford to waste women, or we might say potential wombs, by not using them. Hence they were less concerned about introducing moral and social obligations in the process of impregnation of women. However, after the evolvement of the concept of private property, a social class with possession of a considerable amount of property was born. This class needed legitimate sons and descendants to pass the heirloom of that hard-earned family property from one generation to another, and so the social scenario changed. Gradually, there came restrictions upon the marriage of women, followed by the encaging of women inside the small household. This social situation also formulated the concept of *kshetraja putra*, where the wife was to be impregnated by some other person (most of the time hermits or sages who did not have any desire for material properties), as the husband or the family authority decided in case of the husband's impotency, to give birth to a child who would inherit the family property. It has been clearly stated that the biological father could not hold any right on the *kshetraja putra* (Bhattacharyya 2006, p. 28).

In this regard, we can unfold the story of Shwetaketu, son of the famous sage Uddalak. Shwetaketu himself was a respected ascetic and social reformer. One day, while Shwetaketu was sitting with his parents, a brahmin came and held his mother's hand to take her away by saying, "come, let us go". Shwetaketu got very angry by this foul behaviour of that anonymous brahmin, but his father Uddalak told him, "O son, don't get angry, women are exposed like cows and they are dissolute". However, the son was not convinced by his father's words and he uttered that "I am making this a rule that in human society, neither a male, nor female would be allowed to endorse sexual licentiousness. Whoever doesn't abide by this law should bear the sin of foeticide" (Bhattacharyya 2006, p. 1). This law seems reasonably inclined towards social justice and moral improvement, but it should be remembered that the definition of lechery was different for men and women. For a man, a couple of marriages were not treated as licentious misconduct; but more than one marriage was enough for a woman to be called lecherous. There are more things to be looked at. Shwetaketu was Uddalak's son, but not by blood. Shwetaketu was a '*kshetraja putra*' of Uddalak (which proves Uddalak's impotency), whose biological father was a disciple of Uddalak. So Shwetaketu's regulation came along with another addendum cum dictum that "That woman, who wouldn't give her consent in making sexual union(s) with another person to bear a child (*kshetraja putra*) by the order of her husband, should be considered guilty of the same sin" (Bhattacharyya 2006, p. 2). It would be superfluous to say that the sin of foeticide is unbearable for a woman. We can see, through this rule, patriarchy creates a position where women would be torn between social restriction and moral conscience if they do not go by the horrifying experience of being the mother of a '*kshetraja putra*'. That is why, many women like Ambika and Ambalika, the two queens of king Vichitravirya, had suffered from that gruesome

experience and faced the consequences of it, as this act of copulation could often be demonstrated as society-authorized domestic rape.[2]

In spite of a lot of criticism, the depiction of the most powerful mother goddess Durga in Hindu mythology has been regarded by some as the proof of a truly liberal society. The myth of Durga demonstrates utter respect for woman as she is considered the icon of utmost power which destroys evil. The question is, was she truly the symbol of female prowess? The *Markandeya Purana*, *Devi-Bhagavat* and other mythologies describe, by the power of Brahma's boon, the furious Mahishasur (buffalo-demon) had occupied hell, heaven and earth. Brahma awarded Mahishasur with virtual immortality by declaring that no male being could ever kill Mahishasur. In this situation, goddess Durga slew Mahishasur (because she was a female) and protected the Gods as well as the universe. Now if we look at the process of her creation, we find that the powers of various powerful canonical Hindu gods flew from their body like rays of light to converge in the sky to generate this most beautiful and perfect woman. Then the gods adorned her and provided her with their very own signature weapons to fight the demon. So, the triumph of goddess Durga over the demon is actually the victory of the male gods, who created the goddess and gave her their weapons. This apparent projection of feminine dignity and prowess is basically a subtle trick to hide the statement of male-authoritarian intervention over the feminine, followed by triumph in war, which is in itself considered a masculine ground. If ancient Hindu society had actually believed in gender equilibrium and accepted the spirit of female prowess, then it would have imagined at least one terrifying demon who is a female. We fail to find any mythological female character who is utterly powerful and pure evil. Actually, pure villainy is another masculine ground, as it requires hold of extreme power to threaten the collected powers of good. Had a woman been imagined to acquire that power, the course of the nature of our social views would have changed.

There is another layer in the Durga story. Durga eliminated Mahishasur with the famous trident of lord Shiva, the *trishul*. Now, she possessed a lot of other furious, mighty weapons in her arsenal such as the *Sudarshan Chakra* of lord Vishnu, the *Vajra* of the king of gods Indra, the *Kaladanda* of Yama and many others. But the one she chose to slay the demon with was the weapon of her 'husband' lord Shiva. This incident also shows where the society wanted a woman's allegiance to be bound. It is the husband, who should be unquestioningly served by the wife if she wants to spend her afterlife in heaven. It is the husband, who should provide supremacy, wealth and virtue to the wife, as a Bengali proverb says "patir punye

[2]*Mahabharata* tells us that, these two ladies had to mate with a famous old hermit, Maharshi Vedavyas, as their husband Vichitravirya died without leaving any successor to the throne. However, the Maharshi was a dreadfully ugly bearded old man. So, at the time of copulation, when she looked at him for the first time, queen Ambika closed her eyes in fear. This fear was also a punishable offence, so she gave birth to a blind son, Dhritarashtra. The other queen Ambalika kept her eyes open, but her body became pale at that time in fear, so she gave birth to a pale son, Pandu.

satir punya" i.e. "it is the piety of the husband that makes the wife pious". So, Durga slew the demon by the power of her husband.

The subtlety of this myth does not end here. The question is, was Durga really the wife of Shiva? *Devi-Bhagavat* says, when Brahma came to Shiva to discuss destroying Mahishasur, Shiva told him, "You've granted him boons that made him thrive. Where is such a woman who could destroy him? It is obviously impossible for your wife or mine to go to war" (Bhattacharyya 1977, p. 163). As we have discussed earlier, 'war' is a masculine space, where feminine powers are always discarded. Shiva is actually representing the prevalent patriarchal authoritarian society. So, when Durga slew the demon with the *trishul*, the mythologies built up a marital connection between her and Shiva.

There is more. How did the mythologies connect Durga and Shiva? They juxtaposed Durga with the known wives of Shiva, such as Uma or Sati. They said that all of the goddesses are the representations of Mahamaya, the omnipresent goddess of illusions. But why did not Shiva marry Durga instead? The mythologies state that Durga is generated by the collected *tejah* of various gods. Now if we take the exact meaning of *tejah* i.e. semen, we derive that Durga had no distinct biological father. In the patriarchal society, the father's name is the most socially significant identity. Lord Shiva could not be attributed to marry a woman who is basically born to fight beasts and demons, having no distinct father to her name. Thus that juxtaposition suited necessarily. This is the true position of women in the religio-social hierarchy provided by Vedic Hinduism as well as mainstream Brahminical Hinduism. However, it is also intriguing to note that even alternative religious cults became entangled within the pervasive discourses of patriarchy.

The non-mainstream or alternative religious practices originated with an aim to challenge and subvert the patriarchal brahminical religious hegemony. They often allocate a partnership position for women as they involve conjugal religious practices, in which the female partner is no less important than her male counterpart. Buddhist and Hindu *tantric* practices apparently have a respectful inclination towards the dignity of women as partners since they consider women as the key to success in the *sadhana* or the continuous process of ritualistic sexo-yogic exercise.

Tantric practices have their origin in ancient rituals in praise of the mother goddess. From the eighteenth century A.D., tantric rites and practices started to burgeon in greater Bengal (West Bengal, Bangladesh, Assam, parts of Bihar), Nepal, and Tibet. Tantra stood against all socio-religious hierarchies which were prevalent in society. Tantra allowed men from lower social castes (like *Hadi*, *Dom* and *Chandal*) to take the place of religious preceptors and train disciples from various social castes. Most importantly, tantra provided a respectful space for women, as it says, "Every woman, even if she is a prostitute, is *Mahamaya* herself, and thus, deserves respect and adoration" (Bhattacharyya 2000, p. 219). It should be sincerely admitted that until the nineteenth century, tantra had given refuge to innumerable women who were cast away from the authoritarian patriarchal society. The question is, by its inner framework, was tantra truly liberated from the subtle influence and authority of patriarchy?

According to the principles of tantric practices, "*Iyantu shambhavi vidya gopya kulavadhuriba*"—i.e. this knowledge should be kept in such secret confidentiality in which a *kulavadhu* or the virtuous wife of some prestigious family is kept. In this way, Hindu tantric tradition actually replicates the dictates and agenda of a male-dominated society. On one hand, tantric religio-conjugal practices always require a female body for *sadhana,* while on the other hand, they create a need for those women, who are not '*kulavadhu*' and who are not associated with the virtues of 'protective' governance of the patriarchy. Such women were made 'available' by the same society for 'religious' or 'quasi-religious' conjugal practices. This may be the reason why the references of low-caste or subaltern women, such as '*dombi*', '*chandali*', *and* '*shabari*' are evident in the *Charyapada*s, the metaphoric hymns written by Buddhist tantric practitioners of the twelveth century A.D.

Almost all the tantric scriptures have the same narrative: the absolute male Shiva is giving answer to the questions of his female consort, the source of all power, Mahamaya. However, the practices that Shiva explains in those the tantric volumes are actually meant for the male constituency of society. The various religio-customary rites were to be performed by the male chief of the family, but sometimes, the wife also had to perform rituals along with her husband. However, the religio-sexual rites were absolutely meant for male practitioners to perform.

According to tantra, the spinal column of a man is circled by two arteries, *ida* and *pingala*, which flow downwards. In the spinal column, there is another channel called *sushumna* or *sahasrar*, which is coiled like a snake. A *sadhaka* or practitioner has to control his breathing and steer his seminal fluid upwards to alter the direction of the flow of *ida* and *pingala* and channelise them through the *sushumna* or *sahasrar*, until it reaches the head. At this point he would be able to achieve the elusive joy of union (*mahasukha* and *sahajananda*) with the all-powerful female, *Mahashakti*. Now, this whole process is supposed to take place inside a male body during sexual union. However we become curious about the role of the woman in this process. She serves as the female counterpart, involving in sexual union to lead the *sadhaka* towards *siddhi* (the successful completion of the process). So, tantra apparently might suggest that women are all-powerful and ever-proficient; but in terms of practice, tantric exercises requires women only for coital union, and that union is never meant for the woman's spiritual upliftment. She is a mere tool used to help the man reach the state of flawless and absolute joy, as proposed by tantra. Tantra also postulates that not every man is eligible for this kind of difficult *practice* and so, a man has to master few preparatory rites of lower level to gain eligibility as a practitioner of the higher level. However, according to tantra, every woman is eligible to take part in these sexo-yogic practices from the very beginning of her first menstruation. This kind of opportunist religious priority consequently provoked a dangerous social anarchy in the declining period of tantra in greater Bengal.

Many of the tantric texts also have some social concerns. The question is whether these concerns are free from patriarchal agendas and social hierarchies or not. *Mahanirvanatantra* says, "O *Maheswari*, the man whose chaste wife is pleased upon him, he finds every religious rite and work done and gains your

favour" (Vidyaratna 1893, p. 66). Surprisingly, the later part of the same chapter of *Mahanirvanatantra* exactly echoes the *Manusmriti* when it utters:

> A woman's duty is to serve the husband with good words, to do those works which her husband likes and to please the husband and his friends by doing as she is ordered by the husband. (Vidyaratna 1893, p. 73)

It insists that "A woman must be under control of her father at her childhood, husband after marriage and husband's friends at old age; she should never be independent" (Vidyaratna 1893, p. 73). Tantra also supports *Varnashram* or the distribution of work according to social class and caste (Vidyaratna 1893, p. 67),[3] which was fabricated by the Brahmins to assert their topmost position in social hierarchy. So basically, in spite of subverting the patriarchal brahminical hegemony, tantra yields to it in a nuanced manner with its own apparently radical agendas.

After twelveth century A.D., the tantric practitioners of greater Bengal got disarrayed by the inflow of Islam and the Muslim rule that followed. The canonical religions and rituals got amalgamated with folk and alternative religions for survival and formed many heterogeneous religio-syncretic folk cults. Then the birth of Chaitanyadev stimulated a cultural renaissance in Bengal. However, after his death, *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* strived to develop a socio-religious hegemony, which actually worked as an important cause for folk cults to develop among the social subalterns. This is the background of the emergence of *baul* and *faqir* traditions of Bengal, who formed a folk-oriented sahajiya-cult incorporating *sahajiya vaishnavism*, *shaiva-hatha-yoga*, Hindu and Buddhist tantric practices and Sufi mysticism. They also had their own religio-conjugal practices which were influenced by *tantra*, thus having a lot of doctrinal similarities. These *bauls* and *faqirs* were hated by both orthodox Hindus and Muslims as they did not believe in any kind of religious canons. Until the seventh decade of the twentieth century, these cults faced brutal physical assaults and social banishment. These poor ascetics had nothing but faith in their doctrine and songs on their lips to struggle the hardest to form an alternative socio-religious space which shares class and gender equity and ultimate respect for human beings, whom they consider the diminutive mortal forms of the Absolute. Nowadays these *baul* and *faqir*s of Bengal are internationally regarded as the believers of a de-institutionalized free society providing equal religious and social rights to men and women. However, the question is to what extent do women, who serve as the '*sadhan-sangini*' (female partner in religious practice) of the *baul*s and *faqir*s, actually get equal rights, a dignified position and true fulfilment in religious and social life.

[3]In this regard, tantra played its own trick. *Mahanirvanatantra* says that the lower castes or the Sudras only have right to practice tantric religion, they do not have the right to practice any other kind of mainstream religions or religious rites. That is why we can see that tantra became popular among low social castes. But tantra actually supported *Varnashram* in all other social contexts, so it failed to initiate a significant class/caste struggle.

As it has been mentioned earlier, the *baul* and *faqir* cults have tantric origins, and so their religio-conjugal rites have the basic framework of *tantra*. We have discussed the true agenda of that framework earlier. However, there is a different approach in the *baul* cult. *Tantra* addresses any woman as mother. It clearly states its purpose, i.e. to use her as the helper in the religio-sexual practices. However, as *Baul-Faqir* doctrines have incorporated some theories of *sahajiya-vaishnavas*, they believe that every man is Krishna and every woman is Radha and to fulfil their love, they have to perform *parakiya-rati* (extra-marital sexual union). Bauls indicate a concern for love, as they say that the love of gods can be felt in this mortal body. Now, where there is a concern for love, a love which is not restricted under the social norms and conditions, the bond of heart between the male and female could be very strong, which is never a matter of regard in the case of *tantra*. And when the woman, the *sadhan-sangini* (the female helper or counterpart of practice) is left aside by the man or the *baul*, as she cannot help him in his practices any more, it is more painful and tragic than *tantra*. Then again, some *baul*s have *akhda*s or domestic schools for practicing, teaching and communicating with disciples. Many elderly *baulani*s (or the erstwhile *sadhan-sangini*s) spend their last days in the management of these *akhda*s. But the ones who do not find the shelter of any *akhda*, face a very tragic end.

The *baul*s say that the woman is the sole key to the mysteries of the universe and of the body too. They say that ultimate power is hidden inside the female body. They praise and adore women, worship her before beginning the sexual union and allocate her an apparent position of honour. This notion of honour and equality apparently seems very rewarding not only to women, but also to men who believe in a humanitarian society free of agencies and hierarchies. But that position of honour is not permanent for a lot of women. Moreover, *baul-faqir* cults do not allow the practitioners to beget children. They treat their disciples as their children. However, that does not fulfil maternal needs of a woman always, especially when the practice is to acquire prolonged sexual union, but never to beget a child.

Leena Chaki has done extensive fieldwork amongst the *baul*s of Bengal to find the true position of women who belong to their society. She found that women get attracted towards the *baul-faqir* cult for various reasons. Sometimes they belong to a *baul* or *faqir* family, sometimes they want to get rid of dominating social bindings which are very strong in rural and subaltern Bengal till now, some of them are widow or homeless, and of course some of them get attracted by the practice itself (which is a quasi-tantric process that ends up in obtaining a much delayed climax after a prolonged sexual union, and thus to acquire ineffable spiritual pleasure). This apparently does not sound offensive, but the perspective of some male *sadhaka*s (practitioners) brings out the dark sides. I am not trying to propose that all male practitioners belonging to the cult use women only as a tool for religio-coital exercise. However, there are a lot of practitioners who choose a woman, perform the sexual rite with her, and if they find that the woman does not possess enough physical ability, they desert her and find someone else. Actually the theoretical framework of the practices does not restrict them from doing so. Many of the *sadhaka*s have multiple *sadhan-sangini*s, and they consider that the more number of women

the *sadhaka*s can continue practising with, the higher is the achievement of the *sadhaka*. However, there is no one to ensure whether the man is true to his path or not, because, similar to *tantra*, women have nothing to gain spiritually in this cult too.

Nevertheless, women do not complain as they have been led to believe that the paths of *sadhana* for the male *sadhu*s are not bound by such 'insignificant' issues. They believe that they are getting a chance to serve the male practitioner as a reward of their piety and they are gaining more of it by serving the *sadhaka*s. This is what society wanted women to think from the ancient times. So, the voice of social authority over women has not really changed much. A lot of *baulani*s (female consorts of a *baul*) have confessed to Chaki that,

> Women from various families come to serve the *sadhaka*, who is the Guru and serving him is a very virtuous work. Sometimes the *sadhaka*s ask their followers or disciples to send women from their families. As a disciple makes offerings of cows, calves, rice or fruit to the Guru or *sadhaka*, it is also customary to offer women to him. (Chaki 2012, p. 168)

And the most subtle trick is that the *baul-faqirs* have created an expedient doctrinal discourse to convince women. They convince the initiated with doctrinal references that the whole process of *sadhana* is actually being controlled by the female consort; it is up to her ability whether the difficult *sadhana* of prolonged coital union is a success or a failure. The fact which is ignored in this regard is that a *sadhaka* can have hundreds of women for practising the sexo-yogic rites, but if a woman is found incapable (which is always decided by the male *sadhakas*) of undergoing this difficult process of *sadhana*, she will be left nowhere. Chaki once met a *baulani* who told her, "Can you worship God with only one flower? God must be worshipped with a lot of flowers. That is also applicable to *baul sadhana*" (Chaki 2012, p. 167). This can be considered as a perfect example of patriarchal interpellation.

These examples clearly illustrate the pervasive nature of patriarchal discourses which ensure that even supposedly alternate religious cults remain entangled within similar tropes of deception, authority and subjugation. The question of the possibility of there being alternate emancipatory spaces for women within religious discourses therefore remains unsolved yet.

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Part II
(Be)longing in Space

Chapter 6
Through Other Eyes: Nineteenth-Century Irish Women in South America

Laura P.Z. Izarra

Abstract The gendered cultural discourse of Irish migration reveals many masks that women adopt to conform to the narrow social limits either laid down or confronted by the process of transculturation that they undergo in the non-English speaking lands of South America. This essay turns our sight to the representations of Irish women migrants in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Women's diasporic writing deconstructs the mythic echoes of a Promised Land constructed by men's migrant narratives which predominantly represent themes of displacement, renewal and success. The various "Irelands" of the diasporic mind and a "new Irishness" are being reimagined and reinvented beyond the seas by Marion Mulhall's travel writing, William Bulfin's and Annie O'Rourke's letters and Anne Enright's contemporary novel on the nineteenth-century Irish courtesan Eliza Lynch. The Irish migrant women took part in social changes provoked by the coming of modernity. A critical reading of the process of inter/trans-culturality through the eyes of nineteenth and twentieth-century writers would help to understand the late twentieth-century phenomenon of global movements.

Keywords Irish women in South America · Marion Mulhall · Annie O'Rourke · Eliza Lynch · Anne Enright

Migration is an old world social drama and it has turned into a symbolic text that transgresses temporality. An estimated one and a half million Irish emigrated from Ireland between 1845 and 1851, with a third dying in the coffin ships on their

Part of this essay is based on my previous article "Don't cry for me Ireland: Irish Women Voices from Argentina" (2010, pp. 133–146) and my book *Narrativas de la diáspora irlandesa bajo la Cruz del Sur* (2010).

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journey. Meanings from the past are reconfigured in the present and future provoking different degrees of anterograde amnesia: victimization, alienation and loss are resignified into simultaneous but paradoxical opportunities of change causing oppression as well as compensation. Migrancy is generally considered a problem by the host country, but it is also seen as a contribution or compensation that is affected by temporalities. Nineteenth-century literary narratives represent this process of change and re-vision migration in connection with nationalisms while contemporary narratives retell the past as a shrewd critique of their present.

Travel writings, private and public letters, (auto)biographies and fiction represent the encounter of cultures and its effects in the process of formation of an individual and a community identity. But what really happens in the intersection between cultures? Although a great number of travel writings are predominantly male, this essay will explore—through the eyes of women—the myriad intersections between Ireland and a particular location in South America: Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay through the nineteenth-century writings of Marion Mulhall, William Bulfin and Anne O'Rourke; and Anne Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2003) a fictional representation of a nineteenth-century Irish woman who went to live in Paraguay as the concubine of the dictator Solano López. The focus of this analysis is to reveal the role of language—how they see themselves and the others (or how they are seen by the others)—and the role they are allowed to play in the new environment.

When we refer to migrant/diasporic literary narratives, we know that we are entering an interdisciplinary territory where historical facts and issues of identity and nations are central for understanding the representation of a culture of survival which the critic Homi Bhabha has defined as transnational and translational. He explains that a culture of survival is transnational because it is "rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement" and it is also translational because it calls attention to "*how* culture signifies or what is signified by *culture*" (Bhabha 1995, p. 48). Thus, the process of cultural survival is tightly linked to the geographical movements of the people, to the various economic and political transactions operating between the country of origin and the host country, and to the distinction "between the semblance and similitude of the *symbols* across diverse cultural experiences—literature, art, music, rituals of life and death—and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as it circulates *as a sign* within specific contextual locations and social systems of value." (Bhabha 1995, p. 49). In these transactions, different cultures already present in the diaspora space come into contact, are in a continuous process of translation in order to keep their cultural heritage and survive as minorities in an adopted country which is also under continuous transformation.

Literature is the space of memory and imagination and revisits archetypal narratives, myths and social dramas that link the past and the present in order to connect issues of identity and subjectivity to cosmopolitan forms of human experience. Buenos Aires, a cosmopolitan capital and the most important cultural connection in South America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been shaped by the intersection of various generations of Irish and other European migrants.

Published and unpublished literary and epistolary texts, life-stories, travel narratives, sketches and memoirs were also the main forms used by Irish women migrants to portray the effects of the new geographical, historical and political landscape on their psyche and on the social roles they used to perform in a non-English speaking country. The question that arises from these texts is: do these women retain strong links with their place of origin or do they dispel the myth of return of the diasporic subject, thus creating a new imaginative space, a new culture of survival? Women's personal and fictional writings reveal how language is the main protagonist in their "self-representation" and the representation of the host country. Language establishes a relationship between the construction of an external world to signify it and make it known to others, and the consciousness of an internal world that must be signified to oneself and/or to others. Then, narratives of the quotidian reveal the sociopolitical dimension of female invisibility in the historiography of the Irish immigrant community.

Nineteenth-century newspapers of the British and Irish diasporic communities in Argentina documented the transnational and complex process of cultural translation, exalting principles that would preserve the identity of their community. Newspapers, such as *The Southern Cross* and *The Standard*, configured the cultural values of the Irish community fixing the continuation of the traditional ones. Various mechanisms were used by their editors and writers to retell the same romantic story of loss, nostalgia and solidarity as well as a story of success in the "Promised Land". In the first stage of the transnational and translational process of construction of an Irish diasporic identity, they aimed at keeping an endogenous community. A dream of return went along with this archetype and emotional ties of history and geography became part of the mechanics of "belonging" rather than of "becoming".

Newspapers induced how people had to behave to be part of that story of success. The role of housewives/housekeepers and motherhood—the proper nineteenth-century women's virtues—was also praised. However, Padraic MacManus, editor of *Fianna*, attacked conservative elements in the Irish community and the Irish orphanage and he supported girls' education fervently. He argued:

> There is a wide demand at present in Buenos Aires for typists, shopgirls and governesses that can command two languages, and it would be criminal to condemn young girls of our race to the most slavish and worst-paid occupations, like domestic service, who for a few dollars extra for their education could easily be fitted for higher positions in life, with easier work, a brighter future and consequently a more certainty of finding husbands and becoming mothers of educated and cultured families – families that would be a credit to our race when educated in its traditions; instead of such shoneen families as we now often meet, ashamed of their race, their names and their parents; anxious to be confounded with Calabreses or Cockneys, rather than point out their descent from the oldest white people in Europe – the Gaels (31 July 1913).

The pride of belonging to the oldest white race in Europe strengthens his argument of educating girls for better jobs; in a contrapuntal way, it is also explicit as to the kind of jobs that Irish women were performing when they arrived in Buenos Aires.

Newspapers of the community represent transatlantic movements and 'translate' them into textual symbols that keep alive a homing desire, which is not always a wish to return to a place of 'origin'. Nevertheless, as the sociologist Avtar Brah explains, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination, a place of no return (Brah 1996, p. 192). This ambiguous process in the formation of an Irish-Argentine identity becomes visible in the analysis of women's narratives. The process of writing is a personal strategy aimed at maintaining a close connection with the land of origin and evaluating the experience of life in the adopted land.

Writing becomes a space of translocations—an imaginary locality of interconnected spaces: a subject becomes semiotically *present* to the other in the former's *absence* during the acts of reading and writing. Thus, those texts turn into a space of intersubjective encounter, of a reciprocal "presentification" (*mise en présence*) (Landowski 2002, p. 167). The author becomes present in the absence of the other while for the reader, the process of presentification and translocation is more complex in its partial reversal. The act of writing down one's feelings, impressions and experiences in an unknown place far away from home makes distances diminish metaphorically, although, paradoxically, they are also enlarged when the past is seen with nostalgia. The centripetal force of the immigrants' desire of belonging congregates them into communities that struggle to reproduce the structure of their country of origin in the host land despite the disillusion that may have led them to emigrate.

Immanent elements present in the grammatology of the text generate multiple "effects of meanings" and the enunciating subjects produce their narratives constructing the outside world in its significance. In the 1860s, Marion Mulhall, wife of Michael Mulhall, who joined his brother Edward, founder of the Irish-Argentine newspaper *The Standard*, wrote diaries of their journeys between the Amazon and the Andes, which were first published in the form of letters in their newspaper and in book form in 1881. Marion registered the everyday life and economic progress of the countries they visited referring to the external world as a signifier. In the preface, she describes herself as the first "English" woman[1] to "penetrate the heart of South America",

> … travelling for thousands of miles through untrodden forests, seeing the Indian tribes in their own hunting-grounds, visiting the ruined shrines of the Jesuit Missions, and ultimately reaching that point whence I beheld the waters flowing down in opposite directions to the Amazon and the La Plata. (Mulhall 1881, p. 1)

This kind of narrative follows the discourse of nineteenth-century male texts and represents the *courageous woman* facing the wilderness of the unknown country; she is an adventurer. She recognizes that her narratives have no literary merit as they are simply "sketches of her travels and adventures in the countries between the Amazon and the Andes," written in the hope that they may attract the attention

[13]The Mulhalls were Unionists, defenders of Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, in opposition to the Irish-Argentine newspaper *The Southern Cross*, which was nationalist.

of more learned travellers to a quarter of the world that "so well repays the trouble of exploring". Thus, the natural beauty of pastoral landscapes of the surroundings of Buenos Aires (El Tigre) as well as other Argentinean and Brazilian places such as Corrientes, Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro is contrasted with the exotic pampas and the land of Mato Grosso, which are full of adventure. Her first impressions of the city of Buenos Aires are "unfavourable": no harbour and bad weather on their arrival, "the streets run[ning] at right angles in painful regularity, counterbalanced by the irregular architecture and the uneven pavement" (Mulhall 1881, p. 1); the view of flooded houses despite the genial character of the climate implied by its name Buenos Aires (Good Breezes). Her descriptions of the pampas refer to the constant exposure to danger of people living in the frontier of civilization though she explains that Indians seldom interfered with them. Despite the fact that her book contains an appendix with the rise and fall of the Jesuit Missions, Marion Mulhall has a mythical ahistorical vision of the countries she describes. The imperial, anthropological present tense of her writing erases all tension resulting from the asymmetries of power in the encounter of cultures. She describes the natives, their customs and habits and her pseudo-interactive relationship with them, creating an image of a pure uncorrupted state of Nature where there is no conflict. Writing in the third person plural, the unique truth of what is narrated emerges from immanent elements of the text and the imperial, anthropological point of view. The "other" carries the prejudice of the white man; for example, stereotypes prevail when she narrates her travel through Brazil: "This tribe is very numerous, fearfully addicted to drunkenness, and beyond hope of civilisation. At several places we passed deserted huts, the inhabitants of which were killed by these savages" (Mulhall 1881, p. 198). However, in other passages the situation is reversed, and the native's wit counterpoises the corruption of the political social class.

Other "effects of meanings" are created by immanent characteristics present in letters, such as William Bulfin's and Annie O'Rourke's unpublished letters to each other while living in Argentina. According to Landowski, the letter discourse is a social practice marked by the subject's will to make the letter a space for an intersubjective encounter, a reciprocal "presentification" as mentioned above. While Bulfin's letters to his brothers and family abroad have the function to "make known" his new experiences in the diaspora space of the Argentine pampas and to participate in the family and nation affairs, his love letters to his future wife Annie O'Rourke *say* nothing, they only "make the subjects become"—the absent subject becomes present for the other: "… I am writing to you. About what? Nothing at all Annie, only just to say good morning, and to be near you" (Ranchos, 14 June 1888).

The exchange of personal letters is a discursive way of communicating with the other, but a disjunction is imposed by the distance that separates the addresser from the addressee. This distance is measured in two axes, the spatial axis and the temporal axis, because a letter is a deferred communication across physical space, no matter the quantity (or quality) of distance and across time (days, months and years). Willie's letter reveals the lover's wait as well as his impatience, even when living and working in the same *estancia* and having to hide their love due to labour rules. Thus, the situation of the epistolary communication is assumed in the

cognitive and affective levels: Bulfin writes "– I can love, Annie. Oh so well! So deep, so strong—so fond—so trusting, so tender, so true—yes so true" (Ranchos, Carmen de Areco, n.d.). The addresser tells the *absence* and solitude; his desire to truth makes him emphatic and repetitive revealing the desire to settle his emotions. On the other hand, Annie's first letters were more reserved though, later, she declares her love openly. She also refers to her nostalgia for her family and the desire to travel to Ireland to see her father who was ill. However, in her letter from the camp (*estancia de Ranchos*) on March 13, 1889, she writes determinedly:

> I have nearly made up my mind not to go home; you will wonder why; first in every letter I get from home it shows me that they are quite sure that I intend remaining at home; then I thought of writing to my father and telling him the truth and see what he would say, … or write and say that I am not able to go what would be true also … I know they will be disgusted if I do not go but that cannot be helped Willie; I scarcely need to tell you that you are dearest to me than all.

Her letters represent a more independent woman giving expression to the external world or the *real state of the things*—facts that have an explicative power of their own. Annie was the governess of the Dowlings and her letters to Willie when she was taking care of the children, either in Buenos Aires or in the camp, show her love for him, her religious practices of going to church and praying for him, her family and friends, the joy of receiving his letters as well as her family's and the social practices, for a young man to date a girl—the boy should write to the girl's father in Ireland and ask permission from him and from the local priest of their community. The immanent principles are thus counterbalanced by the "realist" methodology that interrelates discourses with contextual "situations of communication" which determine the content of the discursive manifestations as well as the forms of expression (Landowski 2002, p. 166). Letters are not just a product but an act of enunciation with a signifying effect. The addressers create an intersubjective space and take a double distance from their own self to reveal their ideological position in the interrelationships between "home" and "homeland" and the network of translocations.

On the other hand, fictional diasporic (auto)biographies reveal the very act of signifying the words "home" and "locality". It is a general assumption that various conflicts originate due to unstable power relations among the immigrants, the natives, and other ethnic groups when they interact in a specific location. According to Avtar (Brah 1996) "home" connotes political and personal struggles over the social mechanisms of "belonging" to a place; "locality" represents the processes of inclusion and exclusion that occur under certain circumstances in specific geographical spaces. If these two concepts are intersected by the transnational and translational axes, cultural boundaries become blurred and are redrawn. The encounter of cultural differences and locations provokes a disturbance that generates new interrelationships with the other represented through a combination of the act of constructing the external world in its significance, and the act of representing the real state of things with its explicative power. This is the case of the narratives about Eliza Lynch in Paraguay, mainly Anne Enright's novel *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2003) where the writer plays with the historical and

fictional ambivalences as facts while the external world is being decoded through the eyes of a stranger.

Many novels were written on the "notorious" life of Eliza Lynch which could be considered at first sight as a compensatory type of diasporic narrative because, in the 1860s, Eliza Lynch became briefly the richest woman in the world. However, her paradoxical personality inspired many other kinds of narratives, popular or scholarly, appreciative or vituperative, portraying her as madonna or magdalen, a heroine or a villain, according to the political or ideological points of view of the authors, the selection of certain historical facts and the cultural functions they play along the novels. The questions are: Can these texts on a "notorious" and "extraordinary" woman be listed alongside all those other compensatory books about successful Irish *male* migrants? What kind of subversion does the retelling of Enright's fictional version present in the twenty-first century? How is Eliza Lynch perceived through the imaginary of other writers? Was Eliza an ambitious Irish courtesan or a heroine in Paraguayan lands?

The list of stories starts with Hector F. Varela's historical novel *Elisa Lynch* (1934). In the preface, the Argentine writer reflects upon the difficult task of characterizing the moral physiognomy of a man and how worse the difficulty is with the portrait of a woman whose subtlety, sensitivity and intelligence "escape from the most experienced brush-stroke". In highly rhetorical language, he describes Eliza as a perfect triad of beauty, youth and fiery/passionate character. However, he adds that her life is "a romance, a live legend, linked to singular confusing treasures of kindness that ennoble her, and acts of prostitution that degrade her" (Varela 1934, p. 21). On the other hand, the Uruguayan Sixta S. Giuliano pays her tribute to Eliza in her fictional biography *Elisa Lynch. Biografía novelada de la heroína paraguaya* (1968) and introduces her as a victim of the enemies of Marshall Francisco Solano López, because she was his "sweet and faithful companion" (*compañera*). She represents Eliza as a heroine, very beautiful and caught by the Triple Alliance war helping and nursing the wounded soldiers.[2]

It is worthwhile to compare the openings of these two novels with Enright's fiction and Siân Reé's *The Shadows of Eliza Lynch* to discover the "effects of meanings" generated by elements present in their grammatology and their implications. Eliza's physical appearance is described by the four writers but always correlated with a historical aspect. Varela, wondering about Elisa's age when he first met her, introduces the Irish woman in a bombastic style saying, "she was known in Paris as the '*great blonde*' or the '*lioness of Regent Street*'; then, elevated to the status of a queen in Paraguay, and not being content in filling the world with its barbarian noise, she also fills it with the scandals of her loves and voluptuous desires" (Varela 1934, p. 26). References to her power were made: first in relation to her beauty, then to her political position, and finally to her sexuality.

Giuliano opens her novel placing Eliza Lynch on board a ship in front of the Paraguayan capital waiting for an authorization of the President Juan B. Gill to be

[2]The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) was fought between Paraguay and the allied countries of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.

able to disembark because "she was still 'the stranger' despite the fact that she had given to her adopted country the best years of her life, her prodigious youth and various sons, noble Paraguayan citizens". It was 1875 and Eliza came from London to make a claim for her estate that was confiscated by law in 1870. As she was not allowed to disembark, she continued her voyage back to Buenos Aires carrying only her memories. She is described as a "blonde woman, elegantly dressed, though in extreme simplicity, and with an inquisitorial though enigmatic look, with a deep and tender melancholy. She was still bright despite her mature age" (Giuliano 1968, p. 11). Although the historical moment chosen by the writer is not a glorious one in Elisa's life—a moment of failure and exclusion—she is seen by the others still beautiful in her maturity, defenceless and economically deprived. While Giuliano's portrait of Eliza is that of a beautiful heroine in her unexpected return to Europe, establishing the victimized tone of the whole novel, Varela's portrait promises to be the "real" one, covering all of Eliza's angles. In his preface, he recalls Eliza's words when she was in Buenos Aires to reassure the reader of his veracity: "If you don't write a book where you don't insult me or treat me with contempt, where you don't portray me as the most perverse or blood-thirsty woman, *your book won't have any echo*" (Varela 1934, p. 23). To which he answered he would not write a book to satisfy either those who believed she was the most damnable woman or those who excused all her faults for being at General Lopez's side. He reaffirmed, "his mission was to *show facts* whose authenticity nobody could destroy now; and only those facts could judge her" (Varela 1934, p. 23). These two novels were told from a third person point of view, the omniscient narrator who is, in a certain way, the historian, in order to gain the reader's reliability.

In *The Shadows of Eliza Lynch*, Siân Reés starts her Foreword in Asunción, capital of the Republic of Paraguay. Differently from Giuliano's, the writer introduces Eliza in a glorious posthumous moment. It was 24 July 1961, the Paraguayans were celebrating the 134th anniversary of the birth of the Marshal President Francisco Solano López, *el Mariscal*, "patriot, warrior and national hero"; at the docks, General Stroessner, the twentieth-century Paraguayan Dictator was waiting for a bronze urn wrapped in the Paraguayan tricolour, brought from Paris aboard the flagship of the Paraguayan Navy, to honour finally his leader bringing his First Lady to rest at his side. Reés quotes from documents and acknowledges all the information that is partly fictionalized. The vivid style of the descriptions of Paraguayan poverty, slave-work in the fields and soldiers' suffering during the war brings out veracity and authenticity. In the first chapter, as Eliza's early life was obscure, very few details were given: her marriage with Lieutenant Xavier de Quatrefages in Paris during the time of Prince Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and their departure to Algeria. Although nothing is known of their life, only one thing is firmly denied: her departure was not for convalescence but love, or some variant or compound of this with boredom, desire, or disenchantment. Stylistic devices reinforce this lack of certainty and the narrator affirms at the end of the chapter,

> … nasty tales were later told of the brief period of Elisa's life after she left her husband. It would be endlessly stated that she had run away to become a courtesan—some even

> said to become a prostitute… It was said her sexual liaisons had been hundreds. It was said men had shot themselves at each other on her account … It was said she peddled her sexual services among the embassies of the Champs-Elysées (Reés 2003, p. 9).

Uncertainty ("it was said") marked the narrative that is counterpoised with quotations from documentary sources; but only one out of the many stories told about her, which is agreed upon, is that she left her husband for a Russian whom she met in Algeria and with whom she eloped to Paris. Her physical description is given through a picture that survives:

> Her looks were arresting: red-gold hair the colour of the Empress Eugenie's, dressed in long, loosely bound ropes and studded with artful roses; blue eyes downcast beneath arched brows; a full mouth; jaw, collar and wrist bones padded with milky flesh; a slim waist and pronounced bust; a black velvet choker and one finger beneath her chin in coy contemplation. (Reés 2003, p. 9).

Here again, the historical moment conforms to a recollection of a picture of the young Eliza highlighting her royal appearance. It is important to say that the political times during the production of these three books framed their content. It is not surprising that in a time marked by the end of Dictatorships in South American countries, the retelling of the story of Eliza Lynch would reveal those who praise that form of totalitarian government—those who praise Eliza for her deeds which try to maintain the government of *el Mariscal*—and those who were against it or at least suspicious of it, like Varela's novel which was written immediately after the fall of the Dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina.

Contrary to the previous novels, Anne Enright gives life to the migrant Irishwoman subverting all the ways Eliza has been perceived and reaffirms the ambiguities of her fascinating life. The opening epigraph of Enright's novel breaks with the polemic dyads that surround Eliza's characterization: "This is the story of how she buried him with her own hands, on the slopes of the Cerro Corá". The disguised anonymity of who this "she" is, and the courage and strength of a woman who buried someone with her own hands seem to foretell the tone of the narrative. However, the introductory chapter ironically named "A fish", is set in Paris, March, 1854, and introduces the reader to the privacy of a couple, a description of Eliza's sexual relationship with the short, bearded "mestizo"—"the tart of County Cork" with the "little mestizo" (Enright 2003, p. 2). The impact of the opening sentence breaks the heroic halo of a woman's suffering constructed by the epigraph and also destabilizes the imaginary of those readers who have already read the previous novels. Contradicting previous descriptions of Eliza's beauty as a *great blonde*, she is described with "exotic, red hair" within a practically bare room, creating an aesthetic contrast with the vivid colours of the turquoise curtains towards which she turned when they were lying and laughing on the bed. The third person narrator brings out shaded motives and reasons to explain why they became lovers: "In jig time, in marching time, in twenty beats, they moved from strangers to the rest of their lives. And they knew it. Such luck!" (Enright 2003, p. 2). With great humour the writer brings her characters together showing sarcastically the quick transition from formality to intimacy through naming: Francisco López and Eliza Lynch, Il Mariscal and La Lincha, Paco and Liz. Eliza's womanliness

(her voice, her silence, her charm) is ironically used as masquerade, as a survival strategy in a male-defined world.

The contrapuntal reading of Eliza's stories shows how and why some historical evidences and literary textures were interwoven to create aesthetic effects that subvert the migrant male narratives of success. The illusion of authenticity is woven thread by thread in these four narratives. Although only the openings of the four novels were in focus here, the reader will discover throughout them how Eliza was ignored by the indigenous community and by the López family and how much she struggled to understand the Paraguayans and their tradition to become part of their society. Her attempts at inclusion fail and Enright portrays Eliza throughout all the ambivalent perspectives of her life—as courtesan, victim, villain and heroine—depending on the way she is perceived by the other characters. Moreover, she fictionally endows her with the inner force that makes her an agent in the process of modernization of Paraguay. The decision taken by Enright of taking various bits and pieces of Eliza's life to compose a big mosaic, a work of art, will symbolize the way one enters metaphorically into the narrative of the "other". Enright does it subverting all the literary tropes which are specific of nineteenth-century diasporic literature, such as nostalgia, sense of belonging and utopian dreams. Thus, the twentieth-century writer recreates Eliza's life to push forward the consequences of dislocation in a contemporary world marked by global movements and cosmopolitanism.

In travel writings, letters, historical novels or fictional biographies, individual and national identities are definitely intertwined. I can conclude that Irish women's diasporic narratives in South America may be seen as metaphors of change within local struggles of inclusion and exclusion. Their protagonists are ordinary people that strive to be part of their community and the host country. Their discursive social practices, whether in the camps or in the city, are representative of a culture of survival that is linked with Ireland in an emancipating way. Thus, the selection of the above texts helps to construct a literary historiography of the Irish community in South America revealing turning points in the construction of a culture of survival.

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Chapter 7
"God Knows Five Daughters is Enough for Anyone": Gender Issues in India and Japan

Biljana Djorić Francuski and Ljiljana Marković

Abstract Gender issues are evidently among the most pressing problems in all contemporary societies, but the gap between women and men is undoubtedly rather wide in two countries which apparently do not have much in common otherwise—India and Japan. A parallel between their cultures can be found in the works of two twentieth century authors whose lives were a strange mixture of Occidental and Oriental ingredients: the recently deceased Ruth Prawer Jhabvala—a European who, having married an Indian, spent more than two decades in India—and Natsume Sōseki—a Japanese whose brief two-year visit to London greatly influenced both his subsequent life and writing.

Keywords Gender issues in India and Japan · Geisha · Arranged marriage · Ruth Prawer Jhabvala · Natsume Sōseki

7.1 Introduction: Japanese and Indian Cultural Values

Although Japan and India may seem different in many ways, a common point for these two Asian countries has traditionally been the position of women in society. Especially in the twentieth century, both India and Japan were torn, under the impact of materialistic West, between modernity and tradition. The gender cultural

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models in these two countries were very slow to change in all their respects, including the division of labour between men and women, family and motherhood cultural ideals, as well as other gender relations. The predominating cultural model (*male breadwinner/female home carer*) still persisted, allocating men the place of breadwinners as they earned the daily bread, while women took care of children and household chores.

Such a situation is depicted by both Jhabvala and Sōseki, who in their works pay a lot of attention to the position of women, for instance, arranged marriage, dowry, the problems encountered by young wives who must live in joint families and their unfair, sometimes even cruel, treatment by the in-laws there, especially the mother-in-law. This article analyses such aspects of gender culture with the help of relevant theoretical works, within the framework of Hofstede's cultural model which enables comparison of cultures. In the case of India and Japan, their five dimensions of cultural values are briefly as follows:

- Japan's power distance index (PDI) tends towards high, while India is near the top, scoring "higher on PDI than any Western European country" (Hofstede 2001: 104);
- uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) is very strong in Japan but rather weak in India;
- they are, both next to each other by mean scores, somewhere in the middle of ranked countries as prevailingly collectivist societies (individualism vs. collectivism—IDV);
- Japan is extremely masculine, i.e. number one among the 50 countries and three regions included in this research, while India is slightly less so (masculinity vs. femininity—MAS);
- and finally, both countries are among the top ten long-term-oriented cultures (LTO): Japan is at the fourth and India at the seventh place.

7.2 Natsume Sōseki and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala

The above cultural values will be illustrated by examples from the works of two authors: Natsume Sōseki who used to write about his native Japanese culture, and R.P. Jhabvala who wrote about Indian society into which she was integrated by way of marriage. In a strange way, both writers were at the same time insiders and outsiders regarding the Oriental cultures they wrote about, because Sōseki's works—although he was of pure Japanese origin—were imbued by the Western thought after his stay in Britain, while Jhabvala was also able to mingle the Eastern and the Western perspectives in her writing, thanks to the fact that her origins were in the West but she spent many years living in India with her husband and his family.

Natsume Sōseki (born as Natsume Kinnosuke, 1867–1916) was the greatest and the most famous modern Japanese novelist of the Meiji Restoration era. Having

studied Chinese and English, he graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and started a career in teaching at a middle school. However, in 1900, he was the first literary scholar who obtained a Japanese government scholarship to study in England, where he lived just for two years. Unable to assimilate culturally into the new environment, while he was in London, he mostly spent his time studying and reading books about Western literature and psychology, which would later on greatly influence both his creative writing and literary criticism. Upon his return to Japan, he was appointed English literature professor at Tokyo University, but after some years and the amazing success of his first novels, he quit teaching and started editing the literary page of the famous *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, in which his subsequent novels appeared in serial form. The highest authority on Japanese literature, Donald Keene, who believes that Sōseki was a "titan of Meiji Literature" (Keene 1956, p. 23), draws attention to the fact that these later novels are much darker than Sōseki's early works and describes their protagonists as *self-torturing*. Nonetheless, his novels are not only the mirror of psychological problems and dilemmas of the characters, torn between the new way of living in the modernized Japan submitted to Western influences on the one hand and traditional Japanese cultural values on the other hand, but also the mirror of significant socio-political changes that greatly affected the society and culture in his motherland at the time. That is why Beongcheon Yu, the author of the "Introduction" to one of the most famous among Sōseki's fourteen novels, *Kōjin* (*The Wayfarer*), selected for analysis in this article, appraises his oeuvre as "a graphic chronicle of the era of dramatic transition from the old to the new Japan" (Natsume 1977, p. 14). In his novels, Sōseki successfully merged Oriental and Occidental literary tradition and psychology, exploring such topics as modernization and changes of the society during one of the most important epochs in Japan's history, but also some issues inherited from previous periods—like the position of women, which is the topic of this article.

Contrary to Sōseki, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (1927–2013) was everything but of pure origins, since she herself came from a hybrid Polish Jewish family, while her husband was Indian, but of Parsi origins, and having married him she lived with her in-laws in New Delhi for over twenty years. She was born in Cologne (Germany), but after the Second World War started her family fled to Great Britain. She graduated from the University of London in English Literature, same as Sōseki, then got married and left Europe first for India and later on for the United States. Although she is of Western origins, Jhabvala's case is a precedent since she has been qualified as an Indian English writer even by the highest literary authorities of India, such as M.K. Naik. Substantiating his claim that Jhabvala undoubtedly deserves to be ranked among Indian English authors, Naik points to the facts that she lived in India much longer than other famous Western 'Indian' writers like Kipling or Forster, and was also more deeply than these Anglo-Indian authors involved in the Indian culture, by virtue of her marriage to an Indian man, which "gave her access to Indian society on terms radically different from those in the case of these writers" (Naik 1982, p. 233). In her fiction, numerous novels and several collections of short stories alike, Jhabvala indeed

demonstrates an extremely deep insight into Indian culture, probably due to the fact that she herself was displaced from her surroundings several times and experienced personally the impact of Indian tradition and values on a Westerner, not as a tourist or researcher but in the capacity of a more or less permanent resident of that country. Nevertheless, although she lived in India for such a long time, she always remained a stranger there, which made her try harder than other Indian English writers (those of authentic Indian origin, unlike herself) to comprehend and appreciate Oriental life in a culture so different from her own. She thus lived and created her works in an in-between world, which is the position that allowed her to gain, in Homi K. Bhabha's words, "the possibility of a cultural hybridity", as well as to satisfy the need—which is according to Bhabha both innovative and crucial—"to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha 2003, p. 1). These differences between her own ancestral Occidental culture and the Oriental culture in which she subsequently lived created conflicting and contradictory emotions in Jhabvala, and the consequence of this course of developments is that in her works both love for and detestation of India are shown. Thus, she almost reached the stance of dual personality similar to the one which can be located in some of her European protagonists "who, in their long sojourn in India have developed a curious love-hate relationship with this country, which at once exasperates and enslaves them" (Naik 1982, p. 252).

7.3 Gender Issues in India and Japan

Both writers devote a lot of space in their works to female characters, viewed not only from the perspective of an insider but also from that of an outsider, at the same time subjectively and objectively. This is in conformity with the following opinion of Edward Said:

> When photographs or texts are used merely to establish identity and presence – to give us merely representative images of *the* Woman, or *the* Indian – they enter what Berger calls a control system. With their innately ambiguous, hence negative and anti-narrativist waywardness *not* denied, however, they permit unregimented subjectivity to have a social function (Said 1994, p. 405).

In Sōseki's *Kōjin*, one of the means used by the author to create his anti-narrative is the portrayal of two women who are not given any name, but are simply called 'the woman' and 'the girl'. Thus—to use Said's words from the above quotation—their *identity and presence* remain un*established*, non-defined and fuzzy. They do not even exist in the list of "principal characters", though their roles in the novel are rather important and their stories intertwined with those of the main heroes:

> The stories of these two nameless women, the former referred to as *ano onna* (the woman) and the latter as *sono musumesan* (the girl), dominate a significant portion of the narrative,

> but their physical presence is minimized, confined to a profile in a dim hallway or a vivid image sealed in the closed compartment of Misawa's mental space (Yiu 1998, p. 127).

In this way, these two women, who are depicted as martyrs, are real *representative images* of two types of '*the* Woman' frequently encountered in Japanese culture: the former being a geisha whose purpose in life is to be obedient and servile to her customers; and the latter, the crazed young woman who must leave the family of her in-laws because of intolerable life there, but dare not return to her parents. In Japan, the place of a geisha is in the pleasure quarters—either in the geisha houses or in tea houses, where she entertains her patrons. In *Kōjin*, *ano onna* was an extremely popular geisha, who was "treated well as the owner's prized daughter. Fragile as she was, she took great satisfaction in her role and devoted herself to her trade. Even when she didn't feel well she never shirked her duties" (Natsume 1977, p. 65). That is why she had to keep on drinking at the encouragement of one of the clients, even after she felt sick. She suffered stomach bleeding and later on in the novel died in the same sanatorium where that man, suffering from the same illness, was hospitalized.

However, geishas are not the only ones whose goal in life is to please their men. This is often considered to be the purpose of any ordinary woman's life. The protagonist of this novel, Jiro, thus advises his sister-in-law to make an effort to satisfy his brother:

> [Nao] "Be more positive? Tell me, please, how. Should I say nice things? I very much dislike flattery, and so does your brother."
>
> [Jiro] "I guess no one can be satisfied with flattery. But if you try just a little perhaps, that will make him happy – and things will be easier for you too …" (Natsume 1977, p. 137)

Women themselves should have absolutely no will of their own, and hence Nao is prepared to do whatever her brother-in-law orders her even if it is dangerous: "[Nao to Jiro] 'What do I propose? Why, as a woman I can't tell you what to do. If you say you're going back I must of course go with you, no matter how risky'" (Natsume 1977, p. 140). This is only a part of the miseries that await any woman once she gets married, or, as Nao's husband Ichiro tells a servant for whom marriage negotiations are underway, "It's a woman's best time when she blushes at marriage talk. But when you're married you will find out it is nothing you're so happy or bashful about. Why, it isn't worth your blush. On the contrary, with your partner in marriage your character is more likely to be destroyed than if you'd stayed single. You have to pay dearly. You mind that." (Natsume 1977, p. 169).

In spite of this, it is the obligation of every woman to get married and thus fulfil her duty towards her parents, which is evident from the words of Jiro talking to his sister Oshige: "A smarter thing for you to do would be to try to get married yourself soon. You ought to realize what a relief it would be to Father and Mother if you were to get married, … get married yourself and settle down. Then you'll make them happy as a dutiful daughter." (Natsume 1977, p. 173). But even such a dutiful daughter has to leave the house of her parents and go to live with her in-laws, where she always remains 'the other' and never fully becomes part of her new family:

> [Oshige about Nao] "And even if she is your favourite, Sister-in-law is *a stranger*, isn't she?" […]
>
> [Jiro] "You don't have to tell me that you are my own sister and she is *a stranger married into our family*." (Natsume 1977, p. 174, emphasis added)

On the other hand, once a woman leaves her parental home, she can never go back, and that is the case with *sono musumesan*, who had some complications in the family of her in-laws and had to leave that house, but the customs prevented her from going back to her parents. The same customs are mentioned by Jhabvala, who concludes that "[W]e don't understand that divorce is a natural thing in any enlightened society" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 15), and this fact has also been registered by Hofstede, who enumerates "[S]trong family ties, frequent contacts. Fewer divorces" (Hofstede 2001, p. 236) as some of the markers of collectivist societies. The tragedy of *sono musumesan* "is fashioned after that of the classic abandoned, crazed woman of No drama" (Yiu 1998, p, 129), but there is a parallel with a similar fate of another female character from *Kōjin*, depicted in the case of Nao, who "bears her sorrows quietly, a woman whose will is subordinated and whose freedom is curbed in an unhappy marriage" (Yiu 1998, p. 136).

It is disputable whether such a miserable life of women in traditional Japanese society described by Sōseki is due to the institution of arranged marriage, called Miai (Omiai), introduced in Japan from the sixteenth century by the Samurai class for military and political purposes. Out of the two couples that Sōseki portrays in the novel, one has already been happily married for quite long. It is interesting that the ongoing negotiations for the other couple take place without the bride even being aware of that: "The whole thing is going swimmingly, and yet the person most concerned has no idea of what's going on" (Natsume 1977, p. 92). Marriages are arranged in Japan with the help of a go-between who is not always a woman but may also be a man, sometimes hired by the bridegroom's family to investigate the future bride's background, like a true detective. What is undeniable is the fact that male protagonists in *Kōjin* are not at all opposed to finding a wife in this way, or as Yiu remarks about one of the male heroes: "Ichiro believes that the law of nature, the impulses and desires that urge one to love, transcends the transitory moral code established by society to regulate behaviour" (Yiu 1998, p. 225).

The second fact that leads one to believe that the arranged marriage is not a source of all misery for women in Oriental cultures is what Hofstede concludes on the basis of his research in *Culture's Consequences*:

> Marriages in collectivist societies are often arranged by marriage brokers, and brides and grooms may have little say in the choice of their partners; they may even be prevented from meeting or seeing each other. *This does not mean that such marriages are less happy than other kinds of marriages*. Research in India has shown more marital satisfaction in arranged than in love marriages, and more in Indian love marriages than in American marriages. (Hofstede 2001, p. 230, emphasis added)

In Japanese society, there has been "a marked decline in arranged marriages, or *miai*" (Andressen 2002, p. 202), but this tradition is still preserved in that Oriental culture. In India, however, arranged marriage is the only way of finding a marital

partner for a vast majority of population even nowadays. A similar condition of women who get married in this way, same as the unhappy female protagonists in Sōseki's novel, is described in Jhabvala's works. Although the period she writes about is much later (the two collections of short stories used in research for the purposes of this article were originally published in the sixties: *Like Birds, Like Fishes* in 1963, and *A Stronger Climate* in 1968), the situation in India was still rather unfavourable as regards the gender issue. At that time, Indian women remained in a significantly inferior position, being married as their parents arranged and ordered them, and then having to live in large joint families with their in-laws after the wedding, where they suffered abuse from both male and female relatives, but especially from the mother-in-law. The aim and conditions of such a life depicted by Jhabvala cannot but impose a parallel with those in Sōseki's novel: "her one purpose in life, her sole duty, was to be married and give satisfaction to the husband who would be chosen for her and to the in-laws in whose house she would be sent to live" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 167).

Even the choice of words is more than similar, as Jhabvala equates a woman's only *duty* in life with arranged marriage, while Sōseki also talks about "a *dutiful* daughter" fulfilling the same purpose; *satisfaction* is another term used by both writers, as is the fact that the goal of every woman is to "give satisfaction to the husband"—according to Jhabvala, or to "make him happy"—in Sōseki's words. Finally, an indisputably common point is also the confinement of a young wife in the house of the *in-law family* selected by her parents—a rather forcible and miserable confinement at that, since the young bride is "sent to live", as Jhabvala calls it, with her in-laws, where she will remain *a stranger* all her life, as Sōseki notices. This reminds us of Hofstede's explanation that in individualist and affluent countries girls have increased educational opportunities and freedom to move around and meet boys, thus gaining opportunities for sexual exploration and love relationships (Hofstede 2001, p. 231), unlike in India, which is a collectivist country and lacks such freedom, so the only logical way of concluding a marriage is to arrange one by the way of intermediaries.

To be fair, young men are also victims of arranged marriages since the families carry out this practice without asking either the girl or the boy for their opinion, as can be seen from the following three quotes:

> her family too, who had *married her to him* (Jhabvala 1985, p. 57, emphasis added),
>
> "I was very disappointed in her when they first *married me to her*" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 104, emphasis added),
>
> "Rahul and I grew up together, and later *it was decided we would be married*." (Jhabvala 1985, p. 192, emphasis added)

Only in rare instances do the young know about any other way of forming a family, and even then they can just daydream of such an event in their lives, not daring to do anything against their parents and customs: "'I hate our system of arranged marriage,' she said. 'I don't want that. I want to be free like Mary, and I want to love also and to be loved.'" (Jhabvala 1986, p. 16). Another additional

grievance for women is that sometimes they are way too young for marriage: "She was just sixteen when she was married." (Jhabvala 1986, p. 167), or even worse: "she had reached the age [twelve!] at which her sisters and cousins were already beginning to observe that reticence which, as *grown women*, would keep them away from the eyes of strangers" (Jhabvala 1986, p. 166, emphasis added).

However, a major part of the problem of women is related to the gender culture still widespread in India, where the division of labour between men and women governs all other complex gender relations. Although some women have become emancipated to a certain extent, particularly in big cities, their freedom of choice continues to be hindered by the customary lack of education for girls, who enter arranged marriages at a very young age, and are then forced to spend the rest of their lives in families in which they cannot be breadwinners exactly because of these two factors. This is how Jhabvala specifies the role of a woman in Indian society: "it was *her duty* to stay at home and look after the children and lead the good, simple, self-sacrificing life of a mother" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 195, emphasis added). This is precisely what Rosemary Crompton calls *the male breadwinner/female home carer model*, in which the rift is created by differentiating the society into two separate and complementary sections: "men are regarded as breadwinners who earn the income for the family in the public sphere with waged work, whereas women are primarily regarded as being responsible for the work in the private household including child-care." (Crompton 2003, p. 63).

The place for most Indian women is therefore at home, and they learn this from infancy. In Jhabvala's words, even little girls "had to *stay at home* with the women of the family, where they became as familiar with the life of kitchen and courtyard as the boys did with that of the shop" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 180, emphasis added). Even thus, girls were a huge burden to their families because of the problem of dowry which some families cannot afford, so any arranged marriage is seen as a blessing, which is evident from the words of a mother talking to her son about his sisters, i.e. her own daughters: "'it is time they were off your hands …' He studied the matrimonial advertisement columns in the newspapers, inserted an advertisement of his own … For their dowries he had to borrow from a moneylender" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 32). That is why parents always hope for a son, which Jhabvala satirically emphasizes in the case of a man who already had several daughters: "He [God] knows five daughters is enough for anyone. … There were all the obvious reasons why he must have a son (who, otherwise, would preside over his funeral obsequies and pour the ghee to feed the cremating fire? Who would carry on the shop, the properties?)" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 177–179).

Not only do girls have to stay at home to finish their chores, but they are also practically not allowed to go out, especially by themselves, and the situation in India is again much worse than that in Japan. In Sōseki's novel, we can find an example of this custom, when Nao had to go on a trip accompanied by her husband, his brother and their mother. However, Jhabvala's female protagonists are literally not let out of the house unaccompanied, as it is shown by these quotes:

"Our girls don't go into these bazaars alone. It is not proper for us." (Jhabvala 1986, p. 55)

> "You can't just saunter down the road as you please." (Jhabvala 1986, p. 57)

> A mainly masculine sea, by the way: she was additionally odd by being feminine, and unaccompanied, uprotected, unowned feminine at that. [in front of a cinema] (Jhabvala 1986, p. 112)

> there were many men and no girls at all [in a coffee-house] (Jhabvala 1985, p. 192)

Even within the bosom of their own home women are restricted to their quarters and not permitted to mingle with men of the household. This is not a custom present only in lower caste families, but even in higher and well-to-do classes. Jhabvala gives the example of the family of a Minister, in which "none of these women ever appeared, for the family was what was known as old-fashioned and the women kept to the inner rooms" (Jhabvala 1986, p. 44). In fact, this custom still prevails in many joint families, aimed at keeping the female and the male members apart: "They were a big family, and the women lived on one side of the house, in a little set of dark rooms with only metal trunks and beds in them, and the men on the other side." (Jhabvala 1985, p. 195).

Another parallel between the representation of married women by these two writers can be found in their portrayal by Jhabvala as "thin, shabby, overworked and overburdened" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 60), which certainly brings to memory Sō seki's words that for a woman there is nothing to look forward to in marriage, because when they are married, women are *destroyed* and "have to pay dearly" (Natsume 1977, p. 169). The extreme case of such destruction and payment is nevertheless something that was a characteristic only of the Indian culture, and that is *suttee*, the self-immolation of widows. Widows, by the time Jhabvala writes, are spared from death, only to meet a destiny full of abuse and beating that Jhabvala thus describes:

> She was a widow and they treated her like a dog (Jhabvala 1986, p. 174)

> They [her children] want me to be what an old widowed mother should be, devoted entirely to prayer and self-sacrifice (Jhabvala 1986, p. 203)

> [a widow's female in-laws] pinched her and pulled her hair and poked her with sharp cooking-irons. "Evil eye," they called her, "killer of your husband, bringer of death." She had to accept everything, for it was true she was a widow and guilty of the sin of outliving her husband. (Jhabvala 1985, p. 24)

> she was to be treated as the widow – that is, the cursed one who had committed the sin of outliving her husband and was consequently to be numbered among the outcasts. They had wanted – yes, indeed they had – to strip her of her silken coloured clothes and of her golden ornaments. The more orthodox among them had even wanted to shave her head, to reduce her diet to stale bread and lentils and deprive her from ever again tasting the sweet things of life: to condemn her, in fact, to that perpetual mourning, perpetual expiation, which was the proper lot of widows. (Jhabvala 1985, p. 58)

> There was no other way for widows but to lead humble, bare lives; it was for their own good. For if they were allowed to feed themselves on the pleasures of the world, then they fed their own passions too, and that which should have died in them with the deaths of their husbands would fester and boil and overflow into sinful channels. (Jhabvala 1985, p. 78)

Nevertheless, it is obvious from these quotes that the destiny of widows who do not have to commit the act of suttee is still so cruel that one of them concludes that "It is better to be dead than to stay in life after your husband has departed." (Jhabvala 1985, p. 99).

7.4 Conclusion

Therefore, we can rightly conclude that all the findings of cultural theoreticians, and above all Hofstede, about the Indian and Japanese culture values are corroborated by the examples from the selected works of R.P. Jhabvala and Natsume Sōseki. In this article, we have supplied illustrations for the fact that collectivist societies are, according to Hofstede (all the subsequent quotes on IDV taken from Hofstede 2001, p. 236), marked by "Horizontal integration: People live with or close to relatives or clan members", while they are provided protection by the family "in exchange for lifelong loyalty". Talking about collectivism, Hofstede also mentions what he calls "Vertical integration: care for aged relatives and worship of ancestors", as well as "Financial and ritual obligations to relatives"—which is obvious in the case of dowry that has to be collected not only by parents but in their absence even by a brother for his sisters. In collectivist cultures, too, "A marriage without children is not complete"—and the proof of this claim is the fact that suttee is not obligatory for widows with children. Two more customs still present in both Japan and India are arranged marriages and extended families, also substantiated by the following statements by Hofstede:

> Mothers expect to live with children in their old age,
> Marriages [are] often arranged,
> Living with in-laws and shared income and religion [are] normal. (Hofstede 2001, p. 236)

The position of women is especially a critical issue in these societies, reflected in the works by the Japanese author Natsume Sōseki and the Indian English writer R.P. Jhabvala, who is so right when she talks about "poor oppressed Indian womanhood" (Jhabvala 1985, p. 15) and above all the problem of "[T]he child-brides and the widows." (Jhabvala 1986, p. 46).

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Chapter 8
Rewriting Genre/Gender? Crime Fiction by Women Authors from India and Latin America

Vijaya Venkataraman

Abstract Crime fiction written by women and featuring women private investigators or police personnel has attracted much academic attention in recent times revealing increasing self-referentiality to issues of genre and gender. Critics and researchers are sharply divided over the suitability of the detective genre for questioning or transgressing existing social models between those who argue that a feminist detective novel is an oxymoron and those who contend that the feminization of the genre has revitalized it through ironic and parodic adaptations. At the same time, many of these novels could be seen to posit questions of gender, identity, race and class in new ways. This article seeks to critically explore these issues from within a comparative perspective in the works of some women authors from the Hispanic world as well as from India to look at the commonalities in the dynamics of genre/gender construction. The writers and texts I juxtapose and read for the purpose of my analysis are Claudia Piñeiro's *Betibú* (2010), Marcela Serrano's *Nuestra señora de la soledad* (1999) and C.K. Meena's *Dreams for the Dying* (2008). I would like to argue that these novels push the boundaries of the genre by denying the possibility of closure and neat endings, thus creating a counter discourse of crime fiction and in the process raise questions related to identity and gender in the present day world.

Keywords Crime fiction by women · Gender and genre · Claudia Piñeiro · Marcela Serrano · C.K. Meena

> The story continues, can continue, there are several possible conjectures, it is open, it is only interrupted. The investigation does not end, it cannot. One would have to invent a new literary genre: *paranoiac fiction*. Everyone is suspect, everyone feels persecuted.[1] (Piglia 2010, p. 280)

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[1]All translations from Spanish are mine.

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These lines cited above, from the Argentinian writer Ricardo Piglia's novel *Blanco Nocturno*, is one of the epigraphs that frame Claudia Piñeiro's novel *Betibú*. The protagonist of Piglia's novel questions the very possibility of finality and justice—the *raison d'etre* of detective fiction—as he discovers that every action has a double, an image that duplicates itself thereby distorting reality and denying the possibility of truth.[2] By implication, it would seem that Piglia, through his character, declares the detective novel dead, signalling the birth of a new literary genre: paranoiac fiction, which he then defines in the following manner:

> The criminal is no longer an isolated individual, but a member of a gang with absolute power. Nobody understands what is happening; the clues and testimonies are contradictory and keep suspicions in the air, as if they can change with each interpretation. The victim is the center of the intrigue and the protagonist; the paid detective or the contract killer no longer is. (Piglia 2010, p. 280)

Popular fiction in general, and crime fiction in particular has been the focus of most critical and academic attention, and the debate has centred around the inevitable conundrum over whether such novels can be formally conservative insofar as their adherence to formulae and yet be used to advance subversive or transgressive themes, and if that be the case, what could ensue from this peculiar combination in terms of the rearticulation of generic conventions. Many contemporary writers, like Ricardo Piglia as exemplified above, have critically employed the genre for drawing attention to the process of detection itself in a self-referential attempt to question the (im)possibility of justice. The political scientist, Slavoj Žižek, points to the idea that in many contemporary television series, the act of deciphering is privileged over the end result of the detective's work. He says:

> In the TV-series Columbo, the crime—the act of murder—is shown in detail in advance, so that the enigma to be resolved is not that of whodunit, but of how the detective will establish the link between the deceitful surface (the "manifest content" of the crime scene, to use the term from Freud's theory of dreams) and the truth about the crime (its "latent thought"): how he will prove to the culprit his or her guilt. The success of Columbo attests to the fact that the true source of interest in the detective's work is the process of deciphering itself, not its result. Even more crucial than this feature is the fact that not only do we, the spectators, know in advance who did it (since we directly see it), but, inexplicably, the detective Columbo himself immediately knows it: the moment he visits the scene of the crime and encounters the culprit, he is absolutely certain, he simply knows that the culprit did it. (Žižek 2009)

Similarly, Jim Collins, in his book *Uncommon Cultures*, argues that the detective story essentially questions the possibility of a happy ending, even as justice is done and that:

> … because of its emphasis on crime, violence and murder and its redefinition of who and what are responsible for it being endemic to our societies, detective fiction is, more often

[2]In his "New Thesis on the Short Story", Piglia says: "The art of narration is an art of duplication, that of foreseeing the unforeseeable; of knowing to foresee what is to come, clear, invisible, like a silhouette of a butterfly against an empty background."

> than not, a discourse that forces contradictions rather than compromises; that is disruptive rather than integrative, because "justice" is characterized as provisional, incomplete, and virtually unenforceable by a State incapable of understanding its complexity (Collins 1989, p. 34)

Eva Erdmann (2009) argues that crime fiction of the late twentieth century has witnessed important shifts—its internationalization on "topographic proportions" along with a comment on the social, political and cultural issues of the world we live in. The question posed by Pepper in the context of black crime fiction as to "what happens when the already alienated figure of the detective is re-constituted as, say, black or, for that matter, as female or gay?" (Pepper 2003, p. 210) and whether this shift is itself sufficient to radicalize the genre is relevant to the discussion on crime fiction featuring women detectives authored by women. Referring to the critical establishment's wariness of best sellers due a "much-discussed discomfort with a perceived feminization of literature that coincides with a feminization of reading", Debra Castillo says:

> When both the hierarchy of literary values and the privileged mode of critical discourse favor "masculine" referents, it is no surprise that critics evince acute discomfort with any feminizing features – qualities that have to be all the more carefully guarded against because of the age-old suspicion that reading books is an effeminate (or feminizing) activity. (Castillo 1998, p. 141)

It is no doubt problematic to describe the crime novel—particularly, the hard-boiled American variety—as reactionary or subversive, hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, as the genre simultaneously resists and re-inscribes dominant cultural discourses. The case of women-authored detective fiction becomes even more complicated. While critics have finally reconciled to a veritable "boom" in crime novels written by women and their "popularity", it has also become a terrain of serious debate—whether the mere replacement of a male detective by a female one makes them radical, disruptive and questioning of gender stereotypes, or whether as Stephen Knight says:

> Commentators identify an inherent difficulty for writers speaking as women, and usually as feminists, in a form which is deeply implicated with masculinism. The violence of language and action of the private eyes, the insistent individualism they share with the clue-puzzle detectives, the extensive male chauvinist traditions of description, attitude and behaviour, as well as the complacent acceptance of a patriarchal social order, all seem contrary to the tenets of late twentieth-century feminism. (Knight 2004, p. 163).

The idea that detective fiction, by making invisible the politics of domination, ends up being "a discourse of concealment" rather than one of the revelation has been echoed by many critics. Babener posits that while many texts of contemporary hard boiled fiction written by women represent attempt at appropriating and re-conceptualizing the genre, they do not necessarily "dismantle patriarchal ideologies or undercut the hegemony of heterosexuality" (Babener 1995, p. 146). A much more forceful argument against reading these texts as an example of female empowerment is made by Teresa Ebert as she calls female sleuths "deputy henchmen for patriarchy" and "agents of patriarchy" seeking a place for women within the patriarchal order. Castillo calls attention to a sense of frustration when:

> Alternative constructions of femininity – whether authored by women or men of whatever class background – resolve into verbal evocations projected against this preexisting backdrop. Resistance can be as marketable as adherence to the norm, and it remains to be seen if … women writers' contestations of dominant imagery will translate into meaningful oppositional politics or, more radically, into more than a symbolic resource in the reconfiguration of knowledge structures and gender identities. (Castillo 1998, p. 36).

Notwithstanding the above, I would like to suggest that many women authors have been successful in their struggle to find ways of transgressing the boundaries, of rewriting the role of gender in culture, of going against the grain of generic codes and conventions and offering models of empowered femininity, thus, creating a feminist counter-narrative.[3] In order to exemplify the above, I propose to study some of the specific narrative strategies in crime fiction, used consciously and explicitly by women to advance questions of gender, identity and class from a feminist perspective. For the purpose of my analysis, I have chosen two contemporary detective novels from Latin America and one from India, which are the following: *Nuestra señora de la soledad* (1999) by the Chilean writer Marcela Serrano; *Betibú* (2010) by the Argentinean Claudia Piñeiro and *Dreams for the Dying* (2008) by C. K. Meena. Though crime fiction by male Latin American writers has received significant scholarly attention in recent times, women authors have not been sufficiently acknowledged. The choice of a comparative framework is based on the need to reveal the commonality of concerns, be they of identity, the place occupied by women at home and at work, as well as that of violence against women. Considering that the reading of crime novels is seen today as "an ethnographic reading" with the scene of the crime becoming "the *locus genius* of the cultural tragedy" (Erdmann 2009, p. 19), the juxtaposition of these texts could throw up interesting insights.

A brief introduction to the authors and the texts is necessary in order to contextualize the comparative perspective. *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*, written in 1999, is Marcela Serrano's first attempt at writing a detective novel, though she is an acclaimed writer known for her novels centering on women and their lives.[4] Claudia Piñero, born in 1960, is known for her works of theatre, but has also

[3]Cranny-Francis (1990), Sally Munt (1994), Kathleen Klein (1995), Maureen Reddy (2003) and Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M.Quinn (2009), among others, too discuss the female detective figure in crime novels in the context of contemporary feminist concerns.

[4]Born in 1951, Marcela Serrano was briefly exiled after the military coup in 1973 and returned to Chile in 1977. She won the prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Award for the best novel written by a woman in 1994 for her novel *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto* (1991) [*We, who love each other so much*]. Serrano objects to being categorized as a feminist writer by insisting that she does not write for women or about women as this would then label her writing as "light" or "secondary". She focuses on women's lives as she believes that women are a cultural minority despite not being so numerically and that "all women in some way or the other have the same story to tell".

written several bestselling crime novels.[5] C.K. Meena, born in 1968, is a columnist and a strong sense of personal freedom underscores her writing, especially in the context of the lives that women lead in India.[6]

In order to explore the possibilities of discovering alternative constructions of femininity, one could examine two aspects in these novels: first, the (gendered) identity of the detective, and second, the plots, themes and the narrative construction of the texts themselves.

As far as gender identity is concerned, we find that the women detectives/investigators in the novels of both Marcela Serrano and Claudia Piñeiro are self-consciously aware of transgressing into the supposedly male world of detection. The detective in Serrano's novel, Rosa Alvallay, is a middle-aged professional woman working for a detective agency, who juggles family and work. The novel begins with her receiving an assignment to find Avila, the missing writer of detective novels. Rosa Alvallay's life is professionally and personally twice removed as it were from that of Ms. Hawthorne, the fictional detective created by Avila. As she says:

> After all, Hawthorne, the heroine of her novels, was a lawyer like me and our jobs were not so different. Of course, mine did not carry within it any glamour and neither did I take it up as a vocation – like her – but due to a series of consecutive failures since I returned to this country, full of hopes, a little before the transition to democracy. Neither has Pamela worked in Human Rights Organizations, nor are her investigations propelled by a primitive and mad desire to help others. And if I carry on with these comparisons, she is not a mother of two, she has not left her husband behind in the other hemisphere and neither does she take care of the house all by herself, leave alone financing it. And, of course, the most crucial aspect, I am not resplendently 30 years old like Miss Hawthorne. (Serrano 1999, p. 38)

The protagonists of the other two novels, *Betibú* and *Dreams for the Dying*, however, defy neat categorization. Betibú, the protagonist, is the "black dame of Argentine literature" and is coming to terms with her failed attempt at romance in her life as well as her writing. Tired of being the ghost writer of several boring autobiographies, she accepts the task of writing "fictional" reports about a crime for a mainstream newspaper in the hope of helping her sagging career and self-esteem. In the process, she gets involved in the investigation along with a rookie and an ageing ex-crime reporter of the same newspaper. In *Dreams for the Dying*, the murder of a woman is investigated by policemen and the revelation of the crime committed by a paid killer, but the search for the motive lays bare the life of

[5]Piñeiro's crime novels include *Tuya* [*Yours*] (2005), *Las viudas del jueves* [*Thursday Night Widows*] (2005), *Elena sabe* [*Elena knows*] (2006), *Las grietas del Jara* [*A Crack in the Wall*] (2009) and *Betibú* (2010). She believes that as a writer, her intention is to focus on social issues rather than on writing a crime novel. According to her, it is only incidental that most of her novels centre on violence, crime and its detection.

[6]In an interview with Charumathi Supraja published in http://www.indiatogether.org/2008/oct/ivw-ckmeena.htm, Meena says: "Why are women in the centre? Not the man but the woman. For me, women are in the centre, whether I like it or not. It's possibly linked to the feminist perspective that I have always had. Somehow when I start writing I find that it's the women who take centre stage, the men are either not very nice guys (laughs) or are incidental.".

the victim, revealing a duplicitous existence that surprises the readers as the web of deceit created by the "victim" herself is unravelled. Here, the "victim" becomes the "author" of deceit.

All three women centralize a female consciousness by constantly drawing attention to the patriarchal world in which they live. While in Serrano's novel, the missing woman who has disappeared of her own accord draws attention to the idea of solitude, and the need for escape, exile, retreat or refuge from a hostile world, Betibú forecloses the possibility of justice in the contemporary world, and Uma, the protagonist of *Dreams for the Dying*, forces us to confront the inner mind of the woman who "did not know her place in the world but discovered that the inside of her own head was the safest place to be." (Meena 2008a, p. 111).

The themes dealt with in these novels point to the feminist appropriation of the genre despite its encoding in the patriarchal discourse in several ways, furthering the idea that radical fiction can subvert and question status-quo from within the conventions of the genre. One could argue with Collins that these writers through their texts seek to re-politicize socio-economic relations according to their own discursive ideology (Collins 1989, p. 35). The textual strategies employed in these texts could help in illustrating this point.

In Serrano's novel, the mystery to be investigated is the disappearance of a writer of hard-boiled detective novels featuring a female detective entrusted to Rosa Alvallay by the writer's husband. The detective hinges her investigation on the novels written by Avila, her interviews and articles, on interviews of family members and of other writers with whom she was in contact. The search leads her from Santiago to Mexico City and finally to Oaxaca. She realizes that Avila has staged her own disappearance to seek self-fulfilment and has carefully plotted in order to break free from her present existence. Rosa Alvallay is able to understand, empathize and identify with the disappeared woman and for this reason, she chooses not to reveal the truth to her client and Avila's husband, as the sense of solidarity for another woman trapped in an unhappy marriage prevails over her own quest for professional success. Assuming a false identity seems to be the only way to achieve fulfilment for a woman. The epigraph framing the novel revealingly tells us: "The world does not give you anything, believe me. If you want a life, steal it", lines taken from the Russian born psychoanalyst and writer, Lou Andrea Salome. The detective of Serrano's novel, like the female detective of Avila's novels, privileges subjectivity as a tool to help unravel the mystery. Further, the unconventional ending in which Rosa Alvallay decides to bury the truth despite its importance for her career, radically counters one of the most important conventions of the genre. Rosa Alvallay says:

> I understand that I must render accounts, that the prestige I would acquire on resolving this investigation would be high, that in this profession the truth is the most appreciated intangible. But, I would not want some other woman, someday, to let out my secret if I were ever to adventure such a hope. (Serrano 1999, p. 246)

Rosa Alvallay's decision to destroy the evidence and instead write a detective novel can be read as an attempt to go against generic conventionality, while questioning the possibility of "justice" in the real world.

In *Betibú*, the suspicious death of a man inside a gated community shakes the faith of the residents that their world is secure as opposed to the perils of "ordinary" life in Buenos Aires. The police as well as the residents of the community convince themselves that it is a suicide, in order not to face the sordid reality of their "pristine" surroundings. A series of apparent deaths follow and in each case, they appear to be suicides. When Nurit Iscar, alias Betibú, is asked to report about the crime from inside the community, living falsely as a member of the community, she unravels the mystery behind all the apparent suicides using her skills at constructing "fictional crimes". She and her friends believe that it is a case of "avenged justice" as the dead men were connected to one another but just as the first victim is exonerated of his wife's murder for lack of evidence, there is no evidence to suggest that the other deaths are not suicides. On the one hand, the novel engages with class relations contrasting the lives of the privileged class who can buy their happiness and security and of those who live outside, focusing on the vulnerability of their existence. At the same time, the novel highlights the impossibility of "justice" as there is no conclusive evidence to nail the perpetrator. As Nurit finally finds the mastermind behind the murders and confronts him, he denies his involvement and challenges her:

> You have a lot of imagination. I don't deny that, she confirms. Although what happened many years ago happened and it is possible that I were there, I insist on asking you: What proof do you have to prove that I had something to do with those murders? None, says Nurit, not as yet. Look, Mrs. Iscar, what you say could be true or not. But in this world, nothing exists if it cannot be proved (Piñeiro 2010, p. 315)

With absolute impunity, he tells her: "I would thus be beyond reach". "How could we describe the pyramid of crime today? Who in the twenty first century is the real murderer?" (Piñeiro 2010, p. 316). The criminal is not the one who has imagined the murder but the one who has executed it. Thus, the quest for truth and justice is aborted. The subverted "ending" however, underlines the need to tell the truth. The reference to Rodolfo Walsh[7] and his stance against the military dictatorship in Argentina becomes the intertext for the crime reporter's quest for "truth". As Jaime Brena, the ex-reporter says: "Crime reporters are neurotic obsessive and obstinate detectives, we know what failure means but we row on till the end. And as Walsh put it, if there is no justice, at least we could have the truth" (Piñeiro 2010, p. 220). The struggle for justice becomes the agenda for the writer as well as the crime reporter, both using their own strategies to tell the truth. Nurit acknowledges the apparently insurmountable difficulties before them and recalls Rodolfo Walsh:

[7]An Argentinean writer and political activist who dedicated his life to investigating state crimes in the 60s. His well-known short story "Operation Massacre" has been read as a reaction against the "pure fiction" model represented by detective stories, but also as the most perfect variation of the genre: the author of detective stories who suddenly finds himself involved in a real case. Claudia Piñeiro invokes this idea in *Betibú*, but privileges the fictional mode over the journalistic one in the end.

> I will stop writing this diary not because it does not matter anymore to me, but precisely because it does. Rodolfo Walsh recognizes that literature became devalued after 1968 "because it was no longer possible to write highly refined works to be consumed by the 'bourgeois intellectuals', when the country was in the throes of convulsions. Whatever is written must be submerged in a new process and must be useful to its progress. Once again, journalism became the appropriate tool. (Piñeiro 2010, p. 332)

Subverting what Rodolfo argued in the context of the criminal violence unleashed by the military dictatorship in Argentina, Nuria Iscar, alias Betibú the writer, is convinced that fiction is the only possible tool when all other attempts to obtain justice are thwarted by powerful nexus. She tells the criminal:

> I am not a journalist, I am a writer, I can narrate without references, I can take what is there in my imagination to be the truth. It is only a matter of calling what I write a "novel" instead of a "chronicle", a minor detail, if you ask me, says Nurit. (Piñeiro 2010, p. 322).

When faced with threat to her life, she decides not to write the report but tells the young rookie:

> Don't let anyone decide your agenda. The media is no longer a channel between the emitter and receiver; we are all a part of it. Prioritizing news according to ones' judgment and not according to the imposed agenda is creating a counter-report. And counter-reporting is not a bad word, rather the opposite. It is to report from a different place, from a place of non-power. (Piñeiro 2010, p. 332)

Walsh's recognition of the inadequacy of literary models is re-appropriated and inverted as literature provides possibilities that journalism does not. Nurit Iscar's inability to tell the truth disconcerts her and she takes recourse to literature because the "truth" frightens her. She says:

> It would be nothing more than a reality invented by me. A novel is a work of fiction. And my only responsibility is to tell a good story. … So I return to literature. I will not write any more reports because writing what I should frightens me and writing anything else is shameful. … And I believe that the readers would know what to do in these new times of reporting. (Piñeiro 2010, p. 333)

Dreams for the Dying offers a complexity rare in the format of crime fiction, through the complex web of deceit is woven by the female protagonist, in this case, who is not the detective but the victim whose murder is being investigated. The identity of the perpetrator of the crime and the motive become insignificant at the end of the novel while the revelation of the "duplicitous" existence of the protagonist raises issues about a woman's space and her relationships in love/marriage within patriarchy. Weaving the narrative voices and perspectives of three women, the novel explores the multiple dimensions of a woman. The identities of Uma, the victim, married and simultaneously in a live-in relationship, and Radha, who comes from a traditional family but has a secret affair with a married man, converge at the end of the novel leaving the men in the novel as well as the readers completely confounded. The third woman in the story, Parvathiamma, narrates her life and dreams which coincide with Uma's life. The ingenuous use of multiple narrative perspectives succeeds in turning the crime novel and its conventional ending on its head, thus offering new possibilities for pushing the boundaries of

the genre. As in Serrano's novel, the protagonist of *Dreams for the Dying* assumes new identities in order to bring meaning to her life. The idea of having to steal a "false identity" from life—as echoed in the epigraph of Marcela Serrano's novel—guides Uma in getting a life for herself, and reestablishing her effaced existence:

> Uma wanted to be reborn in this life, not wait like all good Hindus for the next. One can be born again – and again. Try on various identities like a dissatisfied shopper at a clothing store. … Multiple personality disorder, which she'd read about somewhere, did not sound like a disorder to her. In fact it sounded rather appealing. Those, like her, who had no personality to begin with, deserved a choice, a box full of assorted ones from which they could pick the tastiest. A cryptic diary entry that Magesh (the policeman) would later misinterpret as some sort of perverted lesbian fantasy was 'Woman inside a woman'. There could be another woman within her. (Meena 2008a, pp. 226–7)

Even her live-in partner is horrified by her actions, and despite believing himself to be a vocal defender of women's rights, he is unable to come to terms with the "surprise" Uma has sprung on him. As the narrator comments:

> He should have celebrated her independent spirit … but admiration for her was not exactly what was uppermost in his mind. His thoughts were dangerously close to what he would have, in another man, dubbed as reactionary and sexist (Meena 2008a, pp. 226–7).

Her anguish at not being understood by the men around her, not even the one who "theorized" on gender identity, or by society, pushes her to assume "multiple" identities, stretching her horizons farther than she could imagine and becoming in the process "the thrice born one". Writing letters to a stranger stemmed from her desire to unburden herself as she could not hope to be understood by the society. (Meena 2008a, pp. 228–229).

To conclude, one might say that all three texts, in somewhat different ways, question the possibility of absolute truth—both Serrano and Meena explore the "schizophrenic" self of the woman to show how women are rarely able to live their lives the way they want, and hence, take recourse to scheming and plotting in order to give meaning to their existence. All three novels deny the possibility of closure and neat endings, thus creating a counter discourse of crime fiction. One could say that these texts succeed in recodifying the genre from a feminist perspective through a self-conscious engagement with a woman's place in the patriarchal world and denial of absolute authority with unconventional plots and endings even as the narrative strategies adopted point at fragmentation and multiplicity of identities. Perhaps, the conservatives among the critics would even refuse to categorize Meena's novel *Dreams for the Dying* as detective fiction for its unconventionality and for its "radical" rewriting of gender and genre.

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Chapter 9
Gender Revolution in Socialist Cuba: *Up to a Certain Point*

Ira Vangipurapu

Abstract The triumph of the Socialist Revolution in 1959 granted Cuban women the autonomy over their personal, reproductive and work life. It gave them full access to work opportunities, education and social services, along with abolishing the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and liberalizing the divorce laws. However, the traditional conception of Cuba as a nation built by a brotherhood of men where women were imaged as the spiritual revolutionary "mothers" continued to undermine the Cuban national spaces. While one cannot deny the fact that the literacy and health campaigns of the 1960s brought about significant changes in the lives of Cuban women, one cannot ignore the fact that residual sexist undercurrents continued to affect the substratum of Cuban society which, in turn, continued to turn women into the subalterns of the State due to the failure of the State in engaging the people in a dialogue over machismo as a mechanism of creating gender-based social hierarchy. This article shows how the revolutionary filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, through his film *Up to a Certain Point* (1983), attempts to take the first step towards generating an acceptance for the belief that the alternative to machismo is not only perfectly legitimate, but also an imperative for a socialist state. In his characteristic dialectical manner, Alea highlights this issue and, in this article, I examine the problem that the film deals with and the manner in which it does so.

Keywords Cuban cinema · Revolutionary women · Machista · National space · Cinematic space · Tomás Guittérez Alea

A pioneer of revolutionary cinema in Cuba as well as in Latin America, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's cinema epitomizes the revolutionary spirit of Cuba. I believe that the cinema of Gutiérrez Alea truly reflects his desire to create a social engagement

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through participative cinema in which the viewer plays an active part in engaging with the theme of the film. As a lifelong passionate believer in, and a critic of, the revolution, Gutiérrez Alea, believed that it was important to sustain the critique, even that of the revolution, keeping forever in mind that the revolution was an ongoing process which required periodic correctional measures to keep it on track. If the Cuban revolution was to continue being an inspiration to Latin America and the world, it was important for it to continue interrogating itself, reorientating itself to the socialist ideals it had established. In order to do so, "[criticism] within the revolution, everything, outside it nothing" was not only desirable, it was also the socialist imperative for the Cuban people. For Gutiérrez Alea, cinema, a participative, dialectical cinema was one of the possible cultural means of engaging people in a discussion on the revolution and their relationship with it.

Twenty years after the revolution Gutiérrez Alea wrote "The Viewer's Dialectic", in which he elaborated his belief on the role of cinema in a socialist society. In this tract he observed, "The images of the Revolution have become ordinary, familiar… We no longer crave the same kind of spectacular transformations as we did fifteen or 20 years ago. Cuban cinema confronts a new and different way of thinking about what social processes are going to hold for us because our film draws its strength from Cuban reality and endeavours, among other things, to express it" (Martin 1997, p. 109). This stage, in his words, "requires the masses' active, increased participation in the building of a new society" (Martin 1997, p. 109). To this end, as a filmmaker, Gutiérrez Alea questions the basic nature of entertainment itself and suggests that "Film will be more fruitful to the extent that it pushes spectators towards a more profound understanding of reality, and consequently, to the extent that it helps viewers live more actively and incites them to stop being mere spectators in the face of reality. To do this, film ought to appeal not only to emotions and feelings but also to reason and intellect" (Martin 1997, p. 120).

Gutiérrez Alea reiterated that at historical moments when historical/political paradigm shifts occur, as in Cuba with the triumph of the revolution, cinema and the viewing of films must also undergo a paradigm shift. The spectator could not expect to come into the auditorium for passive consumption of images. He must agree to revolutionize his cinematic experience and add his own bit to the cinematic expression and to create his own wider social gestalt as a result of it. However, under the socialist compulsion, the spectator cannot be expected to flounder alone through these historical shifts of consciousness. The director must transform, revolutionize the spectator too, and not isolate him on the margins of the paradigm shift. Thus for instance, in his film *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966), Gutiérrez Alea while dealing with the Kafkaesque State bureaucracy draws parallels between it and mass mechanical production, and by introducing the Kafkaesque State bureaucracy into the film, cajoles the spectator into thinking about how to make the functioning of the State more efficient. In *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), he makes it inevitable for the spectator to take up positions either with Sergio, or against him, by deliberately introducing elements

of distanciation/alienation from the character and the revolution so as to gain a vantage. In *Up* to a *Certain Point* (1983), he makes the spectator interrogate his own machismo through intense self-reflexivity and in *The Last Supper* (1976), he makes the spectator wonder, through the film, if revisionism was the only way of approaching history by providing a cathartic release from slavery and lingering Creole attitudes to it. In *The Last Supper*, he turns the spotlight on Cuba's slave/sugar relationship to remind his contemporaries of the dangers of enslavement and the contribution of African slaves to Cuba's cultural and economic spheres. Thus, as he reiterates, "the work itself must bear those premises which can bring the spectator to discern reality… it must push spectators into the path of truth, into coming to what can be called a dialectical consciousness about reality [and must employ, in order to achieve this] all methodological resources at hand and all it can gain from information theory, linguistics, psychology, sociology etc". (Martin 1997, p. 129).

Gutiérrez Alea uses representation in his films to produce the effect of alienation in the spectator, making it just a little unfamiliar so as to provide space for the spectator's engagement with the film and prevent the assimilation of the spectator into the characters and actions of the film. Thus, the best actor for Gutiérrez Alea would be one who did not become the person he is playing, but acted him, and was not insecure about this. We can see that Sergio is not just "acting" bourgeois attitudes, he is also questioning his own conflicts with the socialist state. Oscar is not just playing a director making a film on machismo, but also a man coming to terms with his *own* machismo. The slaves on the sugar plantation are not just slaves, they are also real life people confronting their own history of slavery and their relationship to a master class. Thus, the actor must not play the character defined as a permanent historical entity, but as someone whose narrative he is completely aware of, and tell that narrative with a sense of control and immediacy. Just as classical theatre used masks to achieve this effect, the characters of a film must also be 'masked' by the director's touch. The mask must not make possible identification with the faceless anonymous 'everyman' for this would lead us right back to the cinema of delusion. The spectator must be made to understand that the mask is not something unnatural or odd, but a tool designed to set him free of socially conditioned ways of looking, observing and participating. Thus, moving away from a cinema of a dependency on pre-given concepts, Gutiérrez Alea's cinema addresses State mechanisms as well as the individual Cuban citizen and their role in the revolution. At times with hints, with laughter, irony and the occasional slap on the wrist, and always a profound self-reflexivity, Gutiérrez Alea endeavours to ensure his films are a product of his deliberations on how we *learn* revolution—how this form of learning can be created in cinema, which kinds of perspectives this knowledge must build on and most importantly, how this knowledge can be built with collaborative participation by the spectators.

For me, the most engaging quality of Gutiérrez Alea's cinema is his stress on subjectivity and its relationship to the formal structure of a film. Gutiérrez Alea's films are formal experiments reflecting his socio-cinematic theory, what Glauber Rocha called "learning at work", and Fernando Solanas referred to as "cinema of

ideological essay". Where Gutiérrez Alea differs from his contemporaries is in that he effected a revolution in the way the spectators engaged with the film. For Gutiérrez Alea, cinema was just one alternative to a speech, an ideological discussion, wall posters, a means of expressing and engaging the audience. He believed, the closer this relationship, the lesser the distance between the political aims of the government and the people, and that this relationship was a significant factor in the building of a socialist state.

In the film, I have chosen to work on for this article, *Up to a Certain Point* (1983), Gutiérrez Alea takes up issues related to Cuban women who, despite their substantial participation in the Cuban revolution and the polity of a socialist state, continued to be marginalized in socialist Cuba. Gutiérrez Alea critiques the revolutionary government for its paternalistic attitude towards dealing with these issues, but also asserts that "The revolution changes the social base, and, theoretically, there is legally no more discrimination, neither against blacks nor against women. But in the minds of people, prejudices linger on, and you have to fight them at another level, not with laws but by dramatizing it. And film is a good weapon to use in this struggle" (MacBean 1985, p. 29), for as Gutiérrez Alea himself believed, "*si la crítica está bien hecha, si es eficaz, si es profunda y nos ayuda a superar los problemas que tenemos y las debilidades que tenemos, nos hace más fuertes y menos manipulables*" (Chanan 2011, p. 4). Let us now look at some of these issues and then how he foregrounds his beliefs through this film, making it a 'checklist' for the progress of the revolution in Cuba.

In 1963 Fidel Castro had said, "Women of necessity have to be revolutionary. Because women, an essential part of each people, are simultaneously exploited as workers and discriminated against as women". Three years later, he added, "If they were to ask us what is the most revolutionary thing that the Revolution is doing, we would say that it is precisely this, the revolution that is occurring within the women of our country". True, the revolution granted Cuban women the autonomy over their personal, reproductive and work life. It allowed the Cuban woman full access to work opportunities, education and social services, and by abolishing the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and liberalizing the divorce laws, removed the traditional grounds of stigmatizing women socially. However, traditional conception of Cuba as a nation built by a brotherhood of men where women were imaged as the spiritual revolutionary "mothers" continued to undermine the Cuban national spaces. While one cannot deny the fact that the literacy and health campaigns of the 1960s brought about significant changes in the lives of the Cuban women, one cannot ignore the fact that residual sexist undercurrents continued to affect the substratum of Cuban society which in turn, continued to make women the subalterns of the State due to the failure of the State in engaging the people in a dialogue over machismo as a mechanism of creating gender-based social hierarchy.

The Cuban revolution rejected everything colonial, including the family structure based on machismo, which was associated with the Spanish domination. The revolution aimed to put in place the alternatives that would allow the Cubans a new sense of dignity, to usher on to the Cuban national stage women who were

perceived as a social group that needed to be brought into the national mainstream on an equal footing with men. The revolution never took an ambiguous stand over this issue. The literacy programmes of the 1960s reduced illiteracy among women, bringing it down from around 23 % to approximately 4 %. Health programmes reduced child mortality and marriage, divorce and laws related to children were further liberalized to lessen the stigma for unmarried women and illegitimate children. However, as Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert point out,

> … the purpose of all this was not to confront anything so pervasive to the definition of Cuban society as patriarchy. Rather, the question was how half the population could do their share for development.… It is not only the fact that in the process of being inducted into the workforce women were urged to maintain their 'womanly ways' that undermined the program's impact on patriarchy. Perhaps more damning was that nothing was being done to overcome the sexual division of labor within the economy itself.… Indeed, in 1968 the sexual division of labor "received the force of law" with the passage of Resolutions 47 and 48 by the Ministry of Labor". For "these resolutions reserved some 500 job categories specifically for women and prohibited women from entering an equal number of professions.… This could not do otherwise than "strengthen notions of a 'natural' sexual division of labor, so it is reasonable to assume they were passed with the intention of combating what was considered an undesirable by-product of the rush to enlist women in the workforce – the potential dislocation of traditional attitudes about the role of women and men at the level of the principles of male supremacy itself. (Hahnel and Albert 1981, pp. 221–222)

Hahnel and Albert point out further that while

> In the orthodox Marxist view the program to bring women into the workforce is inherently anti-patriarchal and, if brought to its logical conclusion will end by overthrowing patriarchy. In our view, this program has a contradictory implication for patriarchy. While it tends to erode the most extreme forms of patriarchy, and may under certain circumstances even challenge patriarchy itself, it will always be coopted to a form consistent with the new forms of patriarchy and male supremacy so long as the basic roots of these oppressive features of kinship relations go unchallenged. (Hahnel and Albert 1981, pp. 221–222)

The issue here was not of legislation but of the lingering prejudices and the problematic perception of socialism *vis à vis* women: a gender neutered worker whose rights have to be ensured, or on the other hand, a gendered identity which in itself bears the burden of subalternization in the patriarchal hierarchical system. Post-revolutionary Cuba in spite of its best intentions, continued to demonstrate ambiguity over this issue as well as the question of integrating women into a socialist society. This ambiguity was perpetrated by the very ideology adopted and the lacunae that had crept in while passing legislations regarding women, which failed to take into account the challenges posed by deep-rooted machismo. There was a deficit in thinking about machismo as a social issue affecting just the women. In *Working across Cultures: A Professional's Guide to Cultural Understanding*, John Hooker examines the problems of machismo. He defines machismo as "manly virtue" and observes that,

> It is historically associated with honor, bravery, violence, a hunger for power, and a double standard for women that idolizes them even while abusing them. Men actually have

> had little choice in the matter; historically, those who were not machos were ostracized.… Today the character of machismo varies across the social classes. In the lower classes it is still associated with violence and abuse of woman.… In the upper classes, however, it represents honor, courage, and devotion to one's family. (Hooker 2003, pp. 83–84)

In its urgency to establish a socialist state, the revolutionary government in spite of its best intentions overlooked the fact that these aspects of machismo were actually undermining its agenda and so failed to effect mechanisms which could influence the socialization process of men which would, in turn, encourage them to re-think machismo through the kind of family they grow up in, schools and their peer groups, processes through which they learnt about their culture and their place in it. While schooling received a big boost, early school education failed to integrate programmes on gender awareness. While women were being mainstreamed, considerably less attention was given to bring men into the mainstream of the required change in their perception of and relationship with women. This came into contradiction with the perceptions of the post-revolutionary generations who were facing a world that was very different from the one the elder men in their immediate circle had witnessed, a world in which overt machismo was not required. Women's roles were also getting re-inscribed into stronger identities. Moreover, the economic conditions were redefining women's roles as workers. As traditional gender stereotypes, however, still persisted and they created the anxiety of being ostracized among men for being 'open' about women and perpetrated *machista* attitudes.

I believe that Gutiérrez Alea, through his film *Up to a Certain Point*, converts the cinema hall into a critical dialectical space within which he formulates the argument that while analysing and structuring society on the basis of class struggle, "the paternalism of the state" had not taken into account the experience of machismo, and that this needs to be addressed if the revolution is to stay on course. I believe that Tomas Gutiérrez Alea's *Up to a Certain Point* represents an element of dramatization in the process of a re-orientation and resocializing of men's traditional roles in the socialist society. In the film, we see this dramatization centred around Oscar who begins to write a movie script that would highlight the problem of machismo in Cuba, and who realizes by the end of the film that he himself is unable to suppress the machismo inherent in him, that he is unable to close the gap between his realization of being a *machista* and his desire not to be one. As Hagimoto stresses,

> Oscar's dilemma also represents the possible crisis endemic to other males in Cuba, and this problem is precisely what Gutiérrez Alea seeks to recuperate as a challenge to the country's socialist program. In this sense, *Up to a Certain Point* makes it clear that the Revolution's attempt to materialize José Martí's idea of a "nation for all" is now called into question since women are still subjugated by the deeply-rooted system of machismo. (Hagimoto 2009, p. 118)

I believe that the protagonist of the film is neither Lina, Oscar, Marián, Diego, Arturo or Flora, but machismo which claims the dialectical space both inside and outside the cinema hall. James Roy MacBean observes,

> … for Gutiérrez Alea, *machismo* is a phenomenon which needs to be scrutinized up, down and all along the scale of prestige, property ownership and decision-making power which exists, albeit in a far less harsh form than elsewhere, even in a socialist country like Cuba. In many ways then, *Up to a Certain Point* offers a kind of progress report on the Cuban revolution, with *machismo* as one index.… (MacBean 1985, pp. 22–29)

Gutiérrez Alea generates a dialectic around the film by bringing into force four mechanisms—the inclusion of a pseudo(?) documentary section at the beginning of the film, focus on the camera as it records the action for the film, the high level of self-reflexivity, the interaction of the characters within the film—and the interaction among all these and the audience watching the film in the cinema hall. In his study of [Sara] Gómez's *De cierta manera* (completed by Gutiérrez Alea in 1978 after her death) and Gutiérrez Alea's *Up to a Certain Point*, Hagimoto asserts that

> The juxtaposition of documentary and fiction seeks the audience's active involvement in producing the film. Like Walter Benjamin in the [19]30s, Gómez and Gutiérrez Alea propose to restructure the cultural politics of the revolutionary Cuba, emphasizing the audience's active and self-conscious role in the creation of a new culture. By recognizing the complex yet utterly familiar socio-political conditions depicted in the film, the audience is urged to experience what Benjamin calls "contemplation" about their own reality.… Through the interplay of documentary and fiction, *De cierta manera* and *Up to a Certain Point* encourage the public to identify themselves with the real-life characters on the screen and to critically contemplate their own life in order to participate in the construction of Cuba's socialist modernity. (Hagimoto 2009, p. 116)

Gutiérrez Alea opens the debate with a short pseudo(?) documentary footage in which both men and women express their views on the relationship of women with men at work and home. The issue they debate is not just a personal one, but one which takes as its base the nonverbalized power structures that define and maintain gender identities. Johnetta B. Cole and Gail A. Reed foreground these structures when they ask, "In a socialist context, what does power mean? Not only in rhetorical but in everyday concrete terms, who influences, affects, controls what and whom? Indeed, what is control?" (Reed 1986, pp. 321–353), and ask further, "What happens to a woman when she begins to work outside of her household in contemporary Cuba? What transformation takes place in her view of herself, in her view of others, in her relationships?" (Reed 1986, pp. 321–353) Gutiérrez Alea believed that unless these questions were debated in masculine spaces as much as feminine spaces, patriarchy would be perpetrated for "Ultimately", as Janelle Hippe says, "… because the symbolic laws of patriarchy demand the performative unity of sex, gender, and desire, male bodies are compelled to 'perform' masculinity and desire female bodies, whereas female bodies are compelled to 'perform' femininity and desire male bodies". (Hippe 2011, p. 203).

In his film *Up to a Certain Point*, Gutiérrez Alea presents us this belief through the hypothesis that the subaltern Cuban woman cannot speak as long as she is forced to perform femininity and her voice is articulated within the paradigm of *machista* formulations, and men will continue to perform masculinity as long as men are not made aware that changing their perceptions of women in no way poses a threat to their being men. It is every Cuban man who must reflect on the

transformation in his perception of woman and his relationship with her. This hypothesis manifests a critique of the socialist government in that it cannot take a paternalist position in attempting to effect change from the top. Rather, Gutiérrez Alea's critique suggests that these processes have reached the limits of exploring the possibility of breaking *machista* attitudes. It is this dual criticism that sets his film apart from the others of the period of "*el proceso revolucionario*" between the late 1960s and 1970s such as *Lucia* (1968), *De cierta manera* (1978), and *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) all of which deal with the continuing debate within Cuban society over the obstinate refusal of *machista* attitudes to change. Gutiérrez Alea does this by placing his woman protagonist Lina along the margins. It is not her life as a woman that he emphasizes. He is not providing an inspirational model like Teresa or any of the three Lucias for the women among the spectators. Rather, it is machismo itself that is the invisible focal protagonist of the film. From the interviews at the beginning of the film to its end, the focus is on the machismo voiced by the men and the male reactions to the women. In Lina, Gutiérrez Alea evokes the provocative image of a woman trapped between the "Marxist gaze" and the "masculine gaze". Lina is "feminized" by the responses of the men around her to her presence. She is a subaltern constructed by the way men act around her, and the ineffectiveness of the State to change deep-rooted machismo. Within the mechanics of showing a film to the spectators as a narrative, and as an event occurring in the life spaces of the actual spectators, Gutiérrez Alea makes Lina the pivot of reflection over machismo by deliberately marginalizing her. He structures the dialectic of the film around this pivot on one hand and the male gaze which identifies with its surrogates, the dock workers, Oscar and Arturo and the spectator's responses to the women in the film on the other. By diminishing Lina's function as a woman placed within a network of exchanges in the film itself, he makes the spectators search for their responses to women's experiences of machismo and the questions of power within a heterosexual relationship. I believe that the romance which springs up between Lina and Oscar is not "a weakness of dramatic design" (Pick 1996, p. 34) but a deliberate provocation put in place by Gutiérrez Alea to question the male gaze that constructs Lina as a desirable object which can realize itself only in the sexual response *she* has supposedly provoked. In reality, it is the product of the traditional sexual role assigned to her.

I believe Gutiérrez Alea lures the *machista* through his scopophilic instinct into believing that he commands the stage of screen action and that it is he who actually possesses Lina, or has an extramarital affair like Arturo, or who resists change in response to State-led urgings in eliminating machismo. As a bourgeois intellectual (which continued to be a desirable social position in spite of the apparent elimination of class in the socialist society), Oscar draws this scopophilic gaze to himself, and masquerades as the desirable ideal to be identified with. Gutiérrez Alea draws the male spectator into a false sense of security which comes through the legality of this identification. He then springs the unease by placing Lina up in the sky figuratively in flight, and then asks the machista what they would now. Gutiérrez Alea also uses the device of the play-within-the-film, a play that Oscar

has written around the issue of machismo, a play which is watched by an audience in the film itself, but also by the audience of the film. Through this double distanciation, Gutiérrez Alea places the woman in the life of the male spectator at a distance, beyond a frontier which, once she has crossed it, forces a reassessment of his perception of her. As an indirect aid to effect this shift,Gutiérrez Alea deliberately places his recently published tract "The Dialectic of the Spectator" in Oscar's hands to make the urgency for a debate over machismo real and reveal what he was trying to do through the film—provoking the male spectator to see through the trap and into the moral ambiguity of the identification with the male protagonists of the film. *Up to a Certain Point* thus focuses on the implications of being a passive promulgator and active viewer in terms of cultural constructs of gender difference and power of the male as symbolized by the male protagonists.

I believe that Gutiérrez Alea perceived himself as a member of the socialist vanguard of Cuba, dedicating himself to the goal of realizing a truly socialist society. He therefore, does not condemn or excuse Cubans struggling to transition themselves into a socialist one. Recognizing the very real need to re-orient *machistas*, he empathizes with their dilemma over being stigmatized and assures them that he is as culpable as them, that there was nothing wrong about re-thinking and debating over machismo. Dialectical though he may be, Gutiérrez Alea is firm about his belief that machismo has no place in a socialist society. It is this belief that comes through strongly in the film and makes Gutiérrez Alea's proposition so persuasive, his film so convincing.

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Chapter 10
Bodies of Pleasure: Rethinking Gender, Space and Identity

Pranta Pratik Patnaik

Abstract Spaces are products of one's social activity and relations. It is in these spaces that gender is performed. This article is an attempt to understand the 'park' as a 'space of multiplicity', a term borrowed from Grosz (Volatile bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism, 1994), which is equally capable of creating sociable relations, producing new views of living life and challenging the hegemonic heterosexual spaces. It focuses on one such park in New Delhi, which is a meeting place, cruising area and a space enabling the freedom of expression for gays in the city. The park acts as a counter space to the disciplined spaces which produce disciplined bodies. The article highlights the ways in which the body movements define the park spaces and how there is a change in the body movements beyond the boundaries of the park. This links up to the notion of fluid identities. Those who identify themselves as homosexuals in the park cover this identity in other public places like the household, educational institutions and workplace. The article thus intends to give a complete picture of how performance of gender conveys one's sexual identity, which varies from one space to another. It is in these spaces that the construction of 'queer' as the 'Other' is subverted. The article also tries to critically examine the category of 'Other', which itself is covered with various layers in terms of class, caste, religion, age and sexual preferences.

Keywords Gay cruising areas in Delhi · Park as space of multiplicity · Gendered spaces · Heterotopia · Bodily practices · Gender performativity

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10.1 Moving Bodies, Performing Gender: An Introduction

The relationship between body, space and gender identity continues to dominate culture and politics of everyday life. Bodies are seen as living entities and narratives of social processes and structures. The body has become a site of spatial orientation and a medium of communication with others. It is in these spaces that gender is performed and the construction of identity is facilitated and re-shaped. Consequently, the body is simultaneously socially constructed as well as fragmented. It has many identities and is no longer secured or located in some fixed social space. It is certainly the case that the representation of the bodies in social spaces speaks of regulation and control—control of desire, passion and need in the interest of the societal order but it also cannot negate the fact that identities are neither stable nor unified across time and space. Body, therefore, needs to be seen not as a singular bounded entity, but rather as what Anne Marie Mol (2002) terms as the 'body multiple', which emphasizes not on what bodies can do but what they can become.

As there are fluid identities, which change according to contexts or spaces, it implies that space is also not a homogeneous, unified, neutral and a priori entity that precedes the individual; rather, it is an ongoing production process. In such a scenario of uncertainties about identity and space, this article seeks to throw light on three key research questions—if the spaces are not homogeneous, how do the social structures maintain the disciplinary power regimes in relation to the body? Can we consider or recognize that there could be an 'agency' of the bodies that challenge these structures? And if there is agency of the bodies, what are the limits to the performativity of such agencies? In an attempt to answer these questions, this article limits itself to an understanding of parks as an 'embodied space', that is, as a point of intersection between body, space and identity where the creation of place is made possible through spatial orientation, movement and language. The concept of embodied space underscores the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, lived experiences, a centre of agency and a location for speaking or expressing desires.

Theoretically, the article draws on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and Judith Butler's theory of performativity in order to unravel the intersections between body, space and identity. In contrast to disciplinary spaces, which confine people to act, behave or work in particular ways, this article focuses on 'marginal' spaces of gender practices and habitable relations, like gay cruising parks in Delhi.

The article argues that marginal spaces like gay cruising parks are not just spaces of movement but they become so through the movement of bodies. These parks are not completely rigid enclosures, they are not cellular or rank-ordered, but rather are filled with openings and spaces for forms of togetherness that are different from those bound by authority and its stabilizing mechanisms. They do not expect from the individuals to illuminate the meaning of 'knowing how to act' or 'how to respond' as found in the disciplinary spaces. These spaces are open to a

wide variety of behaviours as there is no one given situation, no one set of rules to follow, and no one way to act.

Frequently visited by the sexual 'minorities' of the city, the gay cruising parks are spaces which people either pass through or fill, conveying a message about themselves and their cultural status by dress, accessories, posture, and speech. In other words, they can be called as spaces of habits which include their gestures, dress, speech and mannerisms that they use to occupy, negotiate or modify such 'marginal' spaces. In such spaces, people tend to act in their own way leading to a somewhat flexible behaviour pattern of manners and styles that has a degree of familiarity, or offers a space of comfort to them. A study of such "closet" spaces is essential as it uncovers how any kind of bodily performativity in these spaces both constrains as well as defines the body and constructs the personal identity.

The article is sub-divided into two sections—the first section undertakes a critical review of the theoretical underpinnings regarding body, gender identity and space, which are cloaked under a rigorous socio-biological discourse. Citing a few case studies, the second section deals with the challenges posed to these theories by alternative practices of sexuality, defying the societal norms, falsifying the biological realities by homosexual men in parks, which serve as a gay cruising area.

10.2 Bodily Practices and Gendered Spaces: A Critical Review

Mostly ethnographies on body and space do not theorize the body, per se, but utilize it as a spatial metaphor and representational space. Even though the body is considered as a tool in the production of cultural forms (Bourdieu 1977; Douglas 1971; Mauss 1979), it is treated as an empty vessel without any consciousness, emotion or intention. Douglas, Mauss, Bourdieu and others are more concerned with the body as a metaphor for social and cultural conceptualization than with the organism itself, and the effect of cultural influences on it and its operations. Any adequate analysis of the body, therefore, needs to consider it as "a material, physical and biological phenomenon which is irreducible to immediate social processes or classifications" (Shilling 1993, p. 10). However, this should not imply that the article is advocating for a biological determinism, which reduces the complexity of human psychological and social life to the biological make-up of individuals and groups. Such an essentialist argument reduces the complexity of life to a fixed and pre-given biological component of individuals.

Earlier discussions on the relevance of the body began with the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, where the latter is considered a constraining force which ideally should be brought under the control of the former. In order to overcome the dualism between the mind and body, we need to understand how the body is constructed through sign, symbols and discursive practices. The concept of the self is often used to avoid the assumed split between the body and mind. While defining

the self, we construct the 'Others' who help us in defining particular ways of imagining about ourselves and performing self-identity. This self was referred to as 'looking glass self' by C.H. Cooley. Self-identity is, thus, an expression and manifestation of our internalization of how we are perceived, positioned and responded to by others.

The fact that bodies are always 'made social', points out to the social and cultural processes, which enact upon the thoughts, actions and habits of the individuals. They exist within a network of ties, obligations and duties as prescribed by society. At this point, I would like to invoke Foucault's concepts of positivity and productivity to describe the role power plays in producing, what he termed as, 'docile bodies'. According to him, disciplinary power does not prohibit or constrain, but rather works through the ways in which norms and regulatory ideals of the society are incorporated into an individual's internal forms of self-monitoring and self-regulation. This is achieved not through any imposition or force but through their self-internalization of particular body techniques and practices where disciplinary power works through the acceptance and active participation of its subjects thereby creating spaces to perform their identities.

Lefebvre (1991) talked about three moments in the production of space: spatial practice, representation of space and representational space. Spatial practice refers to the way we perceive our surroundings and ourselves as we negotiate their use. Representations of space are the signs, symbols, codes and ideas associated with institutional knowledge; representational spaces denote qualitative, fluid and relational spaces that are produced and modified over time. Although Lefebvre's discussion of space is based on the mutual constitution of bodies and space, his analysis is silent about the gendered bodies having multiple sexual identities and practices. By taking resort to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, my aim is to fill the gap of Lefebvre's theoretical work, as well as that of a queer theory, by exploring a queer theorization of social space. Butler's analysis of identity as performance parallels Lefebvre's productive view of space. Identities and spaces are simultaneously constituted through representation and discourse, thereby creating productive bodies, which constitute performative spaces. The performative acts of social space and gendered/sexed bodies offer the possibility for moments of "truth", wherein sexuality and space can be performed differently. It needs to be understood that by bringing these theorists together in this article, my goal is not to reduce one to the other; there are clear differences in their theoretical orientation and subject matter. What I am suggesting is that Lefebvre's and Butler's proposals echo one another. Despite their differences, these projects are underscored by critical accounts of the social reality that, when placed alongside one another, facilitate a productive re-thinking on the interrelationship between sexuality and social space. Thus, space and sexuality are inevitably intertwined and sexuality cannot be confined to narrow definitions of the sexed body as it permeates all material and representational practices. Queerness, both as a performative attribute of individual bodies, and as a product of spatial practices, is an inseparable component of space. The agency of the queer bodies is considerably diminished in heteropatriarchal spatial discourses and practices.

However, this article does not dismiss or devalue the agency of the body. By agency, is meant the individual's capacity to resist as well as negotiate or refuse the workings of structural disciplinary power. As Shilling (1993) argues, the body is always an unfinished entity. It is not simply defined by a fixed human nature but also has the potential to change, subvert and transform the particular set of historical circumstances within which it is socialized. The body is, no doubt, affected by discourse but we also need to recognize how the body reacts back and affects the discourse. This is usually spoken of in terms of the structure/agency dichotomy.

Against the backdrop of such theoretical debates regarding the body, space and sexuality, the next section, focusing upon a few case studies, opens up the possibilities and limitations of 'alternative' bodily practices in gay cruising parks—a space, which is continuously produced by a complex interweave of actors and material components.

10.3 Parks as Spaces of Resistance and Negotiation

During the summer of 2010, I developed an observational account of the Central Park of Connaught Place (CP), one of the gay cruising parks in Delhi. The periods of observation were, on the average, 3 hour in duration, with variation in time of day and night, day of the week and my location within and around the park. While the number of people ebbed and flowed, there were 2–3 groups I observed most frequently in the park comprising of five or six men who ranged in age from their early 20s to late 50s. At night, I saw many of the people that I had seen in the park during the day hanging out in the surrounding area. This group spent their time hustling for money, food and drink, soliciting other men and relaxing on the park benches. The activities of these individuals were harder to track at night as they appeared and disappeared deftly and were rarely stationary for very long. This might have been due to the presence of large crowds of people in the surrounding area at night, especially at weekends, and also the noticeable level of police surveillance of the area at night.

The CP Park is not a stable queer space. Instead, its production can be better understood as polemic, marked by an ongoing practice of refutation that is poled on one end by homosexual affirmations and on the other by heteronormative assertions. This polemic process results in the materialization of a social space that is saturated with sexuality. During the evening, it is crowded with men, women and children. After 7:30 p.m., the families leave the park. Few couples still hang around in the park. By 8:30 p.m., groups of men throng around in the park waiting for their chance to open up a conversation with someone or to meet their lovers. As it becomes dark, men start choosing their partners for the night. If a conversation goes right, they go to any of the decided places to fulfil their desire. In case they do not choose anyone or are not picked up by anyone, they move out of the park towards the nearby McDonald's restaurant, which provides another space for the upper middle class gays. The gays in front of the McDonald's rarely come to the park, as they

consider it to be a dirty place full of '*hijras*' (eunuchs), low class guys, thieves and drug pedlars. They have named the park as the "*mandi*" (a slang for the place where bodies are for sale) indicating that it is not classy or elite and essentially depicts low class culture. Thus queer spaces for cruising are bifurcated/ divided along class lines. After 9:30 p.m., there is no one in the park as the police drive them away from the park. The space comes under surveillance after a particular time. Those "unlucky birds", who could not make it for the day, proceed towards their home/ destination but with the hope that the next day it will be their day.

Firoz (name changed), a 21-year-old Muslim guy, belongs to the Chandni Chowk area of Delhi. He is medium built, extremely fair with an average height. He comes to the park every evening after finishing his daily work and leaves at night by 9 p.m., either after having a brief sexual encounter behind a bush in the dark or after several rounds of walk in the park. The way he walks, swaying his waist, and talks, with a smile and glitter in his eyes, attracts the men who are present there to satisfy their desire. At a very young age, he had to work in a household garment factory as a tailor. He mastered this skill from his father. He could not complete his formal education in a college under Delhi University due to economic constraints. He identified himself as gay when he was in school. He has been visiting the park since the last 10 years. On being asked why he visits the park regularly, he replied that he comes to this park to get "fresh air". I probed further and asked him why only this park whereas there was another park just opposite the road. "*Is park mein ek apnapan sa lagtaa hai*" (A feeling of belongingness comes from this park) promptly came the reply. The presumed privacy of the home is challenged when public places like a park provide the context where the queer body feels at home and where gender performance can be managed in a heteropatriarchal society.

He told me about the different categories of people who visit the park and how the park has changed over the years:

> Earlier there used to be a decent crowd that came to the park for cruising. Nowadays all the professional guys are coming. (Professional guys are those who are willing to sleep with another man for a handsome amount of money in return). There is more police vigilance these days. Some thieves are also roaming in this park. They trap a guy, go with him, and take away all the valuables at knife point. I am very cautious due to this reason. I generally hang around with those guys who I have chatted with earlier and are known to me. There are some guys who are also from Chandni Chowk area, so I prefer to talk to them mostly. Most of my neighbours are also here and I am not shy in front of them being gay as they are also like me. But once we leave this park, and if accidentally we meet in Chandni Chowk area, then we don't recognise each other and behave as if we have never met.

The fluid boundaries between the public and the private intersect in complicated ways with the fluid boundaries of gendered performance as the queer bodies need to sacrifice their queerness off stage. He even advised me that I should not recognize him if I see him while travelling on the Metro.

While leaving home for the park, Firoz puts a fancy dazzling t-shirt and tight hugging jeans in his bag, which he changes into in a public bathroom before entering the park.

> This park has a different dress code. Looking at me, he said, if you come dressed like this nobody will notice you. Even though you are not that fair and smart to get noticed, you should try to get attention by your dress. Since I am extremely fair, all colours suit my skin and this tight hugging jeans is the best way to show what you have to offer. If you want a guy, make eye contact and then give a smile. If the other person is interested, a similar gesture will be reciprocated. If that does not happen, initiate a conversation by asking him – what's the time? And then you have to take the lead in making a conversation with him. If they leave the conversation mid way or refuse to tell you the time, or give a light, then you should understand that they are not interested. Don't sit on these railings in the park. It invites danger. Policemen will identify you as gay and will drive you out of this park. Other guys will think that you are easily available. So always keep walking and if you like a guy then just brush his body in a way as if it happened accidentally.

All these mannerisms in the park followed by the gays make this a 'space of habits'. However, such habits are not common to all the gays and they differ from person to person, but generally they all indulge in certain bodily practices in the park producing their own counter spaces. These counter spaces are to be understood as spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning. In this park, practices, where the private is made public and the queer bodies formulate a domestic scene under the protection of concrete representations of gay identity, question the presumed social and sexual order of public space.

Mr. Tarun (name changed), a 50-year-old man, is a doctor by profession who roams with a 25-year-old guy in the park everyday after their daily chores. Tarun's wife stays in Meerut with their children and occasionally visits Delhi. He claims to maintain a balanced dual life by not transgressing the societal boundaries.

> I do all my duties as a husband and as a father. I have never shied away from my responsibilities towards them. So I am honest to them. This is another part of my life. This park is my home as this is where I met my boyfriend and we fell in love with each other and he is my lover. I am not hurting anyone, so why should I have the feeling of guilt? Even he [his lover] is married and his wife is also expecting a baby.

Even though disciplinary regimes like family/household aim to separate the outside (the undisciplined, the marginal) from the inside (ordered), to dominate social spacing, and to regulate who is to be put in operation, they fail to eliminate the outside. The outside always remains an unordered space of spontaneity, unpredictability and indeterminability, something Grosz (1994) mentions to be a 'space of multiplicity' capable of creating sociable relations, producing new views on living life, and challenging hegemonic borders.

The park as a space is not a given stage where actors perform; rather it is constituted, a product of permeated social relations. There is even the construction of the 'Other', which takes place in this park. Firoz and Tarun were always against the eunuchs who visited the park. The eunuchs were considered to be ugly, dirty and unhygienic people. Moreover, they were poorer than the gays who visited these parks. Most of them prefer to stay away from the eunuchs in the park. Firoz was also quite particular about the religion of the guys with whom he wanted to have a fair chance of affair. One evening, a guy introduced himself as Sameer to Firoz, to which he asked—"*Hindu wala Sameer yaa Musalman wala Sameer?*"

(Do you belong to Hindu or Muslim Community?) Firoz has a kind of bitterness towards the Hindus, as he had lost his close relatives in the Gujarat riots that took the lives of many Muslims in the state.

Mr. Avadhesh Kumar, a 60-year-old man, comes to the park every weekend from Shalimar Bagh by bus. A feeble old man, Mr. Kumar was always made fun of by the younger group of people in the park. "*Ab is umar mein tumhe jawani chadhi hain*" (At this age, you are looking for sexual relations). He lamented that persons of his age are in a double dilemma, since he was forced to consummate a heterosexual marriage because of the pressure from his parents and relatives but yet had an eagerness to stay with a young guy. His age is the biggest obstacle for him in finding guys in the park, and yet he comes every weekend with the hope of meeting someone.

Jeetu is a 26-year-old jaat Sikh guy, who quite often visits the park for "*masti*" (pleasure), as he puts it. His father does not take care of the household, his step mother illtreats him and his sister runs the family on the salary that she gets as a school teacher. Jeetu's inability to handle the responsibility to run the family, in spite of being the male member, haunts him. This has led him to booze many a times. In an inebriated state, he speaks a lot about his problems. Being muscular and tall, fitting the idea of a "perfect" hunk, he has many choosers in the park. He is more interested in being picked up by the wealthy guys who can pay for his booze, clothes and other accessories. Age is not a matter for him, what matters rather is the class position of the person with whom he roams around. He had been to various fashion shows and parties, where wealthy men take him as an "escort". He claims that he is not gay but does all this for money, and always under the influence of alcohol. What worries him most is that after a certain age, he will not even be looked at by the same wealthy persons who are now paying for his expenses.

All these instances of marking eunuchs in the park as disruptive miscreants, choosing one's partner on the basis of religion, age and class, points out that an attempt is made to produce the social space of the park along patriarchal and narrowly defined parameters of hierarchy. Even though we acknowledge the existence of agency of the body in performing their sexuality in the parks, we cannot turn a blind eye to the multiple hierarchies that still exist in such spaces along the lines of religion, age and class.

The pleasure seeking bodies in the parks, which can be labelled as what Blackman (2008) calls, a 'somatically felt body', has "aliveness or vitality that is literally felt or sensed but cannot necessarily be articulated, reduced to physiological processes or to the effect of social structures" (Blackman 2008, p. 30). The somatically felt body recognizes the potential of the body to think and feel. The key concept to understand the somatically felt body is affect, which refers to a realm of feeling that is not self-contained and separate, but rather enhanced and produced through the relations between the self and other. Such a realm of connectivity blurs the boundaries between the self and the other.

The feeling body enlarges the scope for performativity, according to Butler (1990, 1993), where the individuals do not simply internalize the positions that they are invited to inhabit, in terms of the cultural norms of masculinity and

femininity, but rather struggle with the contradictions. These struggles might produce resistance to gendered norms and might even lead to the formation of what Foucault termed as 'reverse discourses' through which people experience their embodied subjectivities.

According to Latour (2005), a French Sociologist, giving prior importance to the feelings and emotions in understanding the body poses challenges to the valid existence of the 'social' in determining the bodies. He advocates for a complete rejection of the concept of social dimensions of the bodies opening up questions for future research in this area.

10.4 Concluding Remarks

One needs to address the materiality of space as an arena of continuous production in relation to sexed bodies and sexualized identities. Heteropatriarchal understanding of space based on 'masculinist' premises have largely ignored women and queer subjects who may subvert or alter normative spatial practices. The practices of marginalized queer bodies point to alternative understandings of space based on fluid and porous boundaries between such dualities as materiality/representation, inside/outside and private/public. They all focus on strategies that counter hegemonic spatial practices and engage with the crucial question of how to think space differently.

At this juncture, one can think of Michel Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia', which he suggests are spaces that are different from the entire emplacement that they reflect. There is a connection as well as a complex relationship with other sites, few resemblances and more differences; they are connected in such a way as to "suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, reflected, or represented by them" (Foucault 1998, p. 178). It is above all a liminal space, a break from normality. It is in these liminal spaces that liberating trajectories emerge through the negative critique of normative discursive and material practices by attending to alternative subjects, sexualities and spaces that are largely silenced by the latter. Parks offer a space of alternative belonging, which challenges the disciplinary spatial regimes that command bodies and prescribe fixed habits. Hence, heteropatriarchal constructions and regulation of space are always already an incomplete project.

Bodies exist between discourses and institutions and, at the same time, we must remember that desire is also an important dimension in the constitution of bodies. Both Butler and Lefebvre argue that the notion of authentic spaces and sexual identities are fictional and hegemonic conceptions of social reality are tentative. If we take these claims seriously, practise these politics and extend these observations to other public spaces, I propose that everyday life may be filled with possibilities for performative bodies and productive spaces, which would interrogate the boundaries that have been naturalized and consequently would break down their rigidities.

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Part III
Performing (Be)longing

Chapter 11
"Devadasi" Reform in Colonial South India: The Case of *Radhika Santwanam*

Paromita Bose

Abstract "The issue of devadasi reform was embedded in larger public debates about sexuality in colonial India… Non-conjugal female sexuality represented a near-irrevocable moral degeneration, and it was in large part responsibility of middle-class women to reform and neutralize its dangers by way of example" by Soneji (Unfinished gestures. Permanent Black, Ranikhet, pp. 112–113). It is within this discourse of marriage and conjugality that I wish to study *Radhika Santwanam* (The Appeasement of Radhika), an eighteenth century text written by a courtesan Muddupalani, and the public debate that rose in 1911, between Bangalore Nagarathnamma, another devadasi and a ganika, and Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the father of social reform in South India, when Nagarathnamma wanted to republish the text, which had for long been banned from publication and public circulation. In this *sringaraprabhandam*, Muddupalani uses the male tradition of love making and subverts it, thereby making Radha take the lead in satisfying her bodily desires. Female sexuality was never to be explored or talked about beyond the conjugal relationship in Colonial India. The "new emerging woman" in the nationalist imagination was essentially the keeper of the spiritual domain. In the name of an abstract legality, what was put in the imagination was a "thorough patriarchal family order which maintained the illusion of mutual respect and companionship" (Nair). The image of the devadasi was an antithesis to the image of the "new emerging woman". Hence, though there is very little or no evidence that Muddupalani faced any opposition when she wrote the piece, the issue of the republication of the text written by a courtesan, taken up by another devadasi, created a huge debate within the larger discourse of social reform in colonial India.

Keywords Devadasi reform · Radha-Krishna narratives · Female sexuality and morality · Muddupalani · Bangalore Nagarathnamma

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> The issue of devadasi reform was embedded in larger public debates about sexuality in colonial India. National imaginaries and identities, inflected by class and caste anxieties, undoubtedly hinged upon constructions of gender, and specifically on the control and regulation of female sexuality. Reform projects around the devadasis also represented a persistent, middle-class altruism that was justified through the discourse of moral recuperation. Non-conjugal female sexuality represented a near-irrevocable moral degeneration, and it was in large part responsibility of middle-class women to reform and neutralize its dangers by way of example. (Soneji 2012, pp. 112–113)

In the nineteenth century, women and issues related to sexuality—including sati, widow remarriage and age of consent, among others—were referenced largely, in a symptomatic sense, as signs of India's social and moral lack. As Lata Mani argues, women were essentially the ground on which larger concerns about tradition and culture were staged. The social and the aesthetic practices of women from the devadasi community could not be accommodated in the larger debates of colonial modernity. In a debate which ran over more than a 100 years, the only way in which women of this community could gain "respectability" was through the social institution of marriage. The question of "reformation" of the devadasis was crucial for their inclusion into the larger framework of "women's question" which formed an integral part of the nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Radhika Santwanam, a *sringara prabhandam* in Telugu, is considered to have been written in the latter half of the eighteenth century, by the accomplished courtesan, Muddupalani. Muddupalani was a *ganika* in the court of Pratapsimha, who ruled Thanjavur from 1730 to 1763. An accomplished dancer, she was also well versed in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit and had translated Andal's *Tiruppavai.* She wrote under the tutelage of Pratapsimha and all her works were dedicated to Lord Krishna. *Radhika Santwanam* is written in four sections and has 584 verses. The love between Radha and Krishna is itself unconventional, for it was not sanctioned and was also adulterous. The text traces the love between the two and the period of jealousy and the pain that Radha suffers, once Krishna is married to Ila, Radha's niece. Radha and Krishna indulge in making love, Radha is displeased when Krishna pays attention to the other *gopis*, and is unable to reconcile the loss of Krishna to Ila, and hence curses as well as pleads Kamadeva to bring Krishna back into her life. Krishna, though married to Ila now, cannot forget his sexual escapades with Radha and feels that she is more passionate than any other woman ever.

> '… Did you kiss her Krishna?'
> 'Oh no, her lips tasted bitter, Radha!'
> 'Did you clutch her breasts tight?'
> 'No, they were too small!'
> 'Did you relish her thighs?'
> 'Too slim, Radhika!'
> 'Did you embrace her beautiful body?'
> 'She clung like a creeper!'
> 'Oh, how you must have enjoyed sex with her…'
> 'But a new union is never happy!'
> How can one enjoy one so inexperienced? (Muddupalani 2011, p. 43)

Radha's anguish on the loss of the lover to a younger woman and the discovery of the duplicity of Krishna forms an integral part of the narrative. Radha is aware of the fact that Krishna has several wives and tries very hard to keep her jealousy under wraps.

> Lying on her bed, she thought,
> 'One can give away precious jewels',
> One can give up most relationships too,
> Even the most precious thing,
> Her own life,
> Can a woman give up.
> But giving away one's own lover to another?
> Which woman would do that? (Muddupalani 2011, p. 34)

Radha curses Kamadeva once she is unable to bear this separation. She sends her pet parrot to Krishna, only to find out that he is passionately in love with his new wife. "From early childhood, Ila had been jealous of the proximity and hold Radha exercised over Krishna but, very cleverly, had never revealed her feelings. Overhearing a conversation between Radha and Madhava, where Krishna dismisses her as being 'a novice', Ila bides her time. After the wedding, she uses every trick in the book to make her new husband happy, to the extent that Krishna acknowledges her as his Queen of Love, agreeing in a moment of weakness to even leave Radha." (Muddupalani 2011, p. 82). Her jealousy, anger and sadness know no bounds now. She curses herself for causing their union and for having taught Ila the art of seduction. The fact that Krishna is happy with Ila makes her even more "pathetic".

However, Krishna had spotted the pet parrot and was immediately reminded of Radha and he came to Vrindavan seeking her on his chariot. Krishna is filled with remorse for having ignored and forgotten her. He remembers all the wonderful moments that they had spent together, all the promises that he had made to her, of never forsaking her. "Many have I seen, Many have I talked to, Many have I made love to, But she, Her style, her beauty, her talent are exceptional. The ecstasy of our union, I have felt with no other, She, the only deserving one." (Muddupalani 2011, pp. 109–110). Muddupalani writes several verses describing what Krishna feels as he waits for Radha to arrive in Vrindavan, his dichotomy, the intense love and longing that he has for Radha, the sadness of having left her and thereby losing out on several precious moments of love. He is also convinced of the fact that the moment his arrival is announced, she would come rushing to him. But the reconciliation does not happen that soon. She refuses to meet him and he is kept off bounds by the maidens who guard Radha. "Pity me. Forgive me. Take me into your arms. Make me feel good. Befriend me. Respect my feelings. Show me love. Fill me with happiness. Forget your anger. I cannot bear it! I beg of you Radhika!" (Muddupalani 2011, p. 133). Krishna reminds Radha about how they had agreed that losing a loved one was something they would not even wish for their enemies, how they criticized couples who lived apart and how they made love endlessly. With these words, as he is about to take leave, Radha finally appears in front of

him, curses him and tells him that she has suffered alone, while he was passionately making love to Ila and hence, he should just leave, as it is too late and that both she and Krishna and their relationship have undergone a change. Hearing all this, Krishna falls at the feet of Radha asking for forgiveness and Radha in return kicks him. He rises up calm and composed and refuses to leave. Radha finally gives in and they embrace each other and make love until they are exhausted.

In *Radhika Santwanam*, Muddupalani traces her poetic lineage through her grandmother and her aunt who were both well-known poets. The main *rasa* evoked in the text is that of *sringara*. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha in their essay, "Empire, Nation and the Literary Text" suggest,

> There is little evidence to suggest that Muddupalani's work was attacked or dismissed in her own times. The autobiographical prologue conventional in poetic works of this kind indicates that she was a well-known poet and scholar, also accomplished in music and dance, and that her work was admired in the courtly circles of her times. Muddupalani records with pride that though it was not customary for male poets to dedicate their works to a female mentor, several works had been dedicated to her. She writes of her beauty and her learning with the directness and self-confidence of one who has never been required to be apologetic or coy and records instances when she expressed her appreciation of the work of other artists with substantial gifts. (1995, p. 204)

The text problematizes the concept of love and love making. So far seen as a domain of the male, where men take the lead, and the male desires need to be gratified, Muddupalani proposes an alternative, whereby an "adulterous" woman seeks sexual gratification in a non-sanctioned relationship. Tharu and Lalitha mention,

> But what must have drawn Nagarathnamma to her work, and what continues to strike us today, is Muddupalani's subversion of the received form. Conventionally in such literature the man is the lover, the woman the loved one. Krishna woos and makes love to Radha. Sushil Kumar De in his history of the Vaishnava faith points out that the *gopis* are always represented as women without desire. Radha is depicted as waiting for Krishna and even longing for him, but the narrative has as its focus his pleasure. Not so in *Radhika Santwanam* where the woman's sensuality is central. She takes the initiative and it is her satisfaction or pleasure that provides the poetic resolution. With warmth unmatched in the later poetry Muddupalani celebrates a young girl's coming of age and describes her first experience of sex. In another section Radha, who is represented as a woman in her prime, instructs her niece Iladevi in the art and joy of love. She encourages the younger woman to express her desire and recognize and place value on her pleasure. (1995, p. 206)

The "legitimization" of desire and a woman's right to her body and mode of expression is what sets *Radhika Santwanam* apart from other texts written by women. These also are the reasons why this text was banned, both from publication and circulation, till 1952. I look at Muddupalani's text *Radhika Santwanam*, as a product of what Elaine Showalter calls the 'female' phase of writing in her *A Literature of Their Own*, where women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. Muddupalani uses the male tradition of love making and subverts it, thereby making Radha take the lead in satisfying her bodily desires. Radha is aware of her body and her sexual needs. She does not shy away from taking

the first step towards sexual gratification, thereby bending gender roles which had so long been posited. Radha is portrayed as having desires in the text unlike the others which show her waiting in anticipation for Krishna to arrive. Muddupalani provides Radha with the agency to her contentment, thereby refiguring female sexuality in the classic Radha-Krishna relationship. Much as Showalter suggests, Muddupalani calls for women's access to language so that they can develop a cultural model of their own writing to express and interpret women's experiences distinctly and authentically.

The text, though considered a masterpiece in terms of literary value, and the author, who was credited to have used novel forms like the *saptapadam* or the seven line verse form, have been effectively relegated to the margins of cultural history and conveniently excluded from the literary canon. When Bangalore Nagarathnamma wanted to republish *Radhika Santwanam* in 1911, she faced a lot of opposition. She was clearly dissatisfied with the versions in circulation, which were, as she claimed, a diluted version and had done away with "objectionable" verses. Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the father of social reform in South India, criticized this move, calling Muddupalani an adulteress. He was also of the opinion the *sringara rasa* was used as a trope to fill the poem with "crude description of sex". Nagarathnamma opposed this vehemently, but the consequence was not to her liking. As Tharu and Lalitha mention, Goteti Kanakaraju Pantulu, the government translator, translated the sections he considered objectionable, and the British Government was convinced that the book was obscene and not morally upright. The police commissioner Cunningham seized all the copies of the book and charged Nagarathnamma's publishers. The press and the bookshop selling the book were raided and almost all copies were removed from circulation by 1927. In spite of all the petitions filed, the book was republished only in 1952. And this happened clearly as a response to the fact that the British had left India and the books which had been banned by them, owing to the fact that they were immoral, had to be brought back into circulation and not as a fact that this piece of Telugu literature worth pursuing. The text was still dismissed as being obscene and it was difficult to fit the text within the discourse of the new nation that had been formed.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India was grappling with the notions of morality and conduct as was taught to them by the British. "The greatest difficulty the government suffers in its endeavours to govern well, springs from the immorality and ignorance of the mass of the people… particularly their ignorance of the spirit, principles and system of the British Government", one administrator reported.

> Educators and administrators were both convinced that Indian literature contained neither the moral nor mental cultivation that was so essential if good government was to be desired and appreciated…. Having declared that no vernacular literature existed which would be adequate to this task, or worthy therefore of the name of literature, the government also took the responsibility of promoting the development of suitable literatures in the regional languages. (Tharu and Lalitha 1995, p. 209)

Amidst such notions of morality and social conduct, the western educated Indian elite took it upon themselves to reform the nation and the people of the

nation. The early and the mid nineteenth century had concerns for the social position for women and the centre of the ideological matrix of nationalism. However, as the nationalist movement gained force, the importance of the "women's question" began to diminish. Partha Chatterjee, in his essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question", mentions that Sumit Sarkar observes that the western educated male had to allow certain emancipation to the wife, to avoid being socially ostracized, but it was in no way an ideological preference. Chatterjee, however, differs from Sarkar in pointing out that nationalism imagined women who "must not lose their essential spiritual (i.e. feminine) virtues; they must not become essentially westernized" (1994, p. 243) and "the domain where the new idea of womanhood was sought to be actualized was the home" (1994, p. 250). As Sumanta Banerjee mentions, "The role of woman—like literature and past history—in colonial society was also defined by drawing selectively from the indigenous tradition (the image of the devoted wife) as well as from the contemporary conservative British attempts to reconstruct woman as a refined domestic housewife upholding the moral worth of the family—an effort in which Kumkum Sangari discovers 'a broad dialect between reform and preservation'." (1992, p. 1475). Janaki Nair in her essay "The Devadasi, Dharma and the State", also echoes similar observations: "What was put in its place, both in the nationalist imagination and in bureaucratic practice, in the name of a new abstract legality, was a more thoroughly patriarchal family order which maintained the illusion of mutual respect and companionship." (1994, p. 3165). Female sexuality was never to be explored or talked about beyond the conjugal relationship. The conjugal ideal is incessantly upheld in the nation's multiple imaginaries. Citizenship in its legal totality seemed unattainable for many devadasis, as it was only attainable through the social institution of marriage. The devadasis could not be accommodated as citizens by the modern nation state on account of their non-conjugal sexuality. Women like Bangalore Nagarathnamma and Muddupalani, did not fit into this paradigm of the "new woman" that was being constructed within the nationalist framework, where the new woman represented the 'spiritual' ethos of the nation, the 'home' and as 'mothers' were supposed to, as Muthulakshmi Reddy exhorts in 1932, "Make the future of your children, bright, happy and glorious and make them respectable and useful citizens" (quoted in Soneji 2012, p. 19), and not much beyond that (Tharu, Susie and K. Lalitha 1993).

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Chapter 12
Gender and Performance: The Reinvention of Mohiniyattam in Early Twentieth-Century Kerala

K.R. Kavya Krishna

Abstract This article is an attempt to look at the practices and discourses of gendering the body within the site of a particular dance form—Mohiniyattam. Mohiniyattam is considered to be the classical dance form of women of Kerala. It is understood as a 'feminine' or *lasya* style of dance, based on its use of body movements. Currently, Mohiniyattam is being represented as the heightened version of the ideal Kerala/Malayalee woman's identity and femininity through tourism advertisements, films and other popular representations. This article traces the process of gendering which had gone into the reinvention of Mohiniyattam in the 1930s. It tries to see whether the reinvention of Mohiniyattam was a reimagining and refashioning of the Malayalee woman's identity. It also reads how training the body for a dance form overlaps with instructions for disciplining the female body to be ideally feminine. It is interesting to see how Mohiniyattam produces, defines and sustains a gender ideal for a regional feminine identity through bodily practices. The effort is to see how the dancer's body and her movements are constructed, and how it spills over into the shaping of female bodies within a particular culture and history.

Keywords Mohiniyattam · Invention of Tradition · Constructed femininity · Vallathol Narayana Menon · Performativity · Dance · Gender

Mohiniyattam is recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi of India as the 'classical' dance form of the women of Kerala. It is considered as a *lasya*/feminine style of dance based on its style of body movements. At present Mohiniyattam is represented as the heightened ideal of the Malayalee/Kerala woman and her femininity through tourism advertisements and other popular media representations. To

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understand the hegemonic and symbolic function of Mohiniyattam (or its images) in relation to regional women's identity, one has to re-read the history of 'reinvention' of Mohiniyattam as the 'classical' dance form of Malayalee women. For such a reading, dance has to be looked upon not just as an art form but as a 'bodily' text which can enhance our understanding of "how social identities are signaled, formed and negotiated through bodily movements" (Desmond 1997, p. 29).

Invention of 'traditions' in South Indian dance/music during the nationalist period happened through continuous negotiations among agents of diverse caste, class and gender affiliations with varying degree of power and authority (Peterson and Soneji 2008, p. 4). Mohiniyattam was 'reinvented' as a classical dance form from its demised state in the 1930s by the nationalist poet Vallathol Narayana Menon at Kerala Kalamandalam. 1930s was the period of the Indian Nationalist Movement and the Social Reform Movements in Kerala. This article places the 'reinvention' within its socio-political and cultural context and tries to argue out that the 'reinvention' of Mohiniyattam was also a refashioning of the Malayalee/Kerala woman's identity and her gendered attributes. It tries to see the discussions and debates around obscenity, vulgarity, ideal femininity, 'good' and 'bad' woman, and public and private space, which have gone into the process of the 'reinvention' of Mohiniyattam. It also tries to see, through these processes, women belonging to which class and caste get idealized or marginalized.

Judith Butler's idea of 'gender performativity' is a good entry point to think about the relation between dance and gender. Butler in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) describes gender not only as something socially constructed but also as 'performatively' constituted. Drawing from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), where he challenges 'the doctrine of internalization' (which says that subjects are formed by internalizing disciplinary structures) and replaces it with the 'model of inscription', Butler says that "the law is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body" (1990, p. 135). Butler calls it "the corporeal stylization of gender" (1990, p. 135). She tries to explore how the reiterated or repeated act of gender produces a kind of static or normal view of gender which in turn obscures the contradictions of gender act. She says that one becomes gendered over time by repeatedly performing 'acts' and there is no pre-given or abiding gendered body or identity. Here, Butler describes performing gender as legitimizing norms, as making explicit the social norms through repeatedly performing them. Classical dance forms like Mohiniyattam get their significance mainly through repetition. A good classical performer is supposed to reproduce or repeat the essential qualities and specialties of the art form. This repetition, especially with the claim that it represents the ideal femininity of the 'decent' women of the State of its origin, gets sedimented over time and produces the hegemonic feminine ideal which in turn marginalizes other femininities.

The historical and contemporary renditions of Mohiniyattam can be used as an interesting terrain to study the relation between dance and gender with respect to the processes of engendering in a particular region. I feel that there is an enforced

and constructed femininity at operation in the feminine or *lasya* style of Mohiniyattam which is performed only by women. Enforced/constructed[1] femininity means a conscious way of creating femininity through disciplining the use of the body in a particular style and speed. Mohiniyattam is said to follow the '*kaisikivritti*' style mentioned in *Natyasastra*[2] which is feminine as opposed to the '*tandava*' style which is masculine (Radhika 2004, p. 39). It is considered as feminine as opposed to the other major classical dance drama form of Kerala, Kathakali, which is predominantly performed by men. Even though the terms '*lasya*' and '*tandava*' are not inherent markers of gender, they are often associated with what is considered as archetypes of gender ideal. In the case of this dance form, the question of gender starts with the very title 'Mohiniyattam'. The word Mohiniyattam is composed of two parts, the Sanskrit word '*Mohini*' and the Malayalam word '*Aattam*'. '*Mohini*' means a fascinating woman and is related to the root word '*mohana*' which means delusion, temptation, seduction and a magical charm to bewilder an enemy (Jones 1973). All of these meanings can be traced in the different stories about *Mohini* in the Hindu mythologies.[3] The Malayalam word '*Aattam*' means dance or rhythmic movement of the body. It is described as the dance of '*Mohini*', the enchantress. In most books, websites, documentaries, etc., the title Mohiniyattam appears with a subtitle 'the dance of the enchantress'. While ancient texts consider it as the dance of 'celestial' women, contemporary dance scholars explain it as a dance by 'beautiful' women. The title explains two things: it is supposed to be a dance performed by a 'fascinating' woman and it has the ability to enchant the audience. The striking features of Mohiniyattam for a first time viewer will be its slow, circular and gentle body movements sensuous expressions using the eye, the costume made of off-white 'Kerala Sari' with golden borders and 'traditional' Kerala style gold jewellery. The songs used for

[1]I am using the word 'enforced' in the sense of 'to compel to behave in a certain way'. By enforced femininity I mean a conscious way of constructing a particular effect of femininity. In the case of Mohiniyattam I feel that the body training of the dancer and the rules and regulations prescribed for the dance form focus mainly on constructing and sustaining a particular kind of feminine ideal. Justine A Lemos in her website mentions about her forthcoming book project *Transforming Lasya: The Woman Dance Cultures in Kerala*, were she says that Mohiniyattam forms a "(self-enforced) femininity" for the dancers of Kerala (http://www.justinelemos.com).

[2]*Natyasastra* is an ancient treatise on the performing arts, encompassing theatre, dance and music in India, supposedly written by Sage Bharata during the period between 200 BC and 200 AD in classical India. It is considered as the base text for all Indian art forms.

[3]The Hindu religious text *Bhagavata* narrates the story of the churning of the ocean by *Devas* (gods) and *Asuras* (demons) to secure *Amrita* (nectar). During this process god Vishnu took the form of Mohini, an enchantingly beautiful young woman with bewitching glances and seductive smiles to charm the *asuras*. Thus without even a protest from *asuras*, the *devas* secured all of the nectar for themselves. Another story is that of king Rugmangada, in which Brahma (the creator) sent a beautiful young woman called Mohini to test the king's devotion. Mohini is usually shown in temple sculptures and paintings as a beautiful young woman with her garments seductively clinging to her hips but on the point of falling away and sometimes with male admirers clustered about and gazing in fascination at the sensuous young lady.

Mohiniyattam are mainly *Sringara Padams* (love lyrics)[4] in Malayalam and/or *Manipravalam* (a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam) and the prominent *bhava*/expression in Mohiniyattam is *Sringara* (erotic love).

Mohiniyattam claims itself to be an ideal feminine dance form based on its slow, soft and gentle body movements and through the use of selected expressions like *sringara* (erotic love), *vatsalya* (fondness to children), *viraha* (separation), *bhakti* (devotion), etc. (Radhika 2004; Amma 1992). The Mohiniyattam dancer is not supposed to use harsh expressions like *raudra*/anger in extreme ways or move her body harshly or forcefully in a 'masculine' way. The general instruction which Kalamandalam Kalyanikutti Amma, who is known as the 'mother of Mohiniyattam', gives to the Mohiniyattam dancers is that "the body movements of the Mohiniyattam dancer should be like the soft movements of the tender paddy leaves in soft breeze" (Amma 1992, p. 191). Thus it suggests two attributes for the ideal Malayalee femininity which are gentle/soft/slow body movements and consciously selected use of emotional expressions. Several pioneering Mohiniyattam dancers whom I interviewed commented on the 'restricted' body movements in Mohiniyattam in association with the historical norms of female behaviour, relating it to female 'shyness' and to the desired and the socially/culturally 'permitted' body language of 'decent' and 'aristocratic' women in contemporary and historical Kerala.[5] Kalamandalam Satyabhama, a student of Mohiniyattam at Kerala Kalamandalam at its initial stage who later became an exponent in the field and retired as the Head of the Department of Mohiniyattam of the same institute, explained in a personal interview about how she overcame the difficulty of choreographing a Padam where the heroine was in absolute anger with the hero. She said, as severe anger is not allowed within the techniques of Mohiniyattam, she made the heroine reconcile with the hero after the first part of the song so that her words were not expressions of her anger but her complaints out of love. On enquiring more about why she made such a decision she answered, "Isn't that the way a woman is supposed to behave with her husband in our culture? So the same is applicable to the Mohiniyattam heroine too". To the question about the slow pace and *lasya* style of Mohiniyattam, she replied thus, "Don't we Kerala woman have a *tharavaditham* (*tharavadu* refers to the big joint family households of aristocratic and elite upper caste Nair families; *tharavaditham* means 'good' qualities associated with belonging to a *tharavadu*) there in our body language, in our dressing and style of walking? Are 'family women' supposed to walk like some street girls? Therefore aristocracy of the Kerala women should be there in our dance too. Mohiniyattam is steeped in the culture of the land from which it emerged. And that is why it is slow and graceful".

[4]'Padams' are a genre of lyrical songs within the Indian classical music tradition used especially for dancing and they usually depict the love and longing of the heroine.

[5]Based on the interviews I conducted with Kalamandalam Satyabhama (in 2010 December) and with other teachers and BA and MA students of Mohiniyattam at Kalamandalam from 2010 to 2013.

When the Mohiniyattam teachers and students describe the particular style of body movement as representing the culture of the 'good' woman of Kerala and when it becomes the icon of Kerala culture in tourism advertisements, films and other popular representations, Mohiniyattam becomes something more than just a performing art form. It becomes a cultural symbol and a heightened version of the ideal Malayalee/Kerala woman. Here lies the need to look at the history and the present of Mohiniyattam, not only as a performing art form but as a site of gender performance.

The period of reinvention of Mohiniyattam, which is the 1930s and 1940s, was also the period of the Indian Nationalist Movement for freedom and specifically in Kerala it was the period of community-based social reforms. As J. Devika puts it, "the shaping of ideally gendered individuals within the boundaries of the projected caste-based modern communities of the future was high upon the early twentieth century reformist agendas in Malayalee society… The qualities one possessed were seen to be strongly determined by the sexual endowments of the particular body, its maleness or femaleness. Thus ideally attaining modern individuality would automatically mean that one would be inserted into an idealized 'womanly' or 'manly' subjectivity, in the distinct spheres of the domestic and the public." (2005a, p. 462). It is in this historical and political background that Mohiniyattam gets reinvented.

The 'reinvention' of Mohiniyattam as the 'classical' dance of Malayalee/Kerala women happened in Kerala Kalamandalam under the initiative of the nationalist Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878–1958). In 1930, Vallathol Narayana Menon, a pioneer poet and nationalist of Kerala, started an institution for training of performing arts in Kerala named 'Kerala Kalamandalam' in Thrissur (Namboothiripad 1990). Kerala Kalamandalam (here after referred to as Kalamandalam), which is at present a deemed university for arts, was from its beginning the premier institute for training in indigenous art forms. The beginning of Kalamandalam was a historical shift in the case of patronage, performance, reception and transmission of performing arts. The art forms which were under royal and upper caste patronage and performed in private spaces were brought into the public and presumably secular spaces through the formation of Kalamandalam. According to Peterson and Soneji (2008) the recognition of particular forms of indigenous art forms as 'classical' traditions formed a salient part of South Asian negotiations with modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They point out that in India, the invention of 'classical' art forms lies in the encounter during the colonial period between the pre-colonial order and colonial and national culture. Further, the pursuit of the 'classical' as an idea was not solely an aesthetic one, but it had multiple connotations of antiquity, lineage, textual rigour and above all, it involved the enthusiasm to resonate the essential 'spirituality' of India's tradition. The invention of a 'classical tradition' is not only to be seen as a quest for 'authenticity' and validation but also as the play of power and the politics of representation. The case of reinvention of *Sadir* as Bharatanatyam is the most studied example of the play of Nationalist politics and

its concern over Indian spirituality and the place of woman in the new nation (examples of such studies are Srinivasan 1983, 1985; Soneji 2010). Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and its Fragments* (1995) points out that the process of authenticating tradition is also marked by demarcating boundaries such as classical/folk and public/private. Imagined traditions are thus created and function as points of reference for locating religious/caste and gender identities, and forms of class politics. Cultural performance thus becomes the practice of envisioning and constructing pasts that bear implications for our understanding of the politics of gender and caste in modern times. Thus, the 'reinvention of a tradition'[6] of Mohiniyattam and the beginning of Kalamandalam can be read as Kerala's negotiations with modernity through performing arts which will serve as a site that can illuminate the politics of gender and caste.

Vallathol's enthusiasm to reinvent, reform and sustain Mohiniyattam which was almost in a state of demise made him start a girl's school in Kalamadalam in 1933 to teach Mohiniyattam. But he found it a near to impossible task to find a teacher and a student as the very few women who knew Mohiniyattam refused to openly admit that they knew it, as Mohiniyattam was considered to be a degraded and immoral art form by the newly educated middle class. Vallathol insisted that he wanted a Nair girl from an aristocratic family to become the first student of Mohiniyattam. He believed that only when upper caste girls from 'good' families study and perform it, would Mohiniyattam be able to sustain itself as an art form; otherwise, he feared, it might again go extinct in future. With great recommendation, he got O. Kalyani Amma as the first teacher and Thankamani, a girl from a 'good' Nair family, as the first student (Amma 1992, p. 64). When Vallathol saw O. Kalyani Amma perform, he felt that there were certain obscenities and vulgarities in some body movements, lyrics and certain stage practices of Mohiniyattam. It is said that Vallathol made the dancer aware of them and recommended certain changes including additions and omissions and made it cleansed of the 'obscenities and vulgarities' so that it could be taught in a public institute like Kalamandalam to 'good' family girls.

The changes that Vallathol recommended are the following (as mentioned in Amma 1992, p. 65). Vallathol recommended stopping the practice of the male teacher going behind the dancer singing the song and giving the rhythm. He changed the accompanying instruments in accordance with the *Karnatic*/South Indian Classical music concert style. He introduced the percussion instrument *Mridanga* and the western string instrument Violin which are used for classical concerts along with *Idakka* which is a typical percussion instrument of Kerala. The accompanying artists and the teacher were given a place on the side of the stage

[6]E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O Ranger in their 1983 book *The Invention of Tradition* use the term 'Invented Tradition'. They argue that 'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.

instead of them standing behind the dancer. Earlier, the accompanying artists would stand behind or beside the dancer. He insisted on removing the items and songs of the dance which he felt were obscene. Dance items and the literature that appeared to be related to folk performances or lewd and ribald items were removed from the repertoire. The items removed include the *Mukkutti* (Nose Ring) Song and the segment *Chandanam Chartal* (Sandal Wood Paste Smearing). In the performance of the *Mukkutti* song (*Mukkutti Kanalaye, Mukkutti Kandirkala, Eduthenennal Koduthidayya*—Nose ring is missing, have you found it anywhere, if you have got it, please give it back), the dancer goes amidst the audience searching for the nose ring which is supposedly missing (Amma 1992, p. 65). In the *Chandanam Chartal* segment the dancer goes to the audience and smears sandal wood paste on the forehead of selected audience (Radhika 2004, p. 28). These segments were considered as 'vulgar dance'. The removed items were those that brought the dancer in direct contact with the audience. Similarly overt sexual allusions in songs were interpreted as the expression of spirituality in erotic terms. Vallathol insisted on introducing some more hand gestures based on the ancient text of dance gestures *Hasthalakshana Deepika.*[7] But he was particular that no basic change should happen to the *lasya* style of Mohiniyattam which is based on *kaisikivritti* style mentioned in *Natyasastra.* He insisted that the changes in future should not destroy the feminine style of the dance form which is its essence. He, in consultation with others, also suggested improvisations in dress code and hair style to make it look 'authentically Keralite'. A close reading makes it clear that the focus of the improvisation done by Vallathol and his contemporaries to Mohiniyattam in Kalamandalam was aimed at cleansing the dance form of 'obscenity' and 'vulgarity' and to make it classical as well as modern by setting certain standards. Another aim was to avoid any physical proximity of the dancer with the teacher, accompanying artists and the audience. He was also trying to make claims about a spiritual tradition for the dance form. One can see that certain caste based notions of Malayalee femininity was being reinforced as the essence of Mohiniyattam through the costume and body behaviour of the dancer. He emphasized the point that it should be a dance form which can be performed by 'good' girls from decent families. So the changes reflect the preferred and allowed body behaviour of a family girl in 'the public', as by that time dance had started to be performed in 'public spaces' and not just inside the ritual spaces of temples or 'private spaces' of courts or households.

This discussion on reinvention will be complete only if we look at the debates around it, and the opposition Vallathol had to face for his decision to start teaching Mohiniyattam in Kalamandalam. In 1938, Vallathol received an order from the

[7]*Hastha Lakshana Deepika*, authored by an anonymous scholar, is considered as a treasure house of information on hand gestures for dance. It describes 548 *hasta*/hand gestures for dance.

Cochin State[8] to stop teaching Mohiniyattam in Kalamandalam (Amma 1992, p. 64). Vallathol gave an explanation letter stating that he has cleansed Mohiniyattam of all its obscenities and is not teaching it in its earlier form, and regained permission to teach it. In this context, it is interesting to note the discussions and cartoons that came up in the satirical magazine *Viswaroopam* edited by M.R. Nair (1903–1944) (also known as Sanjayan) which makes fun of Vallathol's decision to teach Mohiniyattam in Kalamandalam. In the speech Vallathol made in Kalamandalam explaining his intention to continue teaching Mohiniyattam in Kalamandalam he said, "If god appears in front of me with art in one hand and morality in the other hand and ask what I want, I will choose art" (quoted in Nair 1940, p. 150). As a response to this speech and Vallathol's decision, Nair wrote in the *Viswaroopam* magazine:

> Earlier the question was whether art is for the sake of art or for life. But with the Cochin state's approval to teach Mohiniyattam and after Vallathol's speech, a new question has emerged: whether art is for prostitution? The great poet has become a person who praises devadasi dance which was considered as immoral by many great Indians and which is banned in temples of Cochin… One shouldn't uproot the sapling of rice to manure the rose plant of art… if such a thing is being done, even if it is by a great poet, we should cut off that hand (Nair 1986, pp. 506–507).[9]

There also came a cartoon which satirized Vallathol's reinvention of Mohiniyattam, with a subtitle that "the great poet has forgotten to see the sexual monster behind each devadasi (temple dancer) because of his over enthusiasm towards arts" (Nair 1940, p. 150). This response was not just an independent fear about teaching Mohiniyattam and women studying and giving public performance. To further understand the anxiety about women coming into public spaces and the general impatience about the presence of the new class of educated women in public spaces, one has to read the other cartoons which came in the same magazine, that can be done elsewhere. At the same time there was another group of middle class men who lamented that modern women were not showing interest in indigenous art forms like Mohiniyattam which represented the true culture of the land. They blamed the newly educated women who were more fascinated with western ways of music, dance and life style (Devika 2005b, p. 39).[10] All these discussions

[8]The state of Kerala was officially formed on 1 November 1956 by the States Reorganization Act of the Indian government by combining Malayalam speaking regions, namely Malabar of the Madras State, and the former princely states of Cochin and Travancore. In 1938, Kalamandalam, located in Thrissur, was situated within the geographical limits of the princely Cochin State.

[9]All the translations from Malayalam sources in this article are done by the researcher herself.

[10]C.P Kalyaniyamma in the article "Anukaranabhramam" in the women's Journal *Lakshmibhayi* (March–April 1915) talks about an article by P Raman Menon B.A. titled "The Craze for Imitation" where he says that women of Kerala, due to the craze for western dance and music, are ignoring indigenous songs and dances like Thiruvathira and Mohiniyattam (Devika 2005a, p. 39).

show the different discourses regarding the place and position of the woman with the advent of modernity and attempts to formulate a regional gender identity.

The present dress code and costume of Mohiniyattam, which is the off-white sari and blouse with thick golden border and the traditional Kerala style gold jewellery, have evolved as a result of many reforms which happened from 1930s to the present. The 1990s saw the urge to make it 'essentially Keralite' and the hairstyle and dress have been further stylized based on paintings of Nair women by Raja Ravi Varma.[11] It is clear that the changes in the dress and costume of Mohiniyattam made it look more like an upper caste woman's art form. The hegemonic appropriation of dressing style can be understood further only by placing it within the history of dress reform and changing connotations of dress across times. In Travancore, struggles were carried out by lower caste women for the right to dress and to wear or stop wearing caste specific ornaments. The privilege of wearing the so called Kerala Sari and use of gold ornaments was available only for upper caste women.[12] Another interesting fact is that until the early twentieth century, dancers were the only women who used blouse or jacket along with *sari/set mundu*, as covering the breast was a sign of immodesty at that time. The women who used blouses were derogatorily called as '*attakari*'/dancer (Devika 2007, p. 277). Covering the breast using a blouse was considered as an act to incite desire and attraction like the very act of dancing. By the 1930s, exposing the breast had become a shameful act instead. The evolution of changing meanings of dress as a signifier in relation to the body and sense of modesty needs further study which can be done elsewhere later.

The more recent debate on cinematic dance in Kerala shows the still pertinent questions on dance in relation to high/low art, notions of public performance and morality, caste/gender etc. In 2011, the Kerala Government Education Department issued a special circular to ban the teaching and performance of cinematic dances by school children as they are 'immoral' and also because they may cause

[11]Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906) was an Indian painter from the princely state of Travancore. His paintings are considered to be the best examples of the fusion of Indian traditions with the techniques of European academic art. Varma is most remembered for his paintings of beautiful sari-clad women, who were portrayed as very graceful.

[12]Breast cloth struggle happened in nineteenth century south Travancore where women who belonged to the Channar caste protested for equal right to wear the blouse. Only upper caste women were allowed to cover their breasts in Travancore. The Kallu Mala Samaram/Stone Necklace agitation was a movement by lower caste Pulaya women in 1915 at Kollam, Kerala (erst while Travancore) where they asserted their right to choose to wear or not to wear certain ornaments. Pulaya women wear not allowed to wear gold or other precious metals. They were allowed only to wear heavy stone necklaces. They threw away the stone ornaments during this agitation.

exploitation of the children.[13] The ban of course places a classical dance like Mohiniyattam as high art and cinematic dance as low and immoral. And at the same time, it easily forgets the (sub)nationalist, patriarchal and elite ideologies which were at play in the history of the making of the 'classical' art form itself. Historically, dance and the women who performed it were always under the surveillance of colonial or postcolonial authorities and other social, cultural and political institutions in India. The abolitionist and reform debates around *Devadasi* dance in the late nineteenth century,[14] the ban on *Lavani* folk dance performance in the 1940s (Rege 1995)[15] and the ban on Bar Dance in 2005 (Kotiswaran 2010)[16] are instances.

Mohiniyattam, or any classical dance form of India for that matter, also bears religious connotations. 'Classical' dance forms many a times serve the pedagogic function of disciplining and fashioning bodies. Even though we claim 'classical dances' as secular art forms of a State, whether they are indeed secular and democratic is a question which has to be explored further. The emergence of the cinematic dance form has given renewed entry to lower caste and class people into the realm of public dance performance. The issues of caste and gender have prevented many sections of society from learning or practising the so-called 'classical' dance forms like Kathakali or Mohiniyattam. The ban on cinematic dance shows that the parameters of judging movement behaviour in dance as 'good' or 'bad' and the fear that the morality of the dance and the dancer pollute the regional 'culture' remain more or less the same in contemporary Kerala. Dance continues to be a contentious site where discourses about gender, body, sexuality, obscenity, morality and culture meet and mingle.

[13]On August 1, 2011, A.P.M. Mohammad Hanish, Director of Public Instructions of Kerala issued ban on cinematic dance being taught or performed in Schools of Kerala citing the reason that it exploits children.

[14]The term 'Devadasi' literally means 'female slave of God'; practically they were women who were dedicated to the temple for a life time as ritualistic dancers, often subjected to sexual exploitation by the priestly class. In nineteenth century India, nationalism and the simultaneous exuberance for the construction of a national identity led to social movements relating to the Devadasi. These social movements were of two categories: reformists/abolitionists and revivalists. The existing studies on classical dance in India have revolved mainly around the reformists/abolitionists and revivalists debates.

[15]Lavani is a folk dance form, performed by women of the Maharashtra state of India.

[16]'Bar Dance', as the term is used in India, refers to dancing by 'modestly' dressed women in bars as an adult entertainment in front of a male audience in exchange of money. In 1995, the Maharashtra state ordered a ban on bar dance. The ban got lifted in July 2013.

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Chapter 13
Wayward Women, Wicked Singing

Madhumeeta Sinha

Abstract The history of "woman's question" goes back to the colonial period of India, and was an important aspect of the social reform movement of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. At the heart of the debates on reform was the effort to create a domestic space infused with feminine purity which would define a good and a bad woman. Simultaneously, there was also a broadening of the term "prostitution", not just to refer to sexual favours in exchange for financial benefits, but to use it as a metaphor for moral corruption. Consequently, the notion of the ideal woman was positioned in contrast to the public woman—the professional dancing/singing woman. The woman became the target of reform and lost her status as artist. In this article, I analyse two documentary films by Saba Dewan *The Other Song* (2009) and *Delhi Mumbai Delhi* (2006) as examples of a contemporary feminist project of historical recovery. Both these films are interesting because they recast singing/dancing, which had been rendered socially and legally untenable, in a new light.

Keywords Thumri · Courtesan culture · Bar dancers · Sanitization of Indian classical music · Saba Dewan

13.1 Introduction

> Deep down in the roots of human unconscious, music holds a key position in regulating orderly expression of the primeval emotional forces…Simple people living in the village have simple music and have simple songs…the more developed, who read and write will have complex feelings and will require a more complex vehicle to express it.
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> —Dr. B.V. Keskar, Indian Minister Information and Broadcasting (1950–1962)

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This article examines two instances of female singing/dancing practices that have been regarded as sinful and corrupt—even as an "evil" in need of urgent eradication—by influential proponents of modern Indian culture, and subjected to stringent policing and censorship by the postcolonial state in India. The first of these relates to the suggestive love songs (*thumris*) of the courtesans which were a popular and widely appreciated component of Hindustani classical music until they became an unwitting casualty of hegemonic efforts to cleanse and gentrify Indian national culture since the 1930s; the second relates to the performances of the young "bar-dancers" whose work was at the centre of a bitter controversy and legal action in 2004–2005 in the city of Mumbai. Although these two instances of female performers being targeted by custodians of Indian culture and public morality are separated by over 70 years, the debates around them reveal significant discursive continuities—as well as discontinuities—and examining them together sheds new light on the cultural politics of gender and art practice in India.

I find it convenient to organize my discussion around two pertinent documentary films by Saba Dewan: *Delhi Mumbai Delhi* (2006), which provides an intimate view of the difficulties and hopes that make up the life of a young girl from Delhi who dances at the beer-bars of Mumbai to earn a living for herself and her family, and is described by Dewan as a film that is "for the freedom of working class women. Granted we have limited choices, but at least they have to be available" (*The Hindu* 2006); and *The Other Song* (2009), which is the story of the filmmaker's search for a lost love song by Rasoolan Bai (1902–1974), a well-known courtesan and *thumri* singer from Varanasi, opening up "a complex universe of hidden traditions, forbidden memories, banished histories, of the nation-building project, and a whole lot of extraordinary women musicians who were the carriers of a grand musical legacy". (Ganesh 2009). Both films are exercises in feminist historical exploration, revealing through the reconstruction of the lives of female performers the extent to which both tradition and modernity in India have been assembled through initiatives of nationalist patriarchy during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Interestingly, this divide remains the terrain where key battles over nationalist modernity have continued to be fought. The term "wayward women" in my title refers to both the singing/dancing courtesan and the bar dancer. The courtesan or *tawaif*, a professional woman trained in *mujra* (semi classical singing and dancing), was an important presence in the cultural life of India until the mid-twentieth century (Vajpeyi 2009).[1] The bar dancer may be seen as a more recent, less exalted counterpart from about the 1980s, but, as Saba Dewan observes, the *tawaif* remains the imagined reference point: "There is an attempt to recreate the *mujra* past, mediated via Hindi films… In Bombay bars, the girls wear so-called Indian costume—ghaghra choli, partly because it's easier to get license

[1]According to an heir of a courtesan's salon in Lucknow: "There was a time when tawaifs were treated as the epitome of etiquette and culture. They were the preservers of north Indian music and dance, and hobnobbed with the nobility… Today, the tawaifs are virtually gone. The word has been redefined and applies to a common prostitute now." Quoted in Vajpeyi (2009).

for 'Indian dance', but also because it fits the audience's appetite". (Gupta 2009). Ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom estimates that 80–90 % of Mumbai bar dancers are hereditary professional performers from tribes like the Deredar, Nat, Bedia and Kanjar—all considered lower castes in India. (Gupta 2009). The second phrase "wicked singing" in my title refers to unsavoury connections that may be discerned between the "cleansing" of cultural practices associated with Muslim and lower-caste performers, the moral policing of sexuality and setting up of "exemplary" institutions such as music academies and government radio stations for the promotion of national culture in India.

13.2 The Search

In *The Other Song*, the search for a lost song takes Dewan to the by lanes of Varanasi, Lucknow and Muzaffarpur, where she meets many fascinating singers and of these she presents to us the brief stories of three: Saira Begum from Varanasi, and Daya Kumari and Rani Begum from Muzaffarpur. Through the conversations we get a sense of how vital music has been in the lives of these women and the numerous difficulties they have had in following their careers as singing women. The first part of the film gives us a perspective into how the figure of the courtesan becomes stigmatized at the moment of moral cleansing before independence. The one, who was known as a repository of art and culture, an aesthetic woman, in the early decades of last century, came to be known as a woman "whose private life was a public scandal". (Luthra 1986).

Saba Dewan's journey starts at Varanasi where she begins looking for the lost 1935 *thumri*[2] recorded by Rasoolan Bai: *Phoolgendwa na maar, lagat jobanwa mein chot*: "Don't throw flowers at me, My breasts are getting wounded". This was a variant of the hugely popular song *Phool gendwa na maar, lagat karejwa mein chot*: "Don't throw flowers at me, My heart is getting wounded". Interestingly, most people Dewan interviews in the film are familiar with the popular version of this song, which has been sung by many others too but Rasoolan's rendering is regarded as the greatest by discerning listeners. Dewan wishes to discover the recording of the more risqué version, where the word *karejwa* ("heart") had been replaced by *jobanwa* ("breasts"). Her investigation into the mysterious disappearance of this version of the song simultaneously becomes an exploration of how courtesans as singers and performers were rendered obscure and inconsequential during the past 70 years as well as a compelling historical analysis of causes and consequences of this phenomenon. The courtesans of north India were

[2]Thumri is a semi classical rendition of Hindustani classical music and the texts are mostly depictions of romantic love linked to the legend of Krishna, a Hindu god. Mostly depicting female contexts, thumris are in generally written in Brajbhasha, a dialect from the northern state of India, Uttar Pradesh.

professionals who were the only women to learn, perform and record music in public in the early decades of the twentieth century.[3] Dewan's film asserts that social disapproval of them acquired greater force following the activities of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, the two fathers of Hindustani classical music, who sought to recast the Hindustani classical music tradition in a Hindu form. For Bhatkhande, music needed to transform itself as "a new modern, national, academic art", whereas Paluskar advocated the case of a devotional/bhakti music which would dominate over all other forms. Janaki Bakhle has described the influence of these two men on Hindustani music as follows:

> Bhatkhande tried to classify, categorize, and classicize music, whereas Paluskar worked to cleanse and sacralise it. (Bakhle 2006, p. 8)

> Paluskar's bhakti nationalism "Hinduized" music and sacralised its pedagogy, but it also created the conditions under which women, albeit middle-class ones, could enter a public cultural sphere without the fear of social disapproval. Yet even as middle-class women moved slowly into a new public cultural space, they replaced an entire generation of women courtesan performers. (Bakhle 2006, p. 8)

Both Bhatkhande and Paluskar believed that music as a national art needed to be revived and modernized through a systematic educational format and decency. The effort at canonization led them to organize a major musical gathering in Varanasi in 1905, where women and Muslims were completely missing. The nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi also had strong denigrating views about *tawaif*s: Gandhi rejected them as Congress workers and refused their donations till they denounced their "unworthy profession that made them worse than thieves".

We realize that this attitudinal shift has remained well entrenched in the decades after independence. Saira in *The Other Song* tells us that these prejudices have continued in institutions like the Doordarshan, the government owned television channel, as well as with concert organizers who humiliate her due to her background or even try to keep her out. Replacing the connotations of *jobanwa* (breasts) with *karejwa* (heart), Dewan shows us, was not merely a matter of linguistic bowdlerization but a far more challenging and complex discursive shift. In fact it meant sanitization and cleansing of a profession and a space used to control female sexuality in the early twentieth century. It was not only Rasoolan Bai, but none of the other singers either ever recorded the *jobanwa* version of the song. Many of them got married to "ordinary" men and moved out of the context of public performances, whereas many others got married to their tabla or sarangi players (accompanying musicians) to gain respectability and continued to perform on the margins in local concerts and programmes. There are others like Akhtari Bai

[3]Gauhar Jan, one of the most accomplished and popular courtesan-singers of her time, recorded her voice for the Gramophone Company in 1902; but when she was invited to an exhibition organized by the government at Allahabad in 1910–1911, many Hindu men objected that it offended public morality and decency.

who managed a makeover of sorts: as a teenage singing sensation, this courtesan got married to a lawyer and gave up her career as a singer for years; she remerged on the national scene as Begum Akhtar and became an iconic singer using the same courtly musical culture but had to completely draw a curtain on her past.

In *The Other Song*, Saira Begum, Daya Kumari and Rani Begum are accomplished singers but have had difficult times, to say the least, while trying to continue in their profession. The film gives us a troubling sense of how women, particularly artists, cope with the moral, cultural sanctions imposed by the society. As Trisha Gupta points out:

> A musical genre whose very form – intimate, expressive, always sung in a first-person female voice – had emerged from the courtesan's salon, had, in order to survive in the bright light of modernity, to move into the concert hall, the radio station, the cinema. And in order to be heard in this new world, the tawaif herself had to become a ganewali or – in even more Sanskritised form – a gayika (Gupta 2009).

The category of "tawaif" is interesting to look at for it points to the similarities between contemporary discourses around illicit performances and the colonial ones, and is one of the defining ideas to differentiate between the "public" and "private" woman. Feminist scholarship has documented how the history of "women's question" in India goes back to the colonial period and was an important aspect of the social reform movement of the late nineteeth and the early twentieth century. At the heart of the debates on reform was an effort to create a domestic space infused with feminine purity which would be the yardstick for defining the good and the bad woman. The bad woman invoked in these contexts invariably gestured towards "public" women who were outside the bounds of the home. These boundary lines were drawn in the colonial period when the national was being structured through initiatives of "reform and revival", although an exception was permitted for the women who heeded Gandhi's appeal to come out of the domestic sphere and participate in the freedom struggle with their men. There were reforms around widow remarriage, girls' education, ban on child marriage and on polygamy by the Brahmin men, the setting up of women's schools and homes for widowed women.[4] In the process, women's education became important insofar as it emerged directly from the 'white man's burden' of educating the enlightened natives and the 'man's burden' of emancipating the native women from what they considered to be a socio-cultural milieu of utter ignorance and impurity. The latter burden came to be shared by the English educated elite of the nineteenth century (sons of absentee landlords, East India Company agents and traders who made fortunes in the eighteenth century, various professionals and government servants) all of whom, in spite of differences in economic and social status, were moving towards the development of certain common standards of behaviour and cultural norms (Banerjee 1989).

[4]Some of the women who played a very active role in the Gandhian nationalist movement were Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani, Muthulaksmi Reddy, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

Taken from the English educators and then modified according to the patriarchal norms of the local Hindu society, codes of conduct for women evolved in different regions of India. The construction of the "good woman" depended in large part on positing the other in the "performing" women who danced and sang, and a broadening of the term "prostitution" to refer not just to sexual favours in exchange of financial benefits but to use it as a metaphor of social and moral evil. Thus, this professional woman, who had more access to public spaces like the street, marketplace, fair and festival in the early decades of the 1900s, became the target of reform and lost her status as artist.[5] Following upon Paluskar's influential suggestions about what had gone wrong with the Indian cultural tradition, the ill effects of corruption by Muslims became part of the nationalist common sense. Without explicitly laying the blame on Muslim musicians, Lionel Fielden, one of the pioneers of radio broadcasting in India, stated that "Indian music had no accepted 'standards' and the only distinction between 'classical' and 'light' was in the content of the words, 'religious' or 'erotic', and the social status of the performer". B.V. Keskar, who controlled All India Radio for over a decade after India became independent, evolved a cultural policy premised on the assumption that Indian music had declined due to the Muslim musicians in whose hands music was no longer "spiritual", it had become merely "erotic", the special preserve of "dancing girls, prostitutes, and their circle of pimps" who "had appropriated and distorted the ancient art". (Lelyveld 1994). Thus, under Keskar's heavy-handed guidance, an official culture of music emerged which was devoid of the "licentious and voluptuous tastes" that were associated with folk and popular (including film) music.

The impassioned voice-over of Dewan is used to create the framework and it successfully establishes a relationship involving her, the viewer, who she holds in direct address with a "you" many times, and the subjects of her film. The interview mode sets up a fascinating connection between personal narratives and public moments as the narrative deftly goes back and forth between the social and the individual, as Dewan self-consciously articulates her own feminist concerns and commitments around the subjectivity of the women she speaks to, and this enables her—and them—to form a larger community with the viewers.

13.3 The Journey

The documentary *Delhi Mumbai Delhi* (2006) also tracks a journey, that of its protagonist Riya from Delhi, her home city, to the city of her work, Mumbai, where she is a bar dancer. The film presents vignettes of her life at home with her family, her stay at Mumbai with other friends and her dancing in a beer bar. We hear

[5]J. Devika through an interesting formulation calls such women "aesthetic" women. See Devika (2005).

of Riya's absence when she is away in Bahrain from her sister; we see Riya in Mumbai sharing a flat with other young women and the family of her "agent" Shammi, whose wife is also her co-worker; we have a glimpse of her trip to the beauty parlour; there are makeup sessions and performances in the glitzy bar—these have been smoothly woven together in the narrative to give us a sense of her life as a working woman. In the course of her travels between the two cities, Riya unveils another part of her life to us: her marriage at the age of 14, the violence in the family, the child births and her eventual loss of her children to her husband at the time of divorce, etc. Through a life swinging from police harassment and family pressures in Delhi to demanding work, fun with women friends, admiring men, emotional ties and gifts in Mumbai, we have a stark portrayal of unpredictability and complex negotiations of a young woman's life. At the end, when she is shown as married and is with her husband, one tries to heave a sigh of relief and believe that all has ended well in this case, but then Riya accepts: "For the present I'm fine…" and while answering about the future she says: "I'm not the sort to be confined like this but I'm trying really hard to stay nicely within the house".

This film was made between 2003 and 2004 when the discussion on banning dance in the bars was taking place in the Maharashtra legislature. The context of this controversial ban came up when the then deputy chief minister of Maharashtra, Mr. R.R. Patil, announced that the performances in bars will be stopped as "they had become a den of prostitution" and that they were a "a bad influence on young men".[6] In fact, many social activists and organizations supported the ban as the demand for it was made in terms of protecting the young dancers from sexual exploitation and saving young men from the wiles and easy virtues of these desperate women. Thus, the construction of an "evil" woman out for easy money and marking her work as a menace to society happened through a moralistic sleight of hand. A woman like Riya became a metaphor for moral decadence of the society which was sought to be tackled by the legislature.

The ban pushed the bar dancers into spotlight from the sleazy, dark corners of their closeted existence. Nearly 75,000 women lost their jobs overnight and many were forced into prostitution. However, there were many groups which opposed the ban and asked uncomfortable questions and exposed the hypocrisy of it. First, the state had not imposed ban on three star hotels and clubs, but on joints of smaller stature where liquor was served and which were called "permit rooms" or beer bars; thus the question was about different standards of vulgarity and obscenity for different classes of people. Second, the song and dance sequences of Hindi films with explicit sexual innuendoes, popularly known as item numbers, are common and screened publicly; hence, a copy of the same could not be considered obscene and illegal. Third, in response to the argument that there was enormous sexual exploitation of women in this job and the government believed that such dances were not just derogatory for the performers, they also "deprave, corrupt or injure public morality", sit was pointed out that Indian cinema, fashion shows,

[6]http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hisouth_asia/4902934.stm.

advertising, etc. were all replete with exploitative practices and images but none of these had ever been closed as an industry. Fourth, there were allegations that certain bars were actually dens of prostitution, and the counter was that in such cases these bars should lose their licences rather than there being a blanket ban on women dancing to film music in the bars. Another interesting point was that women waitresses were still allowed to work in these bars though they could be far more vulnerable to contacts and sexual gestures due to their proximity to the customers. All these and many other arguments and sustained protests by bar dancers themselves led to the Bombay High Court in 2006 upholding the right of the women to dance and earn a living.

13.4 Conclusion

What we see here, on the one hand, is a contest where singing and dancing as popular cultural forms become important sites for struggle over power: for elite ideologies to shape national identities and cultural norms—and for the questioning and negotiation of these elitist norms from lower class/caste women, especially in the wake of the feminist and dalit movements that have been sharply critical of exclusionary nationalism since the 1980s. In the context of *The Other Song* we see that a desire for a homogenous national culture put into place an upper caste Hindu identity as the foundational fiction of the Indian nation. Due to the Gandhian non cooperation movement, women had a new awareness of their role in public life and were also becoming the bearers of the hierarchical upper caste culture.

On the other hand, *Delhi Mumbai Delhi* reveals that the attempt to ban bar dancing was motivated by a sense of moral anxiety mixed with class discrimination. In the context of globalization, the dance bars were acting as the new urban lower/middle-class erotic spaces but they could not have the approval of the upwardly mobile elites for whom cinema and other forms of media were opening up new modes of engagement with erotic pleasure. Therefore, as a misfit between the folk/rural forms of popular entertainment (such as *lavani* and *tamasha*) and the performances in the more private clubs or hotels, bar dancing did not belong to either of the domains the national elites were used to policing—and this made their cultural custodians anxious about the autonomy and "corruption" of lower class sexuality, and seek to clamp down on this practice. However, it is a measure of the rise of newer forms of assertion by (and possibly alliance between) feminist, dalit and minoritarian political subjects in contemporary India that led to the ban being challenged. The Mumbai High Court ruled that "the ban amounted to an arbitrary restriction on the bar dancers' constitutionally guaranteed freedom to practice their profession…" It also "sought to make all dancing in dance bars illegal while exempting all dancing in other kinds of establishments" (Mazzarella 2010). Though the state government went to the Supreme Court to counter the order, in September (2011), the Court asked the Maharashtra government to

"modify" the provisions of the act and ban only "obscene and objectionable" forms of dance as the court did not wish the dancers "to go from bars and restaurants to the streets" (*The Times of India*). And in July 2013 even the Supreme Court gave a verdict against the ban and ordered the opening of the bars. Despite this, the state government has not permitted bar dancing to resume. Most of the associations have neither the financial nor the organisational capability to fight further. We are left with the key questions raised by this controversy: what is the place for the erotic subject in our society, and how do we reformulate our questions to be able to look at issues of sexuality today without raising the bogey of morality?

To recapitulate, I would like to say that for these cultural practices—a song, a particular style of dancing—getting outlawed for being evil, immoral, unpleasant and socially unhealthy signify two similar yet distinct moments in our history. The telling of the story of wayward women and the mission of disciplining them can be seen as the project of Dewan's two films. Her engagement with institutions—both in private and public realms, interrogation of hierarchies and common sense and above all her effort of writing history through the lives of ordinary contemporary "real women" demonstrates how she forges the right to speak for (and beyond) the subjects of these individual narratives.

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Chapter 14
Gendered Bhavas: Perpetuating Notions of "Ideal" Male and Female Behaviour Through Specific Emotions Highlighted in Acting in *Mayabazar*

Piyush Roy

Abstract The concepts of 'Bhava' in acting and 'Rasa' in drama, as discussed in the *Nātyasāstra* have served as valuable parameters for reviewing the merits of a play, directors' intentions and actors' achievements for over two millennia in India. Their influence on meaning-making in Indian cinema is equally significant, given theatre's continuing influence on its narrative and performance aesthetics, most evident in films of the mythological genre. Of all Indian cinemas, the 'mythological film' survived for the longest time in Telugu cinema, until the 1970s, with K.V. Reddy's *Mayabazar* (1957) being its most influential landmark. The highlight of the film, a magical love story from the *Mahabharata*, is its heroine's dual personality premise. A plot twist has her character get impersonated by an illusionist demon, who 'as-a-man-trapped-in-a-woman's-body', is a reveal of how 'ideal' notions of masculine and feminine bhavas in acting are perpetuated by an Indian actor's portrayal of different reactions to similar situations based on the character's gender. This article will establish how in her choice from the nine prescribed Sthayibhavas (primary human emotions) that the actress Savitri selects and rejects to distinguish, personify and limit her 'woman-as-woman' part from a 'man-as-woman' character that *Mayabazar* makes a test case for studying the selection, categorization and prioritization of major human emotions on the basis of gender in a performance.

Keywords Rasa-bhava in film acting · Performing gender · Gender switching · K.V. Reddy · Mayabazar

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> The Indian play demands of an actor total submission to a particular emotion. If you are sad you are really sad… we are very vocal that way. We are not inhibited in expressing ourselves and our feelings (Mehta 1995, p. 37).

14.1 Introduction

The history of world cinema cannot deny the mother influence of theatre in its infancy. Cinema's subsequent evolution, globally, has coincided with an increasing 'experimental' disassociation from its theatrical umbilical cord to carve a medium specific niche of its own. In India too, cinema has followed a similar trajectory, while still retaining many founding influences of its two-millennium-old *Nātyasāstra* traditions, and its most influential theory of aesthetics on performance and its appreciation through concepts such as *bhava* and *rasa*. *Bhavas* are artistic expressions achieved by actors through varying combinations of the four types of *abhinaya* (performance)—*angika* (gestures), *vachika* (speech), *aharya* (costumes) and *satvika* (emotions)—to lend feeling to a conveyed thought or performed action leading to the creation of a corresponding lasting emotional sentiment or *rasa* in the audience. Though *rasa* has many literal meanings like taste, essence, and ultimately 'bliss', in *Nātyasāstra* it is used to signify the 'essence of an emotion' or the final emotional state of 'relish/reaction/aesthetic experience'[1] achieved by a spectator while watching a piece of performing art.

In the context of a performance, it is born in the spectator 'out of the union of the determinants or *vibhavas* (the triggers or the cause of performed words, gestures and emotive expressions), the consequents or *anubhavas* (the realized/felt response to that cause in the words, gestures and expressions of an actor) and transitory mental states or *vyabhicharibhavas* (spectator experiences that arise from viewing these acted cause and effects)'.[2] The *Nātyasāstra*, in its most ancient form,

[1]Sanskrit words and terms when translated into English often suffer a loss in translation, especially those endowed with multiple cultural meanings. Hence, occasional use of multiple words to explain a term's best possible meaning will recur.

[2]Bharata's fundamental *rasa sutra—Vibhavanubhava vyabhicharin-sanyogat rasanispattih*—provides the essence of the birth of a *rasa*. *Nātyasāstra* and its subsequent commentaries (like Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharati*) distinguish a total of 50 emotions, divided into three categories in a hierarchy, in which the higher category encompasses the one below. At the bottom are eight involuntary emotional reactions (*satvikabhavas*) like sweating, trembling, weeping, paralysis, horripilation, fainting, change of colour and change of voice. Above them are 33 transitory mental states (*vyabhicharibhavas*) like apprehension, stupor, joy, cruelty, anxiety, shame, etc., which represent minor incidental feelings. Finally on top are the permanent emotions or *sthayibhavas* (*rati*, *hasa*, etc.). The 41 emotions (8 + 33) in the third and second category respectively, in various combinations, feed and contribute to the creation of a permanent emotion, which are compared to kings surrounded by a large retinue of servant sub-emotions. For example, the transitory mental states manifesting *bhayanaka rasa* are cruelty, anxiety, etc. with their *satvikabhavas* being sweating, trembling, etc. Or a work pervading with the permanent emotion of love, may have jealousy, anxiety, joy, sadness, anger and other *vyabhicharibhavas* functioning as its transient accessories, all suggesting and sustaining the *shringararasa*. It is because of this superiority among emotions that the permanent emotions can generate *rasas*. (Tieken 2000 pp. 121–122; Gnoli 1956, pp. 29–30; Rayan 1965, p. 251; Marchand 2006, p. 7).

credited to *Bharata muni* (approximately between 200 BC and 200 AD) prescribed eight principal *rasas* for the appreciation, categorization and understanding of the essence or dramatic suggestion (*dhvani*[3]) of a performance/play based on eight principal emotional experiences that would emerge within audiences while watching it—*shringara* (the romantic), *hasya* (the comic), *vira* (the heroic), *adbhuta* (the marvellous), *karuna* (the sorrowful), *raudra* (the furious), *bhayanaka* (the terrible) and *bibhatsa* (the odious). A ninth *rasa*, *shanta* (peace or quietude) (Rangacharya 2010, pp. 53–63) was added by subsequent commentators of the *Nātyasāstra* (Ragavan 1940, pp. 11–13). According to Bharata, *rasa* is born in the union of the play with the performance of the actors to be realized by the audience.

These nine *rasas,* known as the *navarasas* were argued to be in direct correlation with the nine principal feelings or basic human emotions called the *sthayibhavas*—*rati* (love), *hasa* (laughter), *utsaha* (energy/heroism), *vismaya* (astonishment), *shoka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsa* (disgust) and *sama* (serenity) respectively—under which ancient Indian psychology grouped human emotional activities and Indian dramatics categorized its performers while reviewing the success of their performances (Rangacharya 2010, pp. 64–77). Their integral and influential role in aesthetic criticism can be appreciated from the fact that "no criticism of a work of art in any form (literature, poetry, music, dance or drama) in India is considered so devastating as the allegation that it is devoid of *rasa*" (Schwartz 2004, p. 8).

Providing seminal appreciation principles for all Indian art forms that were subject of 'the eye and the ear' for two millennia, the *Rasa* theory's ideas about the ideal play and performance naturally extended themselves to influencing the process of meaning making in Indian cinema.[4] An obvious influence that can still be evinced is the '*masala*' (a mix of varying emotion extracting acts and events) style of storytelling of its popular cinema, often argued as a contemporarization of the *Rasa* theory postulate of a 'mandatory' evoking of the *navarasas* for a dramatic work of any merit.

Theatre's continuing influence on cinema's narrative and performance aesthetics is most evident in films of the mythological genre, where the *rasa* achieving performance imperatives have gone beyond a notional continuity to absolute adherence in the structuring of the emotional grammar and graph of a narrative and the shaping of presentation, disposition and categorization of characters and their acts. A significant early Indian cinema genre, the mythological film, has often been dismissed as inferior cinema because of its overt influences of *Nātyasāstra* postulates on them and region specific folk theatre indulgences—fantastical *mise-en-scène*, dialogue driven drama, epic story lines and garish production values—that have often made the genre look like photographed play by unimaginative filmmakers. The acting too, following the theatrical grammar of maximization of emotions through representative character types, puts melodrama

[3]A term added by later commentators, "*Dhvani* assigns critical importance to the concept of suggestion in a work of art over the normal expression of something merely depicted or explicitly stated." (Cooper 2000, pp. 19–20).

[4]"The conception of *rasa* is general and furnishes the criterion by which the worth of all forms of fine art, including cinema, may be judged." (Hiriyanna 1997, p. 72).

over realism, and heightened *rasa* realization over relatable acting, wherein—if you are sad, you are crest fallen; if you are angry, you are furious and if you are happy, you are bursting at the seams! The goal of a performance thus was to epitomize the *bhava*, and personify a *rasa* through the enactment of its most identifiable and representative behaviour, mood and disposition.

Of all Indian language cinemas nowhere has the 'mythological film' survived the longest as in the cinemas of South India, especially the Telugu cinema, where it was a dominant genre right up to the 1970s, starting from its early twentieth century inception.

In this context, I now bring in writer-director K.V. Reddy's path-breaking 1957 bilingual film, *Mayabazar* (Telugu-Tamil), featuring some of the biggest stars of south Indian cinema—N.T. Rama Rao, Akkineni Nageshwar Rao, S.V. Ranga Rao and Savitri. It brought about a welcome change to 'the mythological template' by its humanization of gods and portrayal of extraordinary characters as ordinary human beings for the first time. It needs to be mentioned here that the film was voted 'the greatest Indian film ever'[5] in an all-Indian language cinema encompassing 2013 online poll commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema. Technically, just as *Deewar* ushered in the idea of a model screenplay in Hindi cinema, "a screenplay with a life of its own" (Rajabali 2003, p. 313), *Mayabazar* for the first time highlighted the significance of the screenplay over the story to script an influential turn in the genre's evolution in the South cinemas.

The success of its 'structure' has since been abundantly repeated to make it an influential landmark in the genre. S.S. Rajamouli, a popular and influential 21st century filmmaker of Telugu cinema, rates *Mayabazar* as "the greatest classic and absolute influence of all times, not only on me and my generation of filmmakers, but the entire Telugu film industry. Many of the super hit films of today can't even come close to the magical screenplay of K.V. Reddy written in the 1950s, where each and every bit of the film, tells you so much story" (Rajamouli 2012). It also offers a sumptuous '*rasaswadana*' (relish of all the *navarasas*), with a predominant skew for the pleasurable *rasas* of *shringara, hasya, vira* and *adbhuta* to be reviewed and received as a complete '*masala*' entertainer.

The drama and performance highlight of the film, a magical love story from the *Mahabharata*, is its heroine Sasirekha's dual personality premise, and its interpretation by actress Savitri, which is the focus of this article. An interesting plot twist has her character replaced by a male illusionist demon Ghatotkacha, which thus gets Savitri to oscillate between two diverse personas of a bashful and in-love young princess and a demonic (Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha) princess on a fun and havoc mode.

In this article, I will explore specific *bhavas* from the nine prescribed *sthayibhavas* or universal and primary human emotions that an Indian actor selects and rejects in his/her successful achievement of 'ideal' *Nātyasāstra* prescribed notions of masculine and feminine behaviour in performance. This will be analysed

[5]The poll was conducted and published by CNN-IBN (May 2013).

through a critical study of heroine Savitri's choice of different *rasa*-enhancing *bhavas* (expressions) for her differently gendered double act to distinguish, personify and limit a 'woman-as-woman' Sasirekha vis-à-vis a 'man-as-woman' Sasirekha in three significant, yet similar situations of plot obstacle and resolution in a love story revolving around courtship, rebellion and marriage. This will be done by freeze frame analysis of her diverse *bhavas* on display to distinguish the nature of the two identical looking Sasirekhas differentiated only by gender. I will henceforth refer to the 'real' female Sasirekha as just Sasirekha and the 'male' Ghatotkacha impersonating Sasirekha, as 'the male Sasirekha' respectively.

14.2 Storyline

Sasirekha, the daughter of the king of Dwaraka, Balarama, and his wife Revathi is betrothed to Subhadra and the third Pandava prince Arjuna's son Abhimanyu in their childhood in the presence of her paternal uncle, Krishna, and Rukmini. They grow up nurturing their love for each other. When misfortune strikes the Pandavas with them losing their kingdom in a game of dice to their evil cousins, the Kauravas, Revathi is no longer keen to honour the commitment of giving her daughter to a progeny of wandering mendicants. She rejects Subhadra's reminder request to marry their now adult children in love, when the latter comes to Dwaraka with Abhimanyu to stay with her brothers. Balarama, meanwhile, in a parallel plot twist, is conned by the eldest Kaurava, Duryodhana, and his villainous uncle Shakuni's pleasant talk to agree to marry Sasirekha to Duryodhana's son Lakshman Kumar.

This is when Krishna steps in with a secret plan aided by Abhimanyu's cousin born to an *asura* queen, the illusionist demon king Ghatotkacha, to unite the pining lovers. The '*mayavi*' (magician) Ghatotkacha replaces the real Sasirekha with an illusion of him as the princess, while his talented assistants construct an illusory palace to hold the groom's party at bay. The Kauravas' real intentions are eventually exposed after a laugh riot of mistaken identities and magical mayhem unleashed by Ghatotkacha and his partners-in-magic under Krishna's all-knowing direction. Eventually the lovers are united and the family is reconciled.

14.3 Different Genders, Different *Bhavas*

14.3.1 Sasirekha in Courtship

With the romantic story about star crossed lovers from childhood defining its narrative crux, *Mayabazar* features elaborate courtship and romance sequences progressing through four lyrical scenes or song sequences. Here I will compare and contrast the first meeting sequence between an adult Abhimanyu and Sasirekha

Fig. 14.1 Sasirekha meets Abhimanyu

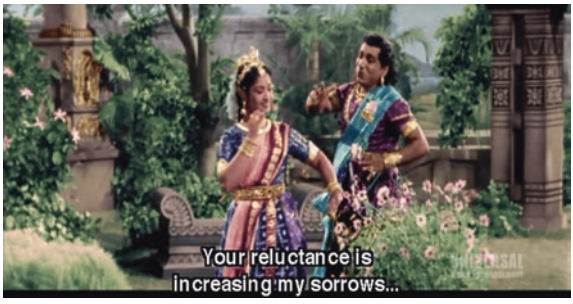

Fig. 14.2 'Male' Sasirekha meets Lakshman Kumar

Fig. 14.3 Sasirekha in joyous *rati bhava*

(Fig. 14.1) with that of the 'male Sasirekha' and her second suitor Lakshman Kumar (Fig. 14.2). Each of the scenes take off with a song sequence articulating the love-struck excitement of the two men at their first sighting of the gorgeous princess in a palace garden.

Both Abhimanyu and Lakshman Kumar indulge in a liberal wooing of Sasirekha. Their strategies involve raving about the object of beauty in their presence. However, while for Abhimanyu the female is an object of subtle, indulgent affection (Fig. 14.3), Kumar's overtures border around aggressive, possessive affection (Fig. 14.4). With both suitors, she play enacts difficult to get (Figs. 14.1 and 14.2), but while she enjoys the attention of Abhimanyu she mocks and rejects the unwanted affections of Kumar.

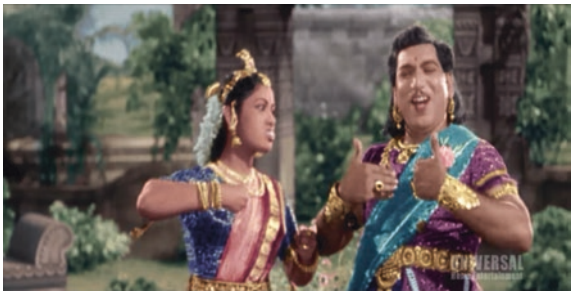

Fig. 14.4 Sasirekha (male) steals a *krodha-vira* gesture

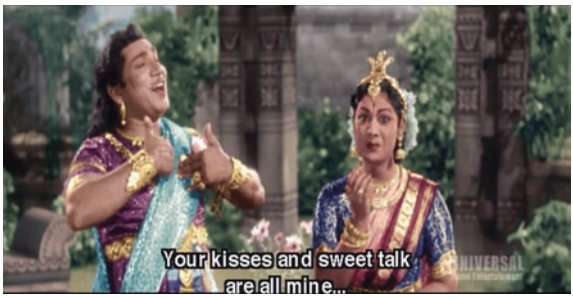

Fig. 14.5 The disgusted rebuff of an unwanted suitor

Given the delicate disposition of Sasirekha, and her stock reactions of apprehension, anxiety and helplessness (*vyabhicharis* of *rati bhava*) to adverse situations, Kumar's aggression would ideally have had her cowering or fleeing the scene evincing reaction attributes of the *rasas* of fear and disgust. Nevertheless, Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha stands the ground like a natural *vira*, fending for himself, returning Kumar's aggression with a mockery mixed stern rebuff (Figs. 14.4 and 14.5).

In Abhimanyu's company, Sasirekha glows, sings and prances around in joyous abandon as he sings—'*You are as beautiful as I had imagined*' (Fig. 14.1). He humours her coquettishness as they re-visit their mutual comfort from childhood leading to love in adulthood. The lovers reappear in two more songs, one enjoying a boat ride and the other in *vipralambha* (love in separation) mode pining for the absence of the other.

The *bhavas* used to differentiate their interpersonal equations in these scenes of togetherness highlight the diverse set of expressions in use for members of different genders or differently gendered dispositions. With Abhimanyu, Sasirekha shares an equation of receiving—be it in her explorative waking up to 'wondrous love'in their first meeting in pure *rati bhava*, expressing 'joyous love' (indicating a growth in the intensity of their love that now allows stolen physical intimacies in *hasya-shringara*) in the second song, or suffering from 'painful love' (love-in-longing) portraying *shoka* (pathos/pity) in the third, evoking the *karuna rasa*. In all these three sequences she is the receiver of affection, who needs to

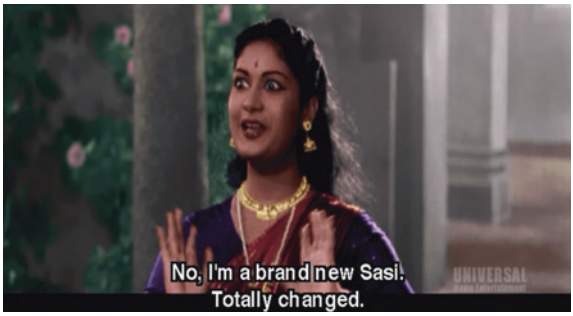

Fig. 14.6 'Male' Sasirekha"s direct eye contact

be pampered in the first interaction, appreciated and cared for in the second and protected in the third sequence. In each of the scenes the male sets the tone of the equation with the female strategically placed at the lower pedestal of receiver (Fig. 14.3). Most importantly, she always looks up to her man for love, care or comfort. Though in bliss, she remains, in essence, a receiver never driving or leading the acts of romance. The relationship dynamics change drastically when Abhimanyu meets the 'male Sasirekha' for the first time. She not only talks back and mock reprimands him as an equal, but also maintains a direct eye contact to the former's evident surprise (Fig. 14.6). The change in body language, she eventually explains to Abhimanyu's visible relief and joyous acceptance is because 'she essentially is a he; his brother'. Thus, the character of Sasirekha switches genders, their temperaments and roles in courtship change, from being an object of desire (as female) to become a desiring object (as male).

The male's role to lead all interaction in courtship is retained in a repeat of the sequence between Kumar and the 'male Sasirekha'. It is interesting to note that while Abhimanyu is represented in an image of the heroic male in their first interaction, (which perhaps explains the oddity of his arriving with a bow and arrows to a decided pleasure interaction with his lover), Kumar in his first meeting is not only shorn of any weapons of masculine significance but is deliberately presented as a character with effeminate mannerisms (he sulks, mocks and hurts easily) dressed in a garish costume with hints of a drape like sari. Moreover, in deference to the 'male' Sasirekha's inherent stronger masculinity, Kumar takes the receiver role of the female, as the superior male (Ghatotkacha the demon versus Kumar) gets to set the terms and tone of the courtship game, as in the case of Abhimanyu with Sasirekha. Ghatotkacha opts for derision, complimented by an aggressive set of emotions bordering on anger, disgust and ridicule (Figs. 14.4 and 14.5) allowed only to the 'male Sasirekha'. Even in the expression of positive emotions, while Sasirekha's joy never goes beyond an 'appropriate' *smita hasya* (modest smile), the 'male Sasirekha' exalts in an entire gamut of laughs from *upahasya* (ridicule) to *attahasya* (boisterous laughter).[6] (Fig. 14.7).

[6]The *Nātyasāstra* lists six types of laughter for actors depending on the nature of their characters—*smita* (gentle smile) and *hasita* (slight laughter) for noble men and women, *vihasita* (open laughter) and *uphasita* (ridiculing laughter) for common men and women, and *apahasita* (obscene laughter) and *atihasita* (boisterous laughter) for the loud and demonic.

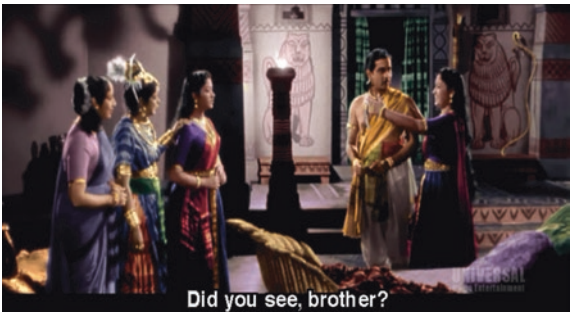

Fig. 14.7 The diverse nature of the two Sasirekhas is best expressed in the contrasting body language and expressions of their lone face-off scene in the film. While the female Sasirekha (*left*) stands in passive expectancy, head lowered, an apprehensive image of delicate feminity, the 'male Sasirekha' (*right*) is one of confidence and aggressive masculinity, head up, ready to lead from the front matching attitude-and-posture with her male compatriot

14.3.2 Sasirekha in Protest

In romantic tales, rebellion has been a predictable reaction of young lovers to the censorship of adults. In spite of *Mayabazar* being shot as a mythical story with modern sensibilities, its protagonists never cross the 'expected ideal' in gender behaviour in their responses to reprimand. When the romance between Abhimanyu and Sasirekha is censured, his first reaction like a high on energy character type steeped in the *vira rasa* is to take recourse to righteous anger. Abhimanyu challenges his elders to duel before being calmed by uncle Krishna. Sasirekha on the contrary resigns to her fate after a meek protest for which she is slapped by her mother. Sulking, she opts for the muted, *viraha* route of release—a picture of self-pity embodying the *karuna rasa* (Fig. 14.8). She sings sad songs of pining, awaiting rescue from her lover. Being a female, her rebellion is limited to waiting for her love to find a way out, instead of taking any concrete action to undo the wrong.

The 'male Sasirekha' however reacts like Abhimanyu with righteous anger fuelled by a feeling to punish the wrong doers (Fig. 14.9). She takes upon herself the onus of finding a way out of the predicament by playing a difficult suitor.

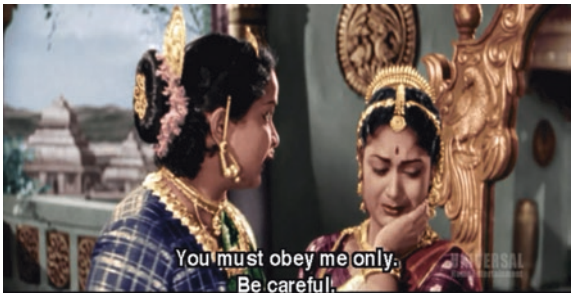

Fig. 14.8 Sasirekha demonstrating *karuna rasa*

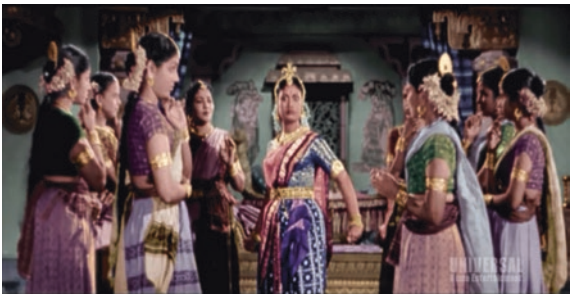

Fig. 14.9 'Male' Sasirekha demonstrating anger

Her masculine spirit allows her to echo the anger of Abhimanyu. However, she channelizes it into a permissible dare allowed to her cover by making her suitor an object of mockery in perfect synchrony with Ghatotkacha's onscreen nature of a hot-headed brave-heart with comic disposition. She constantly mocks and teases Kumar forcing him into uncomfortable situations.

If fear is the emotional response for Sasirekha's resignation with the status quo, dare is the reaction of the 'male Sasirekha' fuelling an urge to upset the status quo. Yet, the censure of Sasirekha is stricter, involving physical restrain, given her weaker gender, while Ghatotkacha's indiscretions are met with gentle admonitions (by Krishna) and shock pleads (by her confidante maid). The 'male' Sasirekha is twice admonished for transgressing the subtle body language expected of her 'female' cover when he gets carried away by his inherent masculine nature. Incidentally, these reprimands to conform do not come from any detractor but the two characters sympathetic to her cause—Krishna and her maid confidante.

Ghatotkacha's prompt subsequent corrections from a boisterous being to a meek and more restrained persona to get the charade continuing above suspicion, though contrite in a funny way, only reinforces that the *emoting* repertoire available for the 'ideal' woman cannot exceed the subtle *rasas* (Figs. 14.10 and 14.11). The 'ideal' heroine, as an upholder of the 'ideal female' on screen, even in the company of other 'not-so-ideal' women, has to operate within the subtle *bhava* stock of coy, blush and awe; it is only the excuse of a different gender that allows her to portray more aggressive emotions (Fig. 14.9), without looking inappropriate.

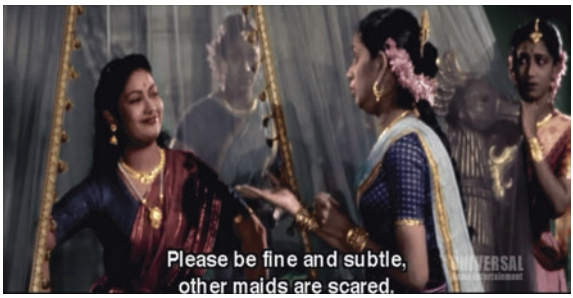

Fig. 14.10 'Male' Sasirekha asked to be 'subtle'

Fig. 14.11 Krishna's pointed insisting of the 'male Sasirekha' to stick to a more gender correct body language has her promptly change posture from a defiant and manly 'cross of arms' to a more submissive 'folded arms' positioning like the other women in the frame

14.3.3 Sasirekha in Marriage

The union of star-crossed lovers being the ultimate drama denouement of the story, their marriage is the film's climax event. Both the Sasirekhas go through their marriage ceremonies, one as a desired culmination, the other as the final set-up act for exiting a charade.

Sasirekha goes through the ceremonies as an image of restrained joy. Though happy, her disposition is demure, head bowed she rarely looks at the groom who sits in a regal posture lording over the ceremony with natural articulate excitement (Fig. 14.12). Her reactions retain her character's mood of being in a perpetual gender conforming state of passive reception. The same rituals take a more equal participation in the marriage ceremony of the 'male Sasirekha' and Kumar. Like the groom in the previous marriage, she does not mute her excitement. She engages Kumar's gaze, returning with more than equal confidence that has him frequently cower and occasionally back-off (Fig. 14.13).

While the script wants Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha to trigger unsavoury actions that change the course of the ceremony, for the audience it is the knowledge of her masculine gender that makes her lording over the ceremonies look natural. To scare Kumar off the marriage, she conjures illusions as he attempts to tie the *mangalsutra* (wedding necklace) around her neck by appearing as a monkey, tiger and demon triggering corresponding feelings of laughter, fear and disgust in him respectively.

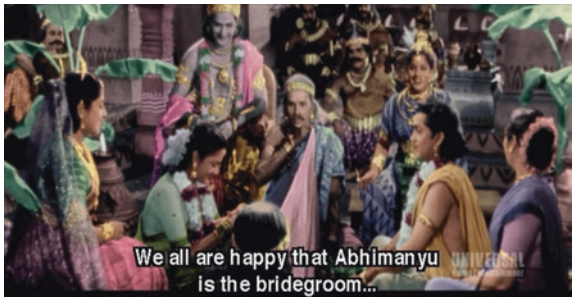

Fig. 14.12 Sasirekha getting married to Abhimanyu

Fig. 14.13 'Male' Sasirekha getting married

14.4 Conclusion

The *Nātyasāstra* prescribes and prioritizes nine *bhavas* as *sthayis* or constant feelings, which are considered to be primary, permanent and universal to all human beings. In a performance working towards a dramatized achievement of these *navarasas* they are generally realized through a mix of *rasas* representing character types predominantly dominated by at least one of these emotions. For instance, in *Mayabazar*, the beautiful 'female' Sasirekha, embodying elements of the *rati bhava* in her mood, costumes and behavior, triggers the sentiment of *shringara* in her young beholders, Abhimanyu, through his energetic and valorous acts, becomes an onscreen trigger for actions evoking the *vira rasa* in the audience, just as the villainous Shakuni triggers the sentiment of *bibhatsa*, the illusionist Ghatotkacha *hasya* and *adbhuta*, and Krishna, through his nonplussed bringing of calm in the lives of the 'disturbed' protagonists and their relatives, becomes a source of *shanta rasa* for all. Every character profile, while personifying a singular *rasa* type, however also abounds with fleeting glimpses of most of the other feelings as they are natural to all human beings.

But it is in the non-overlapping *bhavas* of a 'masculine' Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha vis-à-vis a feminine Sasirekha that the film perpetuates the idea of different *bhavas* for different genders. While the 'female' Sasirekha strictly expresses herself within a stock set of feelings comprising of love, pity, and fear, evoking the *rasas* of *shringara, karuna,* and *bhaya* (Fig. 14.14), the 'male' Sasirekha gets to broaden her *rasa* set for performance by calling into play, acts and expressions of

Fig. 14.14 Sasirekha (female) in the respective *rasa-bhavas* of *shringara, karuna* and *bhaya*

Fig. 14.15 'Male' Sasirekha in the respective *rasa-bhavas* of *raudra, vira* and *bibhatsa*

anger, valour, and disgust that trigger the *raudra*, *vira,* and *bibhatsa rasas* respectively (Fig. 14.15).

In actress Savitri's opting to differentiate the two Sasirekhas through a selective lending of specific *rasa* enhancing *bhavas* complimenting and identifying the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' *in* portrayal that *Mayabazar* makes its strongest case for a possible acknowledgement of categorizing universal human emotions on the basis of gender.

Occasionally the 'male Sasirekha' does became an agent for the evocation of the sentiment of wonder, given his character of an illusionist, but what we definitely do not see him become is a trigger for any of the *rasas* exclusive to the female Sasirekha, like fear and pity. This is a validation of the idea that in a popular impression art form, like celluloid melodrama, certain *bhavas* are expected to impact most when represented by a certain gender only. *Mayabazar* both breaks and perpetuates the stereotypes for masculine and feminine *bhavas* by making a single female actor Savitri perform both sets of emotions. That she can admirably impact with both the 'supposed or as shown' masculine and feminine *bhavas* is evident from her convincing acquiring of the character traits and expressions of a male, but the fact that she cannot essay them as a female, and is allowed to attempt them only under the charade of a male perpetuates the *Nātyasāstra*'s gender-specific notions for ideal and expected, prescribed male and female emotions in performance.

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Chapter 15
The Relevance of Gender in the Narco Corrido/Narco Novel

Minni Sawhney

Abstract Narco corridistas (singers of ballads dealing with the drug trade) as well as narco novelists have been excoriated in high-brow circles because they merely reflect reality instead of sublimating or inventing it. The reality they reflect is seen to be exalting violence with women playing an active role in its propagation. This article discusses whether it is possible to seclude women in situations of dehumanizing and extreme violence and whether these new novels and corridos or "de-emotionalized melodramas", as they have been termed, are not instead representative of this neoliberal age when civil society has wilted under the onslaught of commodity speculation or drug trafficking. The article discusses the life and songs of the first lady of the narco corrido genre—Jenni Rivera—and female protagonists in two novels of Elmer Mendoza—*Balas de Plata* (2008) and *Prueba de Ácido* (2010).

Keywords Narco corrido · Narco novel · Drug trafficking and literature · Women in drug trafficking · Jenni Rivera · Elmer Mendoza

In a column in the American newspaper *The Huffington Post*, Erika L Sanchez wrote that the "narco corrido" genre, (a ballad style dating from the time of the conquistadors) had become a tool for drug cartels, that any narco trafficker with enough money could commission a song for himself and that this ensured that the transmission of history was being dictated by the wealthy.[1] According to her, the

[1]"Like male narcocorridistas, Rivera has purposefully assembled this artificial image to make it into the mainstream music scene. Though it may seem like an improvement to have strong female figures in corridos, one has to question the intention behind these characters. It appears that the attempt may be feminist, but really, these women simply perpetuate patriarchy and

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narco corridistas had long-stopped needing the oxygen of publicity and were not the voice of the people but "active participants in the structures they so boldly defy." She also took on the female singers of these ballads whose popularity according to her relied on their bodies and said their songs participated in "consumerism and patriarchy". This article takes up Sanchez's criticism because it is an early jibe against the lone women narco corridistas as also part of a general dismay in high-brow circles especially in Mexico City at what is perceived as an abdication of the writer or artist's responsibility when he reflects culture. This censuring of literature/culture from the north has a history and is part of the struggle writers have had to wage. Presently the critique against them labels them as mere street noise, a literature that valorizes the fetishization of violence and a false geographical politics of identity. The stridency of the criticism against them evidences the coming of age of this literature as it fills bookshops and seminar programs. In response, writers like Elmer Mendoza maintain that the violence endemic to his native Culiacán and a backdrop to his writing, far from being a fetish, is his only theme and context.[2] This article intends to look at criticism like Sanchez's that is also often directed against narco novels as regards their portrayal of women committing violent acts and what is made out to be an unnecessary foray into a male-centered and violent business.

Sanchez's comments cited above are based on a gendered division of labour. If women are competitive in capitalism then they are not to be emulated. But this begs the question whether any big business is non-capitalist and free of aggressivity? Globalization has made it possible for capital to penetrate and adapt to all environs and has complicated our understanding of hitherto sacrosanct spheres like the home and the hearth that can act as buffers to its predations. As this article will try to show, selective liberalism that relegates women to the private sphere of the family is not possible anymore. The role of women who aid and abet violence inadvertently in some corridos or openly as in Colombian novels like *We were not born to Life* had earlier come in for scrutiny by Hermann Herlinghaus. In the latter's analysis, in a neoliberal world of exclusivities, home for the mothers of assassins who goad their sons onto revenge does not mean a space for universal rules but survival as fierce resistance, and the invocation of a protective divine Virgin adds to the idea of religious practices outside the pale of Christianity as practised by the Church. Herlinghaus terms them "affective marginalities" because they are

Footnote 1 (continued)

capitalism" (Sanchez 2012). Also, as Luis Eduardo Aute says in a 2011 article in *La Reforma*, "Si una sociedad acepta, escucha y valora canciones como los narcocorridos, que celebren las hazañas de los criminales que todo lo destruyen, ésa es una sociedad en decadencia, dice el cantautor Luis Eduardo Aute. Esas canciones (los narcocorridos) son un síntoma de la decadencia de la sociedad" (Aute 2011).

[2]"Como escritor lo que estoy intentando es dilucidar algunos registros que pudiera tener [la violencia] sobre la realidad y sobre la mitología; más sobre la mitología que ha surgido sobre el caso. Y buscar convertirlo en literatura, sin que haya un sentido moral o un sentido de juzgar a los que no me corresponde." (Mendoza 2005).

figures of empowerment but still "profane actors in sacred territories" who suffer the brunt of negative imagery. Although Jenni Rivera might have ended up in the high wealth bracket, yet she lacked symbolic capital or the wherewithal to become a reference point for established figures in the music industry. However, images of corridistas like Rivera or others involved in the parallel economy of the drug trade destabilize traditional notions of keeping certain sections of the population like women and children immune from violence.[3] Her acceptability amongst the wider public who empathize with her lyrics points to their lack of squeamishness when dealing with a subject like the drug industry which by certain accounts employs 40 % of the Mexican population. In Herlinghaus's words,

> The tendency of either exhaustion or marginalization of formerly secure sectors carries a disturbing effect, for it threatens to hollow out the features on which a late liberalist image of the cosmopolitan citizen has been built. On the other hand, the onslaught of neoliberalism has provoked a recent reevaluation of the practices of primitive or original accumulation…. The assumption that predation, fraud, and violence belonged to an early phase of capitalism that is no longer relevant has proven false. (Herlinghaus 2009, p. 9)

Presently Erika Sanchez disapproves of the agency of the women in the narco corrido because it is played out on the turf of global capitalism in which the drug trade is enmeshed, but she does not extend her critique to the myriad other predatory capitalists. Unfortunately the consumerism that the songs describe is universal, though it has exploded from within a context that some parts of the population might consider reprehensible. In the following corrido by Jenni Rivera, the defensiveness of the singer's line that her money is clean and unblemished is directed at those who think she is still part of the underworld.

Jenni Rivera—"La Chacalosa"[4]

Thank you all for being here with me tonight.
They call me the *chacalosa*
I am the daughter of a trafficker.
I know the moves well.
I was brought up among the big mafia.
My father taught me to sell the best merchandise.
When I turned fifteen,
I wasn't given a party
But I inherited a business
That would bring in big money
A cellular and a beeper
So that I could attend to everything.
My father's friends taught me how to shoot.
They wanted me to be well trained

[3]"Affective marginalities: those that carry the negative effects for the other acting as potential or imagined trespassers that allow governing desires and anxieties to incur in projection and thus occupy a morally safe place. Profane actors in sacred territories or subjects and communities that are being positioned at the low end of the class spectrum and ethnic scale or the geopolitical map or serving as targets of moral stigmatization in several other regards" (Herlinghaus 2009, p. 14).

[4]This song is from Jenni Rivera's album *En vivio desde Hollywood*. Released April 4, 2006, by Fonovisa records. Translation mine.

My pistol butt shines as if new.
I oversee the entire business.
I have fields in Jalisco
A laboratory in Sinaloa
Distributors a step away.
My hands don't touch anything.
My triumph is clean.
Women also can!!! Girls!!
Where are my *chacalosas*?
I move around in the latest car of the year
And I revel in all the pleasures
As I work very hard.

More than a paean to consumerism, La chacalosa's words reveal a hands-on approach to her job. She talks about her distribution network, the fields where she cultivates her crop and her manufacturing laboratory.

Los Reyes De Arranque—"Uñas adiamantadas"[5]

With diamond studded nails
And Luis Vuitton bags
Ready to start the party

In the latest cars
This is what today's girls are like
They listen to corridos…

They come in a group to the dance
They ask for an exclusive table
With bottles of Buchanan's
Earlier it was margaritas
To dance they don't need men
They dance alone

And they go frequently to the bathroom
To powder their faces

CHACALOSAS 100 %
These are today's girls
Earlier they were in the kitchen
Now they move merchandise
Just like men they mover around the whole day.
They don't forget their children.
They would give their lives for them.

Uñas adiamantadas is a similar spoof on women who have come a long way from the hearth to the bar. Commenting on the ostentatious lifestyles associated with the drug trade, Hector Abad Faciolince has commented that narco traffickers showed that the glitz and glamour that the traditional bourgeoisie hankers after was within everyone's reach. Corridos like these touch upon brand fetish and dwell on the perceived self empowerment of the woman in a way that can be interpreted as caricaturing it. Either that or it is a tongue in cheek provocation to those who have waged a war on the drug trade when it has fortified itself with a battery

[5]This song is by the group Reyes de Arranque from the album *Alterando el Orden*. Released May 31, 2010 by Sony Music. Translation mine.

of Ivy League lawyers and accountants and adapted itself to various cultures, as researchers have shown. Rivera's own lifestyle before she died bears a resemblance to that of the 'chacalosas', the "empresarial" women who unabashedly strut around unmindful of the elite disdain for their style and indiscretion. Rivera was the daughter of Mexican immigrants who entered illegally into the United States to look for work in 1969. Although she excelled in school, yet her early abusive marriage and children could not have presaged the millionaire she would later become. But her acute business skills, family support and her songs that a growing population of Latina girls who longed to evolve from *orugas* (caterpillars) to *mariposas* (butterflies) identified with, ensured her success. As she admits in interviews conducted for her biography, she faced criticism from those who she called 'manufacturers of artists' but she reiterated that she on the contrary was self made and that her songs stemmed from her own life experiences.[6] She also denied that her overnight success was due to narcotrafficking links.[7]

But perhaps her non-acceptance by vintage singers like Aute or writers of the conservative *Huffington Post* has more to do with the closed circuit of the field of cultural production as laid out by Pierre Bourdieu. Although Erika Sanchez takes pains to point out that she does not denigrate the corrido form, yet she distances herself from Rivera and her so called narco justifying lyrics because like some official discourses she considers them illegal. New entrants like Rivera in a cultural field need a singular identity to brave it out in a competitive market. Although Rivera might have little gravitas in high-brow circles, yet she has used as weapons the very qualities for which others have disqualified her and hence her overwhelming popularity. In the words of Claudio Lomnitz-Adler:

> Social analysts who have studied agency, power, culture and ideology have examined some important dimensions of the relationship between culture and space. Bourdieu's 1979 notion of habitus for example is designed to address the relations between cultural structures, the ways in which spaces are laid out and the self. So although the production and reproduction of social spaces are the result of the practices of people these people are social personae whose very identities and practical orientations are influenced by the spaces in which they have been socialized. There is in other words a dialectic between person and place because places are frames of social relations they become imbued with the values of those relations and therefore help to create the relational values that make up the self. (Lomnitz-Adler 1992, p. 18, italics mine)

In the right place (a native of southern Caifornia) and with a background that her fans could identify with, the rules of the game fell into place in her favour. Like the

[6] "'No decidí ser cantante hasta escuchar a tanta gente de la industria criticar lo que yo quería hacer. Y yo no quería hacer nada. Simplemente era mi pasatiempo grabar música. … Cuando escuché tanta negatividad, que una madre soltera, y una mujer con el físico de Jenni Rivera, que no podia lograr nada en la música. … Y fue por eso que me quedé de cantante. Nada más para demostrar que podia lograrlo." (Cobo 2013, p. 73).

[7] "'Para Lupillo y para mí que somos artistas, es muy doloroso que haya versiones de que nosotros hemos salido adelante de casualidad', le dijo Jenni a La Opinión. 'Los Rivera no triunfamos por arte de magia, o porque nos dedicamos a la venta ilícita de no sé cuántas cosas. Todo lo contrario; no solamente no somos narcotraficantes sino que integramos una familia de mucha lucha, a quienes neustro padre, Don Pedro Rivera, nos inculcó ser honrados, humildes y trabajadores.'" (Cobo 2013, p. 81).

northern Mexican group, Los Tigres del Norte, Rivera's work fell between the interstices of legality/clean/high-brow art and a popular culture that reflected the values of the parallel economy and the lives millions of Latina origin people in the United States.

One of the more famous corridos with a woman protagonist is *Contrabando y traición* of the 1970s, which also came in for flak. In it Camellia, the Texan shoots her lover because he plans to leave her for another woman after they have been partners in crime. Camellia, far from resigning herself to taking her share of the loot and going it alone, takes revenge. The songwriter of *Contrabando y traición*, Angel González in a reply to criticism, said:

> I am a feminist, five hundred percent. Maybe you don't know what that means. A feminist is a man who knows what a woman is worth, who knows that woman is the greatest. Why is woman the greatest? Because woman is half the world, and what's more she is the mother of the other half. In my song, I always have the woman come out ahead. *Contrabando y traición* was the first song like that. (Quoted in Herlinghaus 2009, p. 43)

Despite his speaking somewhat paternally on behalf of women, what is undeniable is that the woman has been represented in northern folk ballads for some time now. There have been studies done with early inventories of different kinds of participation by women in illegal border crossings and these break boundaries as regards their depiction since narcotrafficking disavows moral parameters. Women were depicted as active subjects, companions and often as betrayers and known for their cruelty. Women gradually became active protagonists in an illegal world where their limit capabilities are tested.[8]

Drug heiresses like the chacalosas are familiar motifs in Elmer Mendoza's narco novels, firmly rooted in the states adjoining the frontier between the United States and Mexico. Like the narcocorridos, these novels have often been considered apologia for the drug trade because of their non-didactic mode where crimes go unpunished, and there is a blurring of the difference between victims and victimizers. However, Elmer Mendoza's stream of consciousness writing style with the jumbled language registers of narcotraffickers, politicians, onlookers and police detectives has ideological as well as stylistic implications. Drug lords, who are portrayed as distributing largesse and earning goodwill, while the violence consequent on their activities becomes part of the landscape, compete with the State for power. Parallel economies thrive and the federal state becomes just one of the contenders to use force while crimes are left unsolved and impunity reigns.

Narcotrafficking is introduced unpretentiously as part of the fabric of daily life in the city of Culiacán, Sinaloa. Both *Balas de Plata* (2008) and *La prueba del ácido* (2010) have common characters. These are the companions of Edgar Mendieta (*El Zurdo* to his companions) in the police force or drug kingpins like Marcelo Valdés and his daughter Samantha. In *Balas de Plata,* she blisters the

[8]For studies on women drug traffickers see Lilian Paola Ovalle "La mujer en el NARCO MUNDO" (2008); Elaine Carey, "Selling is more of a habit than using" (2009); NACLA Report on the Americas (2011); Elaine Carey and José Carlos Cisneros Guzmán, "The Daughters of La Nacha" (2011).

principal protagonist, the detective Edgar Mendieta, for suspecting her father in the murder of Bruno Canizales, a popular social figure and also a party transvestite, and through her words the reader gets an insight into the meshing of drugs, power and influence.

> Te busqué por dos asuntos, Mendieta, primero: respeta a mi padre, cabrón; es uno de los hombres más importantes de este país; el presidente, sus secretaries y cuanto lambiscón anda con ellos se le cuadran, si no fuera por él millones de gentes estarían desempleadas… (Mendoza 2008, p. 83)

> (I was in search of you for two reasons Mendieta, first respect my father, bastard, he is one of the most important men in the country; the president, his secretaries and their lackeys bow to him, if it weren't for him millions of people would be unemployed). [My translation]

There is an incestuous link between victims, their kin and the assassins in the rash of unexplained murders in the novels. The assassinated Bruno Canizales has friends and enemies in unlikely places. But then life is complicated in Culiacán. The murderer turns out to be a common acquaintance. He is the father of Paola, the ex lover of Bruno Canizales. He also shot Ezequiel the son of the police commissioner from his 'casa chica'. The murders have apparently little to do directly with the drug trade, the illicit amassing of wealth and a parallel power apparatus. But the signs of dysfunctional society pervade all spheres with no distinctions between the "good dead" and the "bad dead".

Rossana Reguillo has remarked on the "gaseous" violence that the narcomachine spews out, its "phantasmagoric" presence that is suspected in every development. The detective Mendieta is candid about how he transported drugs once (Reguillo 2011, p. 172), and that he gave half the money to his mother and then went on to study literature. His love interests, career reversals and his dogged determination to find killers without letting their narcotrafficking antecedents interfere with his work, despite the tugs and pressures from opposing sides help us to glimpse not just a policeman's life in Sinaloa but that of a society that has become unhinged because of an artificial and fratricidal war it is made to fight by the federal government and the United States.

Mendoza's next novel *La prueba del ácido* is set during the presidency of Felipe Calderón. Early on, the police and detectives comment with consternation at the president's war on drugs. The drug heiress Samantha Valdés reappears. The case under investigation is that of a Brazilian cabaret dancer Myra Cabral de Mello, with powerful narco clients, who has been murdered, her breast grotesquely mutilated. This calling card of the murderer, a strange and bizarre act of cruelty signifies revenge, and the manner in which in a society inured to violence, criminals acquire individuality. Even Culiacán society is shocked. The police, cartel bosses and everyone else here live in affective and geographical proximity and the detective Mendieta had once been in love with her. Her murder, despite her credentials, is an indicator that violence respects no connections or gender. In a seminal work, Nery Cordova has elaborated on how the portrayal of deviation has become a "predisposition" of all writing and culture on the region, as it has

enveloped its economy, society and politics. It is the overarching grid, the condition under which life is lived and has been historically evolving in the state of Sinaloa, and so its cultural products carry the indelible mark of social conflicts either directly or as a subliminal current. Hence the impossibility of stigmatizing either the women or men who are drawn to what is a local business. According to sociologists, marijuana and opium have been the mainstay of the economy of Sinaloa for at least a century. During the Second World War when Adolf Hitler cut access to the poppy fields of Smirna, Turkey, there began a search for new manufacturing bases for morphine needed in hospitals. Presidents Roosevelt and Avila Camacho made a pact in 1942 on poppy cultivation and Badiraguato became an opium capital with official blessings. Culiacán was baptised the new Chicago and it became a violent city with luxurious lifestyles where the most money changed hands. By the 1960s dealing in opium was a common business activity which politicians were associated with. The tide turned abruptly in 1975 with Ronald Reagan and Operation Condor. This anti-drug crusade began with two thousand arrests made in Culiacán alone, and traffickers were accused of crimes against health. Opium cultivators and traffickers fled the region to neighbouring states, or to Tucson Arizona, after they were persecuted and tortured. Hamlets in the hills of Badiraguato were razed whether the inhabitants were opium cultivators or not and this led to what Néry Cordova has called the blossoming of the "flores de la ira" (Córdova 2008, pp. 11–12). The ambivalence that locals show towards the authorities, anger and hatred against federal forces and contempt for local police, is evident in Mendoza's novels. It is part of the defiance of this region against the centre.

When Samantha Valdés invites Mendieta to work with them she does so with no cynicism but with complete faith in the viability of her proposition.

> Precisamente por eso me interesas, Zurdo Mendieta, ¿crees que no necesitamos gente honrada en nuestras filas? Aunque no lo creas o no lo hayas pensado, este negocio no funcionaría sin grandes dosis de fidelidad y honradez; el grupo que se resquebraja, si no aplica correctivos con urgencia, desaparece. (Mendoza 2010, p. 239)

> Don't you think, she asks the detective, that we need honorable people in our ranks. Although you might not think so, this business would not function without big doses of loyalty, groups that are falling apart have to apply urgent corrective measures or they will disappear. [My translation]

In Elmer Mendoza's indirect free style prose, characters' voices mix and the brazen thought and expression of the narco drug heiress Samantha Valdés matches the arrogance of FBI agents. These are what Harry Polkinhorn has called the twilight zones of border writing where languages, dialects, identities fuse into each other and become bastards. By attacking good taste and the values of the neoliberal state, narco corridos are engaged in a struggle for space.

For this reason, the critics of this literature, who decry it because it offends sensibilities and the official discourses on the war on drugs, are part of the same problem. "Capitalism against itself" is how the war against this trade has been described by Luis Carlos Restrepo, because it has two sides with the same

fundamental beliefs in profit and consumerism. Yet, false battle lines are drawn and dichotomies made between crusaders of the government and the rags to riches merchants of a prohibited product. These entrepreneurs have seen their livelihoods vanish when Ronald Reagan changed his mind and reversed a pact made by a predecessor. As women join the workforce in greater numbers, the jobs available for them in the lower levels of the economy are those in the servant sector where their vulnerability is constant, as Saskia Sassen has pointed out in "Global cities and survival circuits". Their choices are between being trafficked and being traffickers of a product which only certain sections consider illegal. Its legalization in two U.S. states points to a rethink about this.

The stigmatization of culture from the north—like the corrido and the narco novel art forms that have taken to representing the drug industry upon themselves to represent the above problematic—is due to the vagaries of a conservative field of cultural production. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova provides a detailed exposition on a hierarchical literary world that privileges a few metropolitan centres like Paris, London, New York and Mexico City, and the obstacles faced by writers belonging to the periphery or regions far from the consecrated spaces of literary production. New entrants into a literary space have to assimilate the criteria of these spaces or run the risk of permanent alienation. Casanova has elaborated on the methods used by those who have successfully rebelled against the domination of these centres, who have to struggle to create conditions conducive to their literary visibility.[9]

In another context, Pierre Bourdieu has stated that

> the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer. (Bourdieu 1993, p. 42)

Within Mexico, the writers of the northern border and others have welded the common experiences of their fraternity with the exceptional space of the Mexican-U.S. border into a distinct habitus in defiance of the historical hegemony of Mexico City in the field of literature and the arts. Their predispositions and literary inclinations are representations of their context where violence has sedimented into a way of life or, what Luis Astorga and Nery Cordova have called, the "diversificada empresa de la desviación." In a manner similar to Jenni Rivera and her lyrics that reflect the lives of poor Latina women who have risen in life, the literature of the north is imbued with a cultural memory that is different from the one in the heartland of Mexico and this makes for singular representations of life there.

[9]"Para acceder a la simple existencia literaria, para luchar contra esta invisibilidad que desde el principio les amenaza, los escritores tienen que crear las condiciones de su "aparición", es decir, de su visibilidad literaria. La libertad creadora de los escritores oriundos de las "periferias" del mundo no les ha sido concedida de entrada: la han conquistado únicamente a fuerza de combates siempre negados como tales en nombre de la universalidad literaria y de la igualdad de todos ante la creación." (Casanova 2001, p. 233).

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Part IV
Modernity, Technology and (Be)longing

Chapter 16
Tagore's Women Heralding The "New Indian Woman": A Critique of the Women's Question in the Nationalist Discourse

Sanghita Sen

Abstract Tagore's women are distinguished for their radical worldview and actions, successfully heralding the 'new Indian women' of modern India. The women's question that proves crucial not only for the colonial justification of a foreign rule over people who apparently 'brutally' treat their women but also for the nationalist discourse regarding the sacredness of space that women in India inhabit, gets a new dimension through portrayal of extraordinary women in Tagore's fictions. His fictional writings foreground images of outstanding women as harbingers of the 'new era'. Tagore's strong belief in the potential of woman as the driving principle for meaningful change in the fossilized immobility of a rigid patriarchal society is evident in most of his remarkable female characters such as Chandara, Binodini, Mrinal, Kalyani, Damini, Bimala, Anila, Nandini, Kumudini, and Ela. These characters, projected as the catalyst for social transformation in terms of the woman question, are fervent advocates of women's rights and caustic critique of social injustices that dehumanize and objectify women in society. This article attempts to explore how such women characters organically contribute, like the blocks of a jigsaw puzzle, to complete Tagore's imagination of the 'modern Indian woman' and critique the nationalist discourse on the women's question in the nineteenth century Bengal.

Keywords Tagore's women · Modern Indian woman · The new woman in Bengal · Home and the world

The central women characters in several of Tagore's novels and short stories seem to have constructed critiquing the women's question within the nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century. Several of his women characters subvert the traditional

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gender roles by outstepping the sacred and sanctified premises of the 'home'. A progressive worldview and subsequent acts of decision making for their respective lives in the rights of an autonomous individual make these women characters successfully herald the 'new Indian women' of post-independent modern India. Tagore's construction of Indian femininity stands, by and large, in contrast with the portrayal of women in the Indian nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century as the caretaker of Indian socio-cultural values and the sacred cultural core kept within the confines of 'home.' This article attempts to explore how his women characters organically contribute, like the blocks of a jigsaw puzzle, to complete Tagore's imagination of the 'modern Indian woman' on one hand, and critique the nationalist discourse on the women's question in nineteenth century Bengal on the other.

Partha Chatterjee draws our attention to the problematic relationship between nationalism and the women's question as "nationalism fostered a distinctly conservative attitude towards social beliefs and practices" (Chatterjee 1989, pp. 233–234) towards the end of the nineteenth century. He points out,

> [f]undamental elements of social conservatism such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the family, acceptance of the sanctity of the *shastra* (ancient scriptures), preference for symbolic rather than substantive change in social practices – all of them were conspicuous in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century. (Chatterjee 1989, p. 235).

The women's question, that proves crucial not only for the colonial justification of a foreign rule over people for treating their women 'brutally' but also for the nationalist discourse regarding the sacredness of space that women in India were supposed to inhabit, gets a new dimension through portrayal of women in Tagore's fictional writings. His novels and short stories foreground images of women as harbingers of the 'new era.' His strong belief in the potential of women as the driving principle for meaningful change in the fossilized immobility of a rigid patriarchal society [*Achalayatan*[1]] is evident in most of his female characters such as Chandara in *Shasti* (1893) [translated as *Punishment*], Binodini in *Chokher Bali* (1903) [translated in 1914 as *Eyesore*], Mrinal in *Strir Patro* (1914), Kalyani in *Aparichita* (1914), Damini in *Chaturanga* (1916) [translated as *Quartet*], Bimala in *Ghare Baire* (1916) [Translated as *Home and the World*], Anila in *Poila Nambar* (1917) [translated as *House Number One*], Nandini in *Rakta Karabi* (1925) [Translated as *Red Oleanders*], Kumudini in *Jogajog* (1929) [translated as *Relationships*] and Ela in *Char Adhyay* (1934) [translated in 1950 as *Four Chapters*] to name a few. These characters are projected as catalysts for social transformation in which they actively partake. These women are fervent advocates of women's rights in the society and caustic critics of social injustices that dehumanize women as mere objects of necessity within the family. Apart from *Rakta Karabi* (Red Oleanders), which addresses the ruthless quest of human civilization into the heart of Nature for materialistic gains without care or concern, other texts

[1]*Achalayatan*, literally "immobile space", is a term that Tagore often uses in his critique of the Indian education system to represent its conservative as well as restrictive nature. It is a system that fears (and therefore resists) any attempt at change or modification.

portray a Bengali society in transition. It was a time when the spread of modern western education gave rise to the Bengali middle class. However, the decadent gentry of Bengal looked upon this emerging class with great suspicion as a force contaminating the so called 'glorious' tradition of India. This view probably spearheaded a regressive move on issues pertaining to women in the society. Tagore successfully embeds this conflict and social debate in his fiction as a background for his critique of the nationalist discourse. It is to be noted here that Tagore's critique of the women's question within the nationalist discourse is subtle, inherent and implicit.

Tagore values the interrelationship between fellow beings in the society as well as an empathetic bond between them. Such a bond enhances the quality of one's being. In his letter written to Lokendranath Palit he comments:

> Each of us perceives the complete truth about the world, about others as well as about our own selves in our whole life out of the combination of our education, observation, communication and reflection. That is the main tune of our own lives. We mingle this tune with the various tunes of the whole world, and we combine the music of our lives to that tune. According to this essence we are attached or detached, nation-bound or sovereign, materialistic or spiritual, active or reflective. That very essence of my life mingled with all truths of the world has been crystallised as a personal living belief in my life which is bound to express itself explicitly or implicitly in all my written works. Apart from my momentary realization about life, this central belief has its imprint in whatever I write. This may be called the truth in literature as it establishes the primary truth in terms of human life in various forms and shapes. (Tagore, http://www.rabindra-rachanabali.nltr.org/node/7511, Translation mine)

Women characters in his short stories and novels are used to foreground different aspects of social treatment, injustice and cultural idiosyncrasies. Their resistance and revolt are also directed to these varying aspects of social paraphernalia. Together they form what may be called the quintessential Indian woman of the 'new era', invoking a social system that is free from practices of discrimination and subordination as well as repression by patriarchy. Tagore imagines a society in which women are neither worshipped nor subordinated, but are given the status of social equals.

Tagore considers 'literature' as a 'vibrant reflection of society in perpetual transition' and women play a more prominent role in it than men. The narrator of *Naranari* echoes this conviction of Tagore: "the chief reason why women have greater prominence than men in our literature is that women of our country are of much greater essence than men here" (Tagore 1935, p. 37, translation mine). His women characters comply with neither the social dictates nor the criticism that their rebellious behaviour may elicit from the society they inhabit. Issues that drive either Mrinal (*Strir Patra* translated as *The Wife's Letter*) or Anila (*Poila Nombor* translated as *House Number One*) out of their respective 'homes' may not be acceptable as 'adequately justified' for many, even today. Reasons that are considered 'valid' socially for a woman to break away from the 'sacred' marital bond, such as the husband's lechery, ill-treatment, physical torture from the husband or the in-laws, are not reasons why Mrinal decides to quit the family. She clearly states,

> I did not suffer in your household, as suffering is commonly understood. In your house there is no lack of food or clothes. Whatever be your elder brother's character, you have no vices of which I can complain to the Almighty. (Tagore 2000c, p. 217)

She quits home to 'live' with the dignity of an individual. The death of the 'second daughter-in-law' becomes imperative after she learns "what it means to be a woman in this domestic world" and thus declares that she needs "no more of it" (Tagore 2000c, p. 217). Anila (*Poila Nombor/House Number One*) too does not abandon her home as a result of any personal 'suffering' but to seek the meaning of her own identity in the given context. She leaves a note (interestingly written on two halves of the same paper), for her husband Adwaitacharan and Sitangshu saying "I am leaving. Don't try to find me. You won't succeed even if you try" (Tagore 2000a, p. 241). She does not leave an eloquent letter like that of Mrinal's. However, the nature of their discontent at the social treatment of women as a whole is similar. Both were 'invisible' in spite of their presence; both did not accept their representative invisibility. Both left the space allocated for Indian women to honour their identities as individuals.

These two short stories mentioned above belong to the *Sabujpatra* era of Tagore's creative career.[2] Here one needs to remember that Tagore's women characters were beginning to be rebellious much before this period. For example, the portrayal of Chandara, the central character of the short story *Shasti* (first published in 1893, translated as *Punishment*), represents this tendency in Tagore's depiction of women. Through the portrayal of this character, Tagore seems to have begun his search for an alternative femininity. Far from proceeding uncomplainingly to accept her death as a result of her 'supposed' offence imposed on her by her own husband Chhidam, Chandara gave her tragic fate a new dimension of resistance. While the trial was going on, both Chhidam and Dukhiram wanted to take responsibility for Radha's murder, yet Chandara did not shift from her path of ominously silent resistance. Probably, what Chhidam said to Ramlochan after Radha's death was still echoing in her mind: "Thakur, if I lose my wife I'll get another, but if my brother is hanged I'll never get another" (Tagore 2000b, p. 113). The apparent lack of respect and value for women in men's life is what compelled Chandara to register her resistance at the cost of her life. Like Mrinal and Anila, she too cannot take any "more of this". The gallows appear to be a better option than being deprived of her own worth as an individual in her own domestic context. Consequently, she accepts the charge of the supposed 'murder' of her co-sister, in spite of being innocent, negating all efforts from her husband and brother-in-law to save her later on. While the judge tells her of the severeness of

[2]*Sabujpatra* was a literary magazine published during the first decades of the twentieth century under the editorship of Pramatha Chaudhuri. It is considered as a landmark period in the poet's career. Buddhadeva Bose, renowned Bengali poet, literary critic and Tagore specialist notes "Rabindranath found freedom in *Sabujpatra*; though there was no gap in the free flow, yet the course of the river took a radical turn here; we can find two different Rabindranaths before and after *Sabujpatra.* He left his earlier strand, broke the shackle of his old habit, he did not return to the strand that he left behind" (Bose 1959, p. 15, translation mine).

punishment for the act of murder, she simply replies "I beg you Sahib, give me that punishment. Do what you please, but I can't stand any more of this" (Tagore 2000b, p. 119). Chandara's progress towards death breaks down Chhidam completely. The 'repentent' Chhidam goes to meet Chandara one last time on the night before her execution. While approached by the kind civil surgeon regarding her last wish to meet someone, she says, "I would like to see my mother once" (Tagore 2000b, p. 120). In reply to the civil surgeon's information that her husband wants to see her, her pungent yet short utterance has been "maran".[3] Chandara's last reply reminds the reader of the lyrical utterance of Radha in *Bhanu Singher Padabali*, hurt at the apparent neglect of her divine lover who too thinks of death as an adorable option—"*maran re tunhu mama shyama saman*" (O Death! You are like my Shyam) and of Radha's languished lament "*tunhu nahi bisarabi, tunhu nahi chorbi/Radha hridaya tu kabahun na todbi*" (You won't forget me, you won't leave me alone/You'll never break the heart of Radha) (in Tagore 1999, p. 342, Translation mine)—everything that Shyam did and everything that Radha thinks the Death will not do. Radha's melancholy is echoed in Chandara's act of embracing death as the rejection of the general social attitude towards women as 'disposable.'

The language and mode of resistance of Mrinal and Anila differ from that of Chandara. However, as an act of resistance and assertion of the right of the individual they are well in tune. Together, they contribute to constructing the image of the new Indian woman who strives not for materialistic comfort but dignity in treatment and equality in social status. While Chandara chooses death as the mode of her protest, Mrinal and Anila choose the path of determined rejection of the normative verdict of patriarchal society. Their complaint is not against any particular person but against the very idea of 'swami' (husband) which literally means the 'owner' and the institution of family that creates enormous barriers for their individual selves and their self-respect. Their revolt is against this 'concept' and the practice. The helplessness of Bindu and her elder sister, the resentment of the male members of her family, and her husband's lack of sympathy for the ill-treatment done to Bindu make Mrinal deeply reflect on the worthlessness of women in the 'domestic world' and compels her to revolt against it. Though Adwaitacharan's narcissistic attachment to his own world and neglect of his wife coupled with her brother's sudden death compels Anila to leave home, her letter of intimation regarding her decision to quit written on two halves of the same paper to her husband and her admirer makes the reader tread deeper into the issue. Her husband recognized her only as a caretaker of the home following the ancient Sanskrit proverb—"*grihini grihamuchyate*"—i.e. the wife is a maker of the home (translation mine). Her admirer Shitangshumouli, the dweller of the House Number One, who is a representative of the emerging educated middle class, tried

[3]Though the literal English translation of the last utterance of Chandara, i.e. '*maran*' is 'death,' in the cultural context in which it is often used, it has several layers of meaning. The sense that Chandara might have wanted to convey is 'to hell with you,' i.e. a sense of absolute rejection of Chhidam's repentance at her doom.

to condescendingly perceive her as a deity to be worshipped. Anila considered both as equally unacceptable for neither gave her the right or the position of an autonomous individual. Her resistance is, hence, against this conservative utilitarian patriarchal view of women. Chandara, Mrinal and Anila do not reject any particular man, they subvert the patriarchal practices conspicuous in the society rendering them not only passive recipients of patriarchal actions but also invisible subsequently.

Gora, the protagonist of the novel by the same name, committed the same error of considering women "worshippable only when she is the light of the home" (*pujarha grihadiptayah*). He could find his true self only when he could come out of his restrictive views of women premised on Manu's verdict. Herein lies the uniqueness of Tagore's idea of woman. Both worship out of distant unrealistic reverence and deception out of patriarchal arrogance are equally unacceptable to him. It is probably because of this that Damini (*Chaturanga*) accepts Sribilas as her partner with the memory of Shachish in her heart. Shachish may be her teacher as well as lover, but the uneven terrain of life could only be travelled with someone with greater realistic approach: hence Sribilas is more acceptable to Damini than Shachish as a partner. Damini in her choice as well as her decision is elevated from the realm of 'dream' to the realm of 'reality.' The process of becoming a part of the 'reality' or 'truth' appears to be the singular quest of women that Tagore created. As part of this quest for truth and equality Chitrangada tells Arjun

> I'm not the one who you shall keep afar through worship
> I'm not the one who you shall leave behind by mere neglect
> If you keep me by your side in crisis and prosperity
> Allow me to be a comrade in your pledge
> You'll get to know me. (in Tagore 1999, p. 705, translation mine)

Tagore believed that the liberation of the human mind is possible only by one's consistent attempt to break social manacles and remove prejudiced views of life. The quest is to lead the individual along the enlightened path towards union with the 'Universal Self' of which the individual is a part. Characters such as Chandara, Mrinal, Anila, Damini and Chitrangada are but the beacons representing the 'guardian angel' to materialize the union of the individual with the universal self (Ghosh 2003). Tagore is highly eager to dismantle any kind of illusion and prejudice in his search of Jiban Debata (the benevolent divine self). He opposed the nationalist tendency to worship the country through Nikhilesh in *Ghare Baire* (*Home and the World*). Nikhilesh says, "I am ready to serve my country but I'll only worship Him who is much above. If I worship my country I'll only contribute to its peril." (Tagore 2002b, p. 955, translation mine). Tagore opposed the tendency to give up individuality in the name of organizational discipline with equal vehemence in *Char Adhyay* (*Four Chapters*). Atin's realization echoes Tagore's concern regarding the necessity of upholding individuality in a balanced inclusive society. Atin tells Ela towards the end of the novel—"I murdered my nature, the gravest sin of all. I couldn't uproot and kill any injustice but killed my own self completely" (Tagore 2002a, p. 1382, translation mine).

Tagore relentlessly unveiled various social myths regarding nationalism, the role of the individual in society and the social position of women which forms the crux of Tagorean consciousness beginning from *Gora* to *Char Adhyay* through 1910–1934. It is to be noted here that though the dialogic argument in each of the texts has both male and female participants, it is Tagore's women who drive his point home. Characters such as Binodini (*Chokher Bali*), Damini (*Chaturanga*), Mrinal (*Strir Patra*), Anila (*Poila Nombor*) and Kalyani (*Aparichita*) become instrumental in unveiling individual weakness in their male counterparts as well the fallible treatment of women and the downtrodden in particular social contexts. These characters consequently resist the patriarchal practices and hegemony through pungent satire (Chandara in *Punishment)*, denunciation of the family and social status of a wife (Mrinal in *The Wife's Letter*), ruthless rejection (Binodini in *Eyesore*), option of friendly conjugality instead of passionate love (Damini in *Quartet*), favouring status quo out of an awareness of her own imperfection as well as vulnerability (Bimala in *Home and the World*) and seeking individual freedom instead of domestic security (Anila in *House Number One*). The following expression becomes the yearning for these women characters,

Bhuvaneswaro he,
Mochon koro bondhon shob mochon koro he.
Probhu mochon koro bhoy,
Shob doinyo koroho loy,
Nityo chokito choncholo chito koro nihshongshoy

(O the master of the universe/
Remove all restraints, o the great one
O master remove fear
Terminate all impoverishness,
Make my ever- anxious restless heart doubtless.)

(Tagore 1999, p. 56, translation mine).

Such a yearning prompts Tagore in his later years to lead Kumudini of *Relationships* to resist the unquestioning devotion to the idea of a "worshipping husband."

Supriya Chaudhuri notes that the novel revolves around

> a plot contrasting social fortunes of a decaying aristocracy with those of the rising bourgeoisie of late nineteenth-century Bengal while it focuses, obsessively and uneasily, on the sexual and moral frustrations of domesticity (2006, p. 4).

The quest for the true self is as important to Kumudini as it is to Mrinal. Both are the victims of a 'fraudulent marriage' in some way or the other. While for Mrinal the death of the self of the 'second daughter-in-law' proves crucial, the designation of '*barabou*' (the elder daughter-in-law) appears equally meaningless to Kumu. Her poignant reflection is: "I'm their *barobou*: does that mean anything if I'm not Kumu?" (Tagore 2006, p. 253). Kumu's distinctive individuality lies in her sense of self-respect and her empathy towards others. Kumu devotes herself to her yet-unseen husband before her marriage following the devotion and mutual respect which existed between her parents. However, her experience after she arrives in

her husband's house is completely contrary to what she had imagined. What hurts her most is her insult to her own self at her own lack of judgement: "in the heart of her heart what bothered her most was the sense of an insult to her own self" (Tagore 2002c, p. 1101, Translation mine). Disillusioned after the marriage about her 'imagined' husband she clutches onto Moti and his mother to bind herself to the Ghoshal family, her 'home' for life.

> Madhusudan is a successful modern man; his only goal is to achieve wealth and outward status…. In accordance with the custom of contemporary times, he thought of the glory of wealth as supreme, and had become swollen with arrogance – at such a moment Kumu had found it impossible to surrender to him – this was an enormous blow to his self-respect – so humiliating a relationship was to her like a perversion – it was an insult to her deity – like dragging in the mud what was most precious to her. (Chaudhuri 2006, p. 5)

Chaudhuri refers to Buddhadeva Bose's estimate of Kumu's character who "was to renounce conservative traditions and beliefs" in order to "assert her faith in the religion of humanity alone" in spite of being the product of a past age (2006, p. 7). In spite of several contradictions in the portrayal of characters and plot, the novel's problematic is the institution of marriage:

> … marriage as a critical encounter, sexual and psychological, between two persons, and marriage as a contractual negotiation between families. It is upon the person of Kumudini that this cruelly exact examination of marriage is conducted, and through it she acquires the *literary* form of a person, something beyond mere subjectivity or narrative history (Chaudhuri 2006, p. 19).

It is through examining the institution of marriage that Tagore introduces the issue of marital rape and its impact on women. Kumu's pregnancy as a result of her unwilling sexual encounter with her husband appears as a punishment to her.

> The fear that she might be pregnant made clear to Kumu how monstrous a form her brief encounter with her husband had taken in her mind…. She had tried endlessly to keep pure and inviolate her duty to worship her husband. But never till this moment had she realised how utterly she had been defeated. She was tortured by the monstrosity of the bond that now bound her, in the flesh, to Madhusudan (Tagore 2006, pp. 249–250).

Kumu leaves her 'home' while she is pregnant as a token of her noncompliance to Madhusudan's authoritative control over her as well as everyone in his family as an inanimate 'possession'. Kumu's decision to leave home is the mark of her resistance not only to the patriarchal hegemony that considers women as 'disposable' or insignificant but also a move to register her own claim to be treated with dignity as an autonomous individual. This aligns her with Mrinal, Binodini, Anila, Kalyani, Ela, Damini and Nandini among other Tagore's characters. At the end of the novel, she comes back to Madhusudan's house. Nevertheless, this return is not be mistaken as a regressive move of a progressive action. She comes back for her child and not for the social norms. Both her departure and her return absolutely depended on her volition. In execution of her will she enjoys the privileges of an autonomous individual. Her freedom is neither conditional nor dependent upon approval of an authority, and herein lies her victory as an individual.

The path that was paved by Rabindranath while creating women characters as the harbingers of the 'new era' was furthered by characters such as Satyabati of Ashapurna Devi's *Pratham Pratishruti* (translated as *The First Promise*), Jamila of Walliullah's *Laalsalu*, Sanaka of Sambhu Mitra's *Chand Baniker Pala*, Dopdi Mejhen of Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, Sujata of Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Ma* (*The Mother of 1084*), Madhavilata of Samaresh Majumder's *Kaalbela*, etc. They all carried the torch of resistance, relentless questioning of the discriminatory social practices and the message of social transformation against an unjust society. It is here that Tagore's women characters play a pioneering role in casting a role model for the new woman in modern India while critiquing the stand of the Indian nationalist discourse on the women's question.

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Chapter 17
Manasi to Neera: The Evolution of the Concept of "Muse" in Modern Bengali Poetry

Soumi Chatterjee

Abstract Although the concept of 'muse' in Bengali poetry was borrowed from the West in the nineteenth century by several poets, Tagore was the first person who extracted the very best qualities from nature and the human and created his own muse, 'Manasi'. Though a number of iconic women were portrayed in the writings of Jibanananda Das, another legendary poet of the post-Tagore era in Bengal, they never became the muse for the poet because the blow of the First and Second World Wars was strong enough to shatter the concept of love, trust, ethical values as well as romantic musings of life in common people all over the world. Very surprisingly, the idea of the muse came back in Bengali poetry nearly a decade after Jibanananda. Binoy Majumdar's 'Gayatri' or Sunil Gangopadhyay's 'Neera' once again evoked the sense of hope, desire, refusal and sorrow among the young middle class readers in a broken time. The portrayal of the 'muse' or the 'beloved' has also undergone a gradual change during this time. Tagore's women characters were pioneers of the new Cultural Revolution, but they mostly belonged to an elite class. However, Gayatri or Neera was the poetic representation of any educated and urban modern Bengali woman of post-partition Bengal. In this work, I try to focus first on the evolution of the concept of beloved or muse in modern Bengali poetry, and second the influence of the socio-cultural terrain of post-partition Bengal and the changing position of women in Indian society on this evolution.

Keywords Muse in Bengali poetry · Michael Madhusudan Dutta · Rabindranath Tagore · Buddhadeva Bose · Jibanananda Das · Sunil Gangopadhyay

The most inspirational role of a woman in the poetic world created by men all over the world is probably the role of a beloved or muse. The nature and manner of these women are one of their kind, although their representation varies immensely

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depending upon the space, time and the expression of the poet. Bengali poetry, too, has a similar tradition.

According to ancient Greek mythology, muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (the goddess of memory). Hesiod mentioned and named nine muses in the eighth century BC. They were considered as personifications of knowledge and aesthetics, and later they became goddesses of art, science and literature. Various literary persons like Homer, Virgil, Dante, Petrarch, Shakespeare, as well as painters like Raphael had given these 'muses' immense importance in their respective works. In earlier epic literature like Homer's *The Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, the concept of muse was purely based on popular mythical belief. Poets used to invoke muses to inspire them to write. As we can see in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> O Muse! The causes and the crimes relate;
> What goddess was provok'd, and whence her hate;
> For what offense the Queen of Heav'n began
> To persecute so brave, so just a man; […]
>
> (John Dryden translation, 1697, Web)

Considering the influence of muses in earlier poetry, Catharina Vallejo writes,

> Muses are therefore passive, at best an inspirational value; they themselves are not creators. On the contrary, they are the "other" external to the creative process, that is, "Woman" "stands as the silent but enabling condition of writing" (2007, p. 82)

Later, from the thirteenth or fourteenth century AD, the concept of Muse began to merge with the inspirational women of an artist's real life. Beatrice and Laura, who in real life were the lady loves of Dante and Petrarch, became their respective muses in their poetry. Beatrice, in *Divine Comedy*, has been portrayed as a divine soul, who emerged to guide Dante through the pathways of Heaven. In the case of Laura, the depiction was more poetic and realistic. Petrarch in *Canzoniere* (or the "Song Book") often spoke about the beauty of Laura or the enormous joy that her presence evoked in his mind. And in doing so, according to Gianfranco Contini, Petrarch never rises above the "bel pié" (her lovely foot) because Laura is too holy to be painted; she is an awe-inspiring goddess. Therefore, we can see that although for the first time the poet's beloved sublimated to the heavenly muse, her depiction in poetry was still quite symbolic.

We can also see the presence of muse in Shakespeare's sonnets or in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but the invocation of the 'muse' was an indication that the speaker was working inside the poetic tradition, according to established norms. It was a notion of romantic literature to put emphasis on human beings, especially on women. Therefore, often the poets had addressed the muse and had expressed their intensity through nature or human beings. Sometimes, their adored women such as Elizabeth Hitchner (whom Shelley called 'sister of my soul' or 'my second half') became their muse (such as in *Queen Mab*). This somewhat changed towards the end of the nineteenth century. According to Vallejo,

> The end of the nineteenth century was a profoundly ambiguous era, contradictory in several dimensions. With the co-existence of Romanticism, positivism and modernism – to name but three of the conceptual perspectives that were current – profound changes occurred in all social, political, and cultural endeavors (2007: p. 82).

It is often thought that, the concept of muse in Bengali poetry evoked in the nineteenth century was a concept borrowed from the West. Although there was a very long tradition in Vaishnava literature (especially in the poems of Chandidas, Vidyapati, Govindadas, etc.) to think of Radha as a *preyasi* (beloved) of Krishna, Radha was never the muse of the poets. Usually, the poets were silent observers of the emotional tension between Radha and Krishna and often had a deep concern for Radha. A number of poets of the nineteenth century colonized Bengal were deeply moved by the essence of western Romanticism and neo classicism, but the excellence was achieved by none other than the 'avant-garde poet of Bengal Renaissance' Michael Madhusudan Dutta. In an unfinished ode called "Brajangana" or "The Lady of Braja" he beautifully depicted the sorrow of Radha, who is deprived of the love of her beloved Krishna. In the poetic excellence of Madhusudan Dutta, the western notion of adoration blended with the eastern concept of empathy towards the woman who is madly in love. In another series of poems called *Veerangana*, which was a verse epistle inspired by Ovid's *Heroides*, he has portrayed various emotions and arguments of 11 mythical women to their lovers. Radha in "Brajangana" mournfully talks about the conflict between her heart and the society. Social norms did not allow her to listen to her heart, and her heart does not agree to obey the social norms. In response to this conflict, the poet has shown his concern, just like most of the mediaeval poets by saying,

> The one who loves, my dear, what value does she have for
> Family, honour or wealth? …
> Madhu [the poet] says, forget the family, and go to
> Sri Madhusudan [Krishna], o lady, he is the abode of *rasa*

(Dutta 2007, p. 150, translation mine)

Here the poet simply advises Radha to not care about the society and go to her beloved, Krishna. Now if we consider it as the poetic tradition of Vaishnava poetry only, we might overlook the fact that what Madhusudan tried to depict is the freedom of women, but as the society did not permit him to speak for the liberty of women, he had to hide his true intention behind a myth. In case of Vaishnava poets, they had done the same. But they were bound to the doctrinal concept of eternal union between Radha and Krishna, so the restrictions of society were basically never important to them. But Madhusudan was not a doctrinal poet; he was born with the free spirit of renaissance. So when he insists that Radha ignore the restrictions of society, he actually revolts against prevalent social norms. In a letter by Kaikeyi in *Veerangana* he writes:

> If there is no sin in this body,
> If this self has followed the husband's footsteps, and been devoted to the husband,
> May Dharma [the husband] judge me as per the principles of *dharma.*

(Dutta 2007, p. 165, translation mine)

where queen Kaikeyi sought justice from king Dasharatha for not keeping the promise he made to her by choosing Rama instead of her own son Bharat for coronation. Similarly, in the letter from Tara to Som, the poet chooses to portray

the passion of Tara to her husband's disciple Som, where Tara did not care about the fact that she is married, or that Som is much younger than her, and more precisely, as per social norms Som was to be treated like a son by Tara. Madhusudan has also shown the prudence and wisdom of Bhanumati (wife of Duryodhana) or Duhshala (sister of Duryodhana) in their respective epistles.

In both these works, the classical women (heroines) have been given the liberty to ask for their rights or to convey their emotions freely by the poet; whereas, the middle class Bengali society was truly conservative about each and every activity of women at that time. Therefore, it can be said that it was almost impossible for any poet in nineteenth century Bengal to create a muse who resembled a beloved. It was always either the nation (in Rangalal's writing) or a mother-like figure, or a daughter or a dead wife who was the inspiration of poetry, like Akshay Chandra Boral wrote "Esha" in memoriam of his wife or Biharilal Chakraborty wrote "Sarala" after the death of his wife. On the contrary, the portrayal of the muse or beloved in poetry in that era was not only rare, but most of the times it was a desperate endeavour to imply that very concept.

In Tagore's literature, the depiction of women as inspiration is very diverse in nature. Kazi Abdul Wadud once wrote in *Prabasi*, "Rabindranath's expressions have two distinct aspects to it: that of a mystical player of the flute, and of a visionary" (Wadud 1925, p. 497). Where in his poems women are more like a guardian angel, controller of the poet's life; in his novels and short stories, women like Binodini of *Chokher Bali*, Bimala of *Ghare Baire*, Ela of *Char Adhyay*, Chandara of *Shasti*, Nirupama of *Dena Paona* and Nandini of *Rakta Karabi* are rebels and reflect his visionary power. They represent what Tagore inevitably wanted women to be at that crucial time, when society, nation, and thus, conjugal relationships were going through a process of transformation. Whereas, Tagore's muse Manasi later on led to the emergence of his idea of 'jiban devata' and formed the foundation of his unique idea of humanitarianism, Tagore's women characters became the true muses of the rational, literate middle class Bengali gentry.

Bengali poetry after Tagore followed the trend of giving emphasis to women (both classical and fictional) as muse, which we can see in Buddhadeva Bose's Kankabati, or Ajit Dutta's Malati, but the women became more earthy or visible in their writing than ever, and they were unique and easily distinguished with their names such as Maitreyi, Kanka, Roma, Aparna, Damini, etc. The poets also started to describe the physical beauty of their beloved from this time. As Buddhadeva Bose writes,

> Your voice or a few words uttered
> The spark in your eyes, or rounded lips
> A sight of your tongue or white little teeth
> Strikes me like thunder. (Bose 2010, p. 115, translation mine)

This kind of detailed physical description of a woman was considered obscene at that time. But what Buddadeva Bose or the modern poets tried actually was to abolish the romantic atmosphere in literature and evoke the consciousness of modernity among the readers. They started to address their female creations with a specific name like Arunima Sanyal, Shefalika Bose or Maitreyi Ghosh or Alaka

Basu, and often with their geographic references, such as Banalata Sen of Natore, to emphasize their uniqueness. The Bengali poets were greatly inspired by foreign poets like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarme, Rilke, Paul Eluard, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats and to be more associated with the notion of modernity of the contemporary world they started using symbols, which often made their poetry complex. Classical and iconic women (such as Damayanti, Damini, etc.) once again emerged in modern Bengali poetry, but this time with modern interpretations by the poets.

Though a number of iconic women like Banalata Sen, Suchetana or Suranjana have been portrayed in the writings of Jibanananda Das, another legendary poet of the post-Tagore era in Bengal, they never became the muse for the poet. The blow of the First World War was strong enough to shatter the concept of love, trust, ethical values as well as romantic musings of life in common people all over the world. The circumstances became more disastrous after the Second World War. Jibanananda, like many other celebrated modernist poets such as T.S Eliot and W.B.Yeats, could not avoid portraying the terror that he witnessed during his time. But the world he created in his poetry was majorly surreal and his very famous women characters also belonged to that surreal world. In his writing, all his women witnessed the time he portrayed, or the poet simply confessed his feelings in front of them but did not wish their influence to overflow the practicality or the roughness of his time. What he sought from women like Banalata Sen is shelter, but what he realized is that, "A strange darkness had descended upon the earth." Therefore he writes,

I have looked upon woman with love
I have looked upon woman with apathy
I have looked upon woman with hate.

She has loved me,
And came near
She has paid no heed to me.
She has despised me and gone away when I called
Loving her.

(Das 2007, p. 19, translation from allpoetry.com)

This detachment with love or women makes us realize why there was no muse or inspiration in his poetry. This transition period in Bengali literature is very important because from this time the poets did not remain in the small territory of their own imagined world but truly became aware of the socio-cultural revolution across the world and became a part of it. Very surprisingly, the idea of the beloved or muse came back in Bengali poetry nearly a decade after Jibanananda. The first generation young poets like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Utpal Kumar Basu, Deepak Mazumdar, Shakti Chattopadhyay and Binoy Majumdar dreamt of a different world but what they witnessed was the partition, riots, unemployment followed by economic depression, etc. Still they did not give up hope, and started a new literary revolution to free their thoughts and language from earlier tradition. They neither depicted the heavenly and platonic love for women nor portrayed any apathy towards them, but showed

their true passion for love, for women. And thus Binoy Majumdar's 'Gayatri' or Sunil Gangopadhyay's 'Neera' once again evoked the sense of hope, desire, refusal and sorrow among the young middle class readers in a broken time. They led the path of young people to take risks, to break the conservative norms of society, and to revolt against 'tradition', as Sunil Gangopadhyay writes in "A truth bound sentiment",

This hand has touched Neera's face;
Could I use this hand to commit a sin
Ever again?
…
I whisper to myself—
'Be worthy of her,
Be worthy and rise'
I touch Neera's chin—
This hand has touched Neera's face;
Could I use this hand to commit a sin
Ever again?

(Gangopadhyay 2010, p. 207, translated by Sheila Sengupta)

Or in a poem titled "Ephemeral" he wrote,

Sometimes, when I've looked at the sky,
I've seen a dying star.
I feel a shiver in my heart,
my eyes come down to the earth
and to the world all around.
At those times, Neera,
I feel a strong desire
to fight all that is born to die!
I wish to place the flag of the Heavens
in your almond-hued palm,
and tell the whole world,
that the ray of mystical light
falling on your chin,
shall stay arrested, forever.

(Gangopadhyay 2010, p. 196, translated by Sheila Sengupta)

We can easily observe how Neera, Sunil's muse, provides him the love and warmth, inspires his poetic imagination with her presence as well as evokes a sense of social responsibility inside him. Neera was not only a muse, but also the true image of middle class, educated women of the 50s or 60s. She was the perfect blend of reality and imagination regarding the concept of muse of that era.

It is to be noted that not only the muse, but also the portrayal of the 'beloved' has undergone a gradual change from Rabindranath to Jibanananda, from Jibanananda to Sunil. This also corresponds to the change in the representation of women in Bengal's socio-cultural terrain. When Madhusudan was writing *Veerangana* in 1862 and raising questions about the rights of women, there were a large number of girls' schools in Bengal, widow remarriage was enacted already, but the society was not ready to accept any reformation regarding women's rights. We can derive the true position of women in society from the autobiography of Rassundari Devi entitled *Amar Jiban* (My Life) written in 1876. She tried to educate herself to "escape the grind of petty

domesticity" and wrote "Just because I am a woman does it necessarily mean that trying to educate myself is a crime?" She also wrote about her widowhood (her husband died in 1869) in her autobiography:

> Toward the end of my life I have been widowed. I feel ashamed and hurt by the realization that even if a woman has lived her life fully, has brought up her children and leaves behind her sons and daughters to carry on, her widowhood is still considered a misfortune (in Tharu and Lalita 1991, p. 191).

According to Bharati Ray, the role of women started to change from the late nineteenth century,

> Women for the first time saw themselves reflected through a public mirror. In fighting against the British domination, many of them also began to resent their domestic bondage. They started to question the inequality boldly in women's journals about women's marginalisation in society that existed between men and women. Even some housewives, ordinary and relatively unknown, started writing. (Ray 2010, p. 72)

And this self-awareness of women reflects in the strong female characters of Tagore. Being an iconic figure he not only depicted the negligence women used to get from the society for a long time, but also tried to enlighten society through his speeches and writings. It is said that Tagore got his poetic inspiration from many women throughout his life such as Anna Tadkhad (who was given the name Nalini or the lotus by the poet himself), his wife Mrinalini Devi, Lady Ranu Mukherjee, Victoria Ocampo (named as Vijaya by the poet himself) and last but most importantly his Notun Bouthan or sister-in law Kadambari Devi. At the age of 65, Tagore acknowledged the fact in a letter,

> After all that I have experienced in life, one thing which I can truly admit with pride that I have never ignored the love of women, however it might be. I have always considered the love or affection or care of any woman as a *favour* because I have felt that it always contributed something to me. (Roy 1997, p. 163, paraphrased translation mine, italics indicates original use of the English word within the Bengali text)

In first few decades of the twentieth century, the role or importance of women in society changed very drastically. During the late 1950s or 1960s, it was not only an outcome of the post-independence free thinking society, but also an effect of the economic depression West Bengal faced after the failure of two continuous 5-year plans. Primarily, refugee women started to take up various jobs in different sectors like educational institutions, semi-government and private firms or in the film industry in order to support their families, and later the middle class Bengali women were also influenced by this process and became a part of it. According to Tridib Santapa Kundu,

> Economic independence made them self-conscious and confident enough to fight against patriarchy. The patriarchal control over women's education and employment was relaxed to a great extent and the process of women's empowerment got a momentum in the post-Independence/partition Bengali society. (Kundu 2006, p. 52–54)

Bengali women felt the essentiality of education and started joining colleges and universities for higher studies; they started taking part in active political movements too. In other words

> The Bengali women came out of their private domain of domesticity and child-rearing and took up various public duties, driven mainly by the economic motive. Whatever the motive was, it meant more freedom from domestic chores and some command over money which they could now claim as their own (Kundu 2006, p. 52–54).

These new working class women showed their influence in literature too. Neeta of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (written by Shaktipada Rajguru and later adapted to film by Ritwik Ghatak), Madhabilata of *Kalbela* (written by Samaresh Mazumdar), Arati of *Abataranika* (written by Narendranath Mitra and later adapted by Satyajit Ray into the film *Mahanagar* or 'the big city'), are the very representatives of these modern women. Sunil Gangopadhyay's Neera or Binoy Majumdar's Gayatri do not possess the same rebellious attitude like the previous women though, but seem to be the poetic representation of the very same educated, urbanized modern Bengali woman. Neera as Sunil Gangopadhyay said,

> One day, it was quarter to ten in the morning, I was standing at a bus stop on Circular Road, when a few lines about Neera blew in my mind. That was the beginning… I have grown older, but Neera is still young as a portrait. I want her to be humane, but often she crosses the barrier and emerges in the world of art. She becomes a woman of sculpture; she doesn't remain mine only, and becomes universal. When I call her back again, I see her feet got pricked by thorns, I see tears in her eyes. This seems a never ending game of unity and separation with her. (2010: 3, Translation mine)

Neera was not only the muse of one particular poet; she was derived from the very best essence of women in a broken time, and became eternal. After her, the concept of muse in Bengali poetry became fragmented. A number of female poets started to illustrate the true position of women, their emotions, desires and revolts against the social system. There was no more such a muse as Neera in Bengali poetry, but many new faces and many names such as 'Suparna' emerged with their distinct impression.

It can be seen from the foregoing study on modern Bengali poetry that there was a time when 'muse' used to inspire literature, then came the era when the concept of muse has been rationalized and started to merge with real life women. Gradually, women achieved their own position in society through a long struggle and became iconic in the true sense. *Muse* no longer remained the inspiring goddess or the mere sublimation of the poet's beloved; she became the strength, the inspiration and the true depiction of the modern woman. The concept of *muse* thus has evolved and has found a new definition in the socio-cultural terrain of post-partition Bengal.

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Chapter 18
"Gulabi Talkies": Technology, Empowerment and Changing Spaces Women Occupy

Rajan Joseph Barrett

Abstract This article shows that in postcolonial India technology changes the lives of women, and hence the spaces they occupy get transformed. It tries to show how the age old technology of midwifery and the economy itself persist and change, with the coming of newer technologies like the hospital and the cinema. Besides the lives of upper class women changing, lower class women have had to reinvent themselves by taking up occupations that make them operate in different spaces, and put up with a patriarchy whose norms and practices have not changed much, but have perhaps got more sophisticated in a changing world. The article hopes to establish that through the short story "Gulabi Talkies," Vaidehi highlights the spaces that a woman can function in despite changing technologies. It also hopes to show that a cultural transformation takes place with Lillibai, the protagonist, as an agent who functions from boudoir like spaces of the birthing room to the public space of the talkies. Technologies change and for the working classes, survival is linked to reinvention and adaptability.

Keywords Technology and women · Transformation in traditional female occupations · Vaidehi · "Gulabi Talkies"

Technologies that we function with shape us—whether it is the economy or the hospital. The culture that these technologies affect gets noticed often, only when there is a new technology in the making, or there is an import of technology from another country or space into an environment that did not support that technology. I would be inclined to consider that some technologies move from urban to rural spaces, from industrially more advanced societies to those which are villages or non-industrial towns and cities. Perhaps, the reverse is also true; however, there is prestige attached when the technologies move from what are considered economically and

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socially privileged zones to less privileged ones. When it comes to India, different parts of India were affected differently with the coming of industrialization in various ways; as a result the cultures of different parts of India alter with variations in the intensity of the impact. Historically, industrialization and colonialism were two technologies which seem to have come in more or less together, and had responses that often seem confused. A response to the culture of the colonizers was often a reaction to the technology that they supplied. Changes in the economic system, a technology in itself, with the opening up of the Indian Economy to the West, destabilized a lot of people and the means and manner by which they survived. Though Manju Singh does not really consider economy as a technology in itself, her notion of empowerment and development might be an important consideration:

> The empowerment of rural women is specifically vital for the development of the rural Bharat. Bringing women into the mainstream of development is a major concern for the Government of India. Rural women still remain a disadvantaged segment of Indian society. They continue to struggle with dual responsibilities of economic production and domestic labour, and the majority are confronted by poverty, illiteracy, high health risks, inadequate access to technology and productive resources and lack of credit/market access. To improve status of rural women, one of the viable strategies, quite often talked about, is the role of technology to empower them. There are shining examples from the developing countries to illustrate women who started adopting technologies in various farm and off-farm activities and were able to build capacity to reduce drudgeries and enhance quality of life substantially. (Singh 2010, p. 564)

In a postcolonial world, the plight of the marginalized, be it women and/or the working classes, shows that the stability of small time traditional professions got shaken or perhaps even got eliminated. This called for a reinvention of the self and the identity of the person as far as petty professions were concerned. I do not imply that the upper classes were less shaken by postcoloniality and post-industrialization, but that those at the bottom of the class and caste cultural hierarchy have had a greater burden in handling the trauma of change imposed from without. When gender is added to these sociological divisions, perhaps there is a call for greater complexity in analysis.

The story at hand is of a non-industrial town in Karnataka which is slowly being transformed by the spread of industrialization, but it has not become so industrialized at the time depicted in the story. My response seems to come close to what Tejaswini Niranjana says:

> However, I feel the same sort of nostalgia as my fellow translators when I read stories like ‘Ghost’ or ‘Gulabi Talkies’, which take me back to half-forgotten and barely glimpsed rural locations, and to characters whose preoccupations and pace of life seem to be from another time. (Niranjana 2006, p. viii)

The local culture shows that there are strong women who seem to economically provide for their households and insist that the husbands work if the economic conditions are not satisfying enough. They even go so far as to send the husbands off to Bombay to work and earn enough money to send home.

The aim of course is getting rich or moving into the mainstream of perhaps at least a middle class family. I think it is important to notice how the notion of

economic status and the strong woman is linked. Though it might seem that the strong woman is a part of the socio-cultural milieu wherein a woman becomes strong either because the husband is a drunkard or is abroad or in Bombay to work. Thus the woman becomes strong as she has to take on responsibility of the house, family and property. This kind of culture is of course not new because of postcolonialism directly, but seems to be associated with the region with the impact of sea-trading, and the influence of Buddhism and Jainism which are said to predate Modern Hinduism in South India. Vaidehi says: "There were women in our town who were at least twenty years ahead of their time. They would come by themselves to discuss their cases with my father. 'Mr. Hebbar' was how they addressed him." (Niranjana 2006, p. xix). The point that needs to be made is that in some regions of India, policy decisions did not, perhaps, have a gender bias and were not the sole preserve of patriarchy. However, when one considers Vaidehi's (Janaki Srinivas Murthy) account about her writing, one gets another view point:

> There were even those who spoke approvingly about any girl who showed the courage to move fearlessly where the men were. 'That girl is really brave. Not the slightest fear of men!' they would say. Such girls inspired as much fear as the men did. In the front room, the women clients of my lawyer father sat huddled on a bench, or stood leaning against the grill. There were also women who spoke loudly and fearlessly to the lawyer. When we heard such a voice, we would peep out curiously: 'Who's that? Speaking loudly like a man?' (Niranjana 2006, p. xiii)

The technology called 'the economy,' which again is not new, was the driving force for the strength of the woman who asserted the need of a husband who produces and provides income and property for the family. In cases where the husband fitted in with the patriarchal norm of being the provider and protector of the family, I suppose the question of the woman asserting herself to force the husband to go to work, in Bombay or abroad, would not perhaps arise. I hope by now it becomes visible that the technology of 'economy' is a decisive factor in defining the patriarchal norm for masculinity.

It might be important to note that the city of Bombay becomes a 'must visit' at least once in a life for people of the working classes. But that some one has to see that the status of the family be maintained upon having to go to Bombay might demythify the aura around the city and perhaps bring with it new myths. We see that Chandrappa, the one who builds Gulabi Talkies, is the foster son of Gulabi who has herself run away to Bombay and returns after feeling she has done something for her town (Vaidehi 2006, p. 3). Be that as it may, the interlocking structures of patriarchy and the technology of economy are used as a kind of tool to manipulate gender relationships. Policy decisions that are linked to economics, and thereby status of the family in "Gulabi Talkies", are shared, and the cult of the strong woman, which appears obvious to most people in the region, seems to use the economic handle to motivate migration of the husband.

> Lilli's desire was to become rich quickly. There were reasons behind this. Her husband was a man who tinned brass and copper kitchen utensils. He used to rub the tin on the inside of the vessel as though he was working off his rage against someone. Maybe because of this he never got angry with anybody. He could never say firmly how much

> payment he expected for a job. He would mention a sum. If the customer said that's too much, wouldn't this much be enough? Difficult, he would say scratching his head. If the customer said that's all I'm going to give you, he would accept it without a murmur.
>
> It was this man who ran off to Bombay.
>
> It was not easy to figure out whether he ran away or Lillibai drove him away. But Lillibai saw that a man called Vatamare, her own husband's age, had disappeared for a few years and then came back with enough money to open a provision store; (Vaidehi 2006, p. 3–4)

This itself is a handle which also permits more freedom, not that the protagonist, Lillibai, does not already have it in the midwife's job that she practices. It is also a belief that in lower castes and classes women enjoy more liberties than in the middle and upper castes and classes. This, rationally explained, implies that women, because of the economic condition, have to encounter entry into spaces and times of the day that would perhaps be forbidden to women of the upper rungs of society in a patriarchal world that needs to protect 'their' women. I think it is important to consider that the notion of possession of property and women is an old tune that patriarchs sing and this is why they use terms like 'our women' and 'their women.' One can see in the short story how they are afraid about the women of the village getting spoilt by cinema; however, the lower class/caste women enjoy the cinema: "If one asked how it was that the women labourers who sat in front on a mat came there by themselves and cried and laughed with abandon, one might get the answer: 'Those creatures? They have no bridle or rein!'" (Vaidehi 2006, p. 2).

Lillibai's job as a midwife entails being permitted into spaces that would be shut out to many of the lower caste/class that she belongs to (Vaidehi 2006, p. 5). It also entails that she is acquainted with the body in pain, the bleeding of birthing and the postnatal bathing and nursing of both child and mother for a 3-month period at least. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 3). The boudoir of the house and the bathroom are spaces of her occupation or what is often referred to as her 'job site.' This is part of an older technology of a world that has not seen the coming of modern western medicine and the sophistication of child birth in hospitals. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 13). But one can see that this profession is expected to collapse as the technologies associated with modernity percolate into the small town and village life, altering their culture. Lillibai "wasn't a midwife by profession, but did that task when she had to." (Vaidehi 2006, p. 3). Lillibai's position as policy maker also implies that she has to decide who she is and how to negotiate the impending change that is going to phase out her traditional job. It is the lot of the woman in this short story to reinvent herself.

The technologies of modernity, however, are not to be condemned entirely as they shift along with themselves the civilizations and cultures of the worlds that they are transferred to. This implies also a restructuring of the traditional vvvhierarchies and hegemonies that exist with different outcomes to the inhabitants of the worlds they invade.

> The women of the town weren't as afraid as they used to be. Neither were their hands as empty as before. They had become bold enough to say firmly that they were going to the cinema that evening. If the men barked at them, they would reply sharply as they

> continued to tie their hair in a bun, 'Have we become even unfit to see a film? If we listen to everything you say, you'll make us jump this way and that.' And money? The women had learned to ask for enough for four tickets even when only three of them were going, and to save the money for a future occasion. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 14)

The short story captures this moment when technology transfer is taking place and how Gulabi Talkies comes up. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 2–3). It also takes note of the female bonding and the good will between Gulabi, the woman who was instrumental in building the talkies, and the midwife, Lillibai: "She had got the job because of Gulabi." (Vaidehi 2006, p. 5). The fact that Lillibai gets a gatekeeper's job at the talkies gate, the women's entrance, to check the tickets of the early patrons of cinema is because of this relationship and good will of small town and village cultures.

The cinema is a modern technology too. It brings with it a new culture no doubt, but it also brings with it employment opportunities and possibilities of societal reconstruction:

> But for the past few years, a tent came every six months and set itself up in the town. Films which had finished going around every town and were drawing their last breath came to this tent. With the arrival of the tent the situation of the women may have eased a little, but we can only guess at how much. For they had to depend on the men to go to the tent. If the men were in a good mood, they would escort the women to the cinema. Since the women themselves did not want to go out alone, they did not even imagine how they could go in the street without male company. The men took them to the tent, bought the tickets, had them torn at the women's entrance, took care that they sat down properly and then brought them home after the film was over. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 2)

Unlike in big cities, one finds that the job of ticket checking and gate keeping is given to Lillibai, which seems a little at odds with the setting of the story at that point of time. In today's world, with multiplexes and megacities in the making, such a sight would not be considered odd. However, as the culture of 'cinema going' and the talkies is new it is accepted perhaps as a package of the new technology imported by a once local resident, Gulabi, who becomes a kind of elite. That she brings in the talkies and also provides job opportunities to the natives of the village is itself an important innovative step in the success story of the region. Lillibai's role as gatekeeper/ticket-checker spells out for her a new identity.

The midwife metaphor seems to fit even in the role of gatekeeper/ticket checker that is given to Lillibai. Just as the midwife brings children into the world, Lillibai gets the village to the world of cinema, which is a new and modern technology that is not far removed in time as an innovative technology of the industrialized West. The watching of the door for people to go into the cinema hall, where they are transformed as they engage with the visuals of the movies, is itself metaphorical. It seems oriented in a reverse process of her traditional profession of midwifery and at the same time is paradoxically a birthing of the whole village to a new technology, which is going to last a long time as that which gets transformed itself, and transforms those who come to participate in it.

> Day by day the bangle-shop began to stock various kinds of face powder and other cosmetics as its business began to soar; the seamstress struggled to tune her skills to the new

> fashions, and her creations were passed off as fashionable, causing a commotion in the world of clothing which crossed over into the speech and gait of women; their ornaments of brides and the other women at weddings were touched by the breeze of the cinema; … women waited to get their period so that they could be relieved from their daily duties and go off to the talkies thus creating a problem for rules of pollution; they all put on the airs of playback singers and began to sing whenever they felt like it; in the School Day a competition for film songs was introduced, in bhajans too film tunes and styles crept in; even in love-making, words from the cinema came in, making all theatre that was wordless seem worthless; and above all, mothers who composed little lullabies as they swung their infants to sleep now began to hum cinema lullabies. At another level, the cinema had begun to influence another sort of behaviour, and that too was through Lillibai. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 5–6)

Thus Lillibai's role is now transformed to a bringer of enlightenment or newness and life. Whether the job has more status than that of being a midwife is debatable and it would be difficult to assess such a position though it certainly nets in more money: "…one months' salary as gatekeeper was more than three months' earnings as midwife." (Vaidehi 2006, p. 5). However, the space Lillibai occupies and the job site is at antipodes to the job of the midwife as it seems more public for one, not that the midwife's job was less public but the nitty-gritty of functioning was located in closed spaces. In terms of light and darkness too, it is probably bright and in the open as compared to the aura of secrecy and the hush-hush of the birthing room in a conventional society. The reinvention of the human subject with perhaps no male or female role models to follow shows Lillibai as a kind of forerunner in accepting technological and cultural transformation.

That she is seen as making money on the tickets, etc., does not undermine Lillibai as a corrupt woman:

> Without knowing that she had increased the number of women spectators, Lillibai was also responsible for introducing another practice. She would let in four people for the price of two tickets, pushing them quickly in, one after the other. Then she would go to them in the dark after the film began and take half the amount they were to have paid for the two extra tickets, putting it away in the bunch made by her sari pleats where she tucked them in at the waist. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 8)

In fact, this shows the hardships that lower class women face and that they perhaps have to undertake practices of survival, knowing that technological change implies a phasing out of old professions. One can consider the professions of the cycle mechanic and the washerman which have decreased and in some cities are on the verge of extinction. The traditional midwife perhaps is a thing of the past today, as we see at the end of the short story where people start going to the hospital to bring their children into the world. Lillibai is not depicted in a romantic light, moaning about the culture changing or the civilization becoming worse than what it was, but the story shows that she is a woman who can ride the wave of change and move into new spaces that were not hers traditionally nor anticipated her. She can put up with the 'bad new days' as there were no 'good old days' for her.

Lillibai also markets the technology of the cinema using her 'old profession' to create a space and status for the new one. She does all she can to open the minds

of families she has worked with. People who she has known intimately with their bodies, now she has to have a look at their minds and the world they inhabit to refashion them.

Putting up with patriarchy is now a new game in a new space. The manager of Gulabi Talkies is patriarchy in the flesh, both metaphorically and literally, when "one day she saw with her own eyes the theatre manager dragging the sweeper woman into his room." (Vaidehi 2006, p. 10). However, handling him is not a problem for Lillibai as blackmail on both sides is a weapon for holding on to the job. He is aware of her making money on the tickets that are not bought, while she is aware of the woman who visits the office space for sex with the manager. She is also aware here is a vulnerable spot for the manager and therefore a tool for blackmail. In the story, these seem to be occupational hazards that women have to put up with despite modern technology and cultural alterations. This is the reality of working class women as they inhabit different spaces.

The silence of the text about such encounters in the traditional profession of midwifery perhaps does not imply that they do not exist. It must be remembered that this is a world that is on the brink of transformation. The model is Bombay, which is supposed to stand for modernity at the time the story is set in. Today one might have questions about the same, though one would largely agree that the values and culture of modernity that the big city is associated with has not altogether disappeared with its change of name to Mumbai.

While Lillibai is the protagonist of the story, one has to think also of the woman Gulabi after whom the theatre is named. She too stands for alteration of space as the old tree is cut down and a new theatre comes up in the same space. (Vaidehi 2006, p. 2). Those with environmental predilections might find the tree symbolic of a pre-modern hangover. However, the tree also symbolizes the ending of the age of patriarchy and the ascent of woman as far as policy decisions go. The technologies of modernity come built in with the culture of equality too, gender equality, especially, is something that is foregrounded with the coming in of modernity. This short story too shows how there is a little more equality between the two genders with the coming of technology, as shown above.

The conservatives in the short story want to keep their culture intact by not letting the women watch movies. The notion that culture is located in women's minds is still a patriarchal idea in "Gulabi Talkies" and shows that men want to control the spaces that women and their minds inhabit: "The men who decide on seeing the film poster whether or not their wives and daughters could go. Who loudly declare that the cinema was not meant for women at all, such men pay attention when a petition of this kind is submitted." (Vaidehi 2006, p. 7). What women watch is an issue for them as equality and empowerment perhaps would imply more demands and societal change beginning within their own families. Besides, the spaces that men inhabit outside the home are exposed in the cinema and the disguises and masques of the 'good husband' become suspect if women are enlightened by theatre, literature, cinema or education. Thus the new spaces created by the Talkies are a source of enjoyment for the men with voyeurism and

the male gaze built into the projection of movies. However, they are also their undoing as though the cinema might be a source of entertainment for the men but it also threatens and fills them with anxieties about themselves, their families and 'their women.'

Lillibai, in the short story, takes families to the talkies or markets the new technology to them along with all the cultural baggage that comes with it. The anxieties and threats to their societal structure paradoxically become a problem to them but they do not find that their social and traditional ways of culture change because of the modern hospital displacing if not exterminating the profession of the traditional midwife. The men also perhaps consider that the technology of modern western economic structures is something that cannot be countered as they are party to the benefits of the system.

Birth implies anxiety and hope, an anxiety that all might not be well for mother and child and the hope that all will be 'normal and happy.' The short story, in placing Lillibai as the protagonist, scoffs at the world so threatened and anxious, because she has lived through anxieties and hope with each child birth. Her anxiety, of not having the jobs she was established in, is perhaps not a problem for the others who are comfortable, but she chooses to act instead of being anxious. She gets herself a new job in a new space and straddles the old and the new occupations together reinventing herself and inhabiting a whole range of spaces in different roles.

Gulabi's paradoxical absence/presence is also worth considering; she inhabits a space which stands for the ideal of modern innovation and technology, and is absent from the present scene but present with the hope of being a figure for posterity. A role model for bringing in innovation, Gulabi, is an ideal for conforming to the economic notions of progress. She cannot be missed but is missing as a living person as the story progresses. She is also the person who is somehow associated with creating a space for the talkies both metaphorically and physically. The ideal space from Bombay is reproduced in brief for the local audience and the notion that it is an unavailable space is in some ways erased due to Gulabi and the memory of her in the short story.

It is important also to note that the same technology used by two different women does not give them the same status or memorial position for the locals. The possibility that Lillibai would be remembered for a shorter time and Gulabi for a longer time seems obvious, because one does not expect in the world of the short story that something like the multiplex revolution takes over. Perhaps even if that had to take place, the name of Gulabi would have been carried forward owing to the nature of property ownership, guilds, trusts, etc. Lillibai and her story make the point that such underpaid work is often forgotten: who remembers the midwife cum door keeper/ticket collector? The real Lillibais of the world are perhaps just as important as the entrepreneurs like Gulabi, though she had learnt the ropes of the establishment to have a talkies named after her. It is true that Gulabi has played into the hands of the traditional establishment, to some extent, and has fallen in line, but it is also true that she has had to engage with the patriarchy to aquire what she has achieved.

It might be important to consider how both Gulabi and Lillibai operate with a host of technologies of power to get empowered themselves. Whether it is capitalistic empowerment, mere survival, and petty exploitation or it is the packing off of a husband to Bombay, so as to increase the household income or fighting with the manager of the Talkies and blackmailing him, the fact remains that the constant reinvention of themselves for more empowerment cannot be erased. That both new and old technologies work together in their empowerment is also something that cannot be missed out. The technologies themselves one would like to consider as neutral but the uses to which they are put, in empowering the self are worth considering.

I would not perhaps consider Lillibai or Gulabi as feminists because that would be forcing a reading. At the same time, as women engaging and strategizing with their lives in a world where patriarchy is all pervasive and even consumes the men in its negative scheme of things, they work with technologies that not only empower them but also empower and enlighten others. Their empowerment brings in some liberation for themselves and others. The story however is feminist as it consciously engages with the struggles of women with patriarchy and how they get empowered and assert themselves in situations that would never let them do so in a traditional world. That technology and empowerment are so much a part of the story, ropes in the postcolonial situation and the postindustrial world along with the technologies of a pre-industrial and semi-industrial society whose vernacularization seems an unselfconscious political tool against the establishmental world-order.

I hope that my reading has dealt with the notion of technologies per se and how they work, though I have engaged with only three major technologies that the short story foregrounds: the economy, cinema and midwifery. I hope also that I have been able to bring out the major question of empowerment of women, both in spite of technology and due to it.

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Chapter 19
"Because You're Worth It": The New Woman in Post-Liberalization Women's Magazines in India

Parnal Chirmuley

Abstract This article examines instances from English-language women's magazines published in India with the post-liberalization decades (that is, since the 1990s) as a background historical framework. In analysing three well-known magazines in this segment—namely, *Femina*, *Marie Claire* and *Good Housekeeping*—the article will examine their location in larger economic processes. At the same time, this article also engages with the image of the globalizing Indian woman that is put forth in different ways by these magazines, in order to speak to shifting categories of projected, target, and actual readers. Two key questions inform this article, namely, should feminists seek to examine public visual culture in newly liberalized economies, what perspectives can be used and, moreover, how can we engage with publishing practices for women seeking to increasingly fall within a globally uniform system of visual recall.

Keywords Post-liberalization India · Women's magazines in India · *Femina* · *Marie Claire* · *Good Housekeeping*

Women's magazines have always been a matter of great interest to feminists and scholars observing the media, and even insiders were alarmed at the shifting shapes they had become over the decades in the latter half of the twentieth century. They continue to elicit interest, as readers become younger, more defined and deeper participants in global economic relations. The 'glossy', as we know it in India, is younger, and has been very quick to catch up with established global trends and formats of targeted and mass market publishing. The moment of this quick catch up was the policy of economic liberalization that marks a distinct phase with significant implications for cultural production in the country. It is this moment that also defines the framework for this article.

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For the Indian economy, the big decade was the 90s. It was open house, finally. Whichever side of the political divide you stand on, things have not looked the same since. Our public visual culture now freely changes form and venue, morphs into different shapes, changes direction and consistency to suit the needs of free flowing global capital. Whenever economies that were state protected opened up to the urging of fluid capital, long-rooted traditions of cultural production have had to confront the ubiquity of visual messages and of media presence, and have had to adapt, resist or transcend a global system of visual recall. In the India after the 90s, these processes are scripted, as they are elsewhere, by the cooperation of various industries—creative and otherwise—in their sharing of resources, icons and pure public visual space. The aim of this article is to chart this territory and unpack the ideological projection of a globalizing Indian woman by foregrounding the political economy of cultural production in this segment of mass market publishing for women.

While successive Finance Ministers of India, basking in the positive energies radiated by the liberalization mantra, may log in years of growth of the Indian industry, the media that communicates the good news has also been among the biggest beneficiaries. The print, electronic, news and entertainment media have grown substantially over a little more than the previous decade. Satellite television conclusively changed the participation of a significant section of the population not only in the political process, but also in collective globalizing aspirations (Mehta 2008). Major media networks are bearers and purveyors of these aspirations, and this is reflected in lifestyle and niche publications for women readers. These publications are the site of collaborations between various industries—as apparent in the seamless overlap between fashion, advertising, beauty, film and lifestyle—and it is with this as a focus that this article seeks to approach the theoretical concerns surrounding visual culture and the political economy of the women's magazines in India today. *Femina*, *Marie Claire* and *Good Housekeeping*, the three leading magazines I have chosen for this analysis are all part of major media groups and boast significant subscription and circulation figures within the particular segment of English-language women's magazines.[1] Starting with a brief overview of the nature of publications for women outside of the English-language urban readership segment, I shall sketch the primary concerns of each of the above-mentioned magazines to demonstrate their location in a larger economic process which seeks to argue for and perpetuate the relevance of what is often loosely termed 'globalization', and understood as an economic process that moulds visual culture and uses it as an effective ideological tool.

[1]The reasons behind this choice are really that they are from different media stables which also have other mass market magazines with women as target readers, but these three are stated by respective media groups as magazines for women. Also, it must be stated, that the circulation figures for these magazines are nowhere near the scale of regional language publishing for women; yet, in their own restricted brackets, they have circulations which are considered competitive.

19.1 What Have Women Read, What Are They Reading?

Publishing for women in India—whether as advice manuals or magazines, or as a parallel popular literary culture—is multicoloured, to say the least. They have mirrored historically and regionally specific concerns—advice manuals for women in nineteenth century Bengal were part of the new self-definition of an emerging literate elite, which sought to constitute and represent the institution of the family in ways that reflected the uncomfortable relation of that class to the colonial framework, magazines for women that stood on the back of a longer tradition of women's education to mark women readers as a separate and independent segment that needed addressing (Walsh 2004), to the *Sarita* and *Grihashobha* in the Hindi heartland, publications that span a vast and diverse readership that is literate in Hindi, and figure in the National Readership Survey as being among magazines with some of the highest circulation rates. It must be noted that among these Indian-language magazines, those intended for women are among the 10 magazines with the highest circulation—*Saras Salil*, *Meri Saheli*, *Grihalakshmi*, *Grihashobha*, and *Vanitha*. (Kasbekar 2006, p. 121). In each case, they have reflected and variously constituted not only the aspirations of particular social, linguistic, caste and regional divisions among women, they have sought to constitute the reader and act as life guides in various ideologically defined ways. What adds to the diversity of these magazines is that they operate across the vast linguistic map of the subcontinent; in the case of *Grihashobha*, for instance, with editions in several Indian languages, and most have a dedicated and faithful readership. In Western India, a significant number of currently published magazines for women are produced by independent publishers, or smaller print media undertakings, in some cases they are a part of large media conglomerates. There are many publications for women that have been around for over five decades. In terms of content, as publications addressing themselves specifically to women, there is an equally enduring adherence to a format—tips and advice, questions to agony aunts, in some cases discussions on sexuality, and the usual features on travel, cooking, health, children, finances and home management. When you shift the focus towards the English language publications under consideration for this article, the landscape seems to change—only at first glance quite suddenly—into a radically altered projection of who the reader is, what kind of ideological framework she is being addressed from and where she was supposed to see herself within the existing range of social divisions. This is not merely a change in how the reader is represented—in fact this was a result of the changing nature of the Indian media since the 90s. Diversification became a dominant feature of media houses, with each of them launching a variety of publications for specific segments and marketing profiles (Balsara and Nendick 2010). The women's and lifestyle magazine became one such particularity that would address a specific section with a battery of advertising strategies and bring into the domestic sphere the expanding market. While this seems obvious even to a first time reader of these magazines, it is important to note that the same media stables have current affairs/general interest/political

magazines, which each have a lifestyle segment, and are in most cases tied to well-known electronic media groups.[2] With this as a background to publications focussed on women in particular, the need is to reach as large an audience as possible, and therefore the categorical projection or constitution of a reader proves restrictive. As a result, today's women's magazines seem to address all and no women in particular, while *projecting* a readership that is variously career oriented, rather than homemaker, often single, with a disposable income and almost surely urban and no more than in her 30s. Thus the reader is never clearly enough defined in real terms, in ways in which, for instance, magazines founded in regional languages in the immediate post Independence period had a categorical constituency that they acknowledged as being real. The *projection* in today's magazines is not a statement on who the magazine says its reader *is* or *should* be, rather who the reader should aspire to *become*. Moreover, the fact that the *projected*, the *target*, and the *actual* reader might most often be different is not mere accident—and in this respect, this article seeks to ask whether the overt and suggested text and subtext in these magazines is indicative of very conscious strategies that the market deploys in assessing social dynamics that operate within this apparent lack of fit between these three kinds of readers. This difference, in my opinion, is crucial to understanding the dynamics of such print media in a broader context of liberalized economy. Interestingly, in a still finely divided society, this does not prove to be a pitfall, but a successful strategy which seeks to capture a very wide social section in its aspirational prescriptions.

19.2 The Big Three

Having said that the magazines under scrutiny are not just magazines to be leafed through at a hairdresser's, one could highlight the specific niches each of these magazines fits into. As might be expected, there is an available self-projection as part of a larger media strategy. This is apparent in the visual and textual component of each magazine in terms of the nature of advertising and feature content, as well as the clear spelling out in editorial content of where the issue is pitched. It is a combination of both that creates a sense of community that the reader is a part of. I have taken the liberty to take into account how the magazines project themselves with the help of data circulated to prospective advertisers. This information will be used not as statement of fact, but as an indicator of how the magazine seeks to project and represent itself. Within the network of allied areas of interest, of related industries that benefit from visibility in these magazines and who in turn contribute to advertising revenue towards each magazine, each of the magazines

[2]For instance, in this segment targeted at women as readers, the India Today group publishes *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Women's Health*; The Times of India Group publishes *Femina*, *iDiva*, and *Grazia*; whereas the Outlook Group used to publish *Marie Claire*.

claims for itself a unique space. For a structured comparison, we might start from the oldest of the three—oldest in readership memory in India.

19.2.1 Femina

In the summer of 2008, *Femina* completed 50 years of publication. There was a generation of English-speaking middle class women who subscribed to one of the few English-language magazines for women available since the 70s and 80s. *Femina* was one among *Women's Era*, *Savvy*, and the much older *Eve's Weekly* as leading magazines of a time with a largely urban and service sector readership. This occasioned a celebratory 'Best of *Femina*' issue with a selection of landmarks in its publishing history, much loving retrospection of days gone by, and reminders of how *Femina* has grown in the hearts of her faithful reader. The *Femina* team visibly trawled through the archives to prepare this issue—there are letters to the editor written 40 years ago, conversations with recognized and forgotten women who figured on the covers and made news within *Femina*'s parameters during their time, a decade by decade overview of fashion trends and icons that immortalized them. It is *Femina* telling you who made news, who fell from grace, why certain issues should matter to women and even resurrected recipes. Quite apart from being a magazine for women, *Femina* has been the backbone of the *Femina* Miss India Contest, first launched in 1964. It was in the 80s that it found space on television, with a telecast of the pageant, and a telecast of international events like Miss Universe that Miss India would then represent India at. With liberalization in the 1990s, the Miss India pageant was transformed into a comprehensive media extravaganza with media partnerships, and a range of very prominent sponsors. The pageant became a showcase for the globalizing aspirations of Indian womanhood—as in a team of 'experts' worked on each of the selected contestants to get their speech, gait, skin colour, teeth, table manners and their weight and shape just right. The women are chosen for their confidence and the so-called training process teaches them to tone it all down, they are starved, measured, paraded—while this training is ostensibly about 'launching women into life', the focus is on the fashion, film and beauty industries. It is this coming together of the media, fashion and cosmetics industries that determines the character of the pageant. Throughout the contest and the training period preceding it, the language is that of exuding confidence such as only the truly new woman in India must. What is equally relevant is that with the wide support in terms of sponsorship and prominence that this pageant has won—after all, *Femina* is part of The Times Of India Group—both the magazine and the pageant have sought to lay claim to representing the globalized and globalizing Indian woman.

This has significant repercussions, both ideologically and materially. First, it has meant that the advertising revenue for the particular magazine has gone up, lodging the magazine as well as the media group, through its other ventures, firmly within a broader network of media related industries. Since the 1990s,

participants and winners of the Miss India pageant have found space in the beauty, fashion and television and cinema industries, both nationally and internationally. As one contestant of the 2003 pageant remarked, "Even if you don't win, you gain something, so it's not a wasted effort. You make so many contacts, by the end of it you have fifteen different options—serials, ramp, whatever". (Runkle 2004).

19.2.2 Marie Claire

During the writing of this article, this magazine unexpectedly shut down—it is rumoured that it was unable to afford licensing fees.[3] While it is clear that *Femina* is more than a magazine, that it is a veritable industry, *Marie Claire* India projected itself as distinctly different, it projected itself as a magazine with an aim, with its slogan 'Let me be Me' printed on the spine of each issue. This tag line was also the campaign launched by the magazine in its very first issue.

Marie Claire was first launched in France in 1937, but shut down during the war years to resume publication in 1954. As the last editor, Shefali Vasudev harks back to the lasting programme of the magazine, she tells us "'You are all *Marie Claire*', said its creator Jean Prouvost, during its first launch in October 1937 in France, asserting its purpose to help reconcile emancipation with seduction". Launched in India in June 2006, the editorial is a statement of the role this publication was to play, and bears quoting: "… as the strong winds of change sweep India, here is a bold and beautiful magazine. Elegant, open minded and pro-choice, with compelling stories. We believe in individuality, in the freedom to experience and express. Let Me Be Me, our first campaign, opens against a meaningful debate against moral policing. We want to break taboos, ask uncomfortable questions, and answer many of them. Every month, Marie Claire India will surprise you with real and intimate stories, laughter and grit that unite the women of the world. Fashion is a universe of pathbreaking ideas for us. It goes far beyond how you look in dreams". (Vasudev 2006, p. 16). The cover of its opening issue announces that Preity Zinta, a popular actor in Hindi feature films, who also features on the cover, joins *Marie Claire* in this campaign, which has the subtitle 'Stop Moral Policing'. The language of this phrase, in fact of the very campaign, is drawn directly from feminist and secular democratic activists speaking about the attack launched by conservative right-wing politics which reacts directly to any

[3]The announcement was made to the horror of its editors who heard it not at work, but as a statement on a media related website on the internet. This was at the end of July 2013, and announced on various other sources, and the Outlook Group issued a formal statement as well. The Outlook Group stopped publishing *Geo* as well as *People* along with *MC*. This is said to have surprised editors in rival magazines, since advertising in the lifestyle segment had seen significant growth, and it was the general interest and current affairs magazines that had declining revenues from advertising. http://www.livemint.com/Companies/hEWlSTz2UrduDan81NaF6N/Outlook-to-stop-publishing-People-Geo-Marie-Claire-in-Indi.html, accessed on 14 August 2013.

critique of religion, or religious icons, and those for instance discussing sexuality openly. This and subsequent issues make space—from 2 to 12 pages in a magazine issue that is often up to 200 pages in length—for issues that have been at the centre of feminist, human rights and liberal activism debates. Some of the issues that *Marie Claire* covered over a year were caste and women in the family, the controversy over the film *Water* (which discussed the plight of widows in Benaras), homosexuality and marriage, taboos surrounding menstruation, women's rights and law, HIV positive women, performing arts and morality (a focussed discussion on *The Vagina Monologues*). Moreover, many of these campaign articles were contributed by women active in creative, academic and professional fields.

19.2.3 Good Housekeeping

GH, as it is known to readers, was launched in 2004. In 2009, the 5th year anniversary issue occasioned much nostalgia. In that issue, the editor notes that when she looks back on the 5 years since its first issue, all she can see is a blur of change. She says, "Honestly, from the first issue of *GH* in October 2004 to now, so much has changed amongst our readership; in the economy; in global political dynamics; in the country; and even in my life (I even post a blog now!) that I am left breathless. The small changes too are innumerable and constantly happening—for example, 5 years ago about three out of ten readers used eye crème; today, the figure would hover around six or seven. The global economy has been on a roller coaster; we have one of the world's most 'happening magazines' in our group now; attitudes and trends everywhere are on an equally swinging mode; and even food choices have gone from pasta being an 'Italian dish' to 'oh, its just pasta!'" (Dutta 2009, p. 28). Part of the India Today Group, this magazine seems to perform a balancing act between focussing centrally on fashion and beauty, and being a life guide to the modern Indian woman. As part of a very prominent and extremely diverse media group—the India Today Group not only publishes general interest, business, health, and lifestyle magazines, but also owns 24 h news channels both in English and Hindi, has stakes in book publishing and distribution, education (it owns a prominent school in Delhi), music, radio—the magazine is at the intersection of a similar range of media industries as, for instance, *Marie Claire*. They also publish the Indian edition of *Cosmopolitan*—which has a radically different self-projection.[4] *GH,* therefore, maintains an identity that is distinct from the *Cosmopolitan*. *GH* attempts a rounded engagement with its projected reader. It lays stress on domestic management and personal care, focuses on

[4]Called 'the Bible of the Fun, Fearless Female' this is how *Cosmopolitan* describes itself: "The Indian Woman today handles it all. A zip-ahead career that is challenging and fulfilling. And a burgeoning bazaar of products that ensures they keep pace with style. Today's woman makes more money and spends more money than they ever did. And she has begun taking charge." (http://www.indiatodaygroup.com/new-site/publications/cosmo-about.html).

relationships and the family, with features on ageing as a health, social, psychological and financial issue. It carries regular advice on child and pet care, medical and financial advice. It often carries new short fiction, and more regularly real-life stories which are primarily inspirational. While I profile this magazine in this fashion, one might wonder who the reader of *GH* in India is likely to be. Information tailored for prospective advertisers to *GH* says that this magazine has a 90,000 circulation, with a subscriber base of about 26,000. The marketing pitch clearly states that the *GH* "balances the interests of working professionals and housewives", with 51 % of its readers as homemakers and 41 % working women. The *GH* reader balances her career and personal life with diligence, is the health keeper of the family, she keeps tabs on the family budget, finances and investment and is 'the seller's delight': every third reader's MHI (monthly household income) is more than Rs 50,000, every sixth's is Rs 75,000. Every third reader is below 30, and 70 % are below 40 years of age. The following is an interesting characterization: "She likes to look good and make the most of herself but is not a peacock"! It gives slightly doubtful data on how its readers cook in little oil, practice yoga and that they are highly health conscious. Along with its regular issues, *GH* is also known for the events it hosts—made possible with a number of prominent sponsors who have direct selling space at the venue, these events organize activities surrounding the focus areas of the magazine, and draw crowds at venues in Delhi and other cities.

While concentrating in equal measure on personal care, home, health, etc., *GH* addresses its readers by repeatedly creating an image of a forward looking, increasingly globalizing woman—please note the pasta comment from the editorial mentioned earlier—who is nevertheless rooted within the institution of the family. Yet, she is independent and hardworking enough to be acknowledged as a consumer who has literally earned it.

19.3 Critically Speaking

Magazines for women have been the subject of scrutiny for feminist activists and academics wherever such targeted publishing for women readers exists (McRobbie 1997; Gough-Yates 2004). Feminist anthropologists have also participated directly in the pageants mentioned above, to unravel the implications of some of these changing projections of Indian women on a global platform created by the liberalization of the Indian economy. They are part of a more complex language spoken by the media, and are among the key components that serve as a visual, participatory justification of an opening of the economy, increasing private investment and become the exhortation to join in the celebration that is the free market. These English-language magazines with a primarily urban circulation effectively use a liberal vocabulary to address its readers—there is consistent use of traditional paradigms to address women, yet constituting the reader as a young, independent, forward looking woman, who is free to choose the fine balance between the family and life at

work, who is free to make financial decisions, and more importantly, who is the key member in the family structure to direct, invest, and spend personal and household incomes. As some of the marketing presentations intended for advertisers show, the need to portray the woman reader as herself a consumer, and with control over the family income—whether or not she holds a job outside the home—is very clear.

When I first began to translate some of my own ill-concealed pleasure in looking through these magazines into more critical scrutiny, I felt it would be possible to roundly critique the content of these magazines—including the entire spiel on how the reader deserves to get what she wants because she is special, because she is worth it, the campaign formats used variously for health, social, and gender issues—as mere strategies to boost saleability. Such dismissal of these glossies is very tempting, but would be an analysis made from a necessarily 'superior' feminist position, it would then mean partly forgetting the tight mesh in which both conservative gender politics and modern class aspirations are found in contemporary urban India. Along the way I also had to confront the question whether the frame of analysis has to be primarily that of gender, and it quickly becomes clear that the political economy approach can also do justice to some of the questions that emerge. It seems almost axiomatic in this context that in order to understand and unravel the weave of our popular, public visual culture, the large networks of economic power need to be taken into account critically.

Some of the questions that emerge are necessarily self-reflexive—where the present researcher has to ask herself to what end should an analysis of aspects of the contemporary media be undertaken. One also needs to ask who the 'Me' in a campaign like the Let Me Be Me campaign are, who is the woman the magazine is telling she is really worth it? In bringing in the experiences of women living through issues that diverse women's movements in contemporary India are contending with, the magazine cannot be said to win for itself a readership that identifies with these issues. Within the universe of these magazines, this 'me' is fitted into a magazine that is geared to never leaving the woman alone as herself—although every second agony aunt will say this: be yourself, etc., when the very structure of the magazine represents the control over a woman's body, her sense of self, in giving her tips on everything from relationships to sex to dealing with in-laws, perpetually holding up a mirror to show her what she is not and what she should aspire to become, what she should buy so that she can become that person on the cover and inside. This equation needs to be placed against the seamless visual whole that the fashion, film, lifestyle, hospitality, news and entertainment media have become in post-liberalization India. More significantly, when this equation is placed against other publishing traditions for women, particularly in regional languages, and which perhaps do not take as much visual and material space in contemporary India, we realize that there is a much wider readership for regional-language publications for women—perhaps so wide that in terms of circulation figures the magazines under consideration may never expect to meet in the near future—a more serious question emerges: one begins to ask if in fact this image of the globalizing woman and the attendant representation of India as a consequential participant in global economic systems is a discourse that is

consciously generated by the media itself, and whether even academic engagement must go several steps beyond to examine our visual culture not in purely representational terms, but with the political objective of highlighting the limited space in which this discourse operates—it is a discourse for and by those who are the sole beneficiaries of the globally fluid capital, and who never stand to lose anything in the freedom of the market place.

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Chapter 20
"Googling Baby"

Debra A. Castillo

Abstract This article looks at the boom in outsourced, international-assisted reproduction, as shown in websites, literature and films from India and Latin America. It analyses assisted reproduction websites aimed at international clients, alongside texts such as Shoojit Sircar's *Vicky Donor* (2012) and Rocío Vásquez de Velasco's short story "Vientre de alquiler". Tensions explode the myth of family-making via the "gift" of reproductive material, or the "loan" of a womb, especially when these "gifts" and "loans" follow an all-too familiar north-to-south colonial circuit.

Keywords Commercial surrogacy · Outsourced assisted reproduction · Rent a womb · Sperm donors · Fertility tourism · *Vicky Donor* · "vientre de alquiler"

"Surrogacy doesn't need a celebrity role model", says *firstpost* (2011) in response to the outpouring of support for Aamir Khan after he announced in December 2011 that he and his wife, Kiran Rao, had been blessed with a baby boy thanks to this procedure. The author of this article continues with the observation that in countries like India and Guatemala—due to well-founded concerns about baby kidnapping and child trafficking—"it is now far easier to rent a womb than adopt a child". It is also far easier, albeit still highly controversial, for eager parents from the Global North with disposable income to place an order for a designer baby, mixing carefully a chosen donor egg and donor sperm, choosing the child's (or children's) sex. This is the phenomenon that documentary film-maker Zippy Brand Frank captures with the memorable phrase "Google Baby".

In the Spring following this celebrity announcement, Shoojit Sircar's *Vicky Donor* (based loosely on the 2011 Canadian film, *Starbuck*) opened to wide critical and popular acclaim, sparking a widespread interest in paid sperm donation in

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India. That same spring in the USA, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild published her much lauded and equally reviled study, *The Outsourced Self,* a book which focuses in part on the surrogacy boom in India, while describing in more general terms how wealthy westerners are able to outsource almost every aspect of their lives, from cradle to grave. Even more recently, in May 2013, Shahrukh Khan and his wife Gauri announced the birth of their third child, a son, also via surrogacy.[1] Here the Indian stars join a long line of international celebrities who have firmly established this trend in outsourcing childbearing, including Nicole Kidman, Sarah Jessica Parker and Angela Bassett, along with famous gay stars like Elton John, Ricky Martin and Neil Patrick Harris.

What is it about outsourcing, particularly the public, international outsourcing of these very intimate, reproductive functions that makes us squirm and raises questions in our minds? What happens when the project of family-making becomes distributed across multiple individuals and international borders? For one thing, the language surrounding this medical practice is heavily charged with impressively clichéd affect evoking the myth of the happy family, as if in proactive response to anticipated critique. In fact, the boom in assisted reproductive technology has largely (and, I will shortly argue, highly suspiciously) been framed in terms of a very limited and endlessly repeated set of traditional virtues borrowed from the language of idealized nuclear families—i.e. good parents provide loving homes to children—and, in a more general sense, of a utopian construct of community: family as the bedrock of nation. In a parallel manner, sperm and egg "donation" (where the prevailing misnomer is a telling misrepresentation for what is increasingly a paid service) reproduces the most familiar of all repeated metaphors for assisted reproduction: the language of gift-giving; of giving, in fact, the gift of life itself. What could be more altruistic?

For a volume like this one, focused on transnational and transcultural gender negotiations, and steeped in a discussion of myth, it seems particularly important to bring to the surface some of the little-explored tensions in this old–new myth of family-making via the "gift" of reproductive material, or the "loan" of a womb, especially when these "gifts" and "loans" follow an all-too familiar north-to-south colonial circuit. The economics are only too easy to follow: the global south has once again been asked to respond to the needs/wants of the north, regardless of the local perceptions about the reasonableness or ethical implications of this need/want—hence the controversy around international reproductive tourism packages, gay parents, unmarried parents, gender selection for children, etc.

Both surrogacy and adoption fundamentally rely upon this language of virtue and the greater good. Both take as a given that children per se are an undeniable boon. Adoption, of course, has long had the dubious advantage of sponsorship by international stars like Angelina Jolie and Madonna, among others, who testify endlessly about the benefits to their children, to themselves, to society at

[1]In this case, unlike Aamir Khan's son, the news was also accompanied by widespread rumours of illegal gender selection.

large. Their very public expressions of love for family stand in for an argument about what is a good life and how it is achieved, about what it means to care for/about other human beings. Aamir Khan and Shahrukh Khan, too, are household names, and a similar celebrity quality attaches to their family lives. Yet, for all the controversy about Angelina or Madonna's choices for the birth countries of their adopted children, there is something else at stake in the case of the Indian actors' young sons, or for that matter (although it has raised less controversy in the USA), Hollywood stars' decisions to hire surrogates. What is different about Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao's quest to become parents? Why has a fatwa been issued against Shahrukh? Why does adoption "need" (or at least, seem to generate) celebrity role models, and why should not surrogacy have them?

The *firstpost* article (2011) makes its own position very clear; the comfortable domestic rhetoric of virtue and model families hides an ugly reality that is endemic to late capitalist globalized markets: "we run the danger of becoming a society that is indifferent to our children, and yet is eager to create them for profit". Furthermore, beyond the chilling effects of bringing together the language of profit while obscuring the hard and intimate physicality of childbearing for women, the question of whose needs are served is also at the core of the debate. Assisted reproduction ethicist Bill Muehlenberg quotes a surrogate mother: "In adoption, a family sought a child in need of a family. In surrogacy, you are creating children for adults' needs" (Muehlenberg 2013).

The question of "need" is indeed an interesting one when this intentional creation of children may involve a significant timeline, considerable paperwork, and a long series of economic and personal decisions, including buying sperm, buying eggs, hiring a surrogate, doing selective abortion of excess embryos and scheduling a caesarean to meet vacation preferences. The contrast with adoption is clear. In the case of adoption, the existing child (always presumed blameless, if potentially flawed) is constructed as the product of a failed social support network or victim of a pair of individuals' bad choices; s/he needs a family, and by the very framing of the statement we are meant to read "family" as the reparative response to a broken social structure, in which the child is the essential element that resolves two problems at once. The adopted child makes good the failures of society, and turns a couple into a viable and productive community unit.

In the second instance, an already overpopulated world is understood as the background, and the issue of family does not come into the discussion in the first instance; instead, we have fragmented, presumedly selfish individual desires taking precedence over social well-being, in engineering a made-to-order child by technologies in which none of the potential parents (womb mother, social parents) may even be genetically related to the baby. Thus, while appealing to the most old-fashioned virtues of consolidated family, dissonantly, disturbingly, these first world clients reflect an increasingly distributed sense of self and community. At the same time, the southern providers who create this opportunity are distributed in a different way: reduced to fractured and dehumanized body parts: the sperm, the ova, the womb. Especially for the surrogate mothers, the "donors" very real risk to health and life is downplayed (the illness and pain, the invasive procedures,

the unnecessary caesarean sections). Likewise downplayed are suspicions about the surrogate women's virtue; at the same time, their own families are taken to be irrelevant (surrogates generally must be married and mothers, but clinic requirements often prevent them from spending their pregnancy at home with their families).

Vicky Donor makes a point of speaking to the question of need and its pairing with an assumption of high and selfless virtue, but only for people of a specific social class. Poor people, it seems, suffer from the opposite, and socially knotty, problem of excess fertility, a definite vice in the crowded global southern cities. In the air-brushed world of *Vicky Donor,* however, couple after couple—stereotypically from many different castes, ethnicities, and even nations, though all at least moderately well-to-do—come to the film's fertility clinic to find a way to create family, along the way comically highlighting the superiority of Indian sperm in the national and international market. Thus, for example, the doctor gleefully reports that he is getting foreign demand for Vicky's sperm and, to anchor the point, viewers are treated to a brief vignette of a white British couple, where the blonde wife sits silently, wringing her hands, while her husband pleads: "I need a good quality Indian sperm donor". It helps the illusion, of course, that actor Ayushmann Khurrana is a fit, good-looking, light-skinned young man. Not only is he "giving [the gift of] life", he is providing a particularly high quality product. Disturbingly, in terms of the celebration of this fantasy, by the end of the film he has "given life" to 53 children, including black, white and Chinese families, as well as Indians of different castes and communities.

The movie has famously had concrete effects outside the cinema hall, notably in increasing the interest in sperm donation in India (e.g. Sharma, Dutta), as it also reflects (or refracts) real-world scenarios during a time in which India has become increasingly, and uncomfortably, prominent in the global-assisted reproduction business.[2] Eager young men announce their availability, generally in terms framed by altruistic virtues (wanting to make people happy and fulfilled), while at the same time their tweets and ads reveal both a profit motive and a delight in the chance to genetically father very high numbers of children.[3] Nevertheless, objectively, in this global market Indian sperm and eggs are less valued, less profitable (the availability of Caucasian sperm and eggs are advertised even on Indian surrogacy sites). At the same time, in-country, the procedure continues to be subject to

[2]The booming industry in India has suffered a recent setback with a 2013 legislation prohibiting the once lucrative surrogacy business for gay couples and single people. At the same time, loosening restrictions in Mexico have opened up the market in Latin America beyond Guatemala: one medical tourism portal in February 2013 proclaimed, "So long surrogacy in India. Hello surrogacy in Mexico and Thailand!" (Planet Hospital).

[3]Among Dutta's eager commentarists volunteering to donate (or sell) sperm, is one Rananjay Kumar Rai, who writes on July 8, (2012): "I am a development professional (MBA) and living nearby in Patna. I want to donate my sperm to make happy millions of people who are suffering from infertility problems". The idea of millions of people sharing the same genetic father opens up a problem unaddressed at the end of *Vicky Donor*, with his crowd of babies, and presents a new challenge for the human race.

controversy. Within India, assisted reproduction for citizens lags behind service to foreigners, partly due to cost, and partly because of a continuing national obsession with lineage and community affiliations.

Meanwhile, outside India, *pace Vicky Donor*, other germplasm has more caché. On the other side of the world from South Asia, according to a *Time* magazine report, sperm from US men is worth $700+ in Australia and Canada (while Indian men may get paid 500 rupees, i.e. >$10, see, e.g. Sharma 2012). Whiteness plus anonymity are the reasons for this premium value, while additionally, for purposes of creating a designer baby, prospective parents know that proven US genetic material means the baby has the option of often-prized US citizenship (Frank 2010 interview). For similar reasons, certain women's eggs are highly sought (anecdotally: both my niece, a graduate student at the University of Chicago; and my daughter, a graduate student at Yale, have been contacted with offers to buy their eggs for staggering sums of money). (See also Kung 2010, and Skurnick 2010). CNN medical intern Jennifer Adaeze Anyaegbunam, a Harvard graduate, comments on this phenomenon:

> Depending on specific fertility needs, aspiring parents seek out smart genes through both egg and sperm donation … In 2007 Elite Donors ran a $100,000 advertisement in the *Crimson* [Harvard's student newspaper], according to the paper's staff. More recently, similar agencies have taken advantage of Facebook advertising, which allows solicitors to target females attending specific colleges. Only those who meet specific profile criteria are "eligible" to see the ad. (2009).

Hochschild confirms these skewed economics; Harvard women may get $35,000 for their egg "donation". Indian women are paid the equivalent of $100–500 (2012, p. 85).

In contrast with *Vicky Donor,* Indian egg "donors", exploited surrogate mothers, and highly corrupt medical practitioners frame Kishwar Desai's dystopian exploration of the Indian surrogacy business in her second novel, *Origins of Love* (2012), where a Delhi clinic scrambles to find the family of a fatally ill white child orphaned before her birth. This fiction also features the return of the author's middle-aged, cigarette smoking detective, Simran, and, like Desai's previous novel on female foeticide, is a scathing feminist indictment of gender-based discrimination in her home country, based substantially on the kind of extensive research the author customarily did in her previous work as a journalist. Unsurprisingly, neither this novel, nor the 2011 Marathi film on a very similar topic, *Mala Aai Vhhaychy!*, has generated the kind of outpouring of volunteers that followed the release of the film about male donations (Fig. 20.1).

Desai's novel is a fictional compendium of missteps and corruption, and may or may not satisfy as a work of art, but it does address a serious real-world concern, to which the Indian government has only lately, and sluggishly, responded. The Home Ministry, in response to the growing phenomenon of the plight of stateless children born to surrogates in India, in January 2013 issued new, stricter visa requirements for prospective parents.

It seems hardly to have made a difference in the most prominent Indian surrogacy websites, beyond a now-obligatory page referencing legal support for

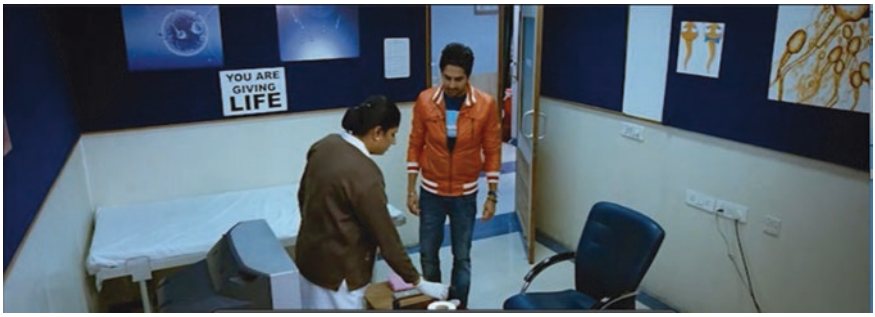

Fig. 20.1 "You are giving life". Screen shot, *Vicky Donor* (2012)

their clients. US-based "Surrogacy Abroad", for instance, continues to advertise its openness to a client base that would seemingly now be disqualified by Indian law: "surrogacy Abroad Inc. is an international surrogacy agency based in Chicago, owned and operated by Benhur Samson, a native Indian and business entrepreneur. Benhur moved to Chicago in 1987, and has been on the business side of the medical field for the last 20 years. During these years, Ben saw an opportunity in the industry to bridge the gap between intended parents of all lifestyles and surrogacy in India. We are a "one-stop" agency for any intended parent (GLBT friendly) and can accommodate every aspect of the journey to parenthood through surrogacy."

On this website, under "proud sponsors" we find a picture of a blonde, blue-eyed baby and the logo "powered by global giving" (the surrogacy abroad webpage will link us to that site). Going no further than the image itself, as presented on the Indian surrogacy webpage site, the photographed baby is merely one of four blue-eyed blonde children prominently displayed on the homepage, where the repeated echo of this very unusual phenotype clearly describes what kind of product this service will offer. At the same time, the concept of "global giving" involves a very densely woven fiction for the western consumer, a reversal of traditional north-south directions in charitable activity. In this framework, Indian (or, in a larger context, the Mexican or Guatemalan) altruism leads certain generous and conventionally attractive southern individuals to make a selfless choice and offer a priceless gift that will help others, and will result in more blonde babies, a happy outcome for the world. In return, grateful northerners will bestow upon those generous individuals who give the gift of life a token of appreciation, in the form of a monetary gift, albeit one that is certainly much less than they would be expected to provide similar gift-givers in their home country. Surrogacy is, in effect, presented as a kind of charity operation, from all sides.[4] This is not a

[4]"Global Giving" from another perspective is an odd sponsor for a for-profit business like this one. It defines itself as a charity fund raising website—something like kick-starter—where grass-roots organizations can propose projects for charitable giving: "Global Giving is full of solutions. Solutions run by innovative, grassroots projects and organizations that are working to educate children, feed the hungry, build houses, train women (and men) with job skills, and hundreds of other amazing things". It is interesting to speculate in what sense a paid surrogacy business can define itself as a charity.

coincidence, but represents in a nutshell the typical narrative from the global north, as Amrita Pande reminds us: "literature on surrogacy in the global north indicates that altruism and the metaphor of 'the child as an ultimate gift' are often evoked by surrogates. … to soften the pecuniary image of commercial surrogacy" (2011, p. 620).

The overt message of the surrogacy firm as depicted on the glossy website, thus, is that theirs is an altruistic mission to help people achieve human fulfilment. In this exchange, southern women offer the ultimate gift to bereft couples; northern parents for their part change these women's lives for the better—or, more particularly, the northerners support these women's dreams of better lives for their families, since the surrogates need to be free of the accusation that they might *personally* gain from this transaction. The altruism of southern women, giving the gift of life, is matched by the altruism of northern parents. Swept under the metaphorical rug are the high divorce rates in the north, the struggles over child custody, the rage that overtakes some people when their child is less than conventionally perfect.[5] Swept under the rug as well are the awkward finances of this exchange of supposed gifts, the lack of alternatives and the conditions of extreme poverty that compel women into becoming surrogates, the difficult moral dilemmas they face, the suffering and dangers they confront. Equally surprisingly, Pande found that while the frankly commercial nature of surrogacy in India would lead one to expect an even greater compensatory emphasis on surrogate altruism; nonetheless, "in conversations with the surrogates, the glaring absence of the gift-giving narrative was hard to miss and equally hard to explain" (Pande 2011, p. 621).[6]

This disconnect between advertised and real affect in itself should not surprise us. All corporations work to control, affect and structure the consumer's interpretation of their product, framing services as clean, good, happy, virtuous, ethical. Feel-good movies like *Vicky Donor* support this image. Only around the edges do other meanings leak out, raising questions of what we believe a good life to be, who is entitled to it, and what are the social relations that underlie altruistic acts. In the world of websites like "Surrogacy Abroad, Inc", surrogates are represented by the familiar image of the in vitro fertilization of ova, the distended belly, the inscrutable tattoo. Within the postcolony, evidently, not all people belong in the same photographic frame nor are they subject to the same rules of recognition. Parents are white, families embrace each other, blonde babies smile at the camera.

[5]One well-documented case is that of Susan Ring, who was impregnated with a donor egg. During her pregnancy, the couple divorced and decided they no longer wanted the children she was carrying. Ring sued for custody, then placed the twins for adoption (Adams 2003). Another case, cited by Dan O'Connor (2013), involves a surrogate who was carrying a foetus found to have birth defects; the genetic parents wanted her to abort; she refused to do so, though she later repented when the incentive to abort went up to a $10,000 bonus.

[6]Hochschild talks about the challenge for some biological parents who, following upon this language of altruism, imagine that they might be able to create a bond with the surrogate who is carrying their child, only to find the linguistic and cultural barriers too high a bar (2012, p. 80).

In the real world, stateless blonde children are a cause for concern, while wombs for rent continue to be relegated to the backrooms and the waiting rooms of national attention, bracketed in an ambiguous social space, not quite fully human. Inevitably, the social spacing is also a suspension of the politics of recognition.

And yet, of course, the other side of this image is glaringly present in popular culture as well—hence the controversy around Nicole Kidman or Gauri Khan or Kiran Rao, who have had children born through surrogacy—or in the concern expressed through the growing corpus of denunciatory documentary films (*Google Baby*, *Made in India*) and fictions (*Origins of Love*, *Mala Aai Vhhaychy!*) that raise warning signs about international surrogacy.[7] In this respect, there has been a significant change of focus in more recent films and fictions, in which the international element and designer baby technology have been increasingly foregrounded. Earlier films in which the surrogate mother becomes an important character focus more on local dilemmas, on social and family relations put in jeopardy by rent-a-womb situations: *Filhaal*, *Doosri Dulhan*, *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke.* In these earlier films, maternity is the compelling force, and the need for a biological child of the husband's sperm an unquestioned good. Commerce, if present at all, is a dirty secret, a plot point that needs to be eliminated through healthy affect. In a parallel filmic history, in Latin America, and in independent cinema from the United States, the perspective of the woman forced by her circumstances to become a surrogate mother has long been a staple of melodrama: *Love for Rent*, *Baby Mama* (USA), *Mujer comprada* (Mexico), *Barriga de aluguel* (Brazil). In stories like these, the surrogate is the victim/heroine, and the wealthier service contractors almost inevitably fall into the role of villains.

The *firstpost* article brings together two stories from the global south that are of particular interest to me as a Latin Americanist with a strong interest in global south studies. It warns about the case of Guatemala, a country which was once the premier source of children for adoption to the USA until burgeoning evidence of baby trafficking lead to strict legislation, and India, the new frontier of global surrogacy. One immediate response to the January change in Indian law was for some international businesses to switch fertility tourism to another southern location: Guatemala is one of those countries, but also Mexico, with its recently loosened surrogacy regulations, especially in the southern state of Tabasco. On rapidly reformulated websites, India has been removed, or made a negative point of comparison, and Mexico touted as advantageous for many reasons: proximity, value, lack of visa hassles, possibility of sex determination of the child, more Caucasian donor germplasm availability, excellent tourist attractions.

"Surrogacy Cancun" echoes the imagery of the Indian surrogacy website cited above, with a slide show highlighting blonde children accompanied by happy parents on a perfect, white sand beach. Since all children are delivered by caesarean section at the convenience of the clients, the clinic can boast of both the superior

[7]Even cautionary tales are good press. In the NPR interview from 2010, Frank comments that Patel's clinic jumped from 70 to 300 surrogates in the 3 years since her film was made.

vacation experience and the superior quality of the souvenir these lucky couples will be bringing home with them. Other materials on the Cancun website make an explicit contrast with India, where, reading between the lines, we are told that poor South Asian women are exploited against their will, leading to an inferior experience, since clients have been made uncomfortably aware that the fictions of the exchange do not obtain. In contrast: "Our surrogate mothers are not 'recruited' but join willingly. … In countries like India, surrogacy has a social stigma attached to it which can be detrimental. This is not the case in Mexico where the idea of family is extremely important and the idea of surrogacy is seen as a selfless act".

"Medical Tourism Corporation" offers services in both Mexico and India. In order to speak of the comparative advantages for each geographical location, the website shows charts of surrogacy success rates in India (a gesture towards a scientific argument), while adding about Mexico, in a tone more appropriate to a tourist brochure than a medical website: "Couples considering infertility treatments like IVF in Tijuana will also enjoy the colorful culture, exciting shopping, and flavorful foods. In addition, visitors can tour cultural centers and South-of-the-border architecture, watch a bullfight or greyhound race, or participate in a Mexican fiesta! The combination of cultural food and fun can help reduce the stress…". The site "Planet Hospital", for its part, is extremely blunt, using plain language to describe a suite of services illegal in most countries on the planet. "No surrogacy situation or request is too difficult for PlanetHospital, we do not judge", they brag. "Patients with HIV or HEP C? No problems. Gender Selection? No problem".

Clicking through a series of these websites is both jarring and instructional. The glossiness of the images, the overwrought prose, the hyperbolic claims, the emphasis on fun and tourism, all ring warning bells. Because these services are so new, only burgeoning in the last 5–10 years, there has been very little analysis or documentation of the actual conditions in these mostly unregulated clinics. Certainly, ethnographic studies like Pande's work in India, and some of the issues raised by medical ethicists support our intuitive sense that there are reasons for concern (Bailey 2011; Deonandan et al. 2012; Meyers 2011; Ross-Sheriff 2012). Easy to find, slick surrogacy websites hide the fact that many of these reproductive tourism businesses catering to foreigners are completely unregulated. One study comments on an "emerging divide between those clinics offering health services to local patients, and those concentrating on the provision of services for foreign clients. This divide or targeted specialization of clientele raises several ethical concerns. In particular, we identify questionable marketing and business practices on the part of clinics that cater to medical tourists. These practices raise concerns about adequate informed consent, marketing of health products as consumer goods, and corporate and professional responsibility" (Smith et al. 2010, p. 4). Unsurprisingly, accredited clinics in Latin America tend to be more difficult to find for interested internationals, and far less user-friendly, since a potential client would have to go through Spanish-only medical registries to locate them (Smith et al. 2010, p. 10).

Likewise, while little work has been done to study the current practices in Mexico, there is a very worrisome, amply documented history of abuse in the neighbouring state of Guatemala, another of the currrently touted surrogacy sites. Online sites like "Advocates for Surrogacy" in Guatemala until very recently used familiar "gift exchange language" to describe their services: "our surrogate mothers … are extraordinary women who bring you the gift of life. … Surrogate mothers enjoy the special joy that the gift of life bestows". However, scholars have long been aware that these promises are likely to be highly deceptive. Guatemala has the highest rate of gender violence in the western hemisphere and a culture of impunity towards violations of human rights, especially of women, including a very lax response of the law enforcement authorities to prosecuting the shocking number of feminicides in that nation (See, e.g. Thomson 2013). While little is known about the new surrogacy businesses, Rotabi, among others, worries that the general climate of insecurity for women, along with the longstanding practice of coercive "manufacturing" of children and forced adoption arrangements (which peaked in 2004) have cemented a culture of abuse, in which women are described (and treated), demeaningly, as "breeders". Says Rotabi: "the activity uses technology that is systematized by animal husbandry practices, and the pejorative use of the term breeders underscores the emotionally provocative nature of the subject of surrogacy practices" (Rotabi and Bromfield 2012, p. 134).

In the hyperbolic world of reproductive tourism, both for and against, Peruvian Rocío Vásquez de Velasco's short story "Vientre de alquiler" stands out as a bracing coda. Published in her 2004 collection, *Sin Vaselina*, "Vientre de alquiler" is surely one of the most mordant satires on a wealthy woman's unflinching pursuit of a child. The story is told from the perspective of Fulvia, a rich woman with everything but a child, and an overpowering rage against a society she imagines judging her as lacking. Unable to bear a child herself, she mixes a friend's egg with her husband's sperm and kidnaps her senile grandmother to implant her with the embryo. When the grandmother dies on the way to the clinic, her collaborative gynaecologist tells her, "Todo tiene solución en la vida. Desházase del cadáver y consiga a otra víctima" (Vásquez 2004 p. 87). Fulvia is delighted to find that her medical advisor so clearly understands and approves her priorities. She calmly removes her grandmother's false teeth as a souvenir, and throws the corpse over a nearby cliff before walking away, presumably to hunt down the next victim.

Vásquez's story is intentionally shocking, matching the matter-of-fact outrageousness of the rest of the volume. Fulvia's story adopts the point of view of this hedonistic woman and the criminally collaborative doctor, while it is also clear that the story is derived from a between-the-lines reading of materials like the reproductive tourism websites cited above, with their cheerful customer service orientation, the implicit promise of perfect babies, delivered on the clients' timetable, in a lovely vacation setting.

From a northern perspective, in fact, the south is picturesque, and its primary interest remains the opportunities it offers for northerners to be creative, to play, to have fun in safely exotic settings. The conditions that make this fantasy possible, in the reproductive tourist world, necessarily involve mostly hidden individuals

whose concept of opportunity is quite different. For the surrogate mother, or even the ordinary clinic employee, the tension is not one between play and work, but rather how to deal with the chronic conditions of an ongoing struggle for survival. This is not a crisis situation, it is not catastrophic in a daily sense. Rather, it reflects ordinary situations of grinding poverty, of a culture of impunity. It is precisely because these conditions are ongoing and longstanding, they do not rise in northern eyes to the level of a demanding an ethical response (as would, for instance, the tragedy of the moment: the tsunami, the landslide, the earthquake). Elizabeth Povinelli is particularly helpful in thinking through the ways in which northerners avoid feeling compelled to think in ethical terms about the everyday cruddiness of ordinary, ongoing violence and poverty. She asks: "How do specific arrangements of tense, eventfulness, and ethical substance make affectively and cognitively sensible and practical, late liberal distributions of life and death, of hope and harm, of endurance and exhaustion across social differences?" (2011, p. 5) It is not just that the industry of assisted reproduction avoids answering these questions. There is no reason for it to address them, since the north has no ethical purchase on ordinary suffering. What Vásquez's story reminds us is that the south is not exempt from blame in this respect, either. Here, hidden within the idealistic world of smiling babies and loving parents, is the real worm in the apple.

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