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Editorial

Introduction

Life writing, autobiography and autofiction have slowly but surely continued on an age-old road to becoming household names for anyone and everyone who examines literary works. On 29 December 2017, the French newspaper *Le Monde* published an article entitled *Quand la littérature nous sauve* (literally translated: When literature saves us), in which French critic Alexandre Gefen discusses his understanding of the common theme of French literary production since the 1980s, namely that of “literature which repairs, restores, heals”. The various articles brought together in the current volume of the *Ravenshaw Journal of Literature and Culture* on Life Writing are examples of social, therapeutic and emotional life writing which can be described as “healing literature”. In this manner all the contributions in this volume, whether they treat historical life writing or contemporary experiences, offer the readers elements of events lived mainly in India, but also in the USA and Europe.

In “Pain is a present tense business”: Siri Hustvedt’s *The Shaking Woman* and Melanie Thernstrom’s *The Pain Chronicles*,” Laura Castor explores two writers whose works have reached a wide audience and have been reviewed by numerous journals but that have so far not led to many scholarly studies. Historical and personal temporal perspectives are central in Castor’s exploration of metaphorical language as linked to subjectivity in Hustvedt’s and Thernstrom’s narratives. Castor draws upon the theories of Leigh Gilmore, who distinguishes between the retrospective views dominating traditional autobiographical writing and modern pain narratives in which forward-looking stories of becoming (and finding meaning in becoming), despite chronic pain, are more prevalent than attempts to seek redemption or triumph. She concludes that these writers express serious doubts as to whether a humanist mastery of their conditions is possible. Instead, along the lines of what Gilmore has called agency without mastery, Hustvedt and Thernstrom

create texts that open up spaces where both reader and writer can learn to witness in ways that expand the scope of autobiographical writing.

“Writing the Body: Self, Illness and Experience in AIDS/Gay Life Writing” sheds light on critical views of illness narratives or pathographies. Making use of Merleau-Ponty’s and Foucault’s theories of the body, Ghosh and Pati look at contemporary understandings of illness narratives that stand in contrast to the grand medical narratives which view the body as an object. Instead, recent scholarship perceives the body as a site of complex interaction and interconnection between physical and subjective experiences. While the healthy body tends to be silent and transparent, in illness, the body calls attention to itself and to experiences that call for expression in narratives that ‘frame’ the illness so as not to allow it to dominate. Many of these illness narratives, such as those on AIDS, are more than therapeutic in scope as they also challenge social discourse.

“Representations of an Olympian and ‘Authentic’ Love for Football” offers an analysis of popular representations in vernacular literature and in interviews of Olympian Rahman in which certain norms, values, and ways of being are produced and solidified. The actions of Olympian Rahman are interpreted through concepts of authenticity, interiority, identity, and validity. Authenticity is further linked to integrity and vitality, as well as to originality and purity. “Representations of an Olympian and ‘Authentic’ Love for Football” explores how the intrepid (or outrageous) behavior of Olympian Rahman has been presented in different biographical accounts. This outrageous and sometimes disruptive behaviour is celebrated and regarded as an expression of Rahman’s authenticity and passion for football. Veena Mani bases her analysis on articles and interviews. Comparing different events and how they have been seen, Veena draws the conclusion that Rahman’s breaking norms in the sporting space was accepted because he was seen as an innocent, rustic, and unsophisticated person. Rahman’s association with an authentic love for football becomes a form of resistance to universalizing norms and scripts within the world of football.

In “The ‘Attempted Murder’ Scene in Elias Canetti’s Autobiography: A Case Study for Bridging Critics’ Opposing Positions,” Claude Desmarais explores the divide in the scholarship around Elias Canetti’s work, with, on the one hand, critics who read his work along the lines of Canetti’s own precepts and, on the other, those who see his writing as an attempt to exercise power and control. Discussing the murder attempt episode in the first volume of Canetti’s autobiography, Desmarais’s essay attempts to bridge this divide, something that can add important aspects not only to autobiographical scholarship but also to contemporary politics, since, as it pointed out in this essay, unresolved smaller clashes often lead to greater social conflict. In politics and in the academic world, we need to learn how to live with both difference and ambivalence.

Making use of Foucault’s “Technologies of the self” and a historicization of the evolution of the idea of the self as related to notions of the self in Hindu philosophy (along with its polarities of permanence and change, knowledge and ignorance), in the Theravada and Mahanaya schools of Buddhism, and to Greek notions of taking care of oneself, this essay, “Knowing the Medieval Self: Reading Ram Das’ *Dardhyata Bhakti Rasamruta*”, explores the criticism of *Dardhyata Bhakti Rasamruta* made by poet and social reformer Pandit Nilakantha Das, arguing that Das may be right about the nonrealistic aspects of this work but not in his thoroughly negative general view of it. Why, then, has this text remained popular for such a long time? Sikha Mahrshi suggests that popular hagiography is important and that one may read the *Dardhyata* as a biographical source that gives a deeper understanding of medieval Odisha and of its preoccupation with spiritual practice as expressed in life stories of devotion. Many of its stories are centered around the supreme divinity of Jagannath and the salvational powers of his blessings. Sikha also suggests that if one wants to be able to appreciate texts like *Dardhyata Bhakti* and understand the mentality of the age in which it was written, context and the socio-cultural conditions must be taken into account.

As “Autobiography and Intended Fallacy: History and Individuality in Gopabandhu’s Autobiographical Poems” suggests, autobiography in India has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. Autobiography has been linked to colonial modernity, and Indian autobiography has long remained in the shadow of Western autobiography. This essay points to the importance of the self in Gopabandhu Das’ *Autobiography of the Prisoner* and *Prison Poems* (1935), with a particular focus on tropes that explore the relation between self and community. Unlike earlier scholars, Shaswat Panda argues that, to be able to fully understand these poems, one has to take into account Gopabandhu’s involvement in the public and his Gandhi-like leadership in the Odia nationalist movement. Exploring Gopabandhu autobiographical writings written in prison and while traveling, Panda argues that these texts express concern with his compatriots and with issues of individuality, and that Gopabandhu’s notions of self are strongly connected to his devotion to public service. Interestingly, Gopabandhu’s extensive travelling differs from western, imperialist and exploitative ideas of travel and is more like a form of service along Buddhist and Bhakti lines.

Raj Kumar’s “Caste, Culture and Identity: Muli Revisited” explores aspects of what has been called narrated autobiography or mediated autobiography and makes an attempt to define these terms and situate them in an Indian context. Since Hindu philosophers have seen our lives in the world as ephemeral in contradistinction to the timeless realm of the soul, it has been difficult for autobiography as a genre to flourish. For Dalit writers this has been even more difficult, since they have been relegated to the despised margins of society. That Muli was able to express himself in the autobiography *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*, written in collaboration with James Freeman, is remarkable in itself but also for the questions it raises about autobiography as a genre.

Adding to our knowledge of Dalit literature in general and Dalit autobiography in particular, “The Aesthetics of Becoming a Being in

Manoranjan Byapari's Bangla Dalit Autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*" gives an overview of Bengali Dalit literature and its history with examples from important fictional and non-fictional works by Dalit writers on the difficulties of Dalit life. In this essay, Ashis De focuses on Manoranjan Byapari's autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* which portrays the struggle of Byapari (born ca. 1950-51) and his family through years of poverty, life in refugee camps, and menial work. But this is also a success story of amazing proportions, as Byapari learns to read and write and goes on to narrate stories that he manages to publish thanks to a fortuitous encounter with the writer Mahasweta Devi. After travelling in Manoranjan's rickshaw and learning about his ambitions, Devi publishes his first piece in her magazine *Bartika*.

Since there are countless autobiographical accounts by male writers from Britain on journeys to India, critical discussions of women's life writing add a missing dimension. "Eliza Fay: An Unusual Memsahib" explores Eliza Fay's *Original Letters from India, 1779-1815* with a focus on the unusual aspects of Fay's character and actions. This essay sees Fay as an indomitable spirit and a survivor who, in her *Letters*, looks at both English and Indian characters and communities with a sharp and realistic eye. Sindhu Menon focuses on Fay's views on anything from her 'spineless' husband to English colonial customs (including the extraordinary sumptuousness of British meals despite the Bengal heat) and hierarchies and comments on Fay's understanding of the custom of suttee.

In "Crossing the Borders of Cultural experience: Cultural Significations of English Translations of Life-Narratives by Women," Sulfia S. Santhosh emphasizes that India has a very long tradition of women writing their lives and suggests that The Translation Project, which translates stories by women from regional languages into English, has made pioneering efforts in this regard. There is a great diversity which includes discourses of resistance that dismantle notions of a homogenous female subjectivity whereby terms such as culture, identity,

and gender must be continuously scrutinized in order to avoid monochromatic visions.

The collection of essays is complimented by an Interview and Book Review. Munira Salim's interview of Urmila Pawar, an eminent Dalit women of contemporary times throws light not only on the Dalits in India, the raising of a Dalit girl in India but also on how the Dalits are trying to create a niche for themselves in the political and social arena. The book review of *Auto/Biography Studies Reader* by Sashi Bhusan Nayak is an interesting inclusion of Routledge's recent anthology on autobiography studies edited by Sidonie Smith.

As is evidenced in this volume of the *Ravenshaw Journal of Literature and Culture* on Life Writing the genre of life writing comes in many forms and formats. The contributions published here are made by researchers from all over the world and propose analyses of narratives that are varied in thematic approach, from pain and illness narratives to narrations of lived religion (Dalit, Buddhism, Bhakti spirituality, Hinduism, Christianity), and in theoretical underpinnings (Foucault, Gilmore, Merleau-Ponty) and genres (journalism, autobiography/autofiction, poetry). Clearly, the variety of themes, backgrounds, contexts and analytical approaches to texts from India, the USA, Europe and beyond allow both the experienced researcher to conduct in-depth readings and the neophyte a window into the exiting and ever-evolving field of life writing. The volume is noteworthy also because it sheds light on Indian autobiography, a genre that has often been downplayed as not acceptable or not receivable to many Indian audiences as Hinduism, but also other religions practised in the Indian subcontinent, view life and living as transient and thus not worthy of lasting writing and publishing, let alone analyzing. We wish you all an interesting and thought-provoking read!

Dr. Kerstin Shands (Södertörn University)

Dr. Karen Ferreira-Meyers (University of Swaziland)

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“Pain is a present tense business”: Siri Hustvedt’s *The Shaking Woman* and Melanie Thernstrom’s *The Pain Chronicles*

Laura Castor

Whereas conventions of autobiographical writing usually assume a retrospective view of lived experience (Lejeune), a number of recent autobiographical narratives about chronic pain have challenged this perspective. Leigh Gilmore notes in “Agency Without Mastery: Chronic Pain and Posthuman Life Writing” that these pain narratives are more concerned with who the “I” of chronic pain might become (83). Instead of asking, “Who am I and how did I come to be this way?” Siri Hustvedt’s *The Shaking Woman, or a History of My Nerves* and Melanie Thernstrom’s *The Pain Chronicles: Cures, Myths, Mysteries, Prayers, Diaries, Brain Scans, Healing, and the Science of Suffering*, both published in 2010, express this change in emphasis. These two writers shift the gravitational pull of their narratives in a different direction to ask: Who am I becoming, and how do I find meaning in the uncertainty at the heart of that question?

The persistence of chronic pain brings the reader and the writer up against the limits of autobiographical discourse rooted in humanism.

For neither writer is it an option to find redemption in pain or to triumph over it. The question for many readers, as reviews of both texts suggest, is not so much “Is she telling the truth?” but rather “Is this a story I can bear to hear?” What happens if the pain doesn’t go away (as for Thernstrom) and if it doesn’t have a known cause and a diagnosis (as for Hustvedt)?

My analysis explores these questions along several planes relating language, agency, and dialogue between the writers and their intended readers. First, the language of pain, as Hilary Mantel observes in her “Diary” (41), “is a present tense business.” Yet to write of pain is by definition to take a distance from direct experience, to reflect on an idea of the past and project an implied view of the future. To write of one’s pain is also to enter a dialogue with a listener with the intention of changing one’s relationship to the pain, whether or not a cure is available.

How do Thernstrom and Hustvedt construct a sense of past, present, and future time in their narratives to open up the range of questions asked of autobiographical writing? In particular, how do the writers position their readers as partners in a dialogue rather than as members of a jury whose role it is to judge the accuracy of the personal narratives they recall, as Gilmore puts it in *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (138, 44-6). Equally important, how do they motivate their readers to bear the ambiguity of stories that do not provide a path to the narrators’ recovery from their conditions?

One way to respond to the questions above is that the historical time is right. First, the continuing popularity of autobiographical narratives attests to a wide audience of readers’ curiosity in the personal lives of well-known and successful people; both Thernstrom and Hustvedt have received acclaim for their achievements in other areas, Thernstrom as a respected journalist for *The New York Times Magazine* and award-winning nonfiction writer (*Homepage -Melanie Thernstrom - Author*)

and Hustvedt for her novels, essays, book of poetry as well as her expertise in art criticism, psychoanalysis, and neuroscience (*Siri Hustvedt - Writer*). Despite their professional success, however, both Hustvedt and Thernstrom call into being fraught selves of a kind that has only recently been acknowledged in the chronicles of autobiographical writing. In autobiography with roots in humanist discourse, the individual glances backward to recount a life story that might serve as an example for others to emulate. The retrospective view of a life well-lived in autobiographical writing from Augustine to the “I” of modernism responds to the question: How did I become the person I am today? (Gilmore “Agency” 83). But there is another issue at stake beneath this query: The readers should feel encouraged in their own struggles through reading the life story of the author and narrator. Paradoxically, the traditional American writer of autobiography, exemplified by Benjamin Franklin, is anything but ‘ordinary.’ The life worth telling in the personal narrative of humanist discourse was the exemplary life, often not the representative one it claimed to be. In practice, the possibility for any individual to find an empathetic listening audience for their own stories has been less available than it might seem in a society aspiring to celebrate democratic freedom of speech (Gilmore *Limits* 13).

By the turn of the new millennium, the memoir boom had taken autobiographical writing along a different path. Now it seems everyone is able to gain a public viewing, if not a hearing in media, from published writing to reality TV to social media. The many forms of self-representation available suggest as much about this ‘cultural moment’ as they tell us about the individuals narrating their stories. For Gilmore, the pervasive trauma in American society – whether expressed in sudden, unforeseen events or in everyday occurrences, present a contemporary problem (Gilmore *Limits* 19). In conventional life narratives, the test of the reliable narrator lies in the ability to take a view of one’s life that both resonates with and gains the trust of readers. Yet trauma by definition characterizes situations that overwhelm a person’s ability to

find a coherent story to make sense of their experience (Caruth, Felman and Laub, Levine, Van der Kolk). The narrator at the end of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* expresses this paradox: Traumatic experience is "not a story to pass on" in the sense that it is not a story that can be completely or accurately recounted without distortion. Nor is it a story to ignore, dismiss, or repress (Morrison 274-275).

Second, *The Shaking Woman* and *The Pain Chronicles* are relevant to a growing field that brings the skills of narrative competence to the practice of medicine. In a 2001 article in *JAMA*, Rita Charon, a physician with a PhD in literature, coined the term "Narrative Medicine." Both Thernstrom and Hustvedt have participated in and written about Charon's work. Charon motivated Hustvedt to write *The Shaking Woman* when she responded enthusiastically to an invited talk Hustvedt gave as part of a lecture series hosted by the Program in Narrative Medicine directed by Charon at Columbia University (Hustvedt *Shaking Woman* 213). *The New York Times* published Thernstrom's article, "The Writing Cure" on Charon's work, and Thernstrom posts it on her website (*Homepage - Melanie Thernstrom*).

A third reason for the interest these two books have generated could be that they help to translate recent advances in neuroscience into an accessible language for a wide audience. Thernstrom states her intentions when she notes that "[...] it is only in recent years that chronic pain has been understood to be a condition with a distinct neuropathology, though this understanding is not widely known." She clarifies, "It is not the duration of pain that characterizes chronic pain, but the inability of the body to restore normal functioning" (Thernstrom 6).

In both texts, the narrators effectively connect their compelling personal stories with larger, historically situated subjectivities. *The Pain Chronicles* was a *New York Times* best-seller. Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman* received a more muted response from a broad audience but it gained her added respect with scholars and physicians in psychiatry,

psychoanalysis, and neuroscience (Hustvedt and Van Booy). What is striking about the comments of reviewers is the extent to which they respond to the competent and effective ways in which the writers have made available research in medicine, as well as literature, religion, and philosophy to a wide audience. Reviewers do not tend to ask the kinds of questions traditionally posed for autobiographical writing, such as “Did the events leading to Thernstrom’s diagnosis of cervical spondylosis exacerbated by congenital spinal stenosis really develop as she reports them? Was her boyfriend Kurt as arrogant and self-absorbed as she describes him?” Did Hustvedt in fact have that dream about her father the day before he died? Rather, Hustvedt and Thernstrom encourage their intended readers to see how they both develop agency that goes against the grain of ideas about what it means to have a normal, healthy self in the humanist tradition. More broadly speaking, their narratives, question structures of institutional and cultural power that reinforce the need for mastery. Both Thernstrom and Hustvedt gain the trust of their readers, and at the same time suggest that any single story they may use to explain and mitigate their pain could in a larger, existential sense be unreliable.

Melanie Thernstrom’s *The Pain Chronicles*: “Pain is right next door”

Thernstrom begins with a first-person narration addressed to the reader:

Imagine, as I imagine, a community of consumptives, coughing blood in a progressive nineteenth-century mountain sanatorium. Their well-regulated hospital life includes the most modern of treatment protocols: antiquated purging and bloodletting have been replaced by mineral baths, good nutrition, mountain air, and heliotherapy – sunbathing. Yet attitudes have not evolved very far from those of Hippocrates, who, in the fifth century BCE, warned colleagues against visiting patients who had advanced consumption (the most prevalent disease of their time), because their inevitable deaths might damage the physicians’ reputation. (3)

Although Thernstrom speaks in a personal voice, she resists foregrounding her own experience. Instead of beginning in a confessional mode, she invites the reader to imagine a past time and place that she narrates in the present tense. She positions herself not as an observer reporting dispassionately on the beliefs of nineteenth-century medical practitioners and patients, but adds modifiers to encourage our positive regard. The hospital is “well-regulated” and the treatments “modern.” At the same time, she introduces a conflict that will recur throughout her text: whereas protocols have developed, traditional attitudes toward patients have not. Thernstrom implies a dynamic of discursive power relationships that, according to Michel Foucault, originated in the eighteenth century and developed in nineteenth-century treatments. Disease had become a political and economic problem for societies that sought solutions through public policy (166). What is particularly relevant for Thernstrom’s readers are the ways in which the treatments she describes resonate so much with the complementary medicine of our time, while the 19th century attitudes toward patients seem antiquated and even heartless.

The introductory passages are followed by a second section that once again asks the reader to imagine. But this time, we enter not a particular place, but an imaginative space, in the present tense:

To be in physical pain is to find yourself in a different realm – a state of being unlike any other, a magic mountain as far removed from the familiar world as a dreamscape. Usually, pain subsides; one wakes from it as from a nightmare, trying to forget it as quickly as possible. But what of pain that persists? The longer it endures, the more excruciating the exile becomes. *Will you ever go home?* you begin to wonder, home to your normal body, thoughts, life? (Thernstrom 4).

For Thernstrom this home is remembered from her childhood and young adulthood before an event that happened when she was twenty-nine. She recalls in the first chapter of her “Pain Diary: I Keep a Secret” the day she challenged her good friend’s former boyfriend to swim across a pond with her. That evening she experienced her first debilitating pain that “began in my neck and poured through my right shoulder, down into my arm and hand” (Thernstrom 20). It also marked the beginning of her romantic, often ambivalent relationship with Kurt: “The feeling of Kurt and the feeling of pain had a similar emotional hue. And because they began at the same time, the narrative of pain and the narrative of romance began to entwine and become a single story in my mind” (Thernstrom 19-22).

“Home,” both for Thernstrom’s prototypical pain patient and for herself is a lost sense of the body feeling familiar and whole. As a socially, historically, and politically constructed sense of what “whole” or “familiar” should feel like, it represents a longing for an imagined past and a desire to recover that memory. It also speaks to a longing to feel less lonely with others, as her relationship with Kurt makes painfully clear.

Thernstrom is a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, as well as the author of three works of life writing: In *The Dead Girl* (1990) she investigates the murder of her best friend as part of a larger psychological, cultural and philosophical critique; *Halfway Heaven: Diary of a Harvard Murder* (1997) draws heavily on the diary of the international student who murdered her roommate and then killed herself. In that text Thurnstrom addresses the larger political, ideological, and cultural conditions that made the crime possible. Thernstrom’s writing consistently moves beyond sensational events to expose the ways in which contemporary cultures are blindsided by the humanist illusion of mastery in contemporary America.

Although she began writing *The Pain Chronicles* at a time when she had already suffered chronic pain for a number of years, she received the project originally as an assignment for *The New York Times*. Her engagement in research and writing has also led her to serve as a member of the Committee on Advancing Pain Research, Education and Care of the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine. In short, her concerns are not just personal (*Homepage – Melanie Thernstrom*). As a public intellectual, she is also a credible narrator.

Thernstrom also gains the trust of her readers through the way in which she structures the book in small digestible pieces. Her chapters interweave personal narrative, histories, mythologies, anecdotes from her travels, and conversations with physicians and patients over eight years. Although she bases the book on her original "pain diaries," her intermittent "Pain diary" sections are not direct excerpts from her actual diaries. Rather, they help anchor the reader's understanding of Thernstrom's evolving relationship with her condition, moving from ignoring it, to deciding to get a diagnosis, to the diagnosis, to her resistance to accepting it, and finally, to a resolve to reframe her assumptions.

In effect, she leads the reader on a journey from ignorance to wisdom, and from unbearable pain to a level of pain with which she can live; her wry reflection in the final "Pain Diary" chapter, "I Try to Change My Perception" affirms how the power of imagination can influence empirical results: "As soon as you know your relief is only placebo, your expectations collapse. The genie is ingenious; he never falls for the same trick twice" (Thernstrom 308). The placebo effect, she learns, is effective for many patients and she registers her disappointment in not being able to make it work, through metaphor and her self-ironizing humour. She also appreciates how inadequate the medical language for communicating with pain patients is, in contrast to state of the art medical research. For example, the idea that pain can be characterized as a number on a scale is woefully inadequate to the challenges practitioners face in devising effective treatments for individual patients.

My pain diary asked me to rank my pain daily on a scale of 0 to 5 [...] I noticed that rating it as a 1 cheered me, but rating it as a 0 just felt like a lie. The fact that it was so clearly a lie embarrassed me, after all the pain research I had done [...] “I could make the pain fluctuate according to whether I was imagining that I was immersed in a lovely Jacuzzi or was the victim of an inquisition” (Thernstrom 305, 306).

As the example above suggests, her daily assessments can vary greatly, depending on how she tries to feel at a particular moment. The passage is typical of her conversational, self-ironic, yet increasingly knowledgeable voice. Thernstrom invites the reader into her world, and we trust her perceptions as she allies herself with us, moving smoothly between the generalized “most people” third person plural, to the direct address to “you” and then to herself as one of us:

Most people internalize their luck – it becomes *them* – or something they feel they deserve, as one always deserves to be oneself. Yet because it’s luck, it can change at any moment. Suddenly you’ll find yourself exiled to the shadowed side of the street. The coin had flipped my way again and again[...].

The answer to *why me?* Seemed plain: bad luck. And this was an answer I found devastating, since I don’t believe in fate, but I do believe in luck. I felt as crushed and blighted as if the fates were actively smiting me. Our bodies are the landscape in which our lives take place; pain was my landscape now (Thernstrom 257).

Thernstrom’s journey weaves in and out of the “you” and the “we” located in histories and figurative landscapes such as the one she evokes above, inviting the reader to come with her as a companion on the winding journey that becomes less bewildering over time.

Siri Hustvedt: “I am the shaking woman”

Hustvedt, too, invites the reader to follow her journey as a friend, and she too integrates and makes accessible a range of specialized knowledge as it developed historically. Her essay on “The Real Story” in *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* opens with her recollection of reading an article in the *New York Times* about the recent memoir boom. The author remarked that if Proust were living today, he would have written *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* as a memoir (93). The comment, she says, irritated her in a way she has never forgotten. It is not that she takes issue with the practice of writing about the self. Her novels, essay collections, and poems often refer to each other, and she uses story lines from her life. For example, her own father’s diaries are integral to the plot of *Sorrows of an American* (2008), and the artist narrator from *What I Loved* shows up as a peripheral character in *The Sorrows of an American*. Another main character in *What I Loved* (2003) could be a doppelganger for Daniel Auster, the son of Hustvedt’s husband Paul Auster and his first wife, the writer Lydia Davis. Daniel Auster pleaded guilty to stealing \$3000 from a drug dealer killed by the dealer’s flatmate, and although he was not charged with complicity in the murder, Auster admitted to being in the victim’s flat when he was killed. Melissa Denes notes that Hustvedt refused to speak of her stepson in their interview for *The Guardian*, but that Hustvedt seems to want to “exorcise” through fiction what was obviously a painful period (Denes).

Denes’ failed effort to get Hustvedt to talk about her stepson is a reminder of why Hustvedt objects to the popular assumptions about the reasons people write and publish their stories, and the glib notions of life narratives ought to be read: that the “self” should be revealed and marketed, and that the only genuine self-expression comes by way of a confessional revelation.

In *The Shaking Woman* Hustvedt, like Thernstrom, asks whether it is possible to know where the “self” is located, as pain takes

her away from her familiar “narrating self” into the body of an alien with no name. Her memoir begins with the image of home as familiar, in contrast to the nursing home where Hustvedt’s father died of emphysema. She describes being “at home in Brooklyn” while her father lay in bed in “the room where he lived at the end of his life” (Hustvedt 1). In the story she then tells, Hustvedt dreams that she is with her father who is on his deathbed, when he reaches out to embrace her. The following morning, when her sister Liv phones her in Brooklyn to say that their father is dead, Hustvedt responds rationally but with the sense of an unconscious understanding; this bond is a figurative “home” that exists generationally between father and daughter, in a different realm from the location of her house in Brooklyn.

Hustvedt understands that she needs to respond rationally and competently, and “When the time came, I didn’t weep. I wrote” (Hustvedt 2). In the passages that follow, taking place two and a half years later, she gives a memorial talk in honour of her father at St. Olaf’s College, where he had been a professor for almost forty years. Again, she senses an intuitive connection:

While I’d been writing this second text, I’d had a strong sensation of hearing my father’s voice...Confident and armed with index cards, I looked out at the fifty or so friends and colleagues of my father’s who had gathered around the memorial Norway spruce, launched into my first sentence, and began to shudder violently from the neck down. My arms flapped. My knees knocked. I shook as if I were having a seizure. Weirdly, my voice wasn’t affected. It didn’t change at all[...]When the speech ended, the shaking stopped. I looked down at my legs. They had turned a deep red with a bluish cast (Hustvedt 3).

In the months after this incident, the event that she assumed was an anomaly develops into a recurring one; she continues to give public lectures, and shakes at some, but not all of them (Hustvedt 29, 39). A doctor prescribes lorazepam and refers her to an epilepsy specialist

(Hustvedt 31), but extensive testing eventually reveals that her brain is “normal” without tumours or swellings (Hustvedt 186).

As we read *The Shaking Woman* Hustvedt takes readers on a figurative journey that she says has led her in a circle (Hustvedt 32). Compared with Thernstrom’s optimism about recent advances in the understanding of chronic pain as a knowable disease rather than curse or stroke of bad luck, Hustvedt does not privilege one form of specialized knowledge over another. Rather, she shows how all knowledge includes stories, either implicit or explicit. “The story of the shaking woman is the narrative of a repeated event that, over time, gained multiple meanings when seen from various perspectives,” she concludes toward the end of the book (Hustvedt 182).

Repeatedly, she complicates the question, “Am I telling the truth of my experience?” For example, Hustvedt recalls one vivid memory of visiting relatives in Bergen, Norway, when she was four. The emotional part she says is accurate; she felt humiliated when the adults in the room laughed because she had put her arms around her cousin, trying to comfort her. Where she made a mistake was in the location, because the house she remembers had not yet been built (Hustvedt 102). Hustvedt’s own memories, her work as a fiction writer, and her forays into neurology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry have convinced her that the neurological processes shaping both experiential memory and imagination are similar.

The questions she asks herself lead to her discussion of the histories of hysteria in the nineteenth century as precedents to recent diagnoses of PTSD (Hustvedt 70-78). These histories also appear in *The Sorrows of an American* (2008). In that text, Hustvedt invented a character she describes as her imagined brother Erik, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. When he dies, Erik’s father leaves his journals that include the time he had spent in the Philippines during World War II. The text for these journals is taken directly from the actual writings of

Lloyd Hustvedt, Siri's own father whose story frames hers in *The Shaking Woman*. Lloyd, too, had experienced a trembling fit with flashbacks from the Philippines, as he "listened to a hymn in the chapel on the St. Olaf College campus" (Hustvedt 126). The site was not far, writes Hustvedt, from where she "shook so hard I thought I would fall down" (Hustvedt 126). However, citing Yazici and Kostakoglu, authors of a scientific article on conversion reactions and neuro imaging, she notes that research has not yet answered the question of how psychological processes become expressed and encoded in a subject's neurobiology. (78)

As tempting as it could be for the reader to assume that the key to Hustvedt's condition is a repressed cellular memory linked to her father, she does not find any direct cause and effect. Whereas Thernstrom maintains a trust that medical research will at a future date uncover the mechanisms of chronic pain as a disease, Hustvedt would see such hope as creating a false dichotomy between scientific and imaginative narratives. For Hustvedt, "We suffer from the hubris of the present: with our misguided notion of perpetual progress, we believe we are always moving forward and getting better and smarter" (Hustvedt 71).

Unlike Thernstrom's easily accessible structure, Hustvedt's form of one long essay without chapter breaks is more demanding of the reader. She uses the form of the essay for a valuable purpose, however, as a means to reinforce the larger ambiguity of the interdependent relationships between mind and body, illness and health, and personal and generational memory.

Conclusion

Thernstrom and Hustvedt each develop a narrative voice and metaphors that allow them to create chronic pain stories that cohere in ways that emphasize the shared journey more than the destination. By engaging the reader as a partner in a continuing dialogue rather than as

a member of a jury who decides whether or not they are telling the truth, their journeys allow them to narrate past, present, and future time in ways that expand the purview of autobiographical writing.

Thernstrom relates her narrating self to her readers, and she makes friends with the experts who encourage her to change her perceptions. Her anecdote at the end of *The Pain Chronicles* illustrates the point. A respected neurobiologist told her this story about a pain and a vision expert:

“You still don’t know how pain works? The vision guy asks the pain guy.

“You may know something about how vision works,” the pain man replies [...] But tell me- in what part of the brain does beauty lie?”

The vision guy falls silent.

“Let me know when you find it,” the pain man says, “because pain is right next door” (Thernstrom 330).

As uncertain as the imminent prospects for a cure for chronic pain still might be, Thernstrom’s metaphor has shifted from the opening of her book. Rather than exiling it to a “magic mountain” far from home, pain can now be greeted as a neighbour “right next door” (Thernstrom 52). The experts in this story are not anonymous doctors who could find a diagnosis for whatever problem happens to be their specialty, but ordinary guys who appreciate art as well as science.

Hustvedt, too, has changed her perceptions. The shaking woman, once “a speechless alien who appears only during my speeches” (Hustvedt 47) becomes a figure whose story she has learned to see from many angles. She keeps a measure of uncertainty, however, as she asks, “Can we say that my responses over time were psychological rather than neurological? Where do we draw the line?” (Hustvedt 182). Even as the closing line of the book affirms, “I am the shaking woman”

(Hustvedt 199), she continues to write in circles, asking

“Can a story ever be true? There will always be holes in it, the unarticulated breaches in our understanding, which we leap over with an ‘and’ or a ‘then’ or a ‘later’. But that is the route to coherence. Coherence cannot eliminate ambiguity, however” (Hustvedt 198).

Siri Hustvedt in *The Shaking Woman* and Melanie Thernstrom in *The Pain Chronicles* both acknowledge that they have neither mastered their situations nor triumphed over adversity. Yet Hustvedt’s present-tense “I am the shaking woman” affirms an agency that can live with the uncertainties of “what we don’t know, will never know, or have forgotten” (Hustvedt 198). Thernstrom’s closing tale of beauty and pain suggests that she and her readers, too, might have the capacity to hold space between coherence and ambiguity.

Endnotes

- i Georges Gustorf claimed in 1956 that autobiography should be respected for its literary value because it has a canon and a history, and because it underlines Western humanist notions of an individual self (Gusdorf). James Olney reinforced Gustorf’s view in *Metaphors of Self* in 1972 when he observed that autobiography is more universal than local, that as a form it transcends a particular historical time, and that its concern with style makes it more poetic than personal (Neuman 214).
- ii Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson survey of the growth and breadth of this movement in “In the Wake of the Memoir Boom” in *Reading Autobiography* (Smith and Watson 127-65). For an insightful discussion of trauma memoirs see Luckhurst, “My so-called life” in *The Trauma Question* (Luckhurst 117-46).

- iii Lee Quinby distinguishes between autobiography and memoir, noting “whereas autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The ‘I’ or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and [...] dialogical” (Quinby 299 qtd. in Smith and Watson 74). A memoir has also been seen as a personal narrative that treats aspects of a life worth remembering rather than the chronological arc of an entire life. Linda Anderson writes in *Autobiography: New Critical Idiom* that from the nineteenth century, “there was a definite hierarchy of values in relation to self-representation with memoirs occupying a lower order since they involved a lesser degree of ‘seriousness’ than autobiography” and that autobiography “came to be equated with a developmental narrative which orders both time and the personality according to a purpose or goal” (8).
- iv Numerous neurological and psychological studies link chronic pain to trauma. See Gilmore, “Agency Without Mastery” for a discussion of pain discourse as related to trauma theory and autobiographical narrative (85).
- v I hereafter cite references from *The Shaking Woman* as “(Hustvedt “page number”)”, and refer to pages from *The Pain Chronicles* as “(Thernstrom “page number”).” References to other works by the authors are specified by the author’s name and title of the work.
- vi Hustvedt’s book has been reviewed by numerous journals in a range of disciplines in the UK, Australia, and the US, including *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Age*, *The Irish Times*, *Scientific American*, *Financial Times*, and *Jewish Journal*. Thernstrom’s *The Pain Chronicles* has been popular internationally,

and reviewed in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The British Journal of General Practice*, and *The National Post*. Surprisingly few scholarly studies of either writer have been done, although this situation is beginning to change in Hustvedt's case. Hartmann, Marks, and Zapf's Introduction to *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works* (2016) states the editors' intentions to "highlight Siri Hustvedt as an important literary figure and her impact on interdisciplinary research in literary studies and humanities more generally" (Hartmann et al 1). In her 2015 doctoral dissertation, Teresa Bell discusses ambiguity in its formal, thematic, and conceptual expressions in *The Shaking Woman* (Bell 284). Leigh Gilmore is one of the few scholars who has written about *The Pain Chronicles*. In "Agency without Mastery" she discusses Thernstrom's account as an insightful example of a chronic pain narrative that challenges humanist ideas of "embodiment." Thernstrom, she says, recognizes the illusions of American culture's "ready-made" language for pain. She learns to see pain in multiple ways, including as a being and a presence (Gilmore "Agency" 86-87).

- vii See also Gilmore's conclusion to *The Limits of Autobiography* (148).
- viii Jason Tougaw's "Brain Memoirs, Neuroscience, and the Self: A Review Article" (2012) identifies five ways in which the "brain memoir" has been used as narrative medicine: Writing a memoir engenders a sense of agency when the writer is confronted by 'accidents' of heredity, disease, or injury; Brain memoirs provide information and comfort to readers with similar difficulties, and to their caretakers; The experiential data they provide can help shape research and clinical practice; They encourage discussion of relationships between mind, body, memory, the self, and narrative; They develop narrative strategies to represent the complex connections between the minds and bodies of the writers.

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Tougaw compares Hustvedt's *Shaking Woman* with other exemplary writers of brain memoirs including Antonio Damasio, Howard Dully and Charles Fleming, Alva Noe, Alex Kates Shulman, and Jill Bolte Taylor. He considers the literariness of Hustvedt's and Shulman's accounts, noting Hustvedt's ability to "make philosophy, neurology, and history seem like the stuff of mystery novels" (Tougaw 174, 180).

Unlike Thernstrom, Hustvedt cannot remember a time before chronic pain. Even though the shaking incident at her father's memorial service marks the beginning of her serious exploration into her puzzling neurological condition, she notes that even as an infant she had tremors (Hustvedt 11). Hustvedt has also suffered from serious migraines since childhood, one of which lasted for a year (Hustvedt 4, 5).

See also "The Real Story" in Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*.

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Writing the Body: Self, Illness and Experience in AIDS/Gay Life writing

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In autobiographical illness narratives, variously known as ‘pathography’, ‘autopathography’, or ‘autosomatography’, the body occupies a prime place simply because the body is the subject of medical intervention, and the site where both the illness and the selfhood of the ill person are localized. Autobiographical illness narratives based on AIDS is considerably a young genre that came to prominence during the 1980s when the AIDS pandemic played havoc. Illness narrative as a form of contemporary art is not only restricted to autobiographies and memoirs, but includes other forms of art such as painting, choreography, performance, and thanks to the advent of the internet, appear in blogs. In the deluge of AIDS literature, not only life writing but fiction and drama abound. Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (performed in two parts in 1991 and 1993), a symbolic examination of AIDS and homosexuality in the 1980s America, is a major dramatic work. Fictional works such as Allan Hollinghurst’s 2004 Booker Prize winning novel *The Line of Beauty* and journalistic

works such as Randy Shilts's 1987 book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* provide a pen portrayal of the AIDS epidemic. However, in this article, we seek to examine the significance of the sick body in life narratives of illness and the ways through which the body is culturally inscribed in the process of self-representation.

The growing concern of body as a pedagogical preoccupation has been incorporated into autobiographical writing, especially to writings by marginalized writers such as LGBT people, cancer and AIDS patients, from feminist, gender and disability studies. An attempt to define the body includes a spectrum of aspects such as identity, self and social perception. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines the body in the following way:

The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them. In the self-evidence of this complete world in which manipulatable objects still figure, in the force of their movement which still flows towards him, and in which is still present the project of writing or playing the piano, the cripple still finds the guarantee of his wholeness. But in concealing his deficiency from him, the world cannot fail simultaneously to reveal it to him: for if it is true that I am conscious of my body *via* the world, that it is the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body. (71)

The above citation renders that body asserts our sense of the self which means that our identity depends on the body. One can infer that body is the ideological locus of the individual, and the physical manifestation of his/her self. In illness narratives of AIDS, the body becomes the vehicle of the experiences of the patient-writer.

As the body and illness are inextricably linked with each other, the narratives that emerge from the experiences of illness—loss and grief, pain and suffering, discrimination and repression—challenge the dominant social discourse which perceives illness as taboo, disability as dysfunctionality, and homosexuality as perversion. In case of AIDS afflicted gay memoirists like Reinaldo Arenas, Paul Monette, Derek Jarman, Paul A. Sergio and Scott O’ Hara, to name a few, what propels their writing is an urge to take stand against homosexual oppression, to do away with the fallacy that AIDS is a gay disease and to show how PWAs (people with AIDS) are treated by a predominantly institutionalized medical system. In a way, writing of the self, for these writers, provides a refuge to find solace and a way of coping with illness. Penning down the experience of pain and suffering, breaking of the sense of the self, caused by illness, give them an outlet for venting their feelings. In this way, autobiographical illness narratives become a therapeutic method by bringing the past and present to re-negotiate experience.

The sick body is just not the part of the ill person but becomes a subject of the social discourse in a pluralistic world, at the onset and spread of illness. And when disease encounters the body, it disturbs the sense of the self. The juncture where illness meets body and starts complementing each other through their encounter is discussed by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* in which he states, “for us, the human body defines, by natural light, the space of origin and of distribution of disease: a space whose lines, volumes, surfaces, and routes are laid down, in accordance with a now familiar geometry, by the anatomical atlas (3). For him, body is a solid, visible space in which one “spatializes disease.”

Foucault's analysis is not simply a critique of the body but an explanation of how the body appears to be a subject of medicine. In his opinion the body is the site where illness resides as an uninvited guest and without the body it is impossible to localize this uninvited guest. Thus, illness makes the body transparent. When the HIV is first detected in the body, it causes melancholy and depression. The body starts consuming itself. Often the disease in the body disturbs the mental steadiness of the patient. Thus, illness is, according to Susan Sontag, "what speaks through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental; a form of self expression" (45). Foucault (1973) summarizes the encounter of the body of the disease and body of the individual in the following way:

The exact superposition of the 'body' of the disease and the body of the sick man is no more than a historical, temporary datum. Their encounter is self-evident only for us, or, rather, we are only just beginning to detach ourselves from it. The space of *configuration* of the disease and the space of *localization* of the illness in the body have been superimposed, in medical experience, for only a relatively short period of time—the period that coincides with nineteenth-century medicine and the privileges accorded to pathological anatomy. (3-4)

Foucault's critique is in close proximity with illness narrative in that it helps to justify such narratives' purpose to provide a more meaningful notion of illness. As the body becomes the subject of medical experimentation, it remains in the scrutiny of the medical gaze which views it as just an object.

Society perceives illness as taboo, as something propelled into the body, out of an unfamiliar world. Acting as a parasite, disease devours the body and causes crisis in the self. From this crisis of the body and mind, writes Emilia Mazurek in "Illness Narratives—Between Personal Experience, Medical Discourse and Cultural Practice", emerges illness narratives:

The moment of crisis favors telling stories about one's life concentrated around the experienced trauma, hence formulating an illness narrative. Describing the experiences connected with an illness helps to rebuild the lost biographical continuity, define the meaning of the critical event, and by this cope in a better way—in both the physical and the pragmatic dimension—with suffering and anxiety. (48)

A discussion of the ill body in relation to illness narratives must offer a critique of the biomedical or the clinical gaze that even Foucault criticized at length. Illness narratives stand at a sharp contrast with biomedicine in that biomedicine treats the body as an object while in narratives of illness the body is an amalgamation of a person's selfhood, identity and the materiality of his/her existence. Regarding biomedicine's view on AIDS patients, author Catherine Waldby in *AIDS and the Body Politics: Biomedicine and Sexual Difference* notes:

The stabilising and defining object of the biomedical sciences is the human body considered as a unified physical, material entity. Located as a naturally given scientific object, human bodies are understood by biomedicine as organic 'matter', as stuff whose form and behaviour are determined by natural processes of evolution and decay. This relegation of human bodies to the status of matter demands that other less fixed bodily meanings be actively refused. (24)

Evident from her observation is that biomedicine treats the body as an agent of viral infection and relegates the body's status to a "thing in itself."

At the core of biomedicine's gaze of the body lies illness that becomes an embodiment of the body since illness cannot exist outside the body. This is why in illness narratives body gets prime attention. Deborah Lupton in *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies*, writes, "It is often not until illness or pain is

experienced that the body comes into conscious being; illness may then be conceptualized as the body taking over, as an external environment separate to the self” (22).

The body in biomedicine is often treated as a property of medicine, an object of medical investigation, the ill persons feel the need to tell the stories of their experience of illness to criticize the medical institution and to challenge the society which views illness as taboo. From these urges, the pressing need of self-representation materializes in the form of autobiography or memoir. But representation of the bodily affairs is a complex process because representation is multifaceted. Self, memory, the social status of the writer, mind body dichotomy, identity politics and the private and public boundary of life attribute to different facets of representations. Thus, autobiographical narration about sensitive issues of the body is intricate. In the opinion of psychologist Jerome Bruner autobiographical narration is “of course a privileged but troubled narrative” (“Life as Narrative” 3) but his suggestion is that identity is founded in the story we tell about our lives (qtd. in J. Brockmeiero and D. Carbaugh 2:29). And in the telling of life stories, the body’s role is primal because in the process of representation, the body’s fundamental role, posits Derek Duncun, is that of an object which give expression to subjectivity” (qtd. in J. Hogan and R. Hogan 3:22). Regarding the ill person’s telling of stories, the medical sociologist, Arthur Frank in *The Wounded Story Teller: Body, Illness and Ethics* writes, “The stories that people tell come out of their bodies. The body sets in motion the need for new stories when its disease disrupts the old stories” (2). Here it can be emphasized that one of the purposes of writing illness narratives is the expression of subjectivity which in turn becomes a way of reclaiming identity, self-recognition and self-validation.

With the onset and progress of illness, the body starts adapting new ways to cope up with bodily changes. This idea is manifested by Kathy Charmaz in “The Body, Identity and Self: Adapting to

Impairments” who says “chronic illness assaults the body and threatens the integrity of the self” (657). Her view is that as illness sometimes causes impairments, the body constantly formulates new ways to cope up with impairment and the social positioning of the person finds itself at stake. This raises question like how can the body be integrated into the sociological accounts of the experience of illness. Investigating on the integration of the body into the sociological experience of illness Michael P. Kelly and David Field in “Medical Sociology: Chronic Illness and the Body” suggest that body is the site in which “the social identity and self-conception” are inscribed (244). It should be critically considered that although the sense of the self is localized in the body, the self and the body are not same. The self is a cognitive construct that is constantly being reconstructed and which is constantly being expressed in various autobiographical accounts which are offered by the individual in self-presentation. Body, contrary to the self, is the site in which “the self is linked to in so far as common-sensically self and body are experienced as one and the same thing” (245).

Kelly and Field in their article bring to attention another major issue regarding the body when illness affects it. Their opinion is that although in many social situations the body is a “taken for granted aspect of the person”, it ceases to be taken for granted “once it malfunctions and becomes more prominent in the consciousness of the self and others” (248). Finally summarizing the body’s role in chronic illness, they suggest that the body serves at least three functions

- The body is that very point in which the self is in touch with the self.
- The body is an obvious, though sometimes ambiguous, point of reference for external labels. The body is an easily available cue to the nature of the appropriate public identities which may be bestowed, and

- Labeling and identification feedback directly to self-conception as the chronically ill person constructs and reconstructs the meaning of their bodily mal-functioning and the responses of others to this.

(Kelly and Field 251)

The body translates into narration through experience of pain and suffering. It is the body that gives narration a voice. In narratives of AIDS, the body is a sentient entity, an archive of memory. In “Bodies of Commemoration: the Immune System and HIV”, Martia Sturken notes:

The human body is a vehicle for remembrance—through its surface (the memory that exists in physical scars for instance), its muscular and skeletal structure (the memory of how to walk, the effect of physical injury), its genetic tissues (the marking of one’s lineage and genetic propensities), and its immune system (the memory of body’s encounter with disease). (220)

Sturken contends that bodies are often provoked to speak without words and the bodies of AIDS affected people speak of suffering, anger, resilience and protest. They also speak of loss, grief, mourning and melancholia.

In the narratives of illness, the body becomes politicized through the representation of the private matters of life to the public. Actually politicization occurs on the public boundary because it is where the sensitive matters of life becomes a growing concern for society. Thus, body appears to define the subject and, particularly for AIDS memoirs by gay writers, for whom repression has always been a part of life, writing the body offers a way of asking for all that has been taken away from life, and most precisely affirming identity.

In *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women’s Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*, Sidonie Smith affirms that body is inescapable for those who claim identity or are assigned to marginalized identities (10). Similarly, Susana Egan in her

book *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* observes that the body is the source of subjectivity and “subjectivity is impossible unless the subject recognizes his/her location in the materiality of a body” (7). Therefore, the body is the site of cultural contestation or cultural inscription, and people with chronic illnesses may have complexes about the body which is the material ground of a person’s subjectivity, and illness may disrupt the sense of subjectivity.

In critiquing the body throughout the article with reference to autobiographical illness narratives, AIDS/Gay memoirs to be exact, we have tried to emphasize the fact that illness disrupts everyday life and the ill person’s social relationship. Illness affects both the ill person and his/her near ones. And the narratives of illness address the experience of the body which is otherwise unheard by the society. Perhaps this is the reason why we see a plethora of life narratives when we browse through, say for example, a catalogue of AIDS literature. Telling of stories of illness is a must, not only because telling entails solace, but also because “the healing process starts when patients tell of symptoms or even fear of illness” (Charon 65). It is in this context of telling stories of illness that she underlines how illness narratives give voice to the ill person. She notes:

The powerful narratives of illness that have recently been published by patients reveal how illness comes to one’s body, one’s loved ones, and one’s self. These narratives, or pathographies as they are sometimes called, demonstrate how critical is the telling of pain and suffering, enabling patients to give voice to what they endure and to frame the illness so as to escape dominion by it. Without the narrative acts of telling and being heard, the patient cannot convey to anyone else—or to self—what he or she is going through. More radically and perhaps equally true, without these narrative acts, the patient cannot himself or herself grasp what the events of illness mean. (Charon 65-66)

Charon's germane observation of illness narratives affirms that the acute pain and the suffering that illness causes to the body can only be understood through the medium of pathographies.

Pathographies or autopathographies places the experiences of illness localized in the body to a more humanized context than grand scientific narratives do. Perhaps that is the reason why we tend to study these narratives with scholarly lens. However, the human body as the site of illness becomes a page upon which representation occurs. The body is used as a weapon because it is the space through which the self gets written.

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Representations of an Olympian and 'Authentic' Love for Football

Veena Mani

1. Introduction

What are the ways in which a sportsman's life stories are narrated? This paper looks into the modes through which a sportsman is produced in relation to notions of authenticity and love for football in Kerala. For the purpose of this paper, I analyse an article on Olympian Rahman published in a popular, vernacular periodical in order to understand literary renditions of his personality. In addition to this, I use insights from my ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kozhikode from May 2014 to December 2015.

In a special issue of 'Life Writing' (2012), Lara Fiegel and Max Saunders foregrounded the aspect of mediation in the process of life writings. They argue that works of life writing necessarily is a process existing between/among "subjectivities, genres, forms or media"(241). This aspect of mediation demands our attention: we need to look at the practices, through which certain images are produced. These mediations are executed not only through stylistic elements but also through certain perceptions of norms and values celebrated in the given context. In other words, life narratives produce and solidify particular ways of being, in relation to the specific historical and regional context.

In this paper, I analyse popular representations of Rahman, both in vernacular literature and from field interviews, through the scholarship on authenticity and love. I explore the meanings of authentic love for football within regional notions, which posit authentic love for football as opposed to not only the 'ordinary' engagements with football but also as in conflict with official, national and international football bodies. This form of love for football is understood as interior to a person and is identified through a performance of sincerity and emotions in public. In conclusion, I argue that the search for an authentic love for football is inevitably a quest for an authentic football fan, who performs resistance to the universalisation of football experience by displaying loyalty to ways of life infused by love.

2. Authenticity and Love

The question of authenticity or the ways in which it is deployed has been emphasised in multiple explorations of identity and validity, and scholars broadly mark the beginning of concerns with authenticity in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Concerns about authenticity, or a lack thereof, vary in the domains of art, religion, and culture. Meanings of authenticity include, and often combine, significations of "authoritative," "legally valid," "genuine," "trustworthy" and "authorized" (Straub 12). However, authenticity in all these formulations stands in opposition to, and in a dynamic relationship with "fake" and "fabricated" (McCarthy 241). Authenticity is, as Doyle McCarthy argues, "to *feel* something with honesty, integrity, and vitality and to express in one's life the truth of one's personal insights and discoveries" (243). She argues that the question of authenticity is deeply embedded within the context of a "modern culture of emotion" and authenticity is "a particular language of the self" (241).

Additionally, authenticity has been studied as related to the entanglement of emotion and selfhood with modernity (Trilling; Taylor). In a poststructuralist understanding, emotions and self are intertwined in their expression and existence. In other words, the expression of

emotions is understood as rooted in a modern sense of a self. Feelings of sincerity and sincerity of feelings are both important in this sense of a self.

Discussions on love also emerge in the explorations of the relationship between modernity and feelings. In his book *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds (IX)*, Zygmunt Bauman explains that modern love is in a permanent condition of liquidation. In other words, love has lost the attached, solid state it supposedly once had. Modern love is placed within loose networks where one can untether oneself at will. While different in his understanding of love from Bauman, Alain Badiou seems to agree that there are many forms of love. His 2012 work, *In Praise of Love* posits, “real love is one that triumphs lastingly, sometimes painfully, over the hurdles erected by time, space and the world” (32). He explains how, at times, love is an adventure but then concludes that real love is more about tenacity than mere adventure.

In the discussion of love and its many forms, both Bauman and Badiou seem to allude to a *solid and real* love. In this paper, I locate this particular form of love, or a lack of it, in relation to honest, sincere and genuine love or, in other words, authentic love. I discuss the case of Olympian Rahman, a legendary football player in Kozhikode, and his actions, in relation to regional notions of authentic love for football. In the process, I argue that meanings associated with authenticity primarily include, and yet are not exclusive to, virtues of genuineness, originality, and purity, and are, in fact, also about love.

3. Representing ‘Olympian’ Rahman

Thazhatheri Abdul Rahman, popularly called Olympian Rahman, was a recurring name throughout my fieldwork in the Kozhikode district in Kerala¹. Born on 20 January 1934, Olympian Rahman was a football player from Kozhikode who represented India in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. India finished fourth in football that year which was the best the Indian football team had ever performed in the Olympics. Thus, Rahman began his adulthood as a popular, celebrated Olympian.

Quite early in life, Rahman seemed to have figured out that his priority in life was football. The young Rahman chose football at the cost of formal education. Appraising the situation, his father gave him an option to drop out of the school, which Rahman heartily chose thus firmly establishing his love for football.

Rahman took no time in becoming a successful football player. He moved from regional to national leagues during his teenage years. He played in the Olympic Games at the age of 21. After playing a number of tournaments for clubs in Malabar such as the Independence club, Kannur Lucky Star, and Malabar XI, he went on to play for leading teams in India such as Rajasthan Club and most memorably for Mohun Bagan Athletic Clubⁱⁱ in Kolkata.

Rahman was not only a successful player but also an accomplished coach. After his peak years as a player, he coached teams like Premium Tyres in Kerala and Mohammedan Sporting in West Bengal. He established the Universal Soccer Academy in Kozhikode, which is currently managed by his son and a few of his students. He was a constant presence in the Kozhikode sporting space until he passed away in 2002.

3.1 In the newspaper

The *Mathrubhumi* weeklyⁱⁱⁱ issue, published on 29 June 2014, was based on the theme of politics of football. In this issue, a journalist named Ravi Menon wrote an article titled “Why India became (mere) spectators?”. Menon was the head of music research with the Mathrubhumi Group. He was a regular columnist on music in *Mathrubhumi* weekly, for more than a decade. In his early days, he was a football correspondent with the *Indian Express* from 1992 to 2005.

In the article, Menon focuses on a few instances centred on Olympian Rahman while attempting to explain the state of Indian football. Menon criticises the official bodies for being corrupt and indolent while

glorifying Rahman as being an authentic lover of football. In his article, Menon particularly focuses on events which argue for Rahman's honesty, originality, and sincerity vis-a-vis football. This authenticity is explained through Rahman's intensity in actions, genuineness in intent and sincerity in thought.

Menon's form of writing seems to be situated within the genre of fantasy literature. In her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2013), Farah Mendlesohn writes about an "otherworldly visitor" (xiv) who brings the readers to the fantastic (or utopian) world. In his writing, Menon introduces Rahman in a similar fashion, as extraordinary and strange. This form highlights the peculiar, if not magical, characteristics of Rahman by juxtaposing him with what is considered as normative or anticipated behaviour. Therefore, Menon projects Rahman as a larger than life persona through reliance on the form of fantastic literature. True to this spirit, Menon begins his article with a description of a dream he once had. He writes,

A white horse swiftly came towards a packed stadium. Appearing like a prince, Olympian Thazhatheri Rahman was sitting on that horse. A burning cigarette was on his lips ... He looked like a cowboy from a seventies Hollywood movie.

Rahman bridled his horse in front of the press box and smiled at the sports-writers present there. One of the sports-writers asked him why he had traveled on a horse that day. Rahman replied "I have come here after giving that scoundrel what he deserves. I should leave now. The entire battalion of mounted police is behind me."^{iv}

Menon adds that, having said that, Olympian Rahman galloped away towards the gallery like a warrior in *vadakkan paattu*^v. Menon explains this rather surreal dream in association with a story he heard from a former national football team member, Sethumadhavan.

Sethumadhavan told Menon about an incident involving Olympian Rahman, which he said happened three decades ago (the year of publication of the article was 2014). The incident in discussion happened during the interval of a match played under the Indian Football Association (IFA) shield. The match was between arch-rivals East Bengal and Muhammadan Sporting at the historic Mohun Bagan Stadium in Calcutta. The stadium was filled with football fans, mostly men, wearing East Bengal's red and gold colours. Sethumadhavan, along with his Premier Tyre teammates, and coach Olympian Rahman were watching the spirited match from the stands. He reportedly emphasised to Menon that the galleries reflected the passion on the ground.

The match was temporarily suspended at half time. It was then that Sethumadhavan noticed that Rahman had left the stands. He assumed that Rahman would have gone out to get some tea. However, this was only the beginning of a dramatic event. Sethumadhavan saw Rahman rushing down the gallery steps. He entered the ground by jumping across the iron fence, which divided the field from the gallery. He ran towards the East Bengal coach Pradip Kumar Banerjee^{vi}; Nobody restrained Rahman, probably because he was a familiar figure to Calcutta football fans.

Menon further narrated how things took an unfortunate turn. He explained that, seeing Rahman, Banerjee came forward with open arms expecting the former to hug him. But Rahman pushed aside Banerjee's hands and seized him by the neck. Apparently, Rahman let loose a roaring sound while Banerjee tried to release himself from his powerful hands. Menon writes about how, in Sethumadhavan's story, East Bengal fans were yelling at that 'Madrasi' who accosted their favourite coach Pradip. However, Rahman was relentless. By this time, mounted policemen came into the ground and with the help of other officials, pulled Rahman away from Banerjee. According to Sethumadhavan Rahman walked out of the stadium, accompanied by policemen, head nevertheless held high.

Menon explained the reason for Rahman's odd behaviour thus: allegedly, Banerjee had denied Sethumadhavan a place with the Indian men's national team and Rahman believed that Sethumadhavan unquestionably deserved that spot. What is notable is how Sethumadhavan viewed this episode. Menon writes what Sethumadhavan told him,

I still feel a sense of fear when I think about that incident. At the same time, I feel surprised by Rahman's bravado. I have never heard him repenting about that. His way was doing what he feels right, right then, in front of anyone and everyone. He did not have a habit of worrying about consequences. Rahman's exceptional act of confronting and assaulting a selector is read as an act of authentic love for football. Menon and Sethumadhavan perceived the incident as Rahman's legitimate response to the selector's alleged corrupt practice that would cause harm to Indian football and not merely as a reaction to the unfortunate rejection of an individual from the national team.

In this particular instance, Rahman's authentic love for football is identified through his extraordinary act interpreted as courage, sincerity, and honesty. He is positioned in the narration against an alleged corrupt and insincere football official. It is this juxtaposition that defines the otherwise disruptive action of Rahman as an expression of his authentic love for football.

This story was extraordinary, yet not unique in the case of Rahman. Rahman was passionate, unpredictable and, according to many respondents, an "unsophisticated authentic Kozhikodukaran who spoke and acted fearlessly according to what he held as truth."^{vii} Many respondents liked to tell stories of Rahman and most of these stories pointed to his exceptional and unpredictable behaviour on the football playground. More often than not, these forms of behaviour pushed against the normative boundaries of stadium spaces.

3.2 From the Gallery

At another time, and in a completely different context, Olympian Rahman once again rushed from the galleries to the football ground. One of my interlocutors during fieldwork recounted this episode from the early nineties when Rahman again entered the stadium space. At Kozhikode Municipal Stadium, Rahman was watching a match between two prominent teams in the district. Keeping everyone at the edge of their seats, the match was progressing in a very exciting fashion. At a particularly eventful moment, a player booted a reverse kick and scored a goal. The gallery went up in cheers. Rahman had coached that player in one of the district camps a few times, and thrilled by the goal, he sprinted from the gallery towards the football ground. He then jumped over the makeshift cardboard separations, to enter the football field.

The match had resumed after the goal and its resultant celebration. However, that did not stop Rahman. He ran straight to the player who had scored and kissed him on the cheek after hugging him tightly. Rahman said something in a hurry to that player and ran back to the boundary. On the way back to the gallery he kept shouting to the referee that he was sorry.

Having been a player and a coach, Rahman knew he should not have run into the field in the middle of a match. However, he did. A respondent from my fieldwork confirmed the story and said, “Rahman did it. He did what he felt.”

In both instances, even though in different contexts and with contrasting intentions, Rahman was celebrated for transcending the expected behaviour within a sporting space. The fact that Rahman was not ignorant of these norms shapes our perception of his actions. The people in the region understood Rahman’s attitude as unsophisticated and therefore associated him with the imagined figure of a rustic, innocent man. This innocence is not defined within vulnerability but within aspects of moral and physical strength. Therefore, the form of power Rahman exerts seems contradictory yet completely meaningful within the understanding of an ‘authentic’ love for football.

4. Authentic love for football

The modes in which Rahman is associated with authentic love for football can be broadly identified in two ways. On the one hand, Rahman's actions are placed within an understanding of intense feelings. On the other hand, these intense feelings are positioned in opposition to norms of sporting spaces and official bodies of football. These two aspects evident in the stories about Rahman are interconnected and important to an understanding of a regional formulation of authentic love for football.

Acting upon the intense feelings and identifying them as sincere and genuine is regarded as signs of authentic love. "Feelings and emotions", Doyle McCarthy writes, "are keys to unlocking who I am, my authenticity, how I perceive and how I discover my 'real self'" (241). Rahman's extraordinary actions in the stadium were perceived as springing from an interior realm of the self, seen as the authentic self. As Sethumadhavan reported, Rahman had a way of doing things he believed to be right despite the time and place. Responding in consonance with one's feelings despite the norms of regional social spaces and communities is a marker of authentic, intense feelings.

The second aspect is the identification of Rahman as an authentic lover of football in opposition to the corruption of official football bodies in India. This binary framing of Rahman's authenticity against corrupt institutions is couched within a particular understanding of modern football governance. Modern institutions, especially in the case of sporting bodies, are understood as global institutions separate from semi-formal, local institutions. They are standardised bodies that work in fraught relationship with regional power networks. Universalisation and standardisation of official football bodies like FIFA and their regional branches are contingent upon processes of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism. Roland Robertson (1992) uses a concept called "universalization of the particular" (177-78) to discuss the methods of universalisation of particular aspects of a (mostly) dominant culture.

Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson (2009), in their discussion of the globalisation of football, explain the developments of official sporting bodies through this concept. They demonstrate how through global bodies like Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), a certain process of standardisation occurred throughout the globe. These processes of standardisation invited certain responses from the regional bodies depending on the power distribution at the local sphere. Many forms of resistance emerged when new global forces disrupted regional variations of the sport.

The forms of resistance in the matter of official football bodies were visible mainly on two fronts. One was the allegation that official football bodies commercialised football and served the interests of the elite members of these bodies over those of common football lovers. The other allegation was that the official football body was an inorganic, standardised entity, which did not recognise the 'true' sentiments of native football lovers. The latter argument was provoked by, among many other things, the lack of recognition to popular, regional football formats. Therefore, the allegation of financial fraud or unfair practices by selection committees is read as insincere and unworthy of recognition. In other words, the official bodies were considered inauthentic in terms of their love for football.

The authenticity of Rahman's love for football is contrasted with the inauthentic stand of the official body. The validity of an authentic subject, as in the case of identity, is shaped by concept(s) of an 'other'. Like Stuart Hall writes "The notion of the sociological subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to 'significant others'..."(275). In this context, I argue that Rahman becomes an authentic subject primarily in relation to the already 'othered' official football bodies.

Rahman's love for football is contrasted not only with that of the workings of the official body but also with familiar forms of love for

football in the region. The exceptionality and strangeness in Rahman's engagement with football are emphasised through Menon's dream sequence, and on two different occasions at Mohun Bagan stadium and Kozhikode Corporation Stadium. Thus the authentic aspects of Rahman's action are formed through their difference from the common, ordered, and controlled behaviour of the sportsman as expected by sanitised and universalised understandings of sport and sportsmanship.

5. Authentic Love as Resistance

What is the purpose of identifying one particular form of love as authentic love as in the case of Rahman? One possible answer might be the form of resistance it offers in the face of universalisation of football experiences.

Rahman's intense mode of performing the 'sincere' and 'genuine' love for football was seen as different from the common ways of football fans and the bureaucratic engagements of official football establishments. Therefore 'authentic' love for football in these narratives diverges not only from the 'insincere' and 'corrupt' but also from the ordinary.

Authentic love is not ordinary. It is assumed to be solid (as in Bauman) and real (as in Badiou). Dynamic and effervescent, authentic love is understood within the intensity of emotions. It is not 'official' but interior to the self. Authentic love is understood as resisting the standardised ways of attachment with someone or something, while also being extraordinary in its effects and comportment.

6. Conclusion

This paper is part of a larger project, which explores the relationship between gender and sports, with a specific emphasis on masculinities. The form of life writings that I have adopted for the current paper offers insights into the ways in which gendered aspects of sporting practices are produced and received in the public sphere. It therefore demonstrates how gender, while normative and assumed in the case of

masculinities, nevertheless shapes the telling of certain actions and its consequences. While the current paper is far more focused on life writing, it nevertheless offers a route to understanding the nuances present in regional construction of masculinities and gender relations in the context of sporting personalities.

Life writings often project not only the personality but also the normative discourses in a given context. In other words, text produces the context and vice versa. In this paper, I closely read popular texts and interviews to understand how Rahman is projected as an authentic lover of football even as this presentation rests on the ascribed values of sincerity, honesty, and commitment. In these life narratives, authenticity is also read from his intense performance of emotions as a football fan and by his transcending boundaries of normative sporting behaviour. Rahman's status as an authentic football lover is constructed in a dynamic relationship in opposition to the official football bodies/officials. Rahman is portrayed as different from the ordinary football fans in Kozhikode because the language through which he is described is always that of the superlative, which is also the language of the authentic.

Notwithstanding their trappings of essentialism and exclusion, authenticity and love function as a language of diversity in resistance to the standardisation and universalisation by global forces. Authentic love, in this case, disrupts the singular understanding of engagement with football. It offers a space for free expression of feelings and emotions as opposed to the measured behaviour expected in an institutionalised space of the stadium. Through the performance of sincere and original emotions, Rahman created a legitimate ground for the criticism of official football bodies, which are deemed corrupt. Authentic love for football is a resistance to universalisation as well as a project of laying claim to the spaces of football.

Rahman's performance of authentic love for football is shaped by both similarity and difference. He shares similarities with many

devoted fans in Kozhikode but is different in the degree of resistance to the global, universal scripts of football engagement. Hence, authentic love for football is both an affirmation of diverse ways of loving football and resistance to the exclusive expressions of football as imagined by global governance.

Endnotes

- i The paper is based on of my fieldwork in Kozhikode, Kerala for twelve months during 2014-15.
- ii Mohun Bagan Athletic Club is one of India's foremost football clubs. The club was part of the national, regional and communal sentiments, which was current in Bengal in the early 1900s. For more, see Dimeo, Paul. "Colonial bodies, colonial sport: 'martial' Punjabis, 'effeminate' Bengalis and the development of Indian football." *The international journal of the history of sport*, vol. 19. No 1, 2002, pp. 72-90.
- iii *Mathrubhumi* (meaning, mother earth/land) is one of the pioneering newspaper publishers in Kerala, which was established in 1923. Their website explains at length that the newspaper was associated with the Indian national movement. *Mathrubumi* newspaper is claimed to have more than 1.5 million copies in circulation combining its fifteen editions.
- iv All translations are mine.
- v Vadakkan paattu is a form of Malayalam ballad popular in Malabar. They were mostly associated with warriors and war deities. They glorified values such as valor, duty, and honor.
- vi Rahman had years of relationship with P. K Banerjee. Both of them represented India in many international tournaments including 1956 Melbourne Olympics and Merdeka cup.
- vii The conversation is from my fieldwork conducted from May 2014-December 2015 in Kozhikode.

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The Attempted Murder Scene in Elias Canetti's Autobiography: A Case Study for Bridging Critics' Opposing Positions

Claude Desmarais

Elias Canetti's work is the scene of a considerable divide in scholarly opinions. There are those who interpret his work and the autobiography in a manner that generally follows Canetti's precepts (above all his notion of his enmity towards death, his 'Todesfeindschaft'), and there are those who denounce him as a textual 'Machthaber' (ruler), that is, someone who exerts control over others (over characters in his autobiographical text) in order to increase his own power. The young Canetti's attempt to murder his cousin Laurica (in an episode entitled 'Der Mordanschlag' found in the first volume of the autobiography, *Die gerettete Zunge*. 1978; henceforth *DgZ*) presents us with a perfect example of such almost diametrically opposed interpretations that can be supported through prior episodes in the text. In one possible interpretation, the young Canetti is like the Turks that murder the Armenians in Istanbul (Stambol in the Sephardic tongue of Canetti's youth), as indicated by Canetti's attempt to kill his cousin Laurica with an axe. In another possible interpretation, Canetti follows the example

of the Armenian servant who has survived the Hamidian massacres (also called the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896),¹ and who uses his song and his axe to vanquish his feelings of inferiority and his sense of powerlessness while chopping wood. By combining the two positions—likely to the opposition of at least one, if not two or more groups of scholars this episode can be interpreted as part of a process, delineated in the autobiography, whereby Canetti attempts to remove the sting of the command² ('der Stachel des Befehls'). Bridging the opposing interpretations, then, not only serves autobiographical scholarship (where autobiography is a key space for the expression and negotiation of identity), but puts into practice what many commentators are now saying is necessary if we wish to face and possibly even heal the fissures of modern day politics. By melding two seemingly diametrically opposed positions this article examines Canetti's difficulty in removing the sting of the command. It also examines how the autobiography binds (without expressly stating so) Canetti's murder attempt (as the festering of personal conflict with nearly disastrous results) to the Armenian, the Turks, and the pogroms and massacres that ultimately serve the interests of rulers; albeit without resolving the personal conflicts and problems of the populace who succumb to the ruler's promises.

Of course, those who entirely reject Canetti's views and critique the autobiographical text as a thoroughly traditional text (three volumes)³ that belies the modernism of Canetti's novel, *Die Blendung* (1935), for instance, will read my bridging opinions through recourse to Canetti's notion of the 'Stachel des Befehls' as a smokescreen for subsuming their criticisms into Canetti's system of thought. The ambivalence that the argument presented here preserves, however, —besides two contrary interpretations, is rich with the irony of Canetti scholarship, particularly vis-à-vis the autobiography. The notion of the 'Stachel des Befehls' allows for the various origins of Canetti's actions in the murder attempt episode to exist in their ambivalence, and to provide a commentary on power and authority that dovetails with Canetti's notion

of the 'Machthaber' and his 'Todesfeindschaft'. This allows both the more favourable and the more condemnatory views of Canetti's murder attempt to coexist. Thus, rather than try and resolve this insoluble paradox of Canetti scholarship on the autobiography, I make the most of both sides of the Canetti divide in my interpretation of the murder attempt.

As defined here, the murder attempt revolves around Canetti's attempt to kill Laurica with an axe after she and he are involved in power struggles over her school notebook, which she keeps from him. Prior to Laurica's starting school, she and Canetti are inseparable playmates, despite her being four years older: 'Es war, als ob der Altersunterschied zwischen uns nicht bestünde' (DgZ 44). Their equality and unity is expressed by how they always want the same things: 'Ich tat, was sie wollte, sie tat, was ich wollte, wir liebten uns so, daß wir immer dasselbe wollten' (DgZ 44). When Laurica starts going to school, things change. Canetti becomes desirous of the letters she is learning to write, in the blue ink echoing Romantic longing. She only lets him look at, but not touch her notebook: 'Aber als ich es [das Heft] berühren wollte, wurde sie plötzlich ernst. Sie sagte, das dürfe ich nicht, das dürfe nur sie, es sei ihr verboten, das Heft aus der Hand zu geben' (DgZ 45).⁴ The young Canetti, offended by how she withholds her notebook, calls her a bad student when she contradicts herself because she is not certain about what is written in it: "[...] aber ich merkte, daß sie nicht sicher war und sich widersprach, und da ich über das Zurückhalten des Heftes gekränkt war, sagte ich: 'Du weißt es gar nicht! Du bist ein schlechter Schüler'" (DgZ 45). She reacts by refusing to let Canetti see her notebook anymore, and a terrible game begins during which he begs to see her notebook, but she refuses and torments him and makes him aware of his smaller stature:

Sie [...] ließ mich meine Kleinheit fühlen. Tag für Tag ließ sie mich um die Hefte betteln, Tag für Tag versagte sie sie mir. Sie verstand es, mich hinzuhalten und die Quälerei zu verlängern. Ich wundere mich nicht, daß es zur Katastrophe kam, wenn

auch niemand die Form, die sie annahm, vorausgesehen hätte.
DgZ 45.

The catastrophe the mature narrator alludes to above, Canetti's murder attempt, is thus predicated on the young Canetti's sense of being small, both in the literal sense of being physically smaller than Laurica, who is four years older, and figuratively, in that she goes to school, and is learning to read and write, and he doesn't. The young Canetti keenly feels that the earlier unity of the two children is destroyed. The conflict escalates to the point where Laurica places her notebook on a ledge which the young Canetti cannot reach. He yelps like a dog, trying to get at it. As he does so, she scornfully laughs at his display of his smallness and his failure to reach the notebook: 'Ich kam nicht hinauf [auf die Mauer], ich war zu klein, ich sprang und sprang und japste, es war umsonst, sie stand daneben und lachte höhnisch' (*DgZ* 46). It is at this point that Canetti resorts to fetching the axe and singing a murderous song expressing his intent to kill her. Readers are provided with the song in the Sephardic language Canetti spoke in his early childhood: 'Agor vo matar a Laurica [...] Jetzt werde ich Laurica töten' (*DgZ* 46). The use of Sephardic ('Ladino' in the German text of the autobiography) thus acts as a guarantee of the veracity of this event, and connects Canetti's murder attempt to the Armenian's ritual and his song. Canetti's grandfather stops him from carrying out his intentions, and the family is very worried by his actions. As Bernd Witte argues, this scene represents the moment of Canetti's personal commandment, an 'Urtabu des Tötens' based on the Biblical 'thou shall not kill' (71).

What are the varied or opposing frameworks for interpreting this episode? Though there obviously can be numerous interpretations of this episode, I present two opposing ones here, focusing on possible links in the text to the axe the young Canetti uses in his murder attempt. The most obvious links are: the Turkish murder of Armenians in Istanbul ('Stambol' in the German text) as part of what are called the Armenian Massacres of 1894-96; and the ritual of chopping wood that the Armenian

servant employed by Canetti's father creates to remember his murdered sister. Despite my mention of these two possibilities, they cannot be considered outside of the context of scholarship on Canetti's autobiography and oeuvre, namely, the opposition between those who at least nominally follow Canetti's system of thought, and those that use Canetti's thought against him. For the latter critics, as argued by Witte, Canetti's closed system of reference overwhelms readers and robs them of not just their freedom to interpret, but even their reader's breath: 'Sie [Canettis Texte] überwältigen ihn durch ihre gedrängte Fülle und rauben ihm mit ihrer suggestiven Kraft den Atem' (20).

More concretely, Gerd Melzer takes the murder attempt episode at face value and sees Canetti as someone who in his autobiography controls and assassinates various characters, as part of the fulfilment of subliminal desires created by his failed murder attempt and subsequent taboo against murder. For Melzer, Canetti the author most often manipulates his characters under the guise of their self-denunciation (a notion Canetti develops based on Büchner's work), which removes blame from the author: 'Was Canetti an diesem Konzept der Selbstanprangerung fasziniert, ist die Unschuld, in die es den Autor entläßt, und zwar gerade dort, wo der Eindruck entstehen könnte, er habe es auf die symbolische Vernichtung einer Figur abgesehen' (65). Though Melzer uses the murder attempt episode as his starting point for this sharp criticism of Canetti's autobiography, he does not link Canetti's behaviour to any other events in the autobiography. Instead, Melzer's approach is to point to Canetti's attempts to reduce the knowledge gap between himself and Laurica by asking her about her notebook and pointing to inconsistencies. By doing so, Melzer argues, Canetti is able to soothe his chauvinist sense of male superiority. This feeling of superiority is augmented by his position as the eldest son in his family, as related to readers (without the autobiographical narrator openly criticizing this childhood view): 'Ich ließ sie nicht fühlen, daß sie bloß ein Mädchen und ein jüngeres Kind war. Seit der Geburt meines Bruders

und seit ich Hosen trug, war ich mir meiner Würde als ältester Sohn sehr bewußt' (*DgZ* 45, Melzer: 58). From Canetti's attempts to lessen his shortcomings in relation to the older Laurica, Melzer focuses on Canetti's sense of feeling small as the one thing he cannot change. Thus, for Melzer (who uses Canetti's own descriptions of how bodily positions express the exercise of power in *Masse und Macht* for his analysis), his use of the axe is Canetti's failed attempt to create the moment of power where the terror and dread of another person's death shifts to satisfaction that one has survived:

In *Masse und Macht* faßt Canetti diese Situation, da einer den anderen niederstreckt, als den 'Augenblick der Macht' (MM I, 249) schlechthin. 'Der Schrecken über den Anblick des Todes löst sich in Befriedigung auf, den man ist nicht selbst der Tote. Dieser liegt, der Überlebende steht.' (Ebda). (Melzer: 59).

It could be argued that Melzer's analysis fails to fully take into account the fact that Canetti's murder attempt is failed. More important, though, is how the physical positions that Melzer wishes to highlight (lying and standing in the quote above) never are depicted in the murder attempt episode. Only Canetti's sense of feeling small is mentioned.

But for the moment, it is useful to note that Melzer's reference to the "moment of power" does aptly describe the Turkish massacre of Armenians, something alluded to in the autobiographical passages prior to the murder attempt episode. Thus, readers are told that bad people had wanted to kill the Armenians: 'schlechte Leute hätten die Armenier in Stambol alle umbringen wollen' (*DgZ* 19). That this is a reference to the Turkish massacre of Armenians can be established through the reference to the city of 'Stambol.' It is the city mentioned in grandfather Canetti's song about apples, an obvious allusion to love, but also strong emotions, sung in the Sephardic language: ' "Manzanicas colorados, las que vienen de Stambol," - "Äpfelchen, rote, die kommen von Stambol", endete auf dem Namen der Stadt Stambol' and which the young Canetti

associates with Turks: 'ich brachte sie [die Stadt Stambol] bald mit den Türken in Verbindung' (DgZ 28–29). Here the term "Turks" and the mention of the city of Stambol/Istanbul conjure up associations with the textual allusions to the Armenian Massacres of 1894–96.

If Canetti's murder attempt is related to the Turks who murder the Armenians of Istanbul/Stambol, then, much like Melzer's position, the young Canetti's murder attempt can be strongly condemned and, more importantly, taken as Canetti's attempt to bring about the 'moment of power'; and thus used to attack the author Canetti as Melzer has done. Such a connection places the young Canetti in the company of those whose hatred of and/or disdain for "the other" leads them to murder, and, in the context of the city of Istanbul ('Stambol'), to perpetrators of massacres as the pawns of rulers. Though readers might find it hard to think that an author would create such an association between himself and such acts, Canetti's notion of the sting of the command provides an explanation of how such an interpretation, paradoxically, can fit into Canetti's frame of reference.

Canetti's concept of the 'Stachel des Befehls' highlights the process through which the individual's submission to power (in following the command) creates a desire to exercise power over others in order to rid oneself of the command's sting (John Patillo-Hess: 9–18). Canetti's opening scene, in which a stranger commands him to show his tongue ('Zeig die Zunge!') and threatens to cut it off ('Jetzt schneiden wir ihm die Zunge ab', DgZ 9) can be seen as the original command with its sting, which leads Canetti to write his autobiography, as the attempt to remove the sting, and thus the power of the command. The key tool Canetti uses to remove the sting of the command, and to avoid the sort of stagnation it promotes, is 'Verwandlung' (transformation), itself the prime mode for engaging in Canetti's enmity against death (his 'Todesfeindschaft'). As defined by David Darby, 'Verwandlung' is for Canetti "the potentially inexhaustible human capacity that all animals

possess to reinvent and transform themselves and their world in defiance of specialization, stagnation, petrification, and death” (Darby: 3).

Thus, though Canetti’s attempt at transformation in the attempted murder episode is a complete failure, it suggests the following insight through the connection to the Turkish massacre of Armenians. Namely, that it is often the festering of smaller, unresolved conflicts that leads to greater social conflict, including murder. Such smaller unresolved conflicts can even be considered as the material which rulers (Canetti’s ‘Machthaber’) use to increase their power through the control of, and death of other human beings.

The other possible explanation for the use of the axe in the murder attempt is the Armenian servants’ chopping of wood with an axe, the same one the young Canetti uses in his murder attempt. In fact, the text strongly points readers in this direction when it states that no one had recognized the connection between Canetti’s murder attempt and the Armenian’s fate as a survivor of the massacres (he hid while his sister was murdered before his eyes): ‘Den Zusammenhang meiner Mordabsicht mit dem Schicksal des Armeniers erkannte niemand. Ich liebte ihn, seine traurigen Lieder und Worte. Ich liebte das Beil, mit dem er Holz hackte’ (*DgZ* 47). To make this connection between Canetti’s murder attempt and the Armenian’s fate, then, readers need to examine the young Canetti’s love of the Armenian, his sad songs and words, and the axe with which he cuts the wood. In order to do so, it is necessary to examine the autobiographical discourse on language and ritual provided in the contrasting portraits of Canetti’s father Jacques and grandfather Canetti (Jacques’ father) as the frame of reference for the Armenian’s ritual of chopping wood.

Canetti’s paternal grandfather demonstrates the negative possibilities tied to language and ritual, as he uses both to exercise power and silence others. Ritual, defined by Edmond R. Leach as the creation of symbolic value through behaviour (520–26), is evident in its negative

possibilities in the family's Passover Seder. During the reading of the Haggadah (which includes the story of the Exodus from Egypt), the grandfather is described as a bird of prey ('Raubvogel', *DgZ* 36), who ensures all are paying attention and silent; the irony here is that he exercises such control during a ritual commemorating Jewish freedom from enslavement. Likewise, the grandfather condemns his son Jacques when the latter insists on moving to England (which means that the son, Jacques, cannot serve in the grandfather's economic empire building schemes): 'Als er sah, daß er nichts ausrichten konnte, wenige Tage vor der Abreise, verfluchte er ihn feierlich im Gartenhof, seinen Sohn, vor den anwesenden Verwandten, die entsetzt zuhörten' (*DgZ* 51).⁵ More damning evidence of the grandfather's nefarious use of language is evident in his treatment of the servant Tschelebon (creating the word association 'Tschelebon/servant/shop'), which contrasts starkly with how Canetti's father gives refuge to the Armenian (creating the word association 'refugee/family/home'); the bitter irony is that Tschelebon is the grandfather's brother: 'Ich [Canetti] [...] erfuhr erst viel später, daß er ein Bruder des Großvaters war' (*DgZ* 15).

As suggested by the contrast in the treatment of Tschelebon and the Armenian, the stories told by Canetti's father demonstrate how language transforms and even saves lives. The power of language to transform lives is illustrated by the stories of Viennese doctors, who are like spirits ('Geister') and thus have no bodily form. They instead consist of their words/statements ('Woraus sie bestanden waren ihre Aussprüche'), which lead to transformation ('Verwandlung') in people's lives that is deemed revolutionary ('umwälzend', *DgZ* 42). In terms of how the knowledge of languages could save lives ('sich oder anderen Menschen das Leben retten', *DgZ* 42), the father tells his son how Canetti's great grandfather overhears two men discussing (in Greek) their plans to rob and murder a wealthy man travelling on the ship he is on. The great grandfather alerts the captain, thus saving a life because he speaks many languages, including Greek: 'Mein Urgroßvater ging

zum Kapitän und erzählte ihm, was er auf griechisch gehört hatte' (*DgZ* 43); the men are arrested before they can carry out their plans.

Most importantly, in contrast to the grandfather's reading of the Haggadah, Canetti's father creates a ritual, while reading *Die neue Freie Presse*, that valorises personal freedom as achieved via language. The father reads to create a realm divorced from the grandfather's realm of control (*DgZ* 42–43); likely this ritual also strengthens the father's resolve to leave Rustchuk for England. At one point in his reading Canetti's father pauses to tell his son that every *Buchstabe* (symbolic of every individual) is important; the newspaper, associated with freedom and Viennese German, mirrors how Canetti's parents use Viennese German to preserve their secret love long enough to gain their respective families' permission to marry: 'In der geheimen Zeit hatten die jungen Leute [Canettis Eltern] ihre Liebe unaufhörlich durch deutsche Gespräche ernährt' (*DgZ* 38). They thus preserve their freedom to choose a partner, an act itself particularly symbolic of individual freedom in a time of arranged marriages or familial control of marriage. Moreover, the father issues a sort of positive command to his son, which can be seen as the connection between the father's otherwise seemingly positive influence and/or impact, and the sting of the command: 'Bald würde ich sie [die Buchstaben] selber lernen, sagte er, und weckte in mir eine unstillbare Sehnsucht nach Buchstaben' (*DgZ* 38). This allusion to Romantic longing as unattainable links this, Canetti's father's words, with the blue ink which is on Laurica's school notebook ('Heft'), one of many such connections made in the autobiography between Canetti's murder attempt episode and the Armenian (Sill 210).

Within the context of language as either the servant of control, silence and death, or of human freedom, speech and life, the Armenian's use of ritual mirrors the father's positive use of ritual, and even provides a more compelling example of the positive use of ritual.. The Armenian's ritual of chopping wood (the transformation of a mundane chore) is an answer both to the massacre perpetrated against the Armenians, and to

his own existential crisis at having to hide to survive while seeing his sister murdered: 'Von einem Versteck aus habe er mitangesehen, wie seine Schwester umgebracht worden sei' (DgZ 21). This hiding is the Armenian's own version of "feeling small", which are Canetti's feelings once Laurica starts going to school and keeping her notebook from him. The ritual is marked at the beginning and end by the Armenian's smile when he sees Canetti, indicating that the ritual is able to transform the terrible violence of the events remembered, but also that Canetti's witness to or observation of the ritual is welcome. The chopping of wood also points to the Armenian's strength (where the wood can be said to represent those who killed his sister, as it is unfeeling), and his song and words are what he did not say while hiding, which now allow him to remember his sister. The object of desire, his sister, is brought back to life (momentarily) by the Armenian's transformative ritual, born out of his ability to exercise personal agency in contrast to his prior silence. His survival therefore becomes something valuable (rather than 'cowardly'), because it allows him, through his ritual, to 'revive' his sister in the present.

In light of Canetti's longing for letters, achieved via the play on Romantic longing by describing his desire as insatiable rather than unfulfilled ('unstillbare Sehnsucht', DgZ 42), and his longing (mirroring that of the Armenian) for a sister lost, a good starting point for analysis is Axel Gunther Steussloff's argument that Canetti's murder attempt symbolizes his desire to return to the prior state of unity with Laurica (58–61). However, this does not fully account for Canetti's desire for words, nor for how the axe is intended for Laurica, and how Canetti's own sad song and words ('I will kill Laurica') appear to stand in contrast to the Armenian's. Here, a slight adjustment of Steussloff's argument is useful. For a small child as Canetti is at the time, without a sense of proportion, Laurica can be equated with the Turks that kill the Armenian's sister, as suggested by the description of her laughter as scornful ('höhnisch', DgZ 46). Thus, both the Turks and the unfeeling Laurica

can be represented by the wood, likewise without feeling, which is chopped with the axe as part of a ritual of regaining agency. At this point, the young Canetti's inability to fully comprehend death is important. For instance, Canetti does not believe that the vipers (or adders) his father tells him are caught for a reward are dead: 'Ich glaubte nicht, daß etwas tot sein könnte' (*DgZ* 41), and he is likewise also unable to grasp that a woman killed by her husband in a fit of jealousy is actually dead: '[...] ich [sperrte] mich dagegen [...], daß die Frau endgültig tot war' (*DgZ* 29). Thus, if Canetti does not understand what death really is, then killing the Laurica that mocks him will simply lead to another, different Laurica who can be his equal, that is, the sister-like relative he wants to bring back to life, as the Armenian brings back his sister through his ritual. Rather than a state of prior unity (even the Armenian's ritual only revives his sister in the present), the narrative thereby instead suggests that Canetti desires unity with Laurica in the present, where they both share in letters, and the ability to read and write.

Rather than view the murder attempt solely as an entirely negative act that mirrors the Turkish massacre of the Armenians, connecting it to the Armenian's ritual allows readers to also see the murder attempt as a failed and ill-informed attempt to achieve or create a positive transformation. Canetti's punishment, if one wants to see it that way, or Laurica's revenge for this failed ritual and murder attempt, is described in the episode where he almost dies from burns after Laurica pushes him into a vat of hot water (*DgZ* 44–48). That the young Canetti is saved by the return from England of his father, the same man who promised he would read, gives these events a startling symmetry.

The young Canetti's failed attempt, then, in connection to the Armenian's ritual of transformation, indicates the difficulties Canetti faces in attempting to remove the sting of the command ("Stachel des Befehls"), and further emphasises the way in which unresolved conflicts can lead to very negative outcomes, despite what can be judged to be better intentions.

Taken together, the two possible views of Canetti's murder attempt demonstrate how the smallest of consequences can lead to dire outcomes. Placed in the context of Canetti's notion of the sting of the command, the apparently less favourable view of this event as associated with the murder of Armenians by Turks, as well as the view of it as a failed attempt to recreate the Armenian's ritual in order to create a new unity with Laurica, presents a more complete picture. Thus, the text demonstrates and suggests the full range of possible negative outcomes that result from not addressing the problems of individuals and social inequalities. The range of acts, as suggested by Canetti's autobiography, goes from either misguided attempts to resolve conflicts, with almost deadly consequences, to participation in acts of societal hatred that range from pogroms to mass murder and genocide by populations that are, at least in part, manipulated by rulers ('Machthaber').

In how far does combining what at first might seem two opposing views of the murder attempt episode provide for a more compelling, or at least interesting argument? Relating the murder attempt episode to just one of the two possibilities explored above would exclude one view and possibly even cloud our view to the range of negative and murderous events that can arise from unaddressed personal issues. Similarly, recent political developments dividing Western democracies, and beyond, are finally being recognized as dilemmas that can only be addressed through a culture of respectfully sharing at times conflictual and opposite opinions, as Van Jones argues in his most recent book discussing what ails American politics, *Beyond the Messy Truth: How We Came Apart, How We Come Together* (2017). Lest scholars believe that the politics of division will not enter the halls of academia, numerous campuses are struggling with just such problems.⁷ We have the opportunity to not only provide a good example, but also to find more interesting spaces for discussion by living with difference, and even, at times, ambivalence.

Notes:

1. *Dictionary of Genocide*, vol. 1: A to L. Samuel Totten and Paul R Bartrop. Greenwood Press: Westport, 2007.
2. The English translation for this term comes from Carol Stewart's 1978 translation of Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power (Masse und Macht*, 1960).
3. In addition to the first volume, *Die gerettete Zunge* (1977, The Tongue Saved), the other two volumes of Canetti's official autobiography are: *Die Fackel im Ohr* (1980, The Torch in my Ear), and *Das Augenspiel* (1985, The Play of the Eyes); Canetti's posthumously published, *Party im Blitz* (2003, Party in the Blitz), is also autobiographical in nature. Canetti's other works include his only novel, *Die Blendung* (1935, Auto-da-Fé), his study *Masse und Macht* (1980, Masses and Power), the travel diary, *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch: Aufzeichnungen nach einer Reise* (1983, The Voices of Marrakesch), his essay *Der andere Prozess. Kafkas Briefe an Felice* (1969, Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice), and plays, essays, and *Aufzeichnungen* (notes). For Canetti's biography, see Sven Hanschek, *Elias Canetti. Biographie*.
4. The reference to touch here harkens back to the opening episode of the three-volume autobiography, where the young Canetti is threatened with having his tongue cut off. This is just one of many such references placing the Laurica scene within an even larger context, including Canetti's 'rebirth' after being severely burned, that goes beyond the parameters of this article.
5. The grandfather later claims responsibility for Jacques' death at a relatively young age in Manchester, making him a tragically sad and ridiculous servant of death (*DgZ* 105–12). In this way grandfather Canetti illustrates what Canetti the author terms 'Selbstanprangerung' (*AS* 22).

6. This association of letters with living beings is suggested by how the chapter title combines letters and vipers (or adders) ('Kreuzottern und Buchstaben'), but also how in a later episode Canetti speaks with the letters he imagines on his playroom wall; granting them an almost life-like status (*DgZ* 57–58).
7. There are numerous reports of how Universities and Colleges, in the United States in particular, often face disturbances and violence because of planned debates or guest speakers. Moreover, these and other institutions are also realizing the need to deal with hatred, bias and sexual abuse more forthrightly. For instance, the University of Maryland, after the murder of a visiting black student at the College Park bus stop, announced its plans to hire a full-time staff member to deal with hate and bias: https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-the-U-of-Maryland-Is/241904?cid=wcontentgrid_6_1b.

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Knowing the Medieval Self: Reading Ram Das' *Dardhyata Bhakti Rasamruta*

Shikha Maharshi

In his social and literary history of the Odia people, *Odia Sahitya Krama Parinama*, Pandit Nilakantha Das (1884-1967), a nationalist, social reformer, educator and poet, is particularly vehement in his criticism of *Dardhyata Bhakti Rasamruta* [Nectar of Firm Devotion]:

Only one who is interested in wasting time and money may buy this book and read. There is no truth in this book...there are only lies...There is no book in this world as purposeless and worthless as this. Many stories in this book are purely imaginary. One of the few known accounts is that of king Harishchandra which is again full of miracles¹ (my trans.; 389).

Das devotes a full chapter to the corrupting influence of such texts. The chapter is titled "Vaishnava Sahitya O BhaktikaMithya" [Vaishnava Literature and Devotional Lies]. Das even criticises Prabhat Mukherjee's reference to *Dardhyata* in his 1940 book *The History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa* (387) because it has no "satya" (truth).

Mukherjee, however, makes no comment on the historical reality of the life stories recorded in *Dardhyata*, rather refers the text to cite a legend associated with the composition of a text called *Abhinav Gita Govinda* composed by a “king named Purushottama” “to excel the original one [Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda*]” (43). Das approaches *Dardhyata* as a historical source and, obviously, is disappointed. Das further says that Ram Das was not well read: “He was not highly educated. It seems unlikely that he could do much except reading *Bhagabata* with the meagre knowledge of Odia alphabets he had and writing some trash”ⁱⁱ (388). Despite Das’ fierce condemnation, this book, which contains the life stories of fifty six saints, continues to find mention in most Odia literary and social histories. Das may be right in arguing that the book does not reflect ‘reality’ but he is wrong in dismissing it as purposeless and worthless.

Reading biographies is about learning life’s lessons as much as it is about finding the truth about another’s life. The biographies of successful or great people are popular because the reader may find models worthy of emulation. When ‘bhakta’ [devotee] Ram Das wrote his book in the later part of 18th century, he only chose such models. They were ‘saints’ of the Vaishnava pantheon. Where there are saints, there will be miracles (Goodich). Miracles, which are an integral part of the saints’ lives, as described in *Dardhyata*, do not follow natural laws. But the miracles are also called so for the saints, because of their unflinching devotion to their God, made the impossible happen. What is of importance is not the occurrence of a miracle but the nature of life practices, of which firm devotion is an integral part, which make possible the manifestation of something miraculous.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this article, I propose that *Dardhyata* be read as a biographical source for understanding a society preoccupied with proper practice of Vaishnava faith. *Dardhyata* is composed in two parts: the first part, comprising twenty five life stories of people both mythical and real, had been composed by 1770 AD and the second part comprising accounts

of thirty real people from different walks of life was complete by 1799 AD. The book apparently took around thirty years to complete, something that points to the popular need for such life stories, for a considerable period of time.^{iv}

It is true that histories of Odia literature mention *Dardhyata* and do not dismiss it as fiercely as Das does, but there never has been an attempt to convert this text from a weak textual source to a strong one. This is because the focus has been on the truth of the events recorded in it rather than on investigating why this text continued to be popular well until the advent of modernism. I examined fifteen histories of Odia literature to understand the nature of exclusion or inclusion that the text witnessed. The text is completely absent in seven of these histories, not even finding a place in the appendix at the least. The histories which exclude *Dardhyata* are: Surendra Mohanty's *Odia Sahityara Madhya Parba O Uttara Madhya Parba* (1968), Brundaban Acharya's *Odia Sahityara Sankhipta parichaya* (1975), Chittaranjan Das' *Odia Sahityara Itihasa: Samajika, Sanskrutika Bhattibhumi* (1993), Bauribandhu Kar's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (1989), Surendra Maharana's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (2001), Gouri Kumar Brahma's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (1982) and, lastly, Surendranath Acharya's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (1997). The last two histories are highly canonical and are constructed around the representative writers of the pre-modern and modern period which at once makes the exclusion of any kind of popular literature obvious.

Eight histories include *Dardhyata*. These are: Tarini Charan Rath's *Utkala Sahityara Itihasa*^v (1916), Shyam Sunder Rajguru's account on Ram Das and his *Dardhyata* (1964),^{vi} Surya Narayan Dash's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (1966), Pathani Pattnayak's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (1978), Premanand Mahapatra's *Odia Sahityara Itihasa* (2015), Jatindra Mohan Mohanty's *History of Oriya Literature* (2006), B. C. Mazumdar's *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature* (1922), and, lastly, Mayadhar Mansinha's *History of Oriya Literature*

(1960). The first five histories have rightly acknowledged the strength of *Dardhyata* as a product of its times. Rath, in his history, credits *Dardhyata* as a Jeebani (life account) of the Bhaktas and informs the readers of Ram Das' professional bearing as a school teacher. Rath writes: "He was self-taught in Sanskrit and had established a pathshala (village school) where he taught the students"^{vii} (39). Similar views resonate in Rajguru's account, who describes *Dardhyata* as "Khandiye Prachina Bhakti Grantha" [Ancient Text of Devotion]. He acknowledges the fact that Ram Das was a learned man and traces his family history which reveals that most of his ancestors like him were 'abhidhans' or school teachers (104-108). S. N. Dash confirms these facts about Ram Das' life and credits Rajguru for his findings. He favours this text for its significance as life stories of devotion. He says: "As a life narrative *Dardhyata Bhakti Rasamruta* owns a place of great merit in Odisha"^{viii} (504). Pattnayak, in his history, credits Ram Das for writing the "Suprasidha Bhakta Jeebana Charita" [Revered Life Stories of the Devotees]. He further says: "He has gathered the stories of bhaktas from history as well as legends and made them a part of the readers' universe"^{ix} (379). In his historical account, Mahapatra too credits Ram Das for having composed these life stories of bhaktas. He says: "Ram Das has been extremely successful in making the people aware of these life stories of the devotees"^x (339). J. M. Mohanty does not say anything about *Dardhyata* or its author but gives a place to the text [Portraits of Devotion] in his list of kavyas composed in the eighteenth century (114).

B. C. Mazumdar and Mansinha's accounts of this text are curious cases which require a closer analysis. Mazumdar includes the text in his narrative but fails to acknowledge its worth as a text by branding the life stories therein as "fanciful and unreliable" (Introduction 25). Mansinha, in his narrative on Balaram Das, refers to an incident (recorded by Ram Das already in his life story of Balaram Das) in the bhakta's life without citing the source. (92). This deliberate shying away from the text by either rejecting it on grounds of historical inaccuracy or

by not being conscious of the fact that these orally circulating stories were already a part of a popular hagiography clearly informs the inability of modern minds to make sense of such texts. This makes investigation around this text all the more urgent.

Such investigation points towards considering the strengths of *Dardhyata* in understanding the “mentality” of the age of which it was a product. *Histoire des Mentalites* or the history of the mind began as a “new interest” for the first time in the work of the later Annales’ scholars (Forster 591). These histories of the mind began to “consider the attitudes of ordinary people towards everyday life” and preferred to examine “the psychological realities underpinning conceptions of intimate relationships, basic habits of mind, and attitudes towards the elemental passage of life” (Hutton 237). Sarah Salih, in her introduction to *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, refers to Katherine Lewis’ essay in the collection which shows how the “historians have learnt to use hagiography as evidence for mentalities, and discovered it to be an excellent source for social and cultural histories” (21).

Dardhyata also does something similar. The stories recorded therein tell a lot more about the histories of the mind of the medieval Odisha’s ordinary people. How did the people begin to live and re-live these accounts of saint lives so earnestly? Most of the stories here are woven around the supreme divinity of Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) and how His blessings save his devotees during times of distress. By the time Ram Das composed this work, Jagannath was already the presiding deity of the Vaishnavites in Odisha. The question is: since when did Jagannath blend into the Vaishnava fold and become synonymous with the very beliefs and life practices of the sect?

Within the purview of this paper, it becomes necessary to briefly note the nature of the representations of Jagannath in Odia textual production from the medieval period onwards. Since the fifteenth century (after the ascension of Kapilendra Dev) Jagannath has been represented

in literary and non-literary writings. One of Kapilendra Dev's inscriptions informs that a piece of valuable cloth called "Pundarika Gopa Sari" had been offered to Jagannath (J. B. Mohanty 26). Such was the pervasiveness of Jagannath on the Vaishnava mind that Balaram Das (sixteenth century) composed a poem called "Bata Abakash" in order to "establish the supremacy of Lord Jagannath over all Gods and Goddesses (27). Other writers, from the sixteenth upto the eighteenth continued the same practice of either "glorifying Jagannatha" or "dedicating verses in His name" (*Ibid*). After Odisha lost its independence to the Afgans in 1568 A.D., Jagannath began to be imagined as the "sole monarch" (Manima) of Odisha, an image which was different from His early depiction as Jagabandhu [Friend of the Universe] and Dinabandhu [Friend of the Lowly] (30-32). Making his bhaktas pine and look upto Lord Jagannatha in his *Dardhyata* was a natural choice exploited by Ram Das.

I therefore would prefer to read *Dardhyata Bhakti* as an illustration of behavioural models through the life of saints to understand how the medieval "self" arrived at its own subjectivities. "The Culture of the Self" that this paper attempts to historicize is modeled after Michel Foucault's theories of the "Self" wherein he is chiefly interested in noting "The Culture of the Self" in a broad way as well as practices or technologies of the "Self" in specific ways. My paper draws upon some of Foucault's concepts, namely "Technologies of the self" formulated in a lecture which he delivered at the University of Vermont in 1982 and the lecture titled "The Culture of the Self" delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1983. Thus in my paper I will try to explore how the Indian medieval mind chose to define, identify or come to terms with one's self and in the process what were the practices or mechanism (which Foucault terms as technologies) did it employ to know oneself.

Before delving into the prosopography^{xi} of "The Culture of the Self" that our text offers, it would be worth the attempt to historicize the evolution of the idea of the "Self" and "selfhood" in the larger Indian

context. The “Self” has been studied from various points of views since ancient times in India and it has been found that the “core of Indian “Self” is metaphysical” and that there is “a general agreement that the metaphysical self, *Atman*, is the real self” (Bhawuk 65). In fact the self has been “studied as “an ontological entity” in Indian philosophy from time immemorial” (67-68). Let us now look at some of the ways of looking at the “Self” that existed in ancient as well as medieval India. When we look for “The Culture of the Self” in the classical Jaina traditions, we see the “man’s place within” the universe as “involving simultaneously the two polarities of permanence and change” (Dundas 4). The ultimate aim of a Jaina practitioner is to be exempt from the cycle of life and death or in other words to attain “spiritual deliverance” which can be attained through “right knowledge, right faith and right conduct” (Ibid). If we go by the classical Indian definition of truth (*satya*) and falsity (*mithya*) as a difference between knowledge and ignorance which sometimes is also interpreted as permanence and change, then in this context the “Self” according to the Jaina tradition oscillates between these two trajectories until the acquisition of the three “rights” mentioned above, liberate it. This responsibility of the self is thus a contemplative one sharing some traces with the Greek notions of taking care of oneself. According to the teachings of Buddhism, an individual is a combination of five *skandhas* or five heaps: Form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness. However, these *skandhas* are empty and there is “no-self possessing them (O’Brein). This doctrine of no-self is called *anatam* or *anatta*.

According to the *Theravada* school of Buddhism, this *anatam* or no-self is the individual’s ego after the dissolution of which the self can experience Nirvana whereas, according to the *Mahanaya* school of Buddhism, this *anatam* is emptiness or “*Sunyata*” (Ibid). Jaina and Buddhist belief systems were particularly popular during the first six centuries of the common era because these faiths enjoyed court patronage. But the situation began to change with the rise of devotional

literature composed by *Shaivites* and the *Vaishnavites*. In order to resist Jainism and Buddhism, these sects adapted various measures such as “public debate” and the “performance of miracles” (Das 27-28). Thus, we can assume that the miraculous in the medieval literature responded to various needs, in this case resisting the contingent faiths. Rejecting these episodes or elements from the medieval narratives as lies or *mithya* would cost us an entire system of practices of the Self.

Foucault does something similar in constructing the evolution of the theory of “Self” in the western context. In the two lectures mentioned above Foucault explains the trajectory of the notion of taking care of oneself and traces the evolution of the idea since antiquity. In doing so he shows how this culture of “Self” shaped and re-shaped itself since the time of Greco-Roman civilisation up to the present times. The concerns over the “Self” and the “drives to seek within the “Self” any hidden feeling, any movement of the soul, any desire disguised under illusory forms”(Lecture, 1984) that he began philosophising during his research on sexuality, finds independent explication in the 1983 lecture. It is crucial to remember that in dealing with the “Self”, Foucault hints at the individual’s attempt to know the “Self” or the soul which would require no external medium or mediation through a master or a teacher. He begins this lecture by citing a dialogue between Lucian and Hermotimus where we learn that Hermotimus has been constantly visiting a master for the past twenty years in order to learn “how to take care of himself in the best possible way”(Ibid). Without self-knowledge, however, he fails to learn this lesson and also loses a huge amount of money in fees. In this context Foucault goes back to Kant’s 1784 essay “What is Enlightenment?” where Kant says:

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self -imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance.

Dare to know! (Sapere aude.) Have the courage to use your own understanding,” is therefore the motto of the enlightenment (1).

From here on Foucault begins to elaborate his major thesis: “Our relation to ourselves and the techniques through which those relations have been shaped” (Ibid). He begins by referring to the Greek concept of *Epimelesthai Sautou*, which means the “concern with oneself” or to “take care of oneself”. Foucault says that this was “for the Greek and Romans one of the main principles of ethics”, a tradition that continued for another thousand years. In Plato’s *Alcibiades*^{xiii} Socrates convinces Alcibiades that he has to take care of himself and that the “self is nothing else but the soul. And that taking care of the soul implies that one discovers what the soul really is and therefore one has to contemplate his own soul and that divine element which is the reality of soul”(Ibid). However, according to the Christian technologies of the “Self”, the relationship of oneself with the master was an authoritative not an erotic one as in the case of the Greco-Roman culture of the “Self”. It implies a set of ascetical practices very different from the pure contemplation of the “Self”. Turning towards the changes in the Culture of the Self, Foucault hinges on the transformation of this culture in the context of the rise of medical science and psychoanalysis in the twentieth century in the course of his lecture.

Dardhyata Bhakti and the techniques of the Self

Ram Das in this text employs a multi-millennial scheme of temporality where the first three accounts in this collection of lives are those of Bali Raja from *Sat Yuga*, Raja Harishchandra from *Treta Yuga* and Karna Raja from *Dvapara Yuga*. The rest of the lives comprises stories from *Kali Yuga*.^{xiv} These stories though far removed from each other by time and space share common narrative structures and techniques in which the *bhaktas* or devotees ultimately draw respite through the power of their sheer devotion. Such schemes would at once

convince the modern minds of the fictionality of this text but one may pause and ask: why did Ram Das choose such narrative structures and techniques? For him it was important to convince his readers of the persistence of devotion across the ages so that the medieval readers could relate to such techniques of the “Self” in achieving results driven by faith. In this context, I would like to evoke an entirely different understanding of the term *Bhaktika Mithya*.^{xv} Maharana in his literary history (2001) presents *Bhaktika Mithya* as a clever stylistic device which was deliberately employed by the poets who often considered themselves as fools (*murkha*) or as low-born (*sudra*) for which they asked for the readers’ forgiveness (*khyama*). Maharana, in fact says that in the guise of ‘*Bhaktika Mithya*’ the writers expressed their dexterity as conscious artists. He refers to the usage of what I would call the “ignorance trope” by the saint poet Balaram Das who addressed himself as *murkha* (fool) and *apandita* (uneducated) in his vernacular *Ramayana* (2006). The tradition of employing such devices was already a well-known practice in the Odia literary scene when Sarala Das, a fifteenth century poet credited and revered for writing the first vernacular *Mahabharata* in the region, reiterated the usage of *Bhaktika Mithya* in his magnum opus. He says: “I am a servant at Maa Sarala’s feet, I am a sudra muni, illiterate Sarala Das. / Whatever Maa says, I write, Dear saints that is not my fault”.^{xvi} Elsewhere he says, “I am a fool by birth; I do not have the knowledge of shastras. / Maa, I write what you ask me to”^{xvii} (quoted in Mohanty 2004 85). In several other instances the poets made it a point to ascribe Gods of having given them the charge of composing the works. For instance in the account of bhakta Jagannath Das in *Dardhyata*, God directs him to compose *Bhagabata*, his magnum opus in the common interest of the readers and listeners: “Lord directed him and said, Listen carefully O’ Dasa. / ...Women, men, children and elderly, / everyone hears with delight” (118-120).

Similar tropes could also be traced in the Christian traditions during the Middle Ages when saints credited their writings as a the result of God's directive. Saint Teresa of Avila in the preface to her work *El Castillo* (1577) translated into English as *The Interior Castle* (1911) says: "If God wishes me to write anything new, He will teach it to me, or bring back to my memory what I have said elsewhere" (15). She also cautiously considers herself as ignorant in saying "That it will be the fault of ignorance, not malice, if I say anything contrary to the doctrine of the Holy Catholic church may be held as certain" (Ibid).

Other techniques that the *bhaktas* employed to reorient themselves in times of distress makes Foucault's understanding of the making of the "self" relevant in this context. He says:

Most of the times people think that what we have to do is to discuss, to liberate, to excavate the hidden reality of the self but the self has to be considered not as a reality which can be hidden but as a correlate of technologies built and developed through our history. The problem then is not to liberate, to free the self but to consider how it could be possible to elaborate new types, new kinds of relationships to ourselves" (1983).

The techniques of the "Self" as described in the first three accounts of mythical kings belonging to the first three yugas respectively focuses on the trope of "*daana*"^{xviii} and "*dakshina*"^{xix} as the righteous conduct that a *raja* or king could demonstrate so as to attain salvation. When *Vishnu* takes the *Vamanavatar* to test his disciple, the righteous and just King Bali, he seeks "*daana*". However, the puzzle revolves around the third feet of the *Vaman* for which the earth as well as the heavens have fallen short of space. Henceforth, Raja Bali offers his own head for the *Vaman* to take the third and the final step. The narrator in *Dardhyata*, Sri Chaitanya, the spiritual master of the *GaudiyaVaishanava* School, tells the listener, Sumana that the importance of Raja Bali's *Charita* (biography) is "*daana*" (5). In the

second account, Raja Harishchandra is asked for his kingdom as “*daana*” by the priests and wealth as “*dakshina*”. Both of the services are diligently performed by the Raja and they earn him divine blessing and respect. In the third account Raja Karna undergoes a similar ordeal where his devotion is tested when he is asked for his son’s death as “*daana*”. Treating these episodes in the literal sense would compel one to read these as “*BhaktikaMithya*” but when seen as technologies of the “Self” (right conduct as kings in these accounts) and as a form of instructive pedagogy for the readers, this text would suggest that such narrative techniques were deliberately employed by Ram Das to instill firm devotion (*drudha bhakti*) in the hearts of the public that consumed these stories as truths.

Foucault also discusses the practice/technique of interpreting one’s dream as a means of taking care of one’s self where the interpretation of dreams would mean two things: the announcement of a true event or as advice from God regarding remedies for illness. The most creative use of the dream sequence in this text is employed in the hagiographical accounts of the two saint poets who wrote and lived during the 16th century: Balaram Das and Jagannath Das. By the time Ram Das composed this text, *Vaishnava* faith was an established fact in the Odia cultural scene and these miraculous dreams would have worked as catalysts in concretising the already ever-growing faith these people had in Lord Jagannath as well as in their spiritual masters or gurus. In BalaramDas’ account, when he was forced away from the Chariot, Lord Jagannath appeared in the king’s dream and directed him to invite Balaram Das to attend the Car festival, lest the chariots would not move. The king honours the *Bhakta* which results in the miraculous moving of the chariots (116).

In Jagannath Das’ account, his peers scheme to defile his reputation before the king in order to curtail his growing popularity among the masses. Their complaint is: “He interprets texts in different ways, for pleasing the women. / Any woman who hears him, is unable to

break away from the thrall...”^{xx} (121). Following which the King reprimands Jagannath Das and questions him about his association with women, to which he replies: “I am a man among men, I transform a woman among women. / This is a blessing from Sri Hari, I do not belong to any of the sexes”^{xxi} (122). The king orders him to demonstrate his metamorphosis. Deeply distressed, the saint prays before Lord Jagannath to transform him into a woman and begins to curse those who were responsible behind his imprisonment. After his plea before God, Das has a dream wherein he is promised help if he remains faithful and devoted at the feet of God. He wakes up to find himself a woman, much to his own amazement. He surrenders himself at the lotus feet of the Lord and his soul feels purified. Das is invited to the court and he is requested to recite his *Bhagabata* which leaves the entire crowd spellbound. Such instances of dream sequences if rejected as pure lies and irrational would only lead to further exclusion of such texts. Instead, these can be considered as narrative gaps which the writer deliberately creates for the readers to fill in according to their own practices of taking care of themselves. As for these gaps, ShlomithRimon quotes Iser stating: “it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism” and also adds that “information gap is the most typical gap in narrative fiction (128) and as for the reader’s role she says, “the story is abstracted by the reader, and characters are constructed by the reader from various indications dispersed along the text-continuum” (119).

Thus, a dissociated reading of *Bhaktika Mithya* by Neelkantha Das as pure lies raises questions such as Did *satya* (truth) and *mithya* (lies) mean the same for the medieval minds as they mean for us? Is it just to judge medieval texts according to modern standards? Ultimate truth, according to the Indian tradition, is defined around *satya* (permanence) and *nitya* (eternal) and not *mithya* (impermanence) (Kumar 109), and any attempt to arrive at empirical truth is considered a “descent” which means there are “discrete levels of reality and that

the empirically verifiable one is, if not the very lowest, still far from the highest” (Goldman 350). According to the western tradition, on the other hand, the distinction between true and false lie primarily on facts (Hall 166).^{xxii} An approach like this would cause further polarisation between two opinions and brand them as wrong or right, false or true, rather than opting for a middle path which is generally suggested by dialectical ways of thinking. Therefore, to be able to appreciate texts like *Dardhyata Bhakti*, a contextual awareness of the then socio-cultural conditions seems necessary.

Social context of the times and textual relevance

A recurrent motif of Jagannath *bhakti* or devotion is a “technique” that Ram Das employed in order to make his readers hold their faith firmly. Approximately four centuries prior to the composition of this text, a regional Hindu Empire gained its foothold in Odisha with Gajapati Kapilendra Dev ascending the throne in 1434 A.D. With the gradual decline in trade and commercial activities, the royal attention naturally fell on the patronage of religion (Panda 1). This must have led to the spread of the *Utkaliya Vaishnavism* resulting in the centre staging of Lord Jagannath in the literary-cultural and religious activities of the times. Moreover, during this period “we do not find a single land grant made to the Buddhist or Jaina institutions,” because priestly support from the Jagannath temple was necessary for the public reach (Mohapatra 73). The decline in overseas trade resulted in the rise of “localized industries” during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Sarala Das in *Mahabharata* refers to textile such as *Jhina* and *Pata*^{xxiii} worn mostly by the upper classes (78). In Ram Das’ account of *bhakta* Balram Das, we see how the discomfited *bhakta*’s respect, after an unpleasant encounter with the priests, is reinstated by the King who offers him “*Pata Saree*” as a mark of respect (116). Education however thrived amidst political and military turmoil because of the patronage in the form of “land of grant” and “monetary concessions to the educational institutions, teachers and scholars”. Giving grants to temples and *mathas*

for the facilitation of learning were also a customary practice (Mohapatra 82). Ram Das, too, belonged to the teaching fraternity of his village and was himself a Sanskrit scholar and teacher (Dash and Rajguru). Banamali Das, a late sixteenth-early seventeenth century writer, wrote a *kavya* named *Chata Icchabati* which describes the love affair between prince Charubrahma and princess Ichhabati. What is worth mentioning is that this love affair bloomed while they were studying in the village school called *chatashali* hinging on the fact that the education system in medieval Odisha was indeed stable. In this context, B. C. Mazumdar's observation about Odisha's education system in his *Typical Selections* is worth recalling. He says: "the art of reading and writing is known and practiced more extensively in Orissa than in Bengal" (Introduction 26). One may therefore pause and consider the socio-cultural situation in the medieval Odisha of which a text like *Dardhyata Bhakti* would be a natural result.

Reading medieval texts by distancing them from their socio-cultural milieu is bound to be marked by the notions of critical thinking that a scholar has been trained in. A caution is raised in Vanina's words when she says: "...medieval belles-lettres are double fiction since the author was not just narrating to his readers an imaginary story paying scant heed to the credibility of the narrated events, but was trying to offer a behavioural ideal which had to be a model for his audience to emulate" (17). Therefore, rejecting medieval or pre-modern texts as falsities or *mithya*, instead of appreciating them contextually would only mislead the readers into rejecting them. One can look for clues and hints of the kind of social life the then people lived, the way they responded to certain situations and the kind of solutions they offered and practiced in times of distress. All this hinges upon the felt need to read medieval Odia texts in an attempt to study the medieval minds and mentalities whereby texts like *Dardhyata* could serve as a valuable source of information about the life and times of ordinary people.

Endnotes

- i Odia Sahityara Krama Parinama. The original in translation is “bajaarru bahi khande kiniartha o samaya nastakarije kehi padhiparanti. Satya boli puni ethire kichi nahi...khali atikaya mithya...Epari bidyahina, merudanda hina, bhabahina rachana pruthibire aau achiboli mane heunahi. Ethire aneka upaakhyana ta pura managadha. Harishchandra pari jahaba gotae adhe suna katha achi, sethire madhya adhbudh kriya khanjiba chada au kichi bi shesh nahi.”
- ii The original is “Se nije paathasaatha bises kichi jaaninathile. Akhyara chinhi Odia Bhagabata padhiba O kheda lekhiba chada aau kichi padhalekha tankara thila pari laagu nahi.”
- iii I choose to focus on the nature of life practices in the light of Foucault’s lecture titled “The Culture of the Self”. As the narrative pattern of the life stories suggest, these life practices makes the miraculous happen.
- iv According to Mahapatra (339), it took 29 years for Ram Das to complete the second part of the volume. Das puts it at thirty two years (388).
- v It is the earliest known full-length history of Odia literature.
- vi Rajguru’s account of Ram Das’ life is a part of a collected volume of his other works brought out by Odisha Sahitya Academy in 1964. The second edition of the text came out in 1994. The Prabandhabalicomprises essays on premodern Odia poets as well as on aspects of Odia language which appeared in the magazine called “Sahitya” during the first two decades of the twentieth century
- vii The original is “Kabi prathamataha sanskruta sikhya kari, khandiye paathshala kari ketejana chatranku sikhya deuthile.”
- viii The original is “Jeebani grantha hisaabre *Dardhyata Bhakti* Rasamruta Odishare bisista sthana adhikaar karichi.”
- ix The original is “Kimbadanti o Itihasara kathabastu sangraha kari se bahu bhaktankara jeebani pathaka sansarare paribeshana kari jaichanti.”

- x The original is “Bhakta manaka jeebana charita ku lokabhimukhi karaibare Ram Dasanka prachestha bes phalabati hoichi.”
- xi I have used terms prosopography and cultural biography interchangeably.
- xii “Demographically the Jains forms a tiny minority within India” (Dundas 4).
- xiii It forms one of the dialogues out the forty one so called Dialogues written by Plato. Foucault in his lecture considers this text as a point of departure for all philosophy because this dialogue teaches people to be concerned with themselves.
- xiv For a detailed idea of the *yuga* based division in the Indian tradition please refer to <https://www.stephen-knapp.com/timings_of_the_four_yugas.htm>
- xv Bhaktika Mithya is a descriptive category employed in Odia literature to make sense of the narrative techniques in the form of tropes, devices and the kind of colophons put to use by the medieval writers.
- xvi The original verse is “Sri chandi saralanka padatala dasa, sudra muni apandita sri Sarala Das. Se jaha kahanti mate mu taha lekhai, sadhu sugyajaneethe mo dosa nahi.”
- xvii The original verse is “Janmaru murukha muhi mora nahi shastras gyana, Tujaha kahu mu taha karai lekhana.”
- xviii Dana was the offering given by the kings on auspicious days to Brahmins.
- xix Dakshina was given to a Brahman for the performance of a ritual. It is closest to an honorarium for the service provided. See http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology_list.indology.info/1998-July/013326.html
- xx The original in transliteration is “Artha kahai nana mate, stirinki mohiba nimante. / Taha sunanti jete naari, ke paaru ta tharu uburi.”
- xxi The original in transliteration is “Puruse purusa bolau, Stirinka sange stiri hau. / Enuti Sri Hari krupaye, chitte kahaku nahi bhaye.”

- xxii Thinkers like Hall and Foucault however reject excessive reliance on facts because facts can be construed in various ways. See *The indigenous experiences: Global Perspectives* (2006).
- xxii Types of hand woven fabric, indigenous to Odisha which are very expensive in nature.

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History and Individuality in Gopabandhu Das' Autobiographical Poems

Saswat Panda

The scholarly assessment of Indian autobiographies has not yielded favourable results in general. There are two primary reasons why articulations of the self in India have, by and large, not fared well. Firstly, the Indian version of the genre seems to have remained in the shadow of its western counterparts for the longest time, and was believed to have taken shape under the influence of colonial modernity. The second reason is the burden of history under which individuality or self-hood fails to express itself. As such the focus on the self is scant, and the autobiography, it is alleged, reveals more about national history than the individual. Often taken as historical testimonies or sociological treatises, (and added to that a narrow focus on the “triumvirate” of Indo-Anglican autobiography) autobiographies, particularly in the vernaculars, have not received their fair share of scholarly attention.

The misreading (or no reading) of the self in autobiography in the Indian tradition can also be attributed to the Weberian impulse in scholars who perhaps search for the isolated and individualistic, ‘Protestant’, self among Indian subjects who are of diverse and complex

cultural backgrounds. The evolution of individuality under colonial modernity is analysed in terms of consciousness regarding the private and public aspect of life, and the division between the two. Part of this may be attributed to ideas of Enlightenment borrowed by intellectuals who were reared or at least impressed by western educational models. The major ways in which autobiographies have been analysed, are based on western intellectual traditions transposed on the Indian scenario. But such analyses perhaps imagine a cultural symmetry which is at best unconvincing. If the ‘dominant’ and the ‘emergent’, to quote Raymond Williams, were exerting their pressure during the colonial rule, the ‘residual’ too manifested in subtle but multiple ways (Williams 121). One such manifestation of the ‘residual’ was the impact of the Bhakti movement, which, along with its notions of intimacy and interiority, carried a tradition of public life given to service. The private and the public were not separate but influenced each other. The case of Gopabandhu Das of Odisha and his autobiographical writings are examples of such complex interactions of the public and the private.

Going beyond the oft-repeated argument of Odia autobiography’s preoccupation with history, the paper will emphasise the importance of the self that emerges through Gopabandhu’s autobiographical poems. In doing so, it will argue that through the yoking together of tropes such as jail, travel and the image of the author as a public figure (but living in confinement) the autobiography gives expression to the individual in terms of his/her relation to his/her community. This desire to strengthen communitarian ties, as I shall show, was based on Gopabandhu’s ideas of ‘participation’. Similarly, the expression of individuality can be discerned through a careful study of meditative lyric poetry written in confinement. I will highlight the historical importance of such articulations of the self through a reading of two of Gopabandhu’s autobiographical pieces “Bandi ra Atmakatha” (Autobiography of the Prisoner) and *Karakabita* (Prison Poems) (1935).

Two scholars, John Boulton and Barbara Lotz, have drawn attention to the significance of autobiography in so far as history is concerned. Through his readings of four autobiographies – those of Fakir Mohan, Gopal Praharaaj, Godabarisha Mishra and Nilakantha Das, Boulton traces the development of autobiography in Odia in terms of its historical significance and the impact of the leaders' public lives on the people. Boulton's focus on form and on questions of individuality have been minimal. Similarly, Barbara Lotz, in her essay "Autobiographies of Oriya Leaders: Contributions to a Cause", is concerned with the 'fuzzy' relations between autobiography and history (Lotz 383). Like Boulton, she too underlines the significance of these autobiographies (she adds Gopabandhu's name to Boulton's list and removes Nilakantha and Gopal Praharaaj) in so far as they serve as an expression of, or are testimonials to the nationalistic fervour of the times. She even denies the presence of any element of an "Oriya Self" in these texts "except as opposition to the dominating other" (386). While the emphasis that these two scholars lay on history is understood, their undermining of the Odia self, at least in Gopabandhu's autobiographical writings, does not shed light on Gopabandhu's enriching and insightful autobiography. In order to understand the ways in which the self finds expression in Gopabandhu's autobiographical poems, it is important to take a quick glance at Gopabandhu's life. For, it is only when we understand Gopabandhu's involvement in the public, that we can make a fair assessment of his autobiographical poems. Only when we closely observe his involvement with ordinary masses and his commitment to the upliftment of the distress, we would be able to understand why it forms an integral part of the poems in question.

The Public Life of Gopabandhu Das

A saintly figure for his people and a benign social worker, Gopabandhu came to resemble a troublemaker for the British authorities owing to his active involvement with the public, and, more than that, because of his tendency to unearth the hushed atrocities committed by

these authorities and the natives who were hand-in-glove with them. But, no time would have been more opportune for Gopabandhu to pen autobiographical poems than when he became a victim of colonial oppression. In a climate of incarceration when some of the country's known leaders had been put behind bars, the addition of his name to that list of incarcerated public figures was likely to elevate his status in Odisha's political imaginary. Some of the known names that were serving their respective sentences by the time Gopabandhu entered prison include Gandhi, Nehru and Rajagopalachari. The imprisonment of these national leaders, particularly Gandhi, as David Arnold argues, made the prison an object of curiosity for many people, especially the middle class (Arnold 29). If one were to think along similar lines, one could argue that Gopabandhu belonged to a league of illustrious leaders whose incarceration contributed to the making of their cults, though in Gopabandhu's case it would be limited to his followers who were present only in what is present-day Odisha and the adjoining Odia-speaking tracts. One needs to pause here to emphasise that Gandhi's influence on Gopabandhu was immense. He not only spread Mahatma's message across the state but his *modus operandi* was similar to that of Gandhi in many ways. One of the ways in which Gopabandhu Das became popular, just like Gandhi, was through his extensive travel. And just like Gandhi, his modest sartorial choices made him a leader to whom the masses could relate.

Much of his autobiographical writings during his imprisonment seem to be preoccupied with thoughts of his compatriots, and are recollected through the description of his travels to various places like Kanika, Jenapur and Bhadrak. Gopabandhu's persona and his image are as fascinating as the writings through which he represents them. By the time he was arrested and later imprisoned, Gopabandhu had become renowned as a social worker, a preeminent leader in the Odia nationalist movement (he was an active member of *Utkal Sammillani* and he had worked tirelessly to bring together people living in different

Odia-speaking tracts). He had been a member of the Bihar Odisha Legislative Assembly, he had instituted a school for boys in Satyabadi which became a model for educational institutions (although it was itself modelled after Fergusson College). But most of all he was known as a champion of the poor and distressed. The relief work which he carried out during the floods in Jenapur and elsewhere is one such instance. The impact of Gopabandhu can also be sensed from the fact that, while he was constantly monitored and practically under section 144 all the time, his written speeches were being read out in meetings. When he was being tried in a district court (8 November 1921) for his so called objectionable column in *The Samaj*, around three thousand had gathered outside the court. The following day the number increased to seven thousand (Satpathy 212). These few highlighted examples from Gopabandhu's public life, convince us that he operated at grassroots level and consequently enjoyed an unrivalled reputation. Through my reading of his autobiographical poems, we shall see why his concern for the masses was genuine. More importantly the question of the self in the autobiography is linked to this idea of devotion to public service.

If we are to study Gopabandhu's autobiographical poems not merely as "text[s] in the service of history" but also as forms of self-expression then it is important to study *Kara Kabita* along with other poems, especially *Bandi ra Atmakatha* because one can trace certain continuities in these self-reflexive writings as opposed to the "six uneven sections", supposedly fragmentary form, which Barbara Lotz seems to perceive (Lotz 384, 415). The poems in *Bandi ra Atamakatha* map Gopabandhu Das' journey to jail mentioning in particular the places where the train stops: the narrator reminisces about his association with those places. For instance when the train reaches Jenapur he recalls the time when the place had been devastated by floods and he had come for relief work. Similarly, when the train passes by Kanika he is reminded of the atrocities committed by the king. It is worth noting here that the way these places are remembered or invoked in the narrative shed light

on Gopabandhu's role as a public figure. Gopabandhu's manner of speaking here, which clearly show his awareness of his own image, has been mistakenly analysed by Lotz as 'patronising' (386). Such a view is reason enough to contest Lotz's claims.

Gopabandhu's role in the public was both a reality and a popular lore. A cursory glance at his life as a public figure has already been discussed. But it would still be relevant here to point out that Gopabandhu had worked with the spirit of a mass leader, a reformer travelling across the state from Puri, to Berhampur to Chakradharpur, and even sometimes to other parts of India. Despite having been involved in an organisation of Brahmins, he had strongly advocated for the entry of Dalits in a temple in Ganjam. Unlike his political and intellectual predecessor, the patriarch Madhusudan Das, he followed a bottom-to-top model for the uplift of people. In *Bandi ra Atmakatha*, Gopabandhu's spirit of participation becomes conspicuous on so many occasions. For instance, when he calls himself a servant of his people or a servitor of his God, it is not a strategic act of self-effacement but in consonance with his ideals of service. Gopabandhu's association with Gokhale and Gandhi, his instituting an organic model of education, and a voluntary organisation in a similar fashion as servants of Indian society augment the argument I have just made. The travel trope and the reference to numerous places go on to highlight the importance of travel for someone whose reputation firmly rested on his will and ability to reach out to the masses. In the spirit of Gandhi, the idea of a leader travelling far and wide is different from western notions of travel (much celebrated through railways) and is reminiscent of travel as service as enshrined in the Buddhist and Bhakti traditions. The very idea of travel as espoused by Gandhi and Gopabandhu can also be seen as a counter to imperialism where travel eventually leads to exploitation. In his case exploitation is replaced by service. It is not surprising that at each familiar station where the train stops, Gopabandhu is reminded of the service he rendered to the needy.

When he equates the common grief of his *Utkalbasis*, his fellow Odias with his own or when he consoles them and asks them not to lose heart because he is being taken to jail, he is hardly being presumptuous. The impact of Gopabandhu's arrest can be surmised from the fact that huge gatherings would hinder the court proceedings until he would intervene to placate them. Amongst many accounts that testify to Gopabandhu's popularity is Gopal Chhotray's autobiography *Pathik* (1995). Chhotray recalls the early years of his adolescence when he and many of his cohorts were deeply inspired by Gopabandhu's boldness and commitment to truth of which his "Deadly if True" is an example. Chhotray recalls that articles such as the one just cited accounted for the popularity of *The Samaj* the popular Odia newspaper which Gopabandhu had started and of which he was the editor. The other significant anecdote from the same autobiography is when a young Chhotray tries all his might to get a glimpse of the modest but charismatic public figure. *Utkalmani* continued to be a legend during his lifetime and afterwards which is comparable to the kind of fame Gandhi enjoyed.

Gopabandhu's popularity and the awe in which the masses held him may lead one to think that he speaks with an air of superiority as has been seen in the case of scholars like Barbara Lotz. But, such a view which only takes into accounts the impact of the community on the individuality of the public figure. It is my belief that part of his individuality is located in the community. Eighteenth-century England is one of the watershed epochs when individuality finds a clear-cut definition. The idea of civic humanism or the individual as an expression of the community became one of the ideas on which the self has been theorised. Following John Locke, the idea of individuality is defined in terms of rights over private property. In the case of figures like Gopabandhu, too, the community becomes important for defining the individual, not through civic humanism, and certainly not through property rights. The dominant idea here is service. It is my belief that Gopabandhu's poems offer a trajectory of an evolving individuality

through different tropes like the cult of Jagannath which eventually link him to the not so ‘imagined communities’ of his compatriots. A few of the poems published in the book titled *Kara Kabita* narrate the musings of a lonely prisoner on subjects as diverse as nature, beauty, and (sometimes on personal issues like) the fate of unrequited love. The significance of these poems cannot be undermined by calling the autobiographical writing fragmented.

Confinement and Interiority

It is difficult to argue in favour of a temporal continuity because of the publication history of these texts. As an aside it might be stated here that *Bandi ra Atmakatha* was published in various editions of *The Samaj* in 1923. Upon the completion of one year of his imprisonment on 26th June 1923 the poems were published in the form of a book bearing the same title. The day had been observed as Gopabandhu Divas all over Odisha (Dash 114). The thirteen poems included in *Karakabita* were published in three different phases before finally appearing in book form in 1935 under the title *Karakabita: 1923-24 Hazaribagh Jail re Likhita* (Poems of Incarceration: Composed in Hazaribagh Jail in the Years 1923-24). It was published by Gopabandhu Sahitya Mandir under the aegis of Radhanath Rath.

Despite not having a clear chronological order these poems show certain thematic and structural unity which, in turn, implies a preoccupation with the self which evolves progressively. *Bandi ra Atmakatha* begins with an address to his *deshabasis*, asking them not to lose heart over his imprisonment which he had already foreseen.

One common image in the poems is that of Lord Jagannath of Puri. In *Kara Kabita*, the jailed protagonist seeks blessings from Lord Jagannath and invokes him time and again; in *Bandi ra Atmakatha* he claims that Utkal need not ask for more when their “leader is none other than Lord Jagannath himself.” It is mere gainsay that the references to Lord Jagannath have all too visible political implication, that is to say

that religion here becomes a means of imagining a communitarian identity. But Lord Jagannath is again referred to in “Bandi ra Swades Chinta”, only this time for a devotee who is far away and helpless.

If the reference to Lord Jagannath indicates how religion plays a crucial role in the protagonist’s life, his varied and ambivalent thoughts on his imprisonment also speaks of the influence of religion on his political outlook. In both texts prison is compared to a place of pilgrimage or worship. In *Bandi ra Atmakatha* it is called “Holy Prabhas” (the possible reference could be a place where Krishna is supposed to have performed a yajna). Remembering the incarcerated Gandhi, the narrator calls him a mere follower. He calls it “Jatiya mukti re Swargdar”, meaning doors to heaven (literally), or referring to the famous crematorium in Puri. In *Kara Kabita*, however, the responses to prison tend to become ambiguous, and the sanctity of the place becomes increasingly hard to imagine. Except for a couple of instances where it is called a place of pilgrimage, the dark prison, it seems, has rendered all other forms of darkness insignificant to him. It is a place which taught him to endure or accept everything with the equipoise of a stoic. Interestingly, one of his inspirations, is Socrates, as evident in “Bandi re Sandhya Bhakti” or Evening Prayers.

But the most striking reference to prison appears in the poem titled “Pitrapakshya Tarpan” or Oblation to Ancestors. In this poem he has doubts if his prayers and offerings will be accepted by his dead ancestors because he is an *aparadhi* or criminal. Here, he questions his status as a criminal or accused because his crime does not appear as a violation of the code of conduct as prescribed in [Hindu] religion. More important is the fact that he doubts if he is a “rajneeti aparadhi” or political prisoner. Questioning the legitimacy of colonial rule, he refuses to believe that his actions have been inimical to *Raj Dharma* when there is no rule, much less a ruler. Therefore, he believes that his body is not defiled and that it can offer *Tarpanto* to his ancestors. The refusal to consider his body desecrated despite imprisonment can be read at

two levels. Firstly, it is a refusal to consider oneself a subject of an unfair rule. Following rituals within the jail is a way of creating a space distinct and 'pure' for oneself within a structure which is often associated with evil. Second, and most importantly, the ability to metaphorically distance oneself harks back on religious traditions, particularly those belonging to the Bhakti movement where corporeal manifestations were only secondary and the soul was primary defining entity of one's self. In the works of Bhakti poets like Meera Bai and figures of greater cultural proximity such as Chaitanya one sees the union of the corporeal and spiritual aspects of love, where the latter sublimates into the former. Meera Bai, in particular, refuses to believe in the restrictions laid on her body, as her heart is supposed to have offered itself to Krishna. Much of what was considered sinful about carnal desire was often exonerated by the philosophy of Viashnavite Bhakti as symbolic of "spiritual longing" (Chakraborty 135). The point about Bhakti gains credence as one moves from one poem to another. The influence is not marginal but profound. It is not merely that the jailed patriot found a way of retaining the sanctity of his body in a spiritual sense. The solitary poet very clearly narrates his bodily desires. The two poems "Prema ra ehi Parinama" (Is this what Love comes to) and "Vishwa ra Milana Chitra" (United in Love- A Portrait of Nature) give voice to the narrator's longing for love and companionship. The lines,

In silent voice, eloquent with emotion
Will not they speak out their hearts,
In that moment of ecstasy won't take
The other in a fond embrace? (S. Das 89)

and,

But my world is empty, so is my home
Kisses, embraces are distant dreams to me,
Who will give and receive the nectar of love, my life
Will end with silent cries of agony. (S. Das 92)

are but a few examples. These lines not only bear testimony to the passion brewing in his heart but are also reminiscent of the poems of longing composed by Bhakti poets. The influence of Bhakti is merged with the influence of the Romantics. “Bandi ra Swades Chinta” (The Prisoner Remembers his Motherland) is quite similar in its tone to Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” The other two poems cited above oscillate between physical love and love as it is imagined to exist in nature. The meeting of the Bhakti tradition and the Romantic tradition brings together what Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya has called the *bhahiprakriti* (external nature) and *antahprakriti* (internal nature) (qtd in Chakrabarty 135). Although Bankim’s dichotomy pertains to two traditions of Vaishnavite philosophy, his analysis often draws comparison to the Romantics such as Wordsworth. Gopabandhu’s meditative accounts which bear traces of both the traditions discussed above point in one direction. The Bhakti tradition, it can be argued, brings with itself the idea of self-effacement. The Romantic style in the lyric form can be seen as subjective expression finding universal resonance. Through the Bhakti tradition the individual sublimates himself for the sake of service and in the longing for love. In the absence of love, the solitary poet imagines forces of nature being in love with each other but eventually the manifestation of love in nature (*bhahiprakriti*) is turned in the direction of God following the call of *antahprakriti*. Thus both the ideas of love and service are defined in Bhakti vocabulary.

The contribution of Gopabandhu Das to the creation of a separate Odia speaking state and to the national movement is arguably immense, and scholars have been right in acknowledging his endeavours. While reading his autobiographical poems one is only convinced that what has been stated above is true. But the analysis would be inadequate if we treated the question of selfhood as being separate from his involvement in community. His “contributions to a cause” need to be seen as an integral part of his individuality which was shaped by discourses of participation and service. The autobiographical writings of Gopabandhu

Das underscore an important idea. They compel us to study autobiographies in the Odia tradition not by superimposing western conceptual models but by taking into account the several discursive forces which were instrumental in shaping history and culture.

Endnotes

- i See Sudipta Kaviraj's "Introduction: Literature as Mirror to Modernity" in *The Invention of Private Life*.
- ii See Ramachandra Guha's observations on the autobiographies of Gandhi, Nehru and Nirad C. Chaudhuri in "The Arts of Autobiography" in *The Last Liberal and Other Essays*.
- iii See Boulton, John. "Autobiography in Oriya 1917-1976". *Essays on Odia Literature*. Jagatsinghpur: Prafulla, 2003. Print.
- iv The poem was published in book form in 1923 in an edition of *The Samaj* which was meant to commemorate one year of Gopabandhu's imprisonment. After this I shall refer to the poem in its book form.
- v Imposition of section 144 clearly meant that he was not allowed to hold meetings or organise public gatherings. The imposition would still be in place even while Gopabandhu would be travelling in train.
- vi *Utkalbasi* literally means a resident of Utkal- the former name of present day Odisha.
- vii Utkalmani literally meaning the gem of Utkal, was a sobriquet for Gopabandhu Das. It was first used by Prafulla Chandra Ray when Gopabandhu was released from Hazaribagh jail.
- viii Compatriots
- xi A ritual of sacrifice or worship carried out before sacred fire.
- x Oblation meant for ancestors

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Caste and Local Culture: Muli Revisited

Raj Kumar

Autobiography may not have been a traditional literary genre in Indian culture, but from the nineteenth century onwards we begin to encounter texts that narrate personal lives. Critical studies of these personal narratives have been slow to emerge. The few Indian autobiographies which have widely drawn attention of researchers world-wide are: M. K. Gandhi's *Autobiography or My Experiment with Truth* (1927), Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* (1936), Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) and a few others. Gandhi, Nehru and Chaudhuri though individually represent different world-views; socio-culturally they belong to a common category: the upper-caste men, and hence privileged to have an audience worldwide. In recent times, there have been a considerable number of critical studies on Indian upper-caste women's autobiographies. Dalits, on the other hand, who have been articulating themselves for quite some time through their personal narratives, were rarely heard of and have thus been systematically neglected in the academic circle.

One important aspect about studying Dalit autobiographies is that they cannot be appreciated or properly analyzed in terms of the existing conventions of evaluating autobiographies written by the educated upper-caste writers. Many of these Dalit narratives have not, in fact, been written down. They have been orally communicated and then, sometimes, recorded by others. For instance, the life-story of the illiterate Odia Dalit, Muli was recorded by the American anthropologist James Freeman and titled *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (1979). Sumitra Bhavé's *Pan on Fire* (Marathi, 1988) and Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine's collaborative work titled *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (1997) are two similar works which were initially recorded and later published as 'narrated autobiography.'

The present paper makes an attempt to study the various aspects of what is called 'narrated autobiography' or 'mediated autobiography' with special reference to James Freeman's *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*. Several questions can be put in this context. For example, what is a 'narrated autobiography'? How is it different from a written autobiography? Can 'narrated autobiography' be read in the same way as a written autobiography? What is so special about a 'narrated autobiography'? These and other related questions will be addressed while exploring Freeman's *Untouchable*. But before we do so, let us try to understand the way autobiography as a literary genre developed in India.

The Evolution of Autobiography in India

The Western world discovered in Augustine's *Confessions* the genre of autobiography, which was written as early as the fourth century A.D. Some of the best known autobiographies written after Augustine's life narrative are: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1789), Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1818) and J. S. Mill's *Autobiography* (1873). In contrast to the West, the tradition of writing autobiography started in India several centuries after Augustine's *Confessions*. To be more specific, Banarasidas's *Ardhakathanaka* (*Half a Tale*, 1641) is considered to be the first Indian autobiography,

written in Hindi verse in the early part of the seventeenth century. At this point several questions can be asked. Why did it take several centuries for the genre to emerge in India as compared to its earlier appearance in the West? Does autobiographical writing need a specific cultural space for its emergence, which was not available in India then? Does a literary genre depend upon certain philosophical pre-conditions? These questions will in turn evoke questions about the nature of Indian caste society and its dominant Hindu world-view, which shapes the mind of any individual.

There are certain philosophical preconditions which enable one to write one's autobiography. First and foremost is the act of situating one's individual 'self' vis-a-vis the communal self. This is possible only when the 'individual identity' of a member of a community or country is valued and respected. It has been generally believed that the traditional Hindu world-view is hostile to the autobiographical mode because it does not recognize the existence of individual self. Instead, it believes that every individual soul is a part of the universal soul personified by God, supposed to be the creator of this universe. Thus, merging with the communal super-ego, the individual ego loses its distinct individuality. But there is more. Hindu philosophers have tendencies to mystify the whole process of living, and especially, when it comes to the nature of the spiritual union of man with infinite being. This complicates the matter further. Hindu philosophers believe that the soul or *atman* alone is real and present in all women and men but not in the body or the mind which are subject to change and dissolution. They argue that it is futile to trace the origin of consciousness in the heart or the brain. Nor does consciousness originate in the mind. Consciousness, as they believe, is the being of *atman*, the knower *per se*, which is unborn. It is self-existent. They also believe that the self is eternal. As the self is changeless, contrary to matter, it is self-shining, self-existent, immutable, free, pure, and blissful. That is the reason why Hindu philosophers argue that the quotidian accounts of temporal lives are ephemeral and what is important is timeless. Autobiography as a genre cannot flourish in this ethos.

But, despite such Hindu beliefs and practices, autobiography did emerge eventually in India. After Banarasidas's *Ardhakathanaka* there have been a number of autobiographies written in English and Indian languages. Indian autobiographies are written by persons coming from different and divergent fields of activities. Among them are authors, journalists, artists, academicians, politicians, social workers, philosophers, civil servants, public figures and others. While the autobiographies written by men outnumbered women's autobiographies, nevertheless Indian women had also started narrating their personal life-stories as early as the second part of the nineteenth century. As compared to Indian upper-caste men's autobiographies, Indian women's autobiographies appeared two centuries later because of delayed access to education. It is the newly independent nation-state that made provisions for their free and compulsory education through the enactment of the Constitution. Educated Dalits articulated their voices by writing about their lives. Thus Dalit autobiography is a distinct genre by itself because by reading it we can hear the voice of the oppressed people who were marginalized by the caste-based society for centuries. The Indian autobiographical tradition is diverse and, therefore, while studying it one has to bear in mind the issues centering on caste, class, culture, religion, and gender. This makes the study of Indian autobiography complex.

The emergence of Dalit autobiography gives a new dimension to the study of autobiography. Apart from being marginal, Dalits have been denied education for quite a long time in Indian caste society. Now that they are getting educated, some of them have been using writing as a weapon for their social assertion. Thus, writing autobiography is a special act for the members of this group who use the genre to achieve a sense of identity and to mobilise resistance against oppression. This phenomenon will be largely understood when we read some of the Dalit autobiographies available in English or through an English translation, such as: Hazari's *Untouchable: An Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste* (English, 1951), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (Marathi, 1984), D. P. Das's *The Untouchable Story* (English, 1985),

Bama's *Karukku* (Tamil, 1992), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi, 1997) and Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-chancellor* (English, 2001). Due to lack of space it may not be possible to analyse all these Dalit autobiographies mentioned above. Instead, we will focus on Muli's life-history which is not a written autobiography but a narrated one.

Muli's Narrated Autobiography

As stated earlier, illiteracy among Dalits is common. Even if they try to get an education against all odds, all of them are not successful in their ventures. Illiterate Dalits cannot write their autobiographies by themselves. But they can narrate their life-stories to others who can help document them. The narrated autobiography of Muli titled, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* falls in this category. It has been collected in Odia and then translated into English by James M. Freeman. A narrated autobiography such as Muli's invites the following questions: Should oral autobiographies be read in the same way as written ones? What is the difference between the two? The following pages seek answers to the questions raised above.

Philippe Lejeune resolves the conflicting issue centering around orality and literacy by stating that narrated autobiographies have the same authenticity and legitimacy as written autobiographies, sometimes even more. Lejeune explains, "[o]n a certain number of points, autobiography by people who do not write throws light on autobiography written by those who do: the imitation reveals the secrets of fabrication and functioning of 'the natural product'" (186). He strongly suggests the idea of 'autobiographical collaborations'. Lejeune also puts forward a thesis thus:

Why this "silence"? Because they did not know either how to read or how to write, and they transmitted their memories orally? It would be naïve to think so. Education became widespread throughout the nineteenth century. But those who knew how to read and write used their education for other ends, in other

forms; why, or for whom, would they have written the story of their life? Behind this problem of literacy and acculturation is hidden another: that of the network of communication of the printed work, and of the function of the texts and discourse that are exchanged through its channel. This network is in the hands of the ruling classes and serves to promote their values and their ideology. Their autobiographical narratives, quite obviously, are not written only to “pass on memory” (which is done through word and example in all classes). They are the place where a collective identity is elaborated, reproduced, and transformed, *the patterns of life* appropriate to the ruling classes. This identity is imposed upon all those who belong to or are assimilated into these classes, and it rejects the others as insignificant. (198)

Muli, the ‘other’ is more than an ‘insignificant’ character for the Odia/Indian ruling classes so far as his collaborative autobiography with James Freeman is concerned. Born into a poor Dalit family in the state capital of Odisha, Bhubaneswar, Muli would have had all the advantages of grabbing new opportunities provided by a civil society in the wake of India’s independence but his untouchable caste identity proved an impediment. He was expelled from school because he happened to come from a supposedly polluted community called Bauri. Failing to get an education which would have given him a decent job, he tried to earn his livelihood by doing several things: he became a daily wage labourer, small shopkeeper, and sharecropper. Given that all these jobs required a strong body Muli chose to become a pimp who supplied prostitutes and transvestites to upper caste men to make easy money. Since Muli physical disposition was weak and a mind indolent, the job of a pimp suited him. But money was not all Muli wanted in his life. As an individual he strived for dignity and self-respect which his caste identity denied him. Muli’s attempt to define a self was rejected by the upper caste men and women in their day-to-day relationship with him. This makes Muli’s life-history significant. James Freeman writes:

The story of Muli's life may move others, as it did me, to ponder their own experiences in ways they had previously neglected. An authentic life-history confronts us with an immediacy and concreteness that compels our involvement, that causes us to discover within ourselves something about human predicaments everywhere in the face of which our cultural differences become insignificant. Muli presents such a life-history. The cultural idiom in which he operates may be foreign to us, but his aims are not: he strives for dignity; he seeks to be respected by the people around him; he questions why fate has brought him to his present circumstances; he wants a good life for himself. As he approaches what he thinks of as old age, Muli sees his dream of achieving a good life slipping by; a bleak end awaits him. He expresses no hopes of salvation or a better existence in a future life. His particular beliefs are guided by his cultural setting, but his predicament is not. (396)

Since Muli's predicament epitomized the predicament of the untouchable community. It is quite important to see how Muli engaged his 'narrative self' while fighting against the 'communal self' of the discriminatory society to which he belonged. It is also important to study the cultural milieu in which Muli grew up. But before analyzing Muli's life history in detail, it is pertinent to discuss the background in which Muli's 'collaborative autobiography' came into being.

James Freeman collected the story of Muli's life in Odia, translated it into English and published it with a title *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*. Freeman knew Odia but he was also helped by an interpreter named Hari. The narrative contains a total of 31 chapters. Except for chapters 1, 2 and 3, which are clubbed together into an Introduction and 30 and 31 which form a Conclusion, which are written by Freeman, the remaining 26 chapters are Muli's version of his own life as told to Freeman. Freeman writes in the Introduction that he neither interfered with Muli nor influenced him in anyway except that he had to provoke him at times to talk in detail about some of the interesting events

of his life. Muli was quite selective in narrating his life-stories. He did not realise that Freeman would help him to connect each episode of his life to a single idea of development of his marginal self. Perhaps Freeman's concern about 'equality of all mankind' drew him closer to Muli and the people of Muli's community since he saw them as the victims of caste oppression. Becoming a 'collaborator' of Muli's autobiography, Freeman did an immense service to the oppressed people at large. In the Conclusion he writes, "by recording the lives and sufferings of Muli and his people, I hope that I have helped to hasten the day when such sufferings cease, not only for Indian untouchables, but for all victims of social inequality" (396). Freeman's activist vision does not in any way suggest that he was biased towards Muli and his community. Freeman was impartial and serious about his academic ethics. While show-casing Muli's life-history he goes so far as to write that, "[a] detailed life-history like Muli's provides a way to reach behind the surface answers outsiders often receive, grasping from the insider's perspective what he really values and how he interprets his experiences" (12). We must acknowledge that it was due to Freeman's earnest efforts to project "Muli as he was" that earned him recognition as the author of the book *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*, worldwide.

Muli was a pseudonym, not the real name. He belonged to the Bauris, an untouchable caste group in Odisha who did not have a fixed traditional occupation at least until the 1970s, when Freeman was collecting Muli's life-history. The Bauris earned their livelihood by doing odd jobs such as stone cutting, road building and weaving. Most of the Bauris were landless and that brought insecurity into their lives. A majority of them were daily wage labourers. Since they belonged to one of the socially and religiously 'polluted' groups, social mobility was a distant dream. Freeman reports that, although subsidiary castes such as Mallias, who were little above the Bauris in caste hierarchy, had amply benefited from the opportunities offered by the new capital city, Bhubaneswar (located three kilometers away from Muli's village, Kapileswar, which is now incorporated into the city of Bhubaneswar), the Bauris had not

done well over the years. Limited contacts outside their community compelled the Bauris to work as unskilled labourers, something they had been doing for generations. It is pertinent to mention here that, due to protective discriminatory provisions enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the Dalits of various Indian states have improved their education and economic status to a certain extent. But Odia Dalits lagged behind by not availing such affirmative action to the fullest extent. One important reason for this may be that Odia society is still very feudal, which means that the powerful upper-caste people of the state, Brahmins, Karans and Khandayats in particular, do not easily allow modern democratic values to enter and upset the traditional power structure. The ingrained exploitative aspects of caste and their economic consequences remain the same, and they may even be stronger today than they were some forty years ago when Freeman was doing his field study. Therefore, like other untouchable communities in Odisha, the Bauris still continue to do unskilled poorly-paid jobs that deny them anything more than basic subsistence earnings. Having inherited such a stigmatized social role Muli seemed to be a handicapped person, both socially and economically.

Muli also belonged to a large family that lived on the brink of starvation throughout the year. Recollecting how, as a child, he, along with other members of his family, starved almost daily:

We were always hungry; most of the time we starved. Father's income alone was insufficient to feed us. Because mother was usually pregnant or nursing babies, she rarely worked in the fields. We ate whatever we could find: snails from the river, leaves, and rice from the fields. Once a day the adults ate cooked food, mostly pakhala [watered rice], but they gave most of it to us. I remember that when I was five years old we ate hot cooked rice only very rarely, once every two weeks, and it was a great feast for us. We usually ate freshly cooked hot rice too fast. To make it feed more people, we let it cool and added water. We ate this watered rice most of the time. (66)

This is a grim picture of a family which struggled to keep going. Muli's family suffered more from food scarcity, particularly with the onset of monsoon. This was a time when agricultural labourers did not get work in the fields. It was also a time when most of the government-sponsored road works and other wage-works ceased temporarily. The poor suffered mercilessly and continued to struggle to make ends meet while waiting for the better. When nothing came through, the only option available to them was to mortgage whatever precious things they had at home. In the case of Muli's family the mortgage was either for bell metal or for other cheap silver crockery, which fetched them a little food. They would go without food for many days. Circumstance, thus, often compelled Muli's father to steal taro from somebody's field so as to feed the children.

Faced with such adversities most of the Dalit families could not set a goal to achieve something higher. Day to day survival became primary. In this context education could have been the tool. But going by the way the upper-caste people opposed such move, the prospect seemed grim. Muli did get admitted to a school, to get educated. Like other parents who want their children to be educated enough to get a secure job, Muli's father and his grandfather sent him to a school too. Muli also appreciated their ideas realizing that, once properly educated, his qualification would automatically ensure him a better-paid job, something that was not available to any member of his community then. Muli worked hard and enthusiastically to achieve his goal but the prevailing condition of the school did not favour him. The caste-prone society infested the school too and several manifestations of caste prejudices were witnessed in schoolrooms. Muli narrates:

The villagers never forgot, nor did they let us forget, that we were untouchables. High caste children sat inside the school; the Bauri children, about twenty of us, sat outside on the veranda and listened. The two teachers, a Brahman outsider, and a temple servant, refused to touch us, even with a stick. To beat us, they threw bamboo canes. The higher-caste children threw mud at us. Fearing severe beatings, we dared not fight back. (67)

The passage undermines the hidden agenda of the upper-castes who were afraid that, once Dalits were educated they would go on to become powerful. Moreover, who would do their menial job at their home if all of them were educated? Muli, an immediate casualty of this mindset, had to drop out from school. He helped his parents by adding a little money to their meager income by becoming a daily-wage labourer. Lack of proper food at home – let alone a balanced diet— stunted his growth like many other children of his community. He had to nurse a weak body all through his life.

Muli's suffering spells a larger existential question that the Dalits in Odisha and elsewhere faced. They have been and continue to be downtrodden and oppressed because of the repression of the caste system. Predominantly rural and illiterate, they were subjected to economic exploitation, cultural subjugation and political powerlessness. Reports on the study of untouchability and atrocities on Dalits reveal that Odisha is one state where public places are still not accessible to Dalits. Although there are violent incidents perpetrated on Dalits, organized protests from Dalit groups are not reported in equal measure. This implies the vulnerability of the Dalits in the State towards the social injustices on the hands of the upper-castes.

Living in an environment where insecurity reigns, Odia Dalits had to lead lives of compromise and alienation. One reason for this may have to do with the socio-economic life of Dalits in Odisha, which has not undergone the level of change that Dalits have experienced elsewhere, for example in Maharashtra. History testifies that a few cases of unorganised and sporadic resistance against caste atrocities did take place, but they were swiftly suppressed. Leaders of these resistance movements invariably came from within the fold of Hinduism. The pervasive cult of Jagannath and other deities have been used to mould the consciousness of Dalits to a point that has blunted the edge of their protests. The legend of Dasia Bauri and many others testify to this. With reference to various myths and legends Muli and his community members were denied entry into temples, including the Jagannath temple

in Puri. Instead of protesting against such injustice to reclaim their civil rights Muli and his community continued to accept the low ritual status. Muli narrates:

I remember Granny as a smiling, peaceful, gentle person, and very religious; every evening, she set out her clay oil lamp for deities, and offered them rice. She often fasted for the deities and visited many temples to worship deities, even though she was not allowed in. From outside the temple she watched, and gave her greetings. For four or five years during the Shivaratri festival [birthday of the deity Shiva] she went to the Dhabaleswar temple, which stands in the middle of the Mahanadi River, and burned a clay lamp full of oil. She also went to Puri every two years or so to visit Lord Jagannath, but she never went inside the temple. I myself went into the outer compound of the Jagannath temple for the first time only in 1970. I did not go into the inner room; I have never seen anybody of my caste enter the temple compound before this time. (124)

The passage tells of a rebel at heart Muli. As a child, he often violated the norms of his community and created tensions among its members. At the age of sixteen, for instance, rejecting the traditional Bauri occupation, Muli became an unskilled labourer, and later a pimp supplying Bauri women and transvestites to upper caste men till the age of forty. To become a pimp or a prostitute was unethical in Bauri community. Thus by choosing this occupation Muli disregarded his community norms, not overtly, but covertly. Overtly, he went through the motions that represented 'respectable' behaviour. Covertly, he broke the rules, showing no guilt whatsoever in doing so. Interestingly, he also justified his act by portraying his prostitutes and transvestites in similar ways, suggesting that they, while giving the appearance of respectability, enjoyed their occupation and wanted money. This was, of course, what Muli thought. We have no way to know what the untouchable prostitutes thought about their occupation. Muli while narrating his life-story hardly talked about the positions of Dalit women in his community. Muli's silence

on the gender subject is understandable. He seems to have inherited a tradition which looks down upon women as inferior. Unconcerned about gender issues in his narrative, he rather narrates how he and his community members were subjected to caste exploitation and oppression. But they often manipulated certain situations to their advantages. This makes Freeman comment that, “[t]hroughout his life-history, Muli depicted how he, his family, and his friends creatively manipulated, adapted, or disregarded rituals to fit their needs” (389).

Freeman’s above cited statement has to be read in the context of caste hierarchy. If at all Muli and his community members creatively manipulated, adapted, or disregarded caste rituals, it was because they wanted to survive under the hegemonic caste rules. Being untouchables, their choices were limited when it came to occupation and earning a livelihood. Therefore, they were always hungry. But this was not the case of the upper castes: the upper castes enjoyed a comfortable life without doing any physical work. Muli must have realized how he and his community members were discriminated on the name of caste rules. So when Muli became a pimp, he knew that it was not a respectable occupation. But by doing so, he deliberately subverted some of the caste rules. Muli regularly supplied untouchable prostitutes to some upper caste men who enjoyed them in private but in public they avoided having any kind of interaction with the untouchable community. Muli, by narrating his life-story, exposed the kind of hypocritical behavior the upper castes shown to the people of the lower castes.

After two years of studying the Bauri community, Freeman comes to the conclusion that Muli’s life-style represented one of three possible occupations ordinarily available to Bauri men and women: the life of unskilled labourers, the life of shamanistic faith healers and the life of transvestites, pimps and prostitutes. As stated earlier, Muli’s physical disposition was weak since childhood and adding to it was his general laziness that made his job as farm labourer and quarry worker tough. He found a way to earn easy money by pimping, an occupation

which fitted his physical (dis)abilities and psychological outlook. The occupation of a pimp brought Muli into closer association with wealthy and powerful upper-caste men, whose life-style he admired and wanted to emulate. Muli befriended many of these men not only to get money, he also wanted them to reciprocate his friendship by showing him respect in public something that rarely happened. Many upper-caste men sometimes shared meals with Muli and his prostitutes and spoke about their friendship in a flowery language, but they cautioned Muli at the end that their friendship must remain secret and never to be disclosed publicly. Resenting this double standard, Muli frequently revenged himself by changing his clients thus severing his relationships with men he did not find to be true friends.

The life-narrative, thus, displayed a behaviour rarely found among untouchables. Muli had to construct his self according to his circumstantial needs or he would have found it difficult to survive. At times he played the role of a pimp, sharecropper and small businessman, but he failed in every venture. Because of his personal failure people of his community, including his extended family members, did not take him seriously, and the upper-caste men whom he supplied prostitutes and transvestites avoided him in the open. Muli's life-history thus provides an insider's view of the psychological effects of discrimination against people at the bottom of society. Like all Bauris, Muli regularly experienced rejection in public places, and because he was an untouchable, he was thought to have the potential of polluting the higher-castes. Muli deeply resented such discrimination and mockingly described how high-caste women avoided his presence lest he would pollute them, how tea stall owners refused to allow him to enter their shops, and how the high-caste men barely tolerated him as long as he supplied them with prostitutes. It is in this context Freeman observes that, "Muli expected to be insulted, avoided, and cheated in his everyday contact with higher-caste people, and he retaliated by cheating them" (383).

To escape discrimination, Muli tried to emulate his upper-caste oppressors, on whom he depended for his survival. When they rejected him, he immediately retaliated by trying to bring them under his control, often by supplying them with prostitutes or by changing his clients, and when successful, he laughed at their behaviour of surrendering their 'self' to a mere untouchable like him. Muli knew well how to play with his generous land-owning masters, construction employers, or customers for his prostitutes. In front of them he pretended to be loyal, but privately he ridiculed them for their behaviours and ideals. Thus, Muli's acquiescence to his superiors did not in any way prove that he accepted his lot.

Now, the question whether life of Muli was a success or a failure? What emerges from the discussion so far is that in spite of role-changing and various self-inventions, he could not reconcile his individual self and his social identity. And all his endeavours fail to get him any social recognition for which he disgraced his community's codes by becoming a pimp, writes Freeman:

Muli's life-history portrayed conflicts between the ideals of his caste, his own expectations, and his actual behaviour. Muli's thwarted expectations led him to idealize his youth. His attempted adaptations were in the long run unsuccessful. He failed to solve both his internal problem of negative self-image and the external problem faced by almost all untouchables of his village: poverty, discrimination, and failure to benefit from the growth of the new city. Pimping brought Muli no improvement over the other available life style choices: hard physical labour and religious healing. No Bauri labourers or healers in the village have improved their economic or social situation in the past decade, while high-caste people have benefited enormously from urbanization...Muli's life-history thus is representative of the condition of most Bauris, who try to improve their situation but fail. (387-388)

Muli's failure can be explained thus: being an untouchable, he was always at the receiving end. Whenever Muli started a new business venture his failure was predetermined. At one point, he started a betel-selling business. He became the first and only untouchable of his village to hold a permanent spot in the busy market place of Bhubaneswar. Up to a point he succeeded, but once people came to know that he was an untouchable, they would not buy betel from his shop. Such caste discrimination in business is a pan-Indian phenomenon even today. Dalits can hardly be found opening up hotels and similar business ventures because they are regarded as carriers of pollution.

Muli's last fight against caste was with a miserly Brahman landowner named Jadu. Muli became Jadu's sharecropper hoping that it would fetch him a good amount of paddy that could bring an end to his economic insecurity. Despite immense effort he put in he was cheated by Jadu. Muli discovered that Jadu never owned any land; he sharecropped the land for a goldsmith, who had recently sold it to an oil presser. After a year's long labour when Muli came to harvest his share of the crop, the oil presser chased him off the land and called the police to arrest him as a thief. Muli, on his part, did not go to the police or to any court of law as he knew very well that a poor untouchable like him would never get justice as laws in India are always in favour of the rich upper-caste. Instead, Muli demanded his due from Jadu and when he failed to get it, quarreled with him in public. He appealed to all present there that they should help him to get justice. Although they supported Muli, they did not force the miser to pay him for cultivating the crop. Despite Muli not getting his due, we see that here he once again breaks the conventional role as a meek and docile untouchable: he was the first untouchable in his village who dared to publicly challenge and insult a Brahman who ritually commanded a superior position in the social hierarchy.

At the end of *Untouchable* Freeman brings the important issue for discussion: what is Muli's future likely to be? Seeing his helpless state throughout the narrative it is difficult to believe in a better future

for Muli and his community. At least that is the case of Freeman. Forty years after the publication of Muli's life-history one would expect his children and grandchildren to be doing better in social and economic areas compared to the wretched conditions in which had his upbringing. But the empirical existential conditions of Dalits in Odisha in general and of the Bauris in particular tell us that nothing much has changed since the days of Muli. Freeman elaborates upon the condition of untouchables thus:

Untouchables throughout India rarely claim to be proud of their place in society; instead, individually or in groups, many attempt to pass as "clean" high castes by changing their names, customs, occupations, and dress to those of the "clean" castes. Others deny their caste by converting to religions such as Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Still others join political groups that cut across caste lines. In the anonymity of cities, untouchables usually can blot out more of their past than those who reside in villages, but the process, slow and painful, often takes generations. In Muli's village, where untouchables depend for their livelihood on higher caste employers, denials of untouchability provoke severe high-caste economic retaliation, if not physical violence. Thus external conditions have doomed Muli and most of the people of his caste to failure, no matter what they choose to do, and Muli's adaptations reflect this situation. Muli and other Bauris have failed, not because they embody expectations of failure or accept their lot, but rather because the Bauris face social and economic disabilities that they are presently powerless to change. (397)

Conclusion

Odia Dalits are still are not visible in the social and political frontline. But on literary and cultural fronts they have made some organised efforts to break the culture of silence so that the voices of the Odia Dalit protests can be heard. The growing number of Odia Dalit poets, writers and activists attest this point. Although Odia Dalit literature

still lacks firm roots, it is slowly but unmistakably taking shape. It is needless to state here that Muli's life-story remains an example for many Odia Dalit writers who emulate in their writings in order to form a distinct Odia Dalit identity. This is what makes Muli's life-history significant.

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The Aesthetics of Becoming a Being in Manoranjan Byapari's Bangla Dalit Autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*

Asis De

Manoranjan Byapari's *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* was published by a less-known Kolkata-based publishing house, 'ab prakashani' quite recently in January 2016. The quintessence of his life was the word that Byapari honours most—'jijibisha', meaning 'an extremely strong urge to live'. The first sentence of the first volume reads as: "Here I am." (*ICJ* 1: 19); the second volume ends with the sentence: "Those unexpressed words make him [the author-narrator] bleed." (*ICJ* 2: 397) [my translation]. Beginning with an emphatic 'I', which is an obvious condition of the genre, and ending with an oblique reference again to that 'I', the narrator-persona's 'bleeding' profusely due to inexpression of suffering and oppression. However, before exploring Manoranjan Byapari's two-volume autobiographical text some deliberations on the emergence of the autobiographical genre in Bengali literature and finally, of the literary space where a few personal narratives written by Dalit writers find their place is imperative.

The aftermath of Muslim invasion in Bengal around 1200 A.D., the literature written in Bangla contains many characters who do not belong to the upper caste but are marginal, poor and belong to the low-caste (like Kalketu and Fullora in *Chandi-Mangal*). Compared to the literatures written in other Indian languages like Tamil or Marathi, Bengali literature has adopted more to non-Brahminical traditions like the 'Vaishnav' tradition and even the 'Muslim-Sufi' tradition as evident in *Vaishnav Padabali* and *Bonbibbi Johuranama*). Sacred texts like *Chaitanya Charitamrita* were translated in Bangla from Sanskrit and the cult of 'Vaishnav' religion in Bengal (quite similar to the role of Buddhism in Maharashtra) gave enough space for society's non-Brahmin, low-caste Hindu people. In Bengali culture, the *Chaturvarna* system of the Hindu society and the Brahminical culture of the caste system were not as predominant as these are in other parts of India. This is one of the main reasons why there is no distinctly separate canon of anti-Brahminical Dalit literature in Bangla.

Modern Bengali literature written after 1860 (the period known as the Bengal Renaissance) owes much to the European literary forms as a cultural effect of British colonialism and the diverse experiments with literary forms in Bangla language by a host of both well and less-known writers took Bengali literature to its present height. The Partition of Bengal, and, more importantly, the subsequent birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation state in 1971, contributed substantially to the division of Bengali literature into two — literature written by West Bengal (one of India's state-provinces) writers and the literature written by East Pakistan/Bangladesh writers. Due to the 'Islamization' of polity in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) after 1947, Dalit people were mostly seen as a 'Hindu minority', and millions of Dalit started migrating to West Bengal as refugees. Post-Partition communal riots initiated the refugee influx from East Pakistan to West Bengal and this continued for the next three decades, even after the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. This demographic change, resultantly, contributed to shift the fulcrum

of the Dalit literary movement from 'East' to West Bengal. What we mean by modern Bangla Dalit literature today is mainly a product of West Bengal, as the issue of casteism is obliquely related to Hindu religion and the Brahminical culture of the *Chaturvarna* system of the Hindu society.

In recent past, the rise of Dalit voices in West Bengal has drawn the attention of academicians. Shankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya rightly point this out in *Towards Social Change: Essays on Dalit Literature*:

In Bengal [West], the active literary movement centering round 'self-identity' started under the able leadership of *Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha*. The first annual convention of this association was held in Bhaina village of Nadia District in 1992. (5)

Though Bangla Dalit literature has a long history (starting from the first decade of the twentieth century)ⁱ, leading contemporary Bengali Dalit writers like Manoranjan Byapari, Anil Gharai, Mahitosh Biswas, Kalyani Thakur Chanral, Jatin Bala, Sunil Das, Manohar Mouli Biswas are quite less-known names to the academic 'elites', even in India. The guardians of Bengali academia have shown a strange indifference to Dalit literatures probably because they considered the caste-based literatures as something less dignified, lacking aesthetics and, therefore, less deserving of attention.

Dalit literature of Bengal is not something which can be labeled as protest literature or literature of victimhood. It also substantially contributes to "provide schemes to uplift the Dalit people from a highly debased condition of life" (Singha and Acharya 6). Dalit autobiographical literature is basically a poetics of pain, centering round the politics of socio-cultural exclusion on the issues of caste, class, poverty and illiteracy — emancipation of the Dalit identity and a quest for social equality being the two immediate demands.

In Bengali Dalit literature there is no proper Dalit autobiography prior to the publication of the first part of Manoranjan Byapari's *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* (2012), although many scholars consider Baby Halder's *Aalo Aandhari* (2004) as the first one. But one should keep in mind that Baby Halder's autobiography was first published in Hindi and then the Bangla version came out in a Kolkata-based periodicalⁱⁱ, before it was published as a book. Considering the degree of suffering and caste-discrimination, Baby's personal narrative is much restricted in scope when compared to Byapari's autobiography. Martine van Woerkens is right when she finds Baby's narrator persona more a "female subaltern" than a Dalit and describes the range of her narrative as something limited and 'psychological': "The narrator's interest is directed towards the hard core of her existence: the family drama, her relationships with others and the enigmatic powers of her inner life" (2016: 233). I feel imperative here to mention Manohar Mouli Biswas, whose autobiography *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki* (2013) which chronicles his early life as a child labourer, his struggle and his days as an accomplished activist of Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha in a moving way. Biswas' testimony has been translated into English, with the title *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal*.

In Manoranjan Byapari's autobiography, the harsh reality of Dalit life and the exemplary struggle of a Bengali Dalit to establish an identity find eloquent expression: "Manoranjan Byapari's identity as a writer rests on his Dalit interpellation" (Dasgupta 128). Though in his article entitled "An Absent-minded Casteism", Dwaipayana Sen remarks that "Byapari is sceptical, however, of the mere acquisition of political power and no proponent of a solely caste-based analysis of society or identitarian fundamentalism" (116). In his *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*, Byapari voices against the impotent political system which failed to uplift the condition of the Dalits in the State. Sometimes Byapari speaks like a militant, who wants to demolish the deceptive, discriminatory system controlled by some hypocrite left-wing political leaders at that time and, like a

raging ruthless murderer, he even wants to kill, all the people who are incarnations of injustice, hatred and humiliation.

At the end of the second part of his autobiography, Byapari's sardonic humour related to the meaning of his name ('Manoranjan' is a Bengali noun meaning 'entertainment'), makes clear the principle and purpose behind his writing: "My name is Manoranjan, but none of my writing is meant for entertainment" (*ICJ* 2: 395). In several of his stories published earlier, Byapari used a significant fictional alter ego: *Jivan*, meaning 'life'. Manoranjan Byapari was fighter, something that becomes evident as he wears four rings on four of his left hand fingers, on each of which is depicted a Bangla alphabetical letter ultimately forming a complete Bangla word: *ji-ji-bi-sha*, which means 'an extremely strong urge to live'. This urge to live led the former illiterate rickshaw-puller, to the world of publication. Mahasweta Devi, the eminent litterateur, after noticing his talent, published his first short autobiographical piece in her magazine *Bartika*. Byapari recounts: "Entitled *Rickshaw Chalai*, it finds its place in the pages of January-March issue of *Bartika* magazine in 1981" (*ICJ* 1: 208)ⁱⁱⁱ. It is Byapari's strong will to win over his situation, his *jijibisha* that brought the writer out of an impoverished rickshaw-puller:

I had sent five short stories written under the pen-name '*jijibisha*' to five different magazines — *Hatiyar*, *Runner*, *Lok-Biggyan*, *Srisikkha* and *Bangabarta*. All the magazines published my stories. After this I achieved sky-kissing confidence. I can do, can do. I will do, will do... (*ICJ* 1: 209)

Born into a penurious Dalit family at Turukkhali village near Pirichpur in East Pakistan's Barisal district in 1950 or in 1951, Byapari recounts in his narrative: "Both my parents were simple folks. They could not tell me the exact year of my birth. Yet, I guess, it should be probably 1950-51. A few years ago, that severe devastation, which people call Partition happened" (*ICJ* 1: 28). When he was a child, due to the continuous communal riots, the family migrated from East Pakistan, to

the platform of Sealdah railway station in Kolkata and consecutive temporary rehabilitations in several refugee camps both in and outside of West Bengal. Witnessing hunger, malnutrition and helplessness all around, as a child Manoranjan was compelled to find his first employment as a cowherd in a farmer family near Siromanipur Refugee Camp in Bankura: “That time, a big, massive ‘nothingness’ encircled our life” (*ICJ* 1: 42). In 1960, the Byaparis moved to a refugee slum in South 24 Parganas, and built their first ‘home’— a shack made of bamboo and mud. The moving description of the next five years takes the reader through a wasteland of poverty and humiliation:

People say it is poverty, penury, insolvency. But all these soft, tender literary words fall short to describe our plight that time. Leave alone Bengali, probably in no language on earth, there are words which can represent that bleak time of our life. (*ICJ* 1: 48)

Along with the issue of caste, Manoranjan also acknowledges the issues of refugee rehabilitation and hatred associated with the cross-border politics of both East and West Bengals:

As we belong to the low-caste, Namasudra community, a group of so-called upper-caste people abuse us by calling us untouchables and Chandal. They spit at us with sheer hatred. Now, after reaching this country (India) as refugees, we face another abuse, just for the reason that we are born ‘there’— as ‘Baangal’. (*ICJ* 1: 51)

In his teens, Byapari realises that all refugees are not equal: class is no less important than caste in Kolkata’s urban setting. The turbulent time of 1965 teaches young Manoranjan to resist, at least for self-defence: during a communal clash, a gangster becomes mortally wounded by him, and in fear of being arrested, he leaves Kolkata for an unknown destination. After this, follows a harrowing description of his movements in Assam, Darjeeling, Lucknow and Kanpur in the autobiography.

Young Manoranjan returns to Calcutta on a summer morning in 1968 and starts working as a porter in a suburban railway station near Jadavpur and eventually gets involved in local political issues and clashes, becomes a goon and even starts drinking regularly. Though professionally he remains a rickshaw-puller his association with a local Naxalite leader makes him bold and desperate against the hypocrisies and injustices that surround him. Dreams of revolution provoke him to extremism, and the illiterate Manoranjan learns to use choppers, revolvers and hand-grenades, becoming a local gangster, and ultimately ending up in jail: “One day I found that I had reached that black tiny cell of jail after a long walk” (*ICJ* 1: 176). But this period of jail-life teaches Manoranjan the art of becoming a better human being, as he comes in contact with another prisoner who inspires him to enter the world of letters and words, from which he was barred since childhood. Showing him a sapling of a banyan tree, which was growing on the jail’s concrete boundary-wall, the middle-aged prisoner (Byapari does not mention his name, but calls him ‘my teacher’) tells Byapari to struggle amidst adversities. When young Manoranjan asks him: “Is it possible to start learning at this age?”, he asserts: “Possible! There is no age-limit for learning. There is a proverb in Hindi that says ‘It is only morning when you wake up’” (*ICJ* 1: 184). The jail’s learning activity starts with a small stick, which is used as pencil and the floor of the jail-yard as paper. Noticing the perseverance of young Manoranjan, the toughest constable of the jail also provides him with chalk. The words of his middle-aged ‘teacher’ inside the jail make Manoranjan conscious of his transformation:

“You are walking now. Tell me, what is the destination? It is from darkness to light. In every step you are getting closer to the country of sunrise. You are advancing very fast. Continue writing, write on, and do not stop.” (*ICJ* 1: 194).

After getting bail, Manoranjan returns to his profession of rickshaw-pulling though he becomes a transformed:

Books satisfy the appetite of the mind, but who would extinguish the fire of hunger inside the stomach? Situation compels me to return to my old profession. I start rickshaw-pulling again. Previously, I used to hide a chopper under the seat of my rickshaw...Now books replace the chopper...The sacred touch of books transforms me into some different being. (*ICJ* 1: 201)

As the wheels of Manoranjan's rickshaw turn, so does his luck. By sheer chance, the eminent writer-activist Mahasweta Devi hires Manoranjan's rickshaw, and from a casual conversation during the ride, she comes to know about his reading habit and persuades him to write about his own life. But quite soon, political betrayal and opposition from the ruling party's political cadres force him to flee with his family to Narendrapur and find employment as the night-guard in a factory. Meanwhile he married and became the father of two children. The rest of Byapari's family—his brother and parents went to the refugee camp at 'Dandakaranya' in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh a long time ago, and by now his brother has left the camp, finds him and calls him to join the family in Chhattisgarh. Poverty and an uncertain future compel Byapari to move to Paralkot in Chhattisgarh. This move puts him in close contact with the eminent Bengali social activist Shankar Guha Niyogi. This episode, like the previous one, is also a formative one, as it teaches Byapari the ethical values of life and his reliance on political activism in support of labourers, working-class people and landless, poor, tribal people increases substantially. Shankar Guha Niyogi's influence transforms him ideologically. Despite his impoverished condition, Manoranjan continues to write amid several assignments of 'Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha', and most of his writings concentrate on the poor, marginal people of Chhattisgarh. After Guha Niyogi is murdered as a consequence of political betrayal, the association breaks up and, after some time, Byapari decides to come to Kolkata for a couple of days with one of his acquaintances of Chhattisgarh in September 1997, which initiates his period of final settlement in the 'city of joy': "If

Kenaram did not insist on me coming back to Kolkata ... my entire life would be futile” (*ICJ* 1: 308). Even though Byapari does not mention the exact date and year of his return to Kolkata, the reader easily discovers it to be the 5th of September of 1997, as he reports: “We have just reached the city today, Mother Teresa died on this very day” (*ICJ* 1: 309).

The first volume of Byapari’s *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* describes his time from 1997 to 2011 within sixty pages, perhaps because he did not think of writing another volume of his personal narrative due to economic constraint. Later he realizes that he should write a complete one: “I will have to publish one book. A writer, who does not have a book completely authored by himself, is marked in the world of letters as someone to be pitied” (*ICJ* 1: 329). An almost unknown publisher cheats him of his hard-earn money, but ultimately he publishes his first book entitled ‘*Britter Sesh Porbo*’ (‘The Final Curve of the Circle’), which contains twenty-two short stories. Byapari confesses in his second volume that he killed his older self of Madan Dutta, and thus it becomes a tale of transformation, only comparable to that of the great sage Valmiki, the author of Ramayana and his former self, the bandit Ratnakar: “If Madan does not die, how would Manoranjan be born? The seat of Valmiki would just be on the dead body of Ratnakar” (*ICJ2*: 36).

The epoch-making non-fiction, ‘Is There Dalit Writing in Bangla?’ written by Manoranjan Byapari, (after being inspired by Meenakshi Mukherjee who translated and edited the essay), has been published in Volume XLII of the Journal *Economic and Political Weekly* 2007. It investigates the etymological root of the word ‘Dalit’ and its application in relation to Bangla literature. A self-schooled writer, who has learnt the Bangla alphabet in his middle age inside Alipore Jail, by profession a rickshaw-puller and later a cook in a boarding school, ‘can’ write a substantial non-fiction related to the existence of ‘Dalit’ writing in Bangla! Several national newspapers and electronic media have already celebrated the rise of a Dalit writer in Bangla, many words have spent

in seminars, conferences and workshops, but is there anybody who has looked into Byapari's source of energy behind this steady, uncompromising rise? Byapari himself answers this question in the second volume of *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*:

The source of my energy is —my smashed life. I am staying on the lowest step of the stair. Who could degrade me more? I am fearless as I have nothing to lose. I tell them—I am the child of a poor, deprived Dalit refugee family who migrated from the 'other' Bengal. I have spent my childhood as a cowherd. After growing up a little, I became the table-boy of tea-shop. After coming of age I have taken several professions of porter, rickshaw-puller, sweeper, truck cleaner, night-guard—have even committed crime due to poverty and hunger. Life has offered me no chance to learn in a school but taken me away to the dark cell of the jail. I have learnt the Bangla alphabet scratching a stick on the floor of the jail. Then, incidentally, I have become a writer. More than ten novels, nearly a hundred short stories, approximately twenty-five essays and some five to seven poems have been published till date. But I have become famous after the publication of my autobiography— *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*. I don't know how rich it is in its literary and aesthetic value— but it contains Truth. Merciless, ruthless Truth. (*ICJ* 2: 327)

On the issue of aesthetics, Byapari shows no politically motivated rage, no ideological militancy against the upper caste, as evident in his candid confession of his first phone conversation with eminent Bengali poet Shankha Ghosh, who consented to be present in the Bangla Akademi on the occasion of the launch of the second volume of *Itibritte Chandal Jivan*: "The poet Shankha Ghosh has touched my art. My art has become immortal. My life closely associated with my art—has become immortal. Every materiality on earth counts an iota before immortality" (*ICJ* 2: 344). The issue of 'touch' is very significant here as it motivates a Dalit in becoming a writer. The fire that tempered Byapari's rage, borrowed the spark of resistance from the issues of

caste, class and 'Dalitism'— as evident in the use of the word '*Chandal*' in the title of his personal narrative, does not affect the aesthetics of the 'writer' Manoranjan Byapari. A greater realization dawns upon him, as he confesses in a rather philosophical manner: "Who knows why, now I find the words of my friend Bappa to be too true—'Not class, neither caste, nor religion—only two types of human beings populate the world—the good ones and the bad ones'" (*ICJ* 2: 340). The writer Manoranjan Byapari transcends the barrier of caste and class—his aesthetics being the songs of humanity's glory.

Manoranjan becomes lachrymose, as he recounts the contribution of Mahasweta Devi to his career as a Dalit writer. When he asks—"What else has she done for me apart from publishing the only story named '*Rickshaw Chalai*' written merely with eleven or twelve hundred words?" (*ICJ* 2: 395), it is not ingratitude but the sentimental cry of a Dalit arising out of the frustrated expectations. One must not forget that the 'Foreword' of Byapari's autobiography's first volume is written by Mahasweta Devi. Furthermore, it is Mahasweta Devi, who decided that *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* was autobiographical: "My request, everyone please read his *autobiography*, and make others read it" (9) [my emphasis]. In the second part, quite amazingly, the publisher, Pranab Kumar Chakraborty does not use the word 'autobiography' in his 'Note'. To him, it should be considered as an autobiographical "novel" in the world of Bangla folk literature, in which the writer has already surpassed "the time of Samaresh Basu" (16). Whatever it may be, 'autobiography' or 'autobiographical novel', Manoranjan Byapari's *Itibritte Chandal Jivan* is certainly a saga of desperate struggle, an aesthetic attempt to earn an identity in the face of a million odds, an exemplary chronicle of becoming a being who ultimately secures a place in the world of Indian literature.

Byapari grows morose when talking about the issue of his economic security, as he is jobless now. While interviewing him during an International conference on Dalit Literature, hosted by Delhi University in December 2015, when he asked me-

Why don't they (the State) use me to educate the illiterate people in the 'Sarvasiksha Mission' (the Government Project called 'Education for All') or even to educate the prisoners in the jails thus providing me with a pleasure along with the financial security of a job? Am I not an exemplary learner to them, who himself started with the alphabet in the jail quite late, but reached his goal of becoming a writer too early, compared to many others around us? (Personal Interview by the author, 2015)

- I remained speechless. The literary world has not made him feel honoured, the State has not yet made him feel secure, but still Manoranjan Byapari holds his head high and becomes an exemplary Dalit writer. The couple of pages at the end of the final volume of the autobiography leave the poignant note of insecurity of an aged Dalit writer, who is more concerned with the politics of deprivation than with the identity of a literary artist:

I write, and some people continue questioning over my aesthetics, my use of punctuations, and *not* the subject matter. They advise me on how to write in a more entertaining manner. They even criticize by pointing out the absence of certain literary merits in my writings. They are never touched by the essence of my writing—the far cry of an ever-deprived being (*ICJ* 2: 396).

The very 'being' of Manoranjan Byapari, particularly the process of his 'becoming' looms large over the identity of a writer, and Manoranjan himself makes it clear when he recounts that in literary seminars and conferences "none talk about my literature, none seems to be interested to hear from me anything about literature", but mostly the interest centre round questions related to his "personal life"; "All seem to have come with a single curiosity—how did this man, being an aged learner himself, can write volumes of literature?" (*ICJ* 2: 396). The ability of an aged Dalit in 'becoming' a published author, the energy of a rickshaw-puller securing the identity of a writer constitutes the marvellous in the man. The self of the 'Chandal' reigns supreme — above his art, sometimes even above his life.

A Note

All references to the original Bengali texts have been translated by me. I have tried my best in making a literal translation to keep intact the sentiment and connotative weightage of Manoranjan Byapari's Bengali words. Any change of meaning is absolutely unintentional.

Abbreviations used: *ICJ 1= Itibritte Chandal Jivan*, Volume I

ICJ 2= Itibritte Chandal Jivan, Volume II

Endnotes

- i The rise of Dalit literature in Bangla mainly took place with the *Namasudra* (a particular low-caste and low-class peasant identity) movement soon followed by the *Rajbanshi* people at the very beginning of the twentieth century. The most important literary periodical that could be cited in this context is *Namah Sudra Darpan* (1909). In Post-Partition Bengal (West Bengal), issues like communal riots, Hindu refugee influx, rehabilitation problems and the left-liberal political ideology of the State somehow pushed aside the Dalit literary movement's caste issue. On this issue, the observation of Prof. Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury is a politically correct one: "Within this political context, the Dalit became 'refugees'—or the refugees became the new Dalit"(1). But from the end of 1980s, after the publication of the Mandal Commission Report and its eventual acceptance by Prime Minister Viswanath Pratap Singh, the Dalit people of Bengal started demanding their constitutional right of equality.
- ii Baby Halder's *Aalo Aandhari* (2002) was first published in Hindi, which was basically a translated and edited version of the original Bangla, done by Professor Prabodh Kumar —grandson of the eminent Hindi writer Munshi Premchand. It was published by Sanjay Bharti of Roshani Publishers. Later, a Kolkata-based literary magazine called *Bhasha Bandhan* started serializing the narrative in Bangla before it came out in book form.

- iii Manoranjan Byapari's first ever composition, the short autobiographical piece entitled '*Rickshaw Chalai*' ('I Pull Rickshaw'), which was published in Mahasweta Devi's magazine *Bartika* in 1981, was written under a pen-name Madan Dutta.

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Eliza Fay: An Unusual Memsahib

Sindhu Menon

The journals, memoirs and letters kept by Englishwomen in India have long been acknowledged as major contributions to travel writing and as important documents in interpreting India to the West. They also, however, to use Ketaki Kushari Dyson's terms, "belong to the literature of self-revelation" (3). These texts can be seen as part of "serial autobiography" (Fothergill 4), that is, life-writing in a significant sense. This essay examines one such text, Eliza Fay's *Original Letters from India, 1779-1815*. There is no lack, of course, of similar material produced by male writers, but the writings by women introduce new complexities at both gender and political levels and also yield certain unique insights.

Eliza Fay's position was not that of the conventional Memsahib. To be sure, her first trip to India was with her husband who had secured a post at Calcutta. It was not a well-omened journey, as the Fays and their fellow passengers are captured by Hyder Ali's troops and endure more than a month of confinement and hardships. Despite this and the

dissolving of her marriage this intrepid lady later made three voyages from England to Calcutta by herself. And she did not come as the dependant of a husband, but rather earned her own living by setting up a draper's shop. There is very little recorded detail about these last voyages she made alone. This essay is concerned with the first and perhaps most eventful trip..

While all Englishwomen in India belonged inevitably to the ruling class elite as opposed to the 'natives' it needs to be remembered that English society in India was itself deeply fragmented on class lines. Eliza Fay was an adventuress with no money, no connections or institutional backing in India In sharp contrast to most other writers of the pre-Mutiny period, Fay also had to undergo a humiliating imprisonment by an independent 'native' power under Hyder Ali.

Despite her terrible experience of captivity and several other misfortunes which included legal separation while in India from her feckless husband, Fay seems to have been unable to resist the call of India since she made a total of five visits to Calcutta, and died and was buried there in 1816. An indomitable spirit is indicated in the Preface to her published letters, where she refuses to "solicit the pity of readers by wearisome retrospect or painful complaints" (Fay 29).

She pays magnificent tribute to the British society in Calcutta, despite all the vicissitudes of her experiences there:

To the inhabitants of Calcutta, she begs more particularly to render her thanks. Long acquaintance, high esteem and unfeigned affection call for this peculiar tribute. Five times has she visited this city, under various circumstances and with different feelings, yet never had cause to regret the length or the dangers of the voyage, secure of ever meeting here all that could increase the joys of social life, in its happiest moments or soothe the hours of languishment in the days of adversity. (30)

It is worth noting that for Mrs. Fay, the “inhabitants of Calcutta” meant the British population there, the Indians themselves were invisible servants except on occasions where they rudely obtruded themselves.

Very rarely does Fay comment on the habits or practices of the ‘natives’ and she seems to have no interest in religious affairs or conversion, though one does find a solitary remark on ‘heathen’ practices:

We had a distant view of the pagodas of *Juggernaut*, - three large pyramidal buildings which are some very famous temples among the Hindoos, who there worship the images of *Juggernaut* and a splendid establishment of the priesthood attendant on the idols in the manner of the ancient heathens. I am credibly assured that at stated intervals, the principal idol is taken out in an enormous car, with a great number of wheels, beneath which his votaries prostrate themselves with the most undaunted resolution; firmly persuaded that by thus sacrificing their lives, they shall pass immediately after death into a state of everlasting felicity. Well may we say that life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel, since in regions where its sacred influence is unknown or unattended to, we see such gross acts of folly and superstition as these, sanctioned by authority: may it please the Almighty dispenser of events to hasten the period of their emancipation, that all mankind may hail each other as brothers and we may be brought together as one fold, under one shepherd. (171)

Mrs. Fay, a comparatively early traveler, was far too much concerned with the mere mechanics of survival to care much for the ‘native’ population or the Indian environment either in terms of aesthetic or spiritual concern. Her attitude is in sharp contrast to somewhat later travelers in the same century like Harriet Tytler who was in India from 1828-1858 and who seems to have come equipped with a keen missionary sensibility:

I said to myself, when I grow up to be a woman, I will save all the little starving children and bring them up as Christians, an aspiration which never left me until thirty-three years later, when God in his goodness permitted me to carry out my heart's desire. (Tytler 10)

When the 'natives' do come into Mrs. Fay's ken, it is mostly as servants with whom one has to be constantly on guard to avoid being cheated. A very domestic account of housekeeping is provided for which one may look in vain in male writers' accounts:

I have commenced housekeeping and am arranging my establishment, which is no little trouble in a country where the servants will not do a single thing but that for which you expressly engage neither them, nor even that willingly. I just now asked a man to place a small table near me; he began to bawl as loud as he could for the bearers to come and help him. "Why don't you do it yourself?" said I, rising as I spoke to assist. *Oh I no English, I Bengalman. I no estrong like English; one, two, three Bengal men can't do like one Englishman.* (178)

The 'Bengalman' could very well have been seeing to it that he is not overworked, an example of Homi Bhabha's "sly civility" (1994, 95). Mrs. Fay seems quite aware of this possibility but enjoys pitting her wits against the servants.

It is an indication of the somewhat exaggerated notion of British supremacy in India that prevailed in England at this time that Mrs. Fay just cannot comprehend that she is being held captive. She indignantly and incredulously exclaims:

"It is true that we were in the hands of the natives; but little did I imagine that, any power on this Continent, however independent, would have dared to treat *English* subjects with such cruelty as we experienced from them" (120).

There is no sense of camaraderie or fellowship among Mrs. Fay's fellow travelers, these are not organized officials going out to fill predetermined posts in India, but mercenaries and adventurers on the lookout for gain and there are several instances of petty squabbles, jealousies and backstabbing even when they are all imprisoned together. There is a pathetic account of a tea kettle which was sent specifically to Mrs. Fay by a gentleman sympathetic to her captive state, being forcibly seized and kept "by the other party" so that she has to make her tea in a bowl!

After all their vicissitudes when the Fays finally reach Calcutta, they rub shoulders with the great; Warren Hastings himself is far above them, but Eliza does make and keep up an acquaintance with Mrs. Hastings. Her husband, on account of wanting to join the Bar in Calcutta, is naturally introduced to the Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, who at one point was expected to be impeached along with Hastings. We get brief vignettes of events of great political significance, for example the duel between Hastings and the first in Council, Mr. Francis. Eliza watches from the sidelines and remarks that she has, "being unacquainted with the particulars, as little right as inclination to make any comments on the subject" (185). That, however, does not prevent her from adding the details:

I must relate what has occupied a great deal of attention for some days past: no less than a duel between the Governor General and Mr. Francis; there were two shots fired, and the Governor's second fire took place; he immediately ran up to his antagonist and expressed his sorrow for what had happened, which I dare say was sincere, for he is said to be a very amiable man. (185)

As always, however, the lives of little people are affected by the actions of the great and Mrs. Fay was to experience this in person. Her husband had managed to alienate the Chief Justice, wreck his

professional chances, destroy most social acquaintance and had found time to father an illegitimate child. He manages to get caught up in one of the major intrigues of the time:

The acquisition of a new Patron has raised his [Mrs. Fay's husband] spirits, Colonel Watson, a man of superior abilities and an immense fortune has long been a determined opposer of Government, and the bitter enemy of Sir Elijah Impey, against whom he has set an impeachment on foot, to prosecute which it is requisite that a confidential agent should serve the process on the defendant here and proceed to England with the necessary documents, Mr. F- has contrived to get himself appointed to this office. (198)

Frustrated Mrs. Fay endures until she is made aware of his illicit liaison and then demands a legal separation, choosing to remain in India. A brave choice indeed, especially at the time, but then the image of Eliza Fay we get throughout the text is that of a courageous, strong and determined personality.

Mrs. Fay had earlier recorded her husband's first attempt to get admitted to the Bar and casually dismissed the political undercurrents as being of no importance to them, little did she know how ironic her words would prove.

On Mr. Fay's expressing some apprehensions lest his having come out without leave of the East India Company might throw obstacles in the way of his admission to the Bar here, Sir Elijah indignantly exclaimed

"No Sir, had you dropped from the clouds with such documents, we would admit you. The Supreme Court is independent and will never endure to be dictated to, by any body of men whose claims are not enforced by superior authority. It is nothing to us whether you *had or had not* permission from the Court of

Directors, to proceed to this settlement; you come to us as an authenticated English Barrister, and as such, we shall on the first day of the next term admit you to *our Bar*.”.... Do you not admire the high tone in which Sir. E- delivers his sentiments? There exists, it seems, a strong jealousy between the Government and the Supreme Court, lest either should encroach on the pressures of the other. ..I merely mention this *en passant*, for it regards not us, let them quarrel, or agree; so the business of the Court be not impeded we cannot suffer. (177)

Whatever else she was, Mrs. Fay was certainly no prophetess!

Eliza Fay had made enough friends on her own, so that she was not left without a roof over her head after her husband’s departure. But her dependent situation made it all the more necessary that she maintain the strict codes of hierarchy among the British in India and her new friends make sure she knew how to behave. Mrs. Hastings, of course, was the First Lady of the settlement, and Eliza’s education in connection to the attention to be paid to this exalted personage is vivid and entertaining. It is typical of Eliza Fay that she complies, but records it in a droll fashion:

Mrs. Hastings was of the party; she came in late, and happened to place herself on the opposite side of the room, beyond a speaking distance, so strange to tell, I quite forgot she was there! After some time had elapsed, my observant friend Mrs. Jackson, who had been impatiently watching my looks, asked if I had paid my respects to the Lady Governess? I answered in the negative, having had no opportunity, as she had not chanced to look towards me when I was prepared to do so. “Oh, replied the kind old lady, you must fix your eyes on her and never take them off till she notices you; Miss Chantry has done this; and so have I; it is absolutely necessary to avoid giving offence.” I followed her prudent advice and was soon honoured with a

complacent glance, which I returned as became me by a most respectful bend. (192-93)

No early account of British life in India would have been complete without an account of the custom of *suttee*. Mrs. Fay also provides the requisite account, but wryly imagines the practice transferred to England and reveals herself as a proto-feminist:

And first for that horrible custom of widows burning themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands; the fact is indubitable, but I have never had an opportunity of witnessing the various incidental ceremonies, nor have I ever seen any European who had been present at them. I cannot suppose that the usage originated in the superior tenderness, and ardent attachment of Indian wives towards their spouses, since the same tenderness and ardour would doubtless extend to his offspring and prevent them from exposing the innocent survivors to the miseries attendant on an orphan state, and they would clearly see that to live and cherish those pledges of affection would be the most rational and natural way of showing their regard for both husband and children. I apprehend that as personal fondness can have no part here at all, since all matches are made between the parents of the parties who are betrothed to each other at too early a period for choice to be consulted, *this is entirely a political scheme intended to insure the care and good offices of wives to their husbands, who have not failed in most countries to invent a sufficient number of rules to render the weaker sex totally subservient to their authority.* I cannot avoid smiling when I hear gentlemen bring forward the conduct of the Hindoo women as a test of superior character, *since I am well aware that so much are we the slaves of habit everywhere that were it necessary—for a woman's reputation to burn herself in England, many a one who has accepted a husband merely for the sake of an establishment, who*

has lived with him without affection; perhaps thwarted his views, dissipated his fortune and rendered his life uncomfortable to its close, would yet mount the funeral pyre with all imaginable decency and die with heroic fortitude.
(202-3. My italics)

Mrs. Fay naturally comes into contact with ‘natives’ for various domestic chores and while repeating some of the usual complaints of idleness and dishonesty, she still retains her good humour and gives an occasional, though slightly patronizing, compliment. Commenting on her brief stay in Madras, she both describes and subverts oriental luxury, the European lifestyle and the native Hindoos come in for both praise and blame:

Madras IS what I conceived Grand Cairo to be, before I was so unlucky as to be undeceived. This idea is still further heightened by the intermixture of inhabitants; by seeing Asiatic splendor, combined with European taste around you on every side, under the forms of flowing drapery, stately palanquins, elegant carriages, innumerable servants, and all the pomp and circumstance of luxurious ease and unbounded wealth. It is true that this glittering surface is here and there tinged with the somber hue that more or less colours every condition of life; - you behold Europeans, languishing under various complaints which they call incidental to the climate, an assertion it would ill become a stranger like myself to controvert, but respecting which I am a little skeptical; because I see very plainly that the same mode of living, would produce the same effects, even “in the hardy regions of the North.” You may likewise perceive that human nature has its faults and follies everywhere, and that *black* rogues are to the full as common as white ones, but in my opinion more impudent. On your arrival you are pestered with Dubashees, and servants of all kinds who crouch to you as if they were already your slaves, but who will cheat you in every

possible way; though in fact there is no living without one of the former to manage your affairs as a kind of steward, and you may deem yourself fortunate if you procure one in this land of pillagers, who will let nobody cheat you but himself. *I wish these people would not vex one with their tricks, for there is something in the mild countenances and gentle manners of the Hindoos that interests me exceedingly.* (162-3 My italics)

Mrs. Fay proved a good manager by keeping her native servants on their toes. Her market-man actually leaves, declaring there is no profit to be had in staying with *her*, as in most other places, he could make a rupee a day, but with Mrs. Fay even an *anna* is detected and must be accounted for. She has a good grasp of what inexperienced Europeans extravagance can lead to and states it very clearly:

I assure you much caution is requisite to avoid running deeply into debt – the facility of obtaining credit is beyond what I could have imagined; the European shopkeepers are always ready to send in goods; and the Baniyans are so anxious to get into employment, that they outbid each other. One says “master better take me, I will advance five thousand rupees” – another offers seven, and perhaps a third ten thousand: a Company’s servant will always find numbers ready to support his extravagance. It is not uncommon to see *writers* within a few months after their arrival dashing away on the course *four in hand*: allowing for the inconsiderateness of youth, is it surprising if many become deeply embarrassed? Several have been pointed out to me, who in the course of two or three years have involved themselves almost without hope of redemption. The interest of money here being twelve per Cent, and the Baniyan taking care to secure bonds for whatever he advances, making up the account yearly and adding the sum due for interest, his thoughtless *master*, as he calls him, but in fact his slave, soon finds his debt doubled,

and dares not complain unless he has the means of release which alas! are denied him. (182)

Even Edmund Burke, making much the same point in the course of his speeches during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, could not have had a better grasp of detail:

The banyan extorts, robs, plunders and then gives him [the British Administrator] just what share of the spoil he pleases to ... while we are here boasting of the British power in the East, we are in perhaps more than half our service nothing but the inferior, miserable instruments of the tyranny which the lowest part of the natives of India exercise. (Burke 134)

Mrs. Fay could well have claimed: “I told you so!”

Eliza Fay is basically a survivor. In every situation, she tries to be a lady, but if it is a question of the survival of the fittest, she is quite ready to fight it out. Her account of meals on board ship among uncongenial companions are both amusing and revealing:

During the first fortnight of our voyage my foolish complaisance stood in my way at table; but I soon learnt our genteel maxim was “catch as catch can” – the longest arm fared best; and you cannot imagine what a good scrambler I am become, A dish once seized, it is my care to make use of my good fortune; and now provisions running very short, we are grown very savage; two or three of us fighting for a bone; for there is no respect of persons. (108)

Mrs. Fay is capable of singular magnanimity and generosity on occasion as this extract from her second trip to Calcutta shows. She could hardly be blamed for the way things turned out:

I took that opportunity of sending home for education, a natural child of my husband’s whose birth had caused me bitter affliction; yet I could not abandon him, though he was deserted by his

natural protector. They accordingly embarked on the 5th of September 1786, on the *Severn Packet* Captain Kidd, with every prospect of a favourable passage; but on the 9th, owing to the rapidity of the current, the vessel struck on a sand, called the Broken Ground, just below Ingellee, and every European on board unhappily perished, except the second officer in whose arms the poor little boy expired. (239)

Eliza Fay, unlike many later writers – Mariam Graham, Anne Katherine Elwood, Emily Eden— does not give descriptions of entertainments or parties; her attitude seems to be one of indifference and boredom:

I shall not attempt to describe these splendid entertainments further than by saying they were in the highest style of magnificence: in fact such grand parties so resemble each other, that a particular detail would be unnecessary and even tiresome. (192)

She takes a keen interest in the appearance and attire of native women and, though criticizing them for too much artifice, wittily accepts that they may well have reason for this:

The Hindoo ladies are never seen abroad; when they go out their carriages are closely covered with curtains, so that one has little chance of satisfying curiosity. I once saw two apparently very beautiful women: they use so much art however, as renders it difficult to judge what claim they really have to that appellation – their whole time is taken up in decorating their persons: - the hair – eyelids – eyebrows – teeth – hands and nails, all undergo certain processes to render them more completely fascinating; nor can one seriously blame their having recourse to these, or the like artifices – the motive being to secure the affections of a husband, or to counteract the plans of a rival. (207)

Two domestic triumphs which Mrs. Fay records with glee are worth noting:

In England, if servants are dishonest we punish them, or turn them away in disgrace, and their fate proves, it may be hoped, a warning to others; but these wretches have no sense of shame. I will give you an instance or two of their conduct, that you may perceive how enviably I am situated. My Khansaman (or house steward) brought in a charge of a gallon of milk and thirteen eggs, for making scarcely a pint of custard; this was so bare faced a cheat, that I refused to allow it, on which he gave me warning. I sent for another, and, after I had hired him, “now said I, take notice friend, I have enquired into the market price of every article that enters my house and will submit to no imposition; you must therefore agree to deliver in a just account to me every morning,” – what reply do you think he made? Why he demanded double wages; you may be sure I dismissed him, and have since forgiven the first but not until he had *salaamed* to my foot, that is placed his right hand under my foot, - this is the most abject token of submission (alas! how much better should I like a little common honesty,) I know him to be a rouse, and so are they all, but as he understands me now, he will perhaps be induced rather more moderation in his attempts to defraud. At first, he used to charge me with twelve ounces of butter a day, for each person; now he grants that the consumption is only four ounces. So you see what a terrible creature I am! I dare say you never gave me credit for being so close. Judge whether I have not sufficient employment among these harpies? Feeling as I do the necessity of a reasonable economy. (180-81)

The second account is even more triumphant as it involves taking on religious custom:

Since I wrote last we have had a good deal of trouble with our Mahometan servants, on account of an old custom; not one of them would touch a plate on which pork had been laid – so that whenever we had any at our table our plates remained, till the cook or his assistant came up to change them. This being represented as a religious prejudice, I felt it right to give way, however ridiculous it might appear, in fact it was an inconvenience we felt in common with the whole settlement, except the gentlemen of the Army who had long before emancipated themselves from any such restraint; finding this to be really the case, the whole of the European inhabitants agreed to insist upon their servants doing the same as those of the officers at the Fort, or quitting their places, They chose the latter alternative, and as their prejudices run very high in all religious matters, we were in doubt whether they would not prefer suffering the greatest extremity rather than touch the very vessels which contained this abhorred food, - but behold in about four days they came back again requesting to be reinstated; and acknowledging that the only penalty incurred by touching the plates was the necessity of bathing afterwards: from this you may judge of their excessive idleness; however all now goes on well and we hear no more of their objections. (186)

Mrs. Eliza Fay, despite all her zeal for economizing, did not compromise on the quantity of food consumed. Her account of a meal, accompanied by prices arouses deep admiration for the British digestion. If this was the standard fare in a not at all wealthy family, it is hardly to be wondered at if a long stay in India wrecked many European constitutions:

We were frequently told in England you know, that the heat in Bengal destroyed the appetite, I must own that I never yet saw any proof of that; on the contrary I cannot help thinking that I

never saw an equal quantity of victuals consumed. We dine too at two o' clock, in the very heat of the day. At this moment Mr. F- is looking out with a hawk's eye, for his dinner; and though still much of an invalid, I have no doubt of being able to pick a bit myself. I will give you our bill of fare and the general prices of things. A soup, a roast fowl, curry and rice, a mutton pie, a fore quarter of a lamb, a rice pudding, tarts, very good cheese, fresh churned butter, fine bread, excellent Madeira (that is expensive, but eatables are very cheap) – a whole sheep costs but two rupees; a lamb one rupee, six good fowls or ducks ditto – twelve pigeons ditto – twelve pounds of bread ditto – two pounds butter ditto; and a joint of veal ditto – good cheese two months ago sold at the enormous price of three or four rupees per pound, but now you may buy it for one and a half – English claret sells at this time for sixty rupees a dozen. There's a price for you! I need not say that much of it will not be seen at our table; now and then we are forced to produce it, but very seldom. (181-82)

Mrs. Fay is indeed bitter about her husband and when Mrs. Hastings refuses to sympathise with the sufferings Mrs. Fay had on the journey because she supposedly undertook it out of mere curiosity – she makes her real reasons very plain in her letter home:

Alas! Mrs. H- could not know what you are well acquainted with, that I undertook the journey with a view of preserving my husband from destruction, for had I not accompanied him, and in many instances restrained his extravagance and dissipated habits, he would never, never, I am convinced, have reached Bengal, but have fallen a wretched sacrifice to them on the way, or perhaps through the violence of his temper been involved in some dispute which he was too ready to provoke. (175)

This is not mere bravado: we have numerous instances where Mrs. Fay has recovered property her husband had carelessly mislaid, nipped many a promising quarrel in the bud and generally nurse-maided him from England to Bengal. She is brief but disgusted when she finally writes about their separation: You my dear sister, who know better than anyone what exertions I have used, and what sacrifices *vainly* made for this most ungrateful of beings, will not be surprised to find that even *my* patience was not I have proof against this last outrage. (201)

And indeed, she had cause to be disappointed – the only explanation for such a woman linking her lot to a man like Mr. Fay is that he represented her passport to Bengal, of which she had very high expectations: “we shall collect our share of gold mohurs, as well as our neighbours.” (183) Of course she did not collect too many gold mohurs, but the key feature of Eliza Fay that comes through loud and clear in her epistolary life-writing is that of gumption. On her later visits to India, she no longer mingled in high circles, she entered trade on her own account, was considerably in debt when she died and, indeed, even the project of publishing her letters was undertaken for the purpose of benefitting her creditors. But the indomitable spirit and acute wit of this early British pioneer in India is evident in whatever state she found herself in

Fay was exceptional in many ways. In the first place she was not coming to a safely established British controlled India. She was one of the few women who were in India before the 1857 Mutiny and the native princes still held sway over vast areas. Next, she was one of the very few Englishwomen who came to India with business plans for survival. The most significant difference between Eliza Fay’s account and of those by Emily Eden, Isabella Fane and others, who came after the Mutiny had been crushed and British rule solidly established, is an attitudinal one. These ladies, with all possible convenience being provided for them, still harp on ‘going home’ as their primary refrain. There is not

a missed opportunity anywhere to articulate the troubles in India and constant yearnings to get the sojourn over with and go Home, Home of course being England. We do not hear this plaint in Fay's writing. Travelling and writing about the colony was a way of transgressing the gender norms and reflect upon humanist ideology. She misses her family, but every trip she makes to England is followed by a return to India. Calcutta was 'Home' for Eliza Fay, the Unusual Memsahib.

Endnote

- ¹ Hyder Ali, the Sultan on of Mysore, was one of the most prominent Indian rulers who strongly opposed the spread of British power.

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Crossing the Borders of Cultural experience: Cultural Significations of English Translations of Life-Narratives by Women

Sulfia S Santosh

The term life-narrative has been riddled with definitional issues as contemporary scholarship on self-referential writings strives for an inevitable higher understanding of the concept and practice of narrating a life. In this particular context, the term life-narrative will be used to refer to narratives in the first person which will include autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, journals and will exclude biographies from the study. Life-narratives have played a significant role in bridging the gaps in the grand narratives of history with regard to the women's question in the annals of the past. A review of the life-narratives by women is quintessential in unraveling the categories of 'experience' and 'reality' by acknowledging the impact of gender on 'lived' experience and reality. This manner of reviewing is vital to the feminist research on the documentation of Indian women's history. This sentiment is aptly expressed by the editors of The Personal Narratives Group in explaining the origins of their initiative and can be borrowed to fit the current research context:

Feminist theory emerges from and responds to the lives of women. The recovery and interpretation of women's lives have been central concerns of feminist scholarship from the earliest pioneering works to the present. Listening to women's voices, studying women's writings, and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Since feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyse the role and meaning of gender in those lives and in society, women's personal narratives are essential primary documents for feminist research. (4)

The two volumes, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, of *Women Writing in India* indicate that the country boasts of a strong and long tradition of women writing their lives. However, using these life-writing materials for historical, sociological and other theoretical purposes is more or less a twentieth century phenomenon. The Translation Project, the name heretofore used for the efforts by various Indian editors to translate life-narratives by women from regional languages into English, is an important part of this endeavour. Tanika Sarkar's *Words to Win – The Making of Amar Jiban: A Modern Autobiography*, Rimli Bhattacharya's *Amar Katha* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* are pioneering works in this regard.

While the trendsetting works in the Translation Project came from Bengal (as part of the academic efforts to elucidate women's position in colonial Bengal and Bengali Renaissance), later on studies on the caste reform movements in Maharashtra also contributed towards the Project. One of the celebrated works in the latter context is Uma Chakravarti's *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, which not just simply follows the trajectory of Ramabai's life but also contains passages (translated into English from Marathi) from her tract *The High Caste Hindu Woman and a Testimony of our Inexhaustible Treasures*. Another Marathi text which is a part of the Translation project is the Dalit life narrative by Baby Kamble *Jina*

Amucha, translated into English by Maya Pandit as *The Prisons We Broke*.

In the globalised era, every discipline is subjected to the contrapuntal forces of multiculturalism and transculturalism; the Translation project is a good example of this bipolar phenomenon. The Project encompasses a wide array of life-narratives written by women from various socio-cultural, educational backgrounds and occupations; these narratives offer glimpses into the cultural specificities of gendered experiences. The Translation Project is a growing endeavor which makes these cultural specificities and the lived experiences available to a larger audience and larger temporality. Publishers like Zubaan and Oxford University Press have been actively engaging in the Translation Project and continue to do so. Some of the illustrious works by Zubaan include *The Sharp Knife of Memory* – the life-narrative of Kondapalli Koteswaramma (translated by Soumya V. B.), *The Maharaja's Household: A Daughter's Memories of her Father* – the memoirs of Maharaj Kumari Binodini Devi (translated by L. Soumi Roy), *My Homage to All* – the life-writing by Kanan Devi (translated by Indranee Ghosh), *Prisoner No. 100: An Account of My Nights and Days in an Indian Prison* – an account by Anjum Zamarud Habib (translated by Sahba Hussain), *A Life Apart: An Autobiography* – by Prabha Khaitan (translated by Ira Pande). Some of the renowned titles by Women Unlimited include *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu* (translated by N. Ravi Shanker), *Sketches from My Past: Encounters with India's Oppressed* – the life-narrative of Mahadevi Varma (translated by Neera Kuckreja Sohoni), *The Scattered Leaves of My Life: An Indian Nationalist Remembers* – the memoirs of Saraladebi Chaudhurani (translated and introduced by Sikata Banerjee), *Torn From the Roots: A Partition Memoir* by Kamla Patel (translated by Uma Randeria). Popular lifenarrative translations by OUP India include *I, Durga Khote: An Autobiography* (translated by Shanta Gokhale) and *Antharjanam: Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman* (translated by Indira

Menon and Radhika P. Menon). The Project provides a platform for the diverse female voices from the various parts of India to be heard pan-nationally or even internationally for that matter by virtue of gaining access to the global language of English. The diversity to be found among the life-narrators serves as a fertile dwelling ground for the academic discussion on identity politics of women as well as the gendered (re)constructions of female subjectivity.

The question also arises that whether this spree of translations from the regional Indian languages to the colonial language of English undermine the efforts of academicians to dismantle the prevailing homogenous Indian conceptualization of female subjectivity into distinct cultural specificities. Addressing this question becomes relevant in context of the larger picture of feminism, where feminist academicians and activists are trying alike to rid the world of a monolithic concept of feminism and embrace the possibilities generated by feminisms. The translated life-narratives, of various regional experiential writings, become a fulcrum for leveraging the multiple discourses of resistance and representation that emanated from India over a long period of time – demolishing the falsehood of the emergence of the written selfhood of Indian women as a by-product of colonialism and English education.

The Translation Project undoubtedly provides the regional life-narratives with the possibilities engendered by pan-Indian readership. It also enables gendered cultural experiences to cross the barriers built by language resulting in a remarkable juxtaposition of three variables namely culture-specific experience, identity politics and feminine subjectivity. Factoring in the nuances gained or lost in translation from a native language into the coloniser's language, it provides a platform for an encounter that opens up the borders of genre writing as well as the clearly demarcated territories of local public spheres in India. As Sherry Simon rightly points out in *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, this kind of positioning of translation within the theoretical framework of culture studies ensures that the key

terms 'culture', 'identity' and 'gender' are not taken for granted but subjected to definitional enquiries in each distinct context.

This does not, however, signify that The Project is a conflict-free zone of smooth convergence. Considering the multicultural nature of the Indian public sphere, scholars have favoured the scrutiny of local public spheres rather than a homogenous Indian public sphere; the feminist scholars have especially insisted on denying a monochromatic visualization of the feminism in the Indian subcontinent, significantly in the writings that comment on the gender specificities of the colonial period. While compiling the various female subjectivities into the colonizer's language, The Translation Project simultaneously signifies a clear divergence of the 'particular' from the 'universal' when the latter refers to be inclusive of the individual and her rights. These contrapuntal forces within the T P can be rightly compared to the conflictual forces of international feminist solidarity and national affiliations or the opposing effects of the poststructuralist attenuations of authorship and the persistent discourses on textual authority.

In order to better understand these contrapuntal forces, there is an urgent need to map out the exact nature of the cultural exchange that happens in the course of translating a regional experiential narrative into English. While de-bordering the categories of cultures and languages, the T P also evolves as a means of articulating the otherness experienced by women in the face of a monochromatic visualization of femininity. There are other concerns that figure into the understanding of the nature of cultural exchange like the manner in which these translated lifenarratives are circulated in the world and the kind of responses they elicit from their readers. One important response of academic readership is to employ these documents, made accessible from other cultures otherwise denied to them due to language barriers, to reinforce the grand narratives of Indian history. In her effort to understand the fidelity of the translation to the original document in *Gender in Translation*, Sherry Simon observes:

Translation is considered to be an act of reproduction, through which the meaning of a text is transferred from one language to another. Each polar element in the translating process is construed as an absolute, and meaning is transposed from one pole to the other.

But the fixity implied in the oppositions between languages, between original/copy, author/translator, and, by analogy, male/female, cannot be absolute; these terms are rather to be placed on a continuum where each can be considered in relative terms. (11)

Whether the translator and/or editor intends it or not, the life-narrative in English is rendered into a problematic matrix of culture, identity and representation. Disclaimers like the one made by the translators of Devaki Nilayamgode's *Antharjanam: Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman* anticipate such a quandary and seeks to implore the target readership into an informed reading practice of the translated life-narrative.

In *Indian Literature and the World*, Neelam Srivastava devotes a separate chapter titled "A Multiple Addressivity: Indian Subaltern Autobiographies and the Role of Translation" to direct the attention of contemporary scholarship towards the inevitability of focusing attention on the process of translation in the field studying Indian autobiographies. She conceptualizes the development of a distinct genre within broader framework of life-narratives – the subaltern autobiography. While Srivastava's attempt is to envisage the development of this 'new' genre as an outgrowth of the growing translation practices in India, due regard should be given to the query as to whether these translation practices, crossing cultural barriers, provide any theoretical understanding of the Indian female subjectivity and its consequent cultural significations. The word subaltern was coined by Antonio Gramsci to refer to groups (of people) identified as being excluded from the grand narratives of history as well as from society's established institutions; this term is used to refer to categories of people who have been robbed of their voices.

From all perspectives of this definition, Indian women as a category can be brought under the term subaltern and their life-narratives can be categorized under the distinctive genre of subaltern autobiography conceptualized by Neelam Srivastava. A politicized identity/subjectivity begins to take shape in the matrix of self-referential writing, translation (paving the way for an alternative canon), grand and alternate narratives of history, gender identity (women positioned as the subaltern) and other indicators of identity politics.

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Munira Salim
in conversation with
Urmila Pawar

I was lucky to receive an invitation to attend the AHRC-funded International Conference held in December 2015 at the University of Pune. One of my intentions behind attending the Conference was to meet Dalit writers, translators and critics, whom I heard would congregate during the Conference. I wanted to witness the event as I thought it could help me add perspectives to my ongoing PhD dissertation. Moreover, the Conference brochure revealed the presence of Urmila Pawar, on whom the major part of my doctoral dissertation is based. My trip to Pune did bear fruits, as I met the author at the Conference. After a formal introduction I proposed an interview which she accepted.

A Note on the Author

Urmila Pawar is a Dalit feminist writer and activist from Maharashtra. As a Dalit writer she has placed herself among other eminent writers like Sharankumar Limbale, Daya Pawar and Baby Kamble. Today, she is one of the most prominent figures in Dalit Literature. She is much acclaimed for her short stories and also her writings as a Dalit feminist historian. In her book *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement*, with Meenakshi Moon (1989), she gives a detailed account of female participation in the Dalit movement led by Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Her life narrative, originally written in Marathi as *Aayadan* in 2003, later translated into English in 2008 and named *The Weave of My Life A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* gave her much critical acclaim and offers a new dimension to Dalit literature.

INTERVIEW

MS: In your autobiography *The Weave of My Life*, you have from time to time mentioned the Konkan Coast. Does that mean you have a special connection to or fascination with the landscape?

UP: Yes, I do have a special connection with the Konkan landscapes, mainly because my village was just adjacent to it. But most importantly, for me the bountiful landscape stands as a difficult path of life through which the women of our community trod everyday to earn their livelihood. The women from my village travelled to the market at Ratnagiri, not very far from our village, to sell petty things like firewood and grass. The heavy load on their head and the difficult path up and down the hills was back-breaking. Therefore, the landscape, for me, stands as a metaphor for our women's hardships in order to make a living.

MS: How did you feel about these hardships?

UP: The hardships of the women had a great impact on me as I have witnessed their plight quite closely. On their way through the steep path, not only did they have the fear of rolling off to the bottom of most part of the hills, but in those desolate regions of the hills they had the fear of the wild animals. What scared them most were the intruders, who, in those desolate areas could sexually exploit them. At times such atrocities did happen, but the women couldn't raise their voices. Their hardship in this difficult region helped me build my determination to help the Dalit women rise from their wretched situation and assert their rights!

MS: When you mentioned sexual exploitation, why did you say that women couldn't speak out against it? What made women shirk from denouncing such crimes?

UP: Women in those days hesitated to speak out against such atrocities because they felt it would spoil their reputation. Whoever is at fault, fingers would inevitably be pointed at the woman. She would be further questioned as to why she went to that place where such incidents may

happen. The matter would be closed, the woman would be accused and the man would be left scot free.

MS: Do tell us something about your book *Amihi Itihaas Ghadavila* (We Also Made History).

UP: Ah! There's an interesting story behind the book (smiles). I'd planned the topic 'The role of Women in the Ambedkarite Movement' for my PhD dissertation. Unfortunately, it was a topic that would fit a student of Sociology and I was a student of Marathi! For that reason Bombay University didn't enroll me. They insisted that I either finish my Master's in Sociology first or pursue PhD studies on the topic I was interested in: those perspectives which could find some connection between the Ambedkarite movements with the study of Marathi literature. In response, I said that, in Marathi literature, there were very few things written about the Dalit issues, and writing related to Dalit movements are all fictionalized. That's why I dropped the idea of pursuing a PhD. But can this stop me? I started writing the book, interviewed the women, collected references and wrote all the relevant details. (Amused) I found out that Bababasaheb has such impact on the Dalits that they could have given their lives at his bidding! Accordingly, the women went door to door and let the Dalits join the movement. During the *Satyagrahas* or the meetings of Babasahaeb, these women have participated actively. Quite often these ladies held *sabhaas* (meetings) on their own. In this book of mine I have, in detail, presented the active participation of women in the Ambedkarite movement. This was path-breaking documentation because, prior to this, only the participation of Dalit men was known. The book was originally written in Marathi and later translated into English by Dr. Vandana Sonarkar.

MS: Almost all your works are written in Marathi and then translated into English. What are your ideas about the translation work?

UP: Translation is of two types. One is when the translator takes out the gist of a part of the text and writes adding his own ideas. The other is when the writer translates the text word for word. For me, word for

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word translation is more effective, because I see the exact translation of what I've written in the text. But in case of the former translator, he adds his own ideas and perceptions during the process of translation, which sometimes diverts the exact intention of the text. But at the same time, it is interesting to read! (Chuckles)

MS: In your autobiography *The Weave of My Life*, you have portrayed yet another significant characteristic of yours, your interest and participation in the theatre. Can you throw some light on the role you have recently played?

UP: There was a movie called 'Ambedkar' and Sonali Kulkarni played the role of Ramabai, her costumes were planned by me. Also I used to regularly check if she wore them properly. Though I don't play any role of late, but a theatre group called *Lokayat* is quite active and my autobiography was dramatized in one of the shows. Besides, I'm the writer of the *Lokayat* feature.

MS: How far, according to you, have theatres been successful in promoting Dalit issues?

UP: Theatres and media are indeed one of the best sources of articulation. But due to the changing political scenario, no one wants to utilize the liberty to express one's ideologies freely, especially through art or drama, for there's always the risk on the side of the artist to get trapped in some kind of controversy.

MS: Then, according to you, what could be the ultimate solution to these problems?

UP: It's the most appropriate question at this juncture! You know what? (Agitated) Instead of blaming the socio-political condition of the nation, or the inequality among the dominant religious groups, or any other factor, we should try to create the enlightenment from our very own homes! Education will not only bring civilization to our society, but also could be the substantial weapon to fight multiple, external insecurities.

MS: Who do you think should take the major responsibility for creating awareness about the importance of education, is it the state?

UP: No, not the state, it's you! You are educated people. Besides, you are academicians, you have the power. No one would protest when you express your ideas in the class. You are the makers of society! From among your students, you will find the leaders of the future society. You can then go and question your former student, the then leader, about the reformation work they have done for uplift of the society, especially for those who are backward or uneducated. You can question, he won't push you or punch you out!

MS: What then is your message to the educated mass, especially to the academicians?

UP: In order to uplift all the backward classes, your major role is to educate them, help them come out of age-old ignorance. It is the responsibility of the upper section of the society to try and bring the lower sections to the equal status. This is humane! We are better now, from stale roti we are eating fresh chappati now. You upper caste people eat all sorts of delicacies like *shrikh and*, curd, butter, etc. and if you insist that we eat cheap things, then that's wrong. You are no one to force us to do anything, you just keep shut up (annoyed)! You academicians, being highly aware of these facts, should rise and not only speak but act in such a way as to stop this kind of exploitation. You have the ability to approach the ministry even, and question the issues of this kind. The minister would never push you but would listen to you. If you don't want to do anything for the betterment of the society at large, then go and have your delicious food and sleep, please don't interfere. (Agitated). Keep all the old ideologies, rules and regulations only in your books, they are outdated, because they were made in consideration with the old society. Keep them aside! Try and create new ones which could be implemented on an equal footing.

Book Review

The Routledge Auto/Biography Studies Reader

Edited by Ricia Anna Chansky and Emily Hipchen, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, 352 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-90478-1

The Routledge Autobiography Studies Reader presents readers a handy, quintessential and panoramic view of autobiography studies with a solid foundation by forty five literary celebrities; who are ready to address numerous long standing questions of the existing scholars in the domain of life writing. Particularly, questions related to the origin and limit of autobiography, design and truth in autobiography, question of genre, self-glorification, memory and postmemory, textual identity and digital identity are addressed extensively. Moreover, this volume is an anthology of forty five theoretical pioneering essays ranging from history of autobiography to digital life writing. Sidonie Smith's foreword to the book, which gives glimpse of life writing that establishes a pre-context for the readers and they are self-motivated for navigating into the writings of the contributors. Furthermore this publication has significantly introduced numerous concepts like 'life, canonicity, genre, modality and interdisciplinarity, reclamation of text, disability and the contested body, trauma, agency, silence, and voicing, celebrity culture, digital lives, subjects in margins, ecocriticism, post colonialism and post humanism.' The contributors in this volume have included popular and pioneering figures of the world of life writing such as James Olney, Georg Misch, Georges Gusdorf, Paul de Man and Philippe Lejeune, Timothy Dow Adams, G. Thomas Couser, William L. Andrews, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Leigh Gilmore, Margaretta Jolly, Liz Stanley, John Paul Eakin, Julie Rak, Nancy K. Miller and Cynthia Huff.

Life writing in general has been a mere habit of cropping and un-cropping; forming and reforming; of human persona that has been presented differently at different times by the narrators who have been either real life heroes or creator of fanaticized figures who are presented as protagonists of these works. This theory has been applied in the said work. Technically speaking, collecting literary pieces, making anthologies, gathering data and putting them into a modified form for making them palatable and readable as part of a specific genre is a matter of credit of an individual editor or a publishing house even if the act is typically guided by commercial or intellectual motifs. Since most of the articles are from the back issues of the three leading journals in life writing, it's easy and financially viable to compile them for an anthology. But whenever such an endeavor is undertaken it proves to be a tremendous success or even at times a blockbuster. Needless to say, it would be handy for the early career researchers to have access to these articles without subscribing to all these journals and databases.

The Autobiography Studies Reader has three sections: *Foundations*, *Transformations* and *Futures* preceded by foreword by Sidonie Smith and general introduction by Ricia Anne Chansky. The latter guides the reader for a consequent and systematic discussion on life writing. The book has been divided into fifteen chapters; each indicating the progression of autobiography studies as a genre.

In the first section, Foundations Georg Misch discusses the origin of autobiography (15-23) whereas Georges Gusdorf tries to define the limit of Autobiography in his essay *Condition and Limits of Autobiography*. This section also contains the 1975 seminal work "The Autobiographical Pact" of Philippe Lejeune (34-48). Timothy Dow Adams's essay *Design and Lie in Modern American Autobiography* which is modeled after Ray Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* interrogates the elements of truthfulness in autobiography. In his words, "Any discussion of autobiographical truth is incomplete without a consideration of its opposite - autobiographical

lies. That lie is the closest approximate opposite to truth is part of the problem” (55). Eugene Stelzig discusses canon of autobiography at length and takes forward the discussion from where Adams left (59-65). Lois W. Banner’s essay *Biography and Autobiography: Intermixing the Genres* touches upon the blurring line between biography and autobiography with a personal note. This section depicts with an incredible range of materials, the idea of a canon, the different directions of life and quoting them into the framework of life writing. Moreover, the illustrations of all the fifteen chapters build up a foundation on the understanding of the origin and progress of life writing as a literary genre.

Section Two, Transformations discusses the commodification of autobiography, the art memorizing and storytelling and the difference between memoir and autobiography. The essays which stand out for me are “Limit -Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation”, “The Jurisdiction of Identity” by Leigh Gilmore, “Letters as/not a genre” by Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, “Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity” by Julie Rak and “Autobiography and the Limits of Moral Criticism” by Charles Altieri. While Gilmore talks about ‘trauma’s centrality to contemporary self-representation’ (154), Margaretta Jolly, emphasizes on ‘truth and sincerity in letters’ (193) Julie Rak examines the distinction between memoir and autobiography (202-08).

The final section - Futures, includes discussion on autofiction, self-narration, eco-criticism, narrative as a form of comics, digital biography, genetic studies of life writing and blogging. The themes and contents have been carefully chosen from the different real-life reflections like a celebrity’s life, life of a blogger, letters addressed to different important figures of life by the writer, and debates on socio-cultural issues circling down the canonical life writing. I was particularly impressed with the idea of self-narration and autofiction and their theoretical postulations. In his famous essay *Making the Case for Self-narration Against Autofiction*, Arnaud Schmitt argues for ‘self-

narration'. In the essay, Arnaud Schmitt, examines the debate on the 'fictional discourse and the referential discourse.' He goes on to add that there are many theories of authorship and there can be many hybrid genres like auto-fiction and self-narration. Other noteworthy articles featuring in this part of the anthology are: "Cultural Ecology, Literature, and Life Writing" by Hubert Zapf, "The Generation of Post Memory" by Marianne Hirsch, "Digital Biography: Capturing Lives Online" by Paul Longley Arthur, "Celebrity Bio Blogs: Hagiography, Pathography, and Perez Hilton" by Elizabeth Podnicks and "Genetics Studies of Life Writing" by Philippe Lejeune. Hubert Zapf tries to connect cultural ecology with life writing such as Thoreau's *Walden* (250). He goes on to add the importance of ethics in literary life writing. Marianne Hirsch advocates for necessity and centrality of memory in his essay "The Generation of Post Memory" (287). For him "Memory signals an affective link to the past - a sense, precisely, of a material 'living connection' - and it is powerfully mediated by technology like literature, photography, and testimony" (288). "Digital Biography" catches the attention of the readers in which Paul Arthur attempts to define digital biography and compares and contrasts it with traditional biographies. The essay reflects on the introduction of a new genre while at the same time emphasizes upon how technology is changing identity of the individual. In another related essay "Celebrity Bio Blogs", Podnicks, delves deep into online celebrity biography. While citing the example of PerezHilton.com, she describes it as "Graphic, aural, oral, auto/biographical, collaborateve" and dubs it as "a postmodern celebration of and desecration of the life and times of fame today" (314). The last essay of the anthology "Genetic Studies of Life Writing" by Philippe Lejeune, where, he goes back to archival materials to develop new reading strategies. In this essay the author states

The purpose of textual genetics is to understand why and how someone created something, whether that thing is a text, a painting, a symphony, or a film What makes it unique is its diachronic aspect: it is a study of the history of a composition. (336)

The editors with mutual effort have indeed designed this resource to benefit the scholars, academics and students so that they delve deep into the domain of life writing. The objective of the book is to present scholarly resources with a view to cater to the future research needs of the field of life writing. It is an amazing package with forty five essays which introduce the readers to the world of life writing. The different trends and issues of autobiography have been covered in this book with a variety of topics centering around autobiography studies. The only lacuna of this book is that it most of the previously published articles from *a/b:Autobiography Studies Biography : An Interdisciplinary Quaterly* (Centre For Biographical Research, University of Hawaii) and *Life Writing*. If certain new articles could have found a place in the collection, it would have been a more fulfilling reading. The chapters have been chosen, as pointed out by the co-editor Ricia Ane Chansky “to exemplify the progression of theoretical approaches to the study of narrated lives” Even though this anthology covers many important aspects of life writing, it by no means is a concise theoretical overview: it is rather more detailed in its approach. It illustrates some important and unaddressed aspects of life writing like - letters as a genre; memoir vs autobiography; ecology and life writing; postmemory; digital biography; blogs as life writing; and autofiction, showing a systematic coherent development of thought and ideas related to life writing. Through the arrangement of the chapters in this book lacks a proper order, it addresses the question of genesis, genre and reception of life writing to a great extent. Some other emerging trends like autofiction has not been given enough space except Arnaud Schmitt’s essay “Making the Case for Self- Narration against Autofiction”. This collection covers many school of thoughts under the umbrella of life writing. It brings together pioneers and emerging theorists in this field to create a unique and unparalleled resource for scholars of life writing. All credit to Routledge for coming to the forefront and publishing such epoch making works on life writing.

Sashi Bhusan Nayak

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BlackSwan, New Delhi in 2010 with several reprints. His English translation of Akhila Naik's *Bheda*, the first Odia Dalit novel is published by Oxford University Press, Delhi in 2017.

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