
POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS
Postcolonial Ecologies
Vol. IX Issue 1
ISSN 2455 6564
January 2024

Postcolonial Interventions

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies

ISSN 2455 6564 . Volume IX, Issue 1 . January, 2024

Postcolonial Interventions

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies

Volume IX, Issue 1

Copyright of individual articles rests with the authors. Any reproduction would require the prior intimation to Postcolonial Interventions and respective authors and an acknowledgement of its first publication in Postcolonial Interventions.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Editors

Dr. Abin Chakraborty

Sayan Aich Bhowmik

Assistant Editors

Somrita Misra

Semanti Nandi

Madhurima Nargis

Anindita Bhattacharya

Cover image: Meeresleuchten_am_Strand_von_Spiekeroog1. Photograph by Stephan Sprintz Accessed from Wikimedia Commons

Cover design: Souraj Dutta and Abin Chakraborty

Published Online January, 2024

Contents

7 Notes on Contributors

page intentionally left blank

EDITORS' NOTE

This issue of Postcolonial Interventions is the product of a 2 day international conference organised by Advanced Research Centre for Indian Writing in English – P.G. Department of English and IQAC, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata in collaboration with *Postcolonial Interventions: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies* on May 11-12, 2023. We received hundreds of abstracts and unfortunately could not include all the participants owing to lack of space and time. We had declared beforehand that selected papers would be included in either in an anthology or in a special issue of our journal. We are glad that we have been able to keep that promise by bringing out this special issue on Postcolonial Ecologies which includes some of the papers presented in the conference along with a couple of other papers which arrived after we had released our CFP. At a time when the climate crisis is gradually pushing us towards climate catastrophe, all such interventions are crucial pointers about the suicidal destruction we are bringing upon ourselves and the protracted history of capitalist-colonialist plunder associated with such impending doom.

Of course, in the current global and national scenario, the notion of doom is rather ubiquitous because the world and the country are riven with multiple maladies

of manifold dimensions. One cannot, for example, ignore the unrelenting crisis being faced by the people of Palestine in the wake of the Israeli onslaught which has violated all tenets of International Law and human ethics by subjecting an entire populaton to indiscriminate aggression in the name of eliminating the threat from Hamas which had launched a terrible attack against Israel on October 7th. The Israeli attack indeed started as a revenge against that attack and the proclaimed desire of freeing the hostages taken by Hamas. Critically, not only has Israel inflicted ten, twenty times more violence against the Palestinians but there appears to be no end in sight to their aggression which has also assassinated journalists, hospital workers, UN workers and other by mercillessly attacking hospitals, refugee camps, schools and even ambulances. An entire population is being subjected to a systematic, gruesome genocide even as the international community continue to twiddle its thumbs and mouth inane rhetoric without any actual commitment to either peace or justice. Like Eliot, we too could wonder, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?". Like Adorno, we too might wonder if literature, academic knowledge or any cultural representation has any meaning after such macabre monstrosities.

It is with the burden of such realisation that Jibanananda Das had once written "The essence of creation, it seems, is hate: ('1946-47'; translation mine). Das was wiriting these lines in the context of The Great Calcutta Killings

of 1946 and the subsequent Partition Riots which unleashed across the subcontinent inhuman atrocities of unprecedented scale and horror. Unfortunately, those traumatic events created scars and open woulds which some have allowed to assiduously fester for their own vested political interests, leading to the manufacturing of hateful majoritarian discourses of violence on the one hand and riotous carnages on the other. One of the most momentous of these calamitous events was of course the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6th December 1992 and the ruthless killing of hundreds of people across the country before and after that barbarous event.Yet, thirty-two years after ther that fateful event, armed by a Supreme Court order, a large section of the country went into a calculated hysteria over the consecration of a Ram Mandir at that exact spot where the Babri Masjid once stood without any sense of guilt regarding the violence that was unleashed, the lives that were lost and hatred that was maximised. With hordes of jubilant devotees, led by the Prime Minister of a supposedly secular nation, India hosted on 22nd January scenes that parallelled events in Germany in 1933 or thereabout. Of course India is not alone. Across the world, whether in Turkey or Hungary or in parts of Africa - similar forces of sadistic division are gaining momentum. All those utopian promises and potentialities that the postcolonial world had once generated continue to recede and wither and no possible shore of recovery is as yet in sight.

What are academics to do in circumstances such as these, especially in the face of growing authoritarianism which leads to cancellation of lectures by public intellectuals, vitriolic misinformation campaigns against nobel laureates and sustained asphyxiation of individuals and organisations associated with civil society who champion liberal, democratic values? Words of sanity, amity and charity seems ineffectually inappropriate in this day and age when the public sphere itself has become almost a cacophonous marketplace where the loudest liars are able to claim sanctimonious spremacy in a society that seems to have become saturated with schadenfreude. But what else do we have? What else allows us to imagine, empathise and exercise reason if not our cherished words? The only thing we can still do is to amplify those words and carry them, relentlessly, indefatiguably, to all corners, however dark and unresponsive, so that eventually the rays of light can shatters the shackles of darkness and usher in some horizon, however unrealistic at this point, of solidarity, sympathy and serenity to a world so desperately bereft of all these.

These hopes and prayers and dreams can only succeed when you, the reader, remain committed to our journey and match our steps with renewed vigour and conviction in the face of mounting adversities. Let these bonds never be severed.

Neocolonial Catastrophe & Environmental Injustice: Representation and Re-presentation of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in *Animal's People*

Swarnendu Dam

I. Introduction:

Neocolonialism is a term used to describe the continuation of economic, political, and cultural dominance of powerful nations or corporations over less powerful ones, particularly in the context of formerly colonized nations that have gained formal political independence. The concept of neocolonialism emerged in the mid-20th century by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Ghanaian political theorist Kwame Nkrumah as a means of analyzing the ways in which Western powers

continued to exert influence and control over former colonies in the post-colonial era (Stanard 5). In the economic realm, neocolonialism refers to the ways in which developed countries maintain economic control over developing countries through mechanisms such as foreign investment, trade agreements, and debt. Developed countries often extract natural resources and exploit cheap labour in developing countries, resulting in the transfer of wealth from the Global South to the Global North. This perpetuates poverty and inequality within developing countries and maintains global economic imbalances. In *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), Kwame Nkrumah wrote:

> In place of colonialism, as the main instrument of imperialism, we have today neo-colonialism… [which] like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries… The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment, under neo-colonialism, increases, rather than decreases, the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world. (x)

In the political sphere, neocolonialism can involve the use of political and military power by developed countries to influence the policies and decisions of developing countries. This can include support for authoritarian regimes, interference in elections, and the imposition of

economic and political sanctions. The result is often the subjugation of developing countries to the interests of powerful nations, rather than allowing them to pursue their own political and economic goals (Serequeberhan 13). Cultural neocolonialism refers to the dominance of Western cultural norms and values over non-Western cultures, often through the media and popular culture. This can result in the erasure of non-Western perspectives and the reinforcement of Western stereotypes and biases. This reinforces the idea that Western culture is superior to non-Western cultures, perpetuating a legacy of colonialism that reinforces global inequality (Parenti 24).

In the same vein, Naomi Klein in her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* challenges the capitalist economic model, asserting that the relentless pursuit of profit and economic growth is a major driver of environmental degradation. She argues that the focus on short-term gains and the exploitation of natural resources are hindering efforts to address climate change and environmental crisis effectively. Klein discusses the role of powerful corporations and their influence on political decision-making. She suggests that the close relationship between big business and government often leads to policies that prioritize corporate interests over environmental concerns, contributing to the inertia in addressing environmental disasters (Klein).

II. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy, A Neocolonial Catastrophe:

Critics of neocolonialism contend that multinational corporations' investments in underdeveloped nations benefit only a select few, while causing harm to their populations in humanitarian, environmental, and ecological aspects. They argue that this type of investment results in unsustainable development and perpetual underdevelopment, with these nations functioning merely as sources of low-cost labour and raw materials. Advanced production techniques are often withheld from these countries, further impeding their economic development. Monopolization of natural resources, while providing an initial increase in investment, often leads to long-term increases in poverty, unemployment, and a decline in per-capita income (Avirgan).

The Bhopal gas tragedy was one of the world's worst industrial disasters, which occurred in Bhopal, India, on the night of December 2-3, 1984. The disaster was caused by a gas leak from the Union Carbide India Limited [UCIL] pesticide plant, which released thirty-two tons of toxic methyl isocyanate gas into the surrounding environment. The gas leak led to the deaths of at least 3,000 people immediately, with the total death toll estimated to be between 15,000 and 20,000 in the years that followed. The gas also caused severe and long-lasting health effects for hundreds of thousands of people,

including respiratory problems, blindness, birth defects, and cancer. The disaster also had devastating environmental consequences, contaminating soil and water sources in the surrounding area (Eckerman).

The disaster has been subject to extensive investigation, although the causes remain contested, with factors including the reckless inclusion of hazardous chemical production in a site originally zoned for "light industrial and commercial use" (Broughton), the disregard of warnings regarding unsafe storage methods, and the failure of multiple safety systems. The plant's safety systems had been designed and implemented in the United States, where Union Carbide Corporation was based, but they had not been fully replicated in the Indian plant due to cost-cutting measures (Shelton 5).

The disaster exemplifies the tendency of American corporate elites to prioritize the lives and interests of the Global North at the expense of those in the Global South, as evidenced by the existence of a nearly identical and more rigorously regulated UCIL plant in West Virginia ("Dow and the Bhopal Tragedy"). Furthermore, the disaster is indicative of the systemic imbalances perpetuated by the multinational corporate structure that favours the interests of developed countries over those of developing nations. The persistence of toxic contamination in the soil and water supply of Bhopal is an example of the "slow violence" (Nixon) that occurs as a result of environmental deregulation under neoliberal

capitalism, which disproportionately affects marginalized and impoverished communities. Even forty years after the disaster, there is still ongoing environmental injustice and human suffering, with toxic agricultural chemicals continuing to contaminate the water supply, developmental abnormalities and health complications affecting newborns, and survivors advocating for just compensation and adequate medical support.

Ironically, the emergence of environmental activism in Europe and the United States during the 1960s actually prompted multinational corporations, such as Union Carbide Corporation [UCC], to seek less regulated avenues for pesticide development in Third World countries, just as India was attempting to bolster its agricultural output. This interconnection serves to underscore the neocolonial implications of the industrial and environmental policy decisions that came to define the Green Revolution which according to Biplab Dasgupta was "at the expense of local communities" (Shelton 7). The majority of victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy were located in impoverished slums situated in closest proximity to the Carbide plant, where "flimsy houses offered little protection from the weather - or from airborne toxics" (Fortun xiv). The displacement of labour and the subsequent migration to urban slums, such as those present in Bhopal, were already outcomes of policies that favored industry, indicating that "many of those living near the Carbide plant had already been victimized by the same processes that culminated in their 1984 expo-

sure" (Fortun 161). Thus, Allison Shelton comments: "... if Bhopali environmental identities before the disaster were already predicated on poverty, displacement, neo-colonial demands and degradation, then these aspects of the following generations' environmental identities were exacerbated by their relationship to the consequential disaster itself" (Shelton 7).

III. Legal Injustice:

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy led to a long and complex legal battle that spanned several decades. The Indian government filed a lawsuit against UCC seeking compensation for the victims and environmental damages. The case was filed in the District Court of Bhopal in 1985, and UCC argued that the Indian courts had no jurisdiction over the case and that the case should be heard in the United States, where the parent company was based. The Indian government eventually reached a settlement with UCC in 1989, which was widely criticized for being inadequate and for not holding the company fully accountable for the disaster. The settlement resulted in UCC paying $470 million in compensation to the victims, which many activists and lawyers argued was far too low given the scale of the tragedy and the long-term health and environmental consequences.

In 1991, the Indian government filed criminal charges against UCC and its CEO, Warren Anderson, for their

role in the disaster. However, Anderson never appeared in court and was declared a fugitive from justice. The Indian government made several attempts to extradite Anderson from the United States, but these efforts were largely unsuccessful. In 2010, a court in Bhopal finally convicted seven Indian executives of UCC of causing death by negligence, and sentenced them to two years in prison. The verdict, however, was criticized for being too lenient and for not holding UCC or its foreign executives accountable for the disaster.

The circumstances surrounding Warren Anderson's departure from India following the Bhopal Gas Tragedy are shrouded in ambiguity. Upon his arrival in Bhopal on December 7, 1984, four days after the disaster, he was arrested by Madhya Pradesh police and taken to the Carbide guest-house, where he was placed under house arrest. According to Lalit Shastri, a journalist who reported on the incident, Anderson was detained in the guest house of his own company instead of a police station, and later flown to Delhi, with the superintendent of police and district collector escorting him to the airport (Shukla et. al.). In his personal bond of Rs 25,000, Anderson pledged to return to India to face trial in the case whenever summoned, a promise he never fulfilled.

In his autobiography, *A Grain of Sand in the Hourglass of Time*, the then chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Arjun Singh, accused Union home secretary RD Pradhan of

contacting him "on the instructions of the then Union home minister PV Narasimha Rao" ("Bhopal gas tragedy"), though Pradhan refuted this claim, stating that he was chief secretary of Maharashtra at that time and became home secretary in January 1985, a month after the tragedy. Forty years after the event, it remains unclear who instructed Singh to release Anderson, a decision that effectively ensured the Union Carbide chairman would never face an Indian court.

Numerous reports have suggested that the US government pressured the Indian government to release Anderson. According to Moti Singh, who was the Bhopal collector at the time of the disaster, Anderson was able to flee using a phone in the room where he was being held to contact individuals in the US. "Had we removed the landline phone from his room, Anderson would not have escaped. He possibly made calls to contacts in the US to help him leave India," ("Bhopal gas tragedy") Singh claimed. The US embassy purportedly exerted pressure on the Indian government as well. Swaraj Puri, Bhopal's Superintendent of Police in 1984, told the Union Carbide Toxic Gas Leakage Enquiry Commission: "We arrested him on the basis of a written order but released him on an oral order" ("Bhopal gas tragedy") that came "from higher-ups" ("Bhopal gas tragedy").

IV. Representation of Environmental Injustice in *Animal's People*:

The legacy of colonialism has left many developing countries vulnerable to neocolonial exploitation by multinational corporations and powerful nations. In the context of environmental issues, this can lead to the exploitation of natural resources and pollution of the environment, often at the expense of local communities. For example, in the case of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, multinational corporations like Union Carbide Corporation [UCC] sought less restricted pesticide development in the Third World while India was looking to increase agricultural production. This led to the disaster that killed thousands of people and injured hundreds of thousands more.

Furthermore, the effects of environmental degradation and pollution often fall disproportionately on marginalized communities, such as low-income neighbourhoods and communities of colour. These communities are often located near toxic waste sites, chemical plants, and other sources of pollution. This unequal distribution of environmental harms is a form of environmental injustice. Thus, neocolonialism and environmental injustice are interconnected. The exploitation of developing countries for economic gain by powerful nations and multinational corporations can lead to environmental injustices and the unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits. Addressing these issues requires an

understanding of the ways in which neocolonialism perpetuates environmental injustices and a commitment to social and environmental justice.

In *The Hindu* (2013), Indian environmental historian Ramachandra Guha writes: "In the West, the environmental movement [arose] chiefly out of a desire to protect endangered animal species and natural habitats. In India, however, it arose out of the imperative of human survival. This was an environmentalism of the poor, which married the concern of social justice on the one hand with sustainability on the other" (Guha). He posits that Western privilege generally safeguards human viability even when confronted with environmental threats, whereas in India, environmental hazards equally endanger humans, especially the poor. India's impoverished population includes diverse communities, such as slum-dwellers and rural pastoralists, Dalits, Adivasis and Muslim migrants and immigrants. These communities are already marginalized by the caste system, colonialism, and/or partition and continue to experience conflict with numerous policies of the Indian nation-state that seeks validation as a legitimate industrial power in the context of the neoliberal capitalist global order. Therefore, Guha points to the unequal power relations — both economic and social in nature, and of national and transnational scope — that have created locales of environmental injustice and unsustainable living conditions for the poor communities in India.

Based on the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* discusses the devastating impact of gas leak from a chemical factory on, not just the people, but also the ecology and the ensuing incessant struggle of the Khaufpuris for environmental and community justice. Smita Sahu in "The Emergence of Environmental Justice in Literature" says, "[*Animal's People*] discusses the devastating impact of gas leak from a chemical factory on, not just the people, but also on the ecology" (549). The polluted soil and groundwater due to the toxic outbreak in the city of Khaufpur is continuing to affect generations after generations and as a result, the children born as deformed, people after getting contaminated by the toxic chemicals, suffer from so many vulnerable diseases like Cancer and so on, even after eighteen years of the incident. Toxic wastes are still left there within the Kampani. No one is interested in taking responsibility for its cleaning. All the characters in the novel are somehow affected and effected by this technology and its advancements as the protagonist, Animal, has lost his ability to walk on his legs as the toxic from the Kampani's Factory has twisted his back, Ma Franci has lost her mental stability, Hanif has lost his eyesight as a consequence of contamination due to toxic leakage from the Kampani. Similarly after suffering from this industrial disaster, Somraj, once a famous singer of Khaufpur, has lost his voice permanently.

A. Animal, the De-humanized Being:

Animal, the protagonist of the novel, no longer views himself as a human, as can be seen in the opening sentence of *Animal's People*: "I used to be human once" (Sinha 1). His spinal column started to twist, forcing him to move with the help of his four extremities. It led the other kids in the orphanage where he was raised to start calling him "Jaanvar" ["Animal"] (Sinha 15). Animal is unable to recall his real name and chooses to self-identify as an animal because of the way he is treated and how he feels. When Zafar tells him: "'You should not think of yourself that way, but as specially abled… Plus you should not allow yourself to be called Animal. You are a human being, entitled to dignity and respect'" (Sinha 23), Animal retorts: "'My name is Animal', I say. 'I'm not a fucking human being. I've no wish to be one'" (Sinha 23). It is Animal's name that has become his self-identity. Name is not only an epistemological category for him but also his ontological reality - for him Animal is not merely his name but Animal is his being: "... when I say I'm an animal it's not just what I look like but what I feel" (Sinha 87). Animal represents the dehumanizing effect of the developing Global South caused by the developed Global North.

Animal covers this secret with outward arrogance, repeatedly expressing his hatred of being pitied, boasting about his extra-human cunning as he makes his way in the world as a con artist and thief, and hurling clever, vit-

riolic comebacks at those who regularly insult him. Nevertheless, in moments alone, he shows a tendency toward self-loathing and self-sabotage, divulging some of his deepest, self-pitying secrets: "Perched like a monkey [at the top of the abandoned factory]… I would look at the lights of the city and wonder if this pipe had been mended, that wheel tightened, I might have had a mother and father, I might still be a human being" (Sinha 32).

In spite of his continuous insistence that he is not a human, it becomes apparent that Animal's resistance to acknowledge his humanity is, at least partially, a psychological defense against rejection by the human world. Animal tells the journalist: "Ask any people they'll tell you I'm the same as ever, anyone in Khaufpur will point me out, 'There he is! Look! It's Animal. Goes on four feet, that one. See, that's him, bent double by his own bitterness.' People see the outside, but it's inside where the real things happen, no one looks in there, maybe they don't dare" (Sinha 11).

When Farouq accuses Animal for using his animal nature as an alibi: "'You pretend to be an Animal so you can escape the responsibility of being human,'... 'No joke, yaar. You run wild, do crazy things and get away with it because you are always whining, I'm an animal, I'm an Animal'" (Sinha 209), Animal retorts: "'... I'm an animal, why?... By choice or because others named me Animal and treated me like one?" (Sinha 209).

The character of Animal in Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* was inspired by a friend's report of a boy walking on all fours in Bhopal. This incident prompted Sinha to imagine the daily life of such a boy and to consider his resilience and perseverance. "We [the characters Animal and Sinha] talked at once and had huge arguments. He didn't want a bit part. He wanted to tell it all," (Naravane) says Sinha. *The Atlantic*'s 2014 retrospective photo taken in 2009 by Daniel Berahulak, which featured Sachin Kumar, a fifteen-year-old Bhopali local who crawled on his hands and knees due to a birth defect caused by toxins. While it is unclear whether Kumar is the same boy that Sinha's friend encountered, the photo serves as a poignant reminder that much of Animal's narration is not exaggerated, but rather reflects the extreme circumstances that the survivors of the Bhopal disaster faced. Sinha attributes the creation of Animal's character to the "collective spirit of the Bhopalis" (Naravane), which he believes "somehow got channeled into one character who presumably symbolized just how disadvantaged you can be" (Naravane).

B. Khaufpur, The City of Terror:

Sinha, in the very beginning of the novel states the condition of the Khaufpur city and its toxic nature: "No birds sing. No hoppers in the grass. No bee humming. Insects can't survive here. Wonderful poisons the Kampani made, so good it's impossible to get rid of

them, after all these years they're still doing their work"(Sinha 29).

The very word "khauf" means terror in Urdu. By naming the city "Khaufpur", Sinha portrays it as a city of khauf or terror where the citizens are forced to struggle with the terror of the ecological catastrophe that happened eighteen years ago and slow poisoning that is going on till date - as Zafar informs the judge in one of the court-hearings: "'... thousands in this city have died since that night, for them was no justice. The factory is abandoned full of chemicals which as we speak are poisoning the water of thousands more'" (Sinha 52). The company "... ran away from Khaufpur without cleaning its factory, over the years the poison it left behind has found its way into the wells, everyone you meet seems to be sick" (Sinha 33). Animal recalls an incident involving an elderly woman of Khaufpur: "Like all the folk living round here, she's terrified that one night the factory will rise from the dead and come striding like a blood-dripping demon to snatch them off" (Sinha 41). The name 'Khaufpur' perfectly embodies the angst of a post-apocalyptic city and its inhabitants.

Kampani's lack of responsible behavior and the ecological damage in Khaufpur brings out the harsh truth of industrial capitalism. After the disaster happened, Kampani did nothing to cleanse the contaminated water and soil of Khaufpur. Kampani fled away immediately after

the leakage, but Zafar, as spokesman of the people of Khaufpur, devoted his life for justice against the Kampani. This very incident indicates the insufficiency between production and environmental safety of Kampani. The novel depicts the factory as untouched and overgrown. Animal, after entering into the dilapidated factory, mentions the cracked abandoned tanks that still contain toxic chemicals. Khaufpur and its people were left to deal with their helpless situation and terrible diseases without hope of getting better. Lack of medical, legal and financial compensation and treatments are a serious problem to Khaufpuris who were poisoned by the leak.

By changing details from the Bhopal disaster - constructing the fictional city of Khaufpur, altering the names of people and relief efforts, and only giving a generic name for the responsible American company as "Kampani" - Sinha makes his novel more universally applicable. The micro narrative of community justice and the local issue of Bhopal becomes a macro narrative of environmental justice and a global issue of industrial and environmental disasters caused by the Western world.

C. Idea of Justice in a Post-Truth World:

The language used by the fictional editor in translating the tapes combines Hindi, French, English, and a language called Khaufpuri that may not have an English equivalent. There are certain lines and passages in

French which are not translated into English: "When the last echos are gone I hear the sound of old woman's quavering / Quand j'étais chez mon père, / Petite à la ti ti, la ri ti, tonton lariton" (Sinha 42).

I perceive it as a conscious creation of an epistemological void - a space of uncertainty in the minds of the readers. Only those who know all three languages may be able to decipher the novel completely. It, therefore, symbolically suggests the inability of 'knowing' the actual catastrophic incident as various narratives of such tragedies are available in the post-truth world. Oxford Dictionaries popularly defined it as "relating to and denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*). Thus, Animal tells the journalist: "As to what happened, well, there are many versions going round, every newspaper had a different story, not one knows the truth" (Sinha 10). Even Zafar is concerned about how false truths can be manufactured through stats and numbers: ""To make such arguments you need facts and figures. You need case histories, a health survey… but before we can discover the truth the damage could be done"" (Sinha 69).

Words like 'tragedy' and 'apocalypse' try to plant the idea that the disaster is not a result of negligence but of an anomaly, whereas the narrative of 'justice' becomes pun-

ishing the culprit rather than emancipating the victims. Animal, thus, mocks the journalist: "You'll talk of rights, law, justice. These words sound the same in my mouth as in yours but they don't mean the same… such words are like shadows that man makes… always changing shape. On that night it was poison, now it's words that are choking us" (Sinha 3).

The tapes of Animal's speeches are first recorded in Hindi and later translated into English. It can be interpreted as an impact of linguistic supremacy of the Global North on the Global South. The protesting voice of the Khaufpuri people stays unheard to the powerful, to the Global North, until it reaches them in English. Animal, however, makes sure that "the book must contain only his story and nothing else. Plus it must be his words only" (Sinha 9). The fictional Editor's Note (2007) reads: "True to the agreement between the boy and the journalist… the story is told entirely in the boy's words as recorded on the tapes. Apart from translating to English, nothing has been changed." Thus, in *Animal's People,* the subaltern (Animal) can speak directly to the Eyes (or the readers) or the (neo-)empire talks back to its (neo-)colonizers (Kampani).

The journalist's interpretation or retelling of Khaufpuri incidents could never have been nearly as authentic and enthralling as that of Animal. The reason, perhaps, is Animal's inherent bond and authentic experience with his bioregion or life-place that "signals a deep and respectful attachment to place and its other-than-human

inhabitants" (Rangarajan 64) which the journalist lacks in spite of his good motives: "How can forgeiners at the world's other end, who've never set foot in Khaufpur, decide what's to be said about this place?" (Sinha 9).

Kirkpatrick Sale outlines the major premises of bioregionalism in his important work *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (1991), and his list of essential knowledge includes: "... rocks under our feet; the source of the waters we drink; the meaning of the different kinds of winds; the common insects, birds, mammals, plants, and trees; the particular cycles of the seasons; the times to plant and harvest and forage - these are the things that are necessary to know…" (42). In other words, especially in Animal's uncensored Khaufpuri words: "What can I say that they will understand? Have these thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks? When was the last time these eyes had nothing to eat? These cuntish eyes, what do they know of our lives?" (Sinha 7-8).

Journalists and media houses more often than not use words like "tragedy", "apocalypse" and "justice" only for the sake of sensitization, to make news more palatable to the readers or the audience. Media coverages, articles and books largely talk about (often dramatize) tragic events but those hardly bring any practical and visible changes, as Animal says: "... many books have been written about this place, not one has changed anything for better" (Sinha 3). Animal severely criticizes the Westerners' lust for toxic tourist spots which "... are located

far from the world of power elites, and are usually the neighborhoods where low-income and minority communities live, since industrial sites, toxic landfills, incinerators and the like are commonly set up in these areas" (Rangarajan 185). Animal claims: "You were like all the others, come to suck our stories from us, so strangers in far off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world. Like vultures are you jarnaliss. Somewhere a bad thing happens… and look, here you come, drawn by the smell of blood" (Sinha 5).

V. Conclusion:

A linguistic strategy that contributes to establish Khaufpur as the city of terror as well as a terrifying sense of place is the use of the present tense by Animal though he recollects stories from the past incidents. Along with the intimate first-person narrative that ensures the reader sympathizes with the plight of Animal and, therefore, with the plight of his people, Animal's use of the present tense in telling past events allows the eyes [as well as the readers] to experience his story more intimately alongside him. The use of the present tense suggests the continuity of perpetual suffering of the Khaufpuris and that suffering will never become a thing of the past. Thus, Animal concludes: "Eyes, I'm done. Khuda hafez. Go well. Remember me. All things pass but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us" (Sinha 366).

Animal's People sheds light on the issue of environmental degradation in urban areas and serves as an example of the power imbalances present within society. Author Indra Sinha portrays the disaster depicted in the novel as a product of civilization and highlights the dominance of Western technologies in the Global South. The protagonist, Animal, exposes the ethical shortcomings of profit-oriented corporate capitalism, offering a critique of its harmful impact on marginalized groups such as the poor in the Global South, non-human beings, and the natural environment. Animal underscores the erasure of Khaufpur's rich cultural life, history, and progress by Kampani, a corporation held responsible for the disaster. Sinha praises the resilience of ordinary Khaufpuris in resisting the authoritarian machinery of death. The novel draws a clear correlation between industrial capitalism, neocolonialism, and environmental pollution, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of these issues.

Works Cited:

Avirgan, Tony. 2002. "World Bank, IMF Threw Colombia Into Tailspin". *Baltimore Sun,* 4 April.

Berahulak, Daniel. 2014. Photo of Sachin Kumar, 2009. In: Taylor, Alan. "Bhopal: The World's Worst Industrial Disaster, 30 Years Later." *The Atlantic*, 2 December.

"Bhopal gas tragedy: How Warren Anderson got away from our grasp". 2014. *India Today,* 1 November 2014. www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/bhopal-gas-tragedy-warren-anderson-union-carbide-dow-chemicals-rajiv-gandhi-congress-arjun-singh-225398-2014-11-01. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Broughton, Edward. 2005. "The Bhopal Disaster and its Aftermath: A Review." *Environmental Health*, vol. 4, no. 6.

Dasgupta, Biplab. 1977. "India's Green Revolution". *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 12 no. 6/8, Feb.

"Dow and the Bhopal Tragedy". 2023. *Dow.com.* https://corporate.dow.com/en-us/about/legal/issues/bhopal/tragedy.html. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Eckerman, Ingrid. 2005. *The Bhopal saga - causes and consequences of the world's largest industrial disaster*. Hyderabad University Press.

Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Guha, Ramachandra. 2013. "The Past & Present of Indian Environmentalism", *The Hindu*, 27 March 2013. www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-past-present-of-indianenvironmentalism/article4551665.ec. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Klein, Naomi. 2015. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate*. Simon & Schuster.

Naravane, Vaiju. 2007. "Eyes Wide Open" (Literary review and interview with Indra Sinha). *The Hindu,* 7 October.

Nixon, Rob. 2013. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP.

Nkrumah, Kwame. 1965. *Neo-Colonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism*. Heinemann, 1965.

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/post-truth. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Parenti, Michael. 2011. *The Face of Imperialism*. Paradigm Publishers.

Rangarajan, Swarnalatha. 2018. *Eco Criticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan.

Sahu, Smita. 2014. "The Emergence of Environmental Justice in Literature". *The Criterion* Vol. 5, Issue 2.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. 1991. *Dwellers in the land: the bioregional vision*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia.

Serequeberhan, Tsenay. 1998. "Philosophy and Post-Colonial Africa". In E. Chukwudi Eze (ed) *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Shelton, Allison. n.d. "Environmental Relations in Indra Sinha's Animal's People". www.academia.edu/37220062/Environmental_Relations_in_Indra_Sinhas_Animals_People_pdf. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Shukla, Asutosh, and Shukla, Ranjan. 2014. "Saved by a call: the mystery of Anderson's escape". *Hindustan Times*, 1 November 2014. www.hindustantimes.com/india/saved-by-a-call-the-mystery-of-anderson-s-escape/story-OEOHIsQYsNqiy8t67dQ8mN.html. Accessed 30 April 2023.

Sinha, Indra. 2007. *Animal's People*. Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.

Stanard, Matthew G. 2018. *European Overseas Empire, 1879 – 1999: A Short History*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Silent Witness and Suffering Waters: Environmental and Cultural Transformations along the Meenachal River in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Harjot Banga

Introduction

In India, the landscape and its constituent elements hold profound religious significance, being venerated and revered as corporeal manifestations of a transcendental and imperceptible divine realm. Within this intricate tapestry of spiritual beliefs, a multitude of associations and symbolic connections are meticulously woven into the fabric of Indian culture, revealing the intrinsic relation-

ship between the terrestrial world and the metaphysical. A remarkable facet of this symbolic interplay is the profound connection between various animals and deities within the Indian pantheon. For instance, the serpent finds its sacred association with Lord Shiva, the god of destruction and transformation, symbolising the cyclical nature of life and death. Conversely, the humble mouse is inextricably linked with Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity renowned as the remover of obstacles and the patron of intellect. Moreover, the regal lion is emblematic of the formidable goddess Parvati, epitomising her fierce and protective nature as she combats evil forces . However, it is not solely the animal kingdom that exemplifies this spiritual symbolism. Rivers, coursing through the subcontinent's terrain, are also elevated to the status of the sacred. These bodies of water are accorded the divine honour of bearing feminine names, reflecting the nurturing and life-giving qualities they embody. Amongst these revered rivers, the Ganga stands as the most illustrious and iconic. For millennia, the Ganga has been revered as the holy conduit that seamlessly bridges the realms of the earthly and the divine, bestowing spiritual purification upon those who immerse themselves in its sacred waters. In this way, it transcends its physical existence to symbolise the profound connection between the mortal realm and the transcendent spiritual reality, reaffirming its pivotal role within the spiritual and cultural landscape of India. As underlined aptly by Steven Darian in his work, *The Ganges in Myth and History*,

> Ganga has played a vital role in Hindu ceremony: in rituals of birth and initiation, of marriage and death. As a goddess, she has moved among the great celestials of Hinduism: at times the child of Brahma, the wife of Shiva, the metaphysical product of Vishnu, or mother to the Vasus and to Karttikeya, god of war (Darian 1978, XV).

The enduring reverence for Nature as a living entity in Indian culture transcends the conventional human-centric viewpoint. Furthermore, Indian mythology and imagery have long imbued Nature with human-like qualities, elevating it beyond a mere backdrop and into the realm of sentient presence. Consequently, Nature not only serves as an environmental canvas but also silently witnesses the unfolding narratives of History and stories. Darian underlines that "even as the face is seen reflected in a mirror, the Soul perceives itself in the stillness of Nature" (Darian 1978, 8). This profound insight underscores the intimate connection between the human soul and the natural world, where Nature acts as a reflective surface, mirroring the essence of the soul in its serene and unadulterated state. In the context of Indian thought, this perspective elevates the natural realm to a higher plane of consciousness, wherein it becomes a repository of collective memories, history, and timeless stories.

The cultural perspective in India regards Nature as a sentient entity, shaped by mythology and symbolism.

This viewpoint enriches ecological discourse and underscores the profound interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Nature, as a silent yet profound witness, embodies a repository of experiences, memories, and spiritual reflections integral to India's rich heritage. However, this indigenous human connection with Nature faced significant disruptions in history. The advent of machinery marked the initial compromise of this connection, while subsequent obliteration was orchestrated by colonisers, inspired by the European adage "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters." In the specific context of this paper, focused on India, we turn our attention to the British Empire, operating through the East India Company, which implemented strategies to exploit natural resources and labour. It is imperative to note that this exploitation failed to generate wealth for local regions but rather established subsistence economies. Resources were undervalued until further up the supply chain, serving primarily the profit-driven interests of corporations involved in their extraction, as articulated by Castellino.

> This exploitation does not generate wealth for the areas, but creates subsistence economies where the extracted resource was not valued until much higher up in the supply chain, and then only to generate profits for the corporations that exploit it (Castellino 2020, 584).

Furthermore, the author highlights the instrumental role of legal frameworks in establishing sovereignty for the purpose of systematic resource extraction—an approach closely aligned with British colonisation in India, where similar mechanisms were employed to advance colonial interests and economic exploitation (Castellino 2020, 583-585).

Following this introduction, the subsequent discussion in this paper is dedicated to a focused exploration of the river Meenachal's active role and its eventual demise within the well-known literary work *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. This paper particularly underscores the river's profound significance as an anti-colonial symbol in the narrative, serving as a silent witness to both a tragic death and a transgressive love story. Additionally, this study will demonstrate the strong connection between humans and non-humans throughout the narrative. To substantiate the central thesis, this analysis employs the perspective of material ecocriticism, a critical framework that ascribes agency and significance to inanimate entities.

The epistemological challenge: western and indigenous knowledge perspectives

Within Indian culture, inanimate entities transcend their inert existence, taking on the semblance of living bodies. This distinctive worldview prompts a reevaluation of

conventional paradigms rooted in rational and scientific observation, ushering in a broader perspective marked by the intrinsic vitality that permeates these objects. In this cultural framework, the boundaries between the living and the non-living dissolve, fostering profound interconnectedness that challenges the limitations of empirical analysis. In their work, *Material Ecocriticism*, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann stress that

> …all matter, in other words, is a 'storied matter.' It is a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces (2014, 1 and 2).

This perspective invites contemplation of existence beyond mere materiality and encourages exploration of the profound vitality imbued within, enriching our comprehension of the world and our role within it. Indeed, delving into the epistemological dimension becomes imperative for a meaningful exploration. Here, a comparative analysis between Western scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge, particularly within the Indian context, emerges as a pivotal avenue for a more profound grasp of the non-Eurocentric perspective.

Indigenous knowledge, as elucidated by Mistry (2009, 371), is characterised by its remarkable qualities: it is context-specific, collective, holistic, and adaptable. In

sharp contrast, Western knowledge finds its foundation in rationality and science, with an unwavering commitment to objectivity. Indigenous knowledge is rooted in the profound essence of '*knowing how,*' a fundamental departure from the Western knowledge paradigm that predominantly revolves around '*knowledge of*' or '*knowledge about*.' This fundamental difference not only underscores the unique nature of indigenous knowledge but also highlights its transmission across generations. It is conveyed through various captivating forms of oral traditions, among which "local songs, stories, and other performance traditions" (Ross et al. 2011, 32) hold a prominent place. This method of knowledge transmission serves as a powerful vessel, preserving the enduring interconnection that exists between humanity and the non-human world. It also nourishes the deep spiritual ties between the earthly and the spiritual realms. In this indigenous epistemology, dreams and non-replicable communications from the ancestors are judged to be intensely meaningful; deep connections to specific landscapes and people are judged to be more important than relationships or understandings of the land in general (Ross et al. 2011, 52).

> This profound perspective encapsulates the essence of indigenous knowledge, where the intimate bonds with the land, the ancestors, and the spiritual realm take precedence over generalised relationships or abstract understandings of the natural world.

It becomes evident that the non-human world possesses its inherent vitality, thereby warranting equitable treatment. To achieve this, it is imperative to grant agency to the non-human entities. Indeed, as articulated by Serenella and Oppermann, contemporary perspectives acknowledge that "things and nonhumans in general are no longer seen as mere objects, statically dependent on a subject, but as 'full-fledged actors'" (2014, 4). This paradigm shift reflects a growing awareness of the dynamic and participatory role that non-human entities play in shaping our living world: "The world's vibrant materiality appears as a "web teeming with meanings" [...], in which humans, nonhumans, and their stories are tied together" (Serenella and Oppermann 2014, 5). Hence, the adoption of the material ecocriticism approach becomes essential for a more nuanced analysis of literary texts, in this case, that of *The God of Small Things*. In this context, it is pertinent to provide a concise definition of material ecocriticism:

> Material ecocriticism, within this expansive framework, encompasses the examination of how material entities such as bodies, objects, elements, hazardous substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and biological entities interact among themselves and with the human dimension. These interactions engender complex configurations of meanings and discourses that can be interpreted as narratives (Serenella and Oppermann 2014, 7).

This "nonanthropocentric approach" (Serenella and Oppermann 2014, 2), as a critical perspective, engages in a comprehensive exploration of matter, encompassing its dual existence within textual narratives and as a self-contained text in its own right. It seeks to delve deeply into the intricate and dynamic relationship between embodied natural elements and the discursive forces that shape their interaction. Whether manifested through representations within literary works or realised in the tangible realm of concrete reality, the nonanthropocentric approach endeavours to unveil the multifaceted ways in which these elements converge and engage with one another. It offers a profound examination of how the tangible and the textual, the corporeal and the linguistic, intertwine to construct a broader narrative of our relationship with the environment and the natural world, transcending anthropocentric perspectives (Serenella and Oppermann 2014, 7).

The gradual demise of the River Meenachal in *The God of Small Things*

In light of the preceding discussions, where a nonanthropocentric approach is applied to explore the interplay between materiality, narrative, and nature, it is essential to substantiate this theoretical framework. To achieve this, Arundhati Roy's renowned novel, *The God of Small Things,* published and winner of the Booker Prize in 1997, will serve as a pertinent and illustrative reference

point. Within the pages of this famous work, the gradual decline of nature, specifically of the river Meenachal, unfolds as a direct consequence of the events occurring within the Ipe family and, concurrently, as an indirect result of historical events inexorably tied to the legacy of colonialism.

The narrative of the twins' family, Rahel and Esther, predominantly unfolds within the confines of the village of Ayemenem, situated in the state of Kerala. Notably, the early years of these siblings transpire in close proximity to the Meenachal River, which flows adjacent to their residence. Similarly, the life story of their mother, Ammu, a divorced woman residing in her paternal home, is intricately interwoven with the presence of this river. It bears witness to the poignant love affair between her and Velutha, an untouchable Paravan. The Meenachal River thus assumes a central and symbolic role in shaping the lives and experiences of these characters, symbolising a profound connection between human existence and the natural world. *The God of Small Things* bears a resemblance to Patrick White's unfinished novel, *The Hanging Garden*, where Eirene Sklavos and Gilbert Horsfall, two children, seek refuge in a garden during the tumultuous backdrop of the Second World War. Similarly, in Arundhati Roy's narrative, the twins and their mother find sanctuary by the Meenachal River, a haven from the complexities and turmoil within their patriarchal and chauvinist family dynamics. Indeed, the area

surrounding the river serves as a metaphorical garden, or better a garden-river—a space wherein societal norms and constraints need not hold sway. This setting epitomises a period when, as Roy (1997) vividly articulates, "the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (31). It is within this realm that the concept of the Love Laws is introduced—a set of regulations dictating whom one should love, how to love, and to what extent. However, it becomes evident that these laws, despite their apparent practicality, are subject to the complexities of a world that often defies such rigid prescriptions (Roy 1997, 33). Indeed, Doris B. Wallace, in her astute observation, accentuates the significance of the garden as a haven:

> Perhaps it is the freedom to be as one is, not as one 'should' be, that makes the garden and its privacy so important. For children, the natural world is free from the adults of the world and the demands they impose (Wallace 1988, 144).

Here, within the garden's embrace, a child can revel in unrestrained liberty, nurturing their imagination devoid of the incessant vigilance of parents and free from the constraints of conformity. This space represents a world apart from the home, meticulously constructed and dominated by adults, where every facet is subjected to their authority.

In this context, the river assumes the role of an instructive nurturer, silently imparting to the twins the indispensable indigenous wisdom required for survival in their village life. It serves as an unconventional yet effective teacher, guiding them through invaluable lessons. Within its tranquil depths, the twins encounter the unspoken pleasures of underwater foraging, discovering essential sustenance. They gain proficiency in the art of fishing, learning to thread sinuous purple earthworms onto hooks adorning fishing rods expertly crafted by Velutha, employing slender culms of yellow bamboo. The river becomes a realm where they become adept in the language of Silence, a skill akin to that of the Fisher People's offspring, as they acquaint themselves with the vibrant dialect of dragonflies. Here, they cultivate the virtues of patience, observation, and introspection, a capacity to formulate thoughts without verbalising them. They also hone their agility, swiftly reacting when the pliant yellow bamboo bows downward (Roy 1997, 203). Their understanding of the river's geography is cultivated through experiential learning, a concept akin to Heidegger's notion of *Erlebnis*, or lived experience (Väyrynen 2021, 90). Their knowledge of the river's course can be summarised as follows:

> So this first third of the river they knew well. The next two-thirds less so. The second third was where the Really Deep began. Where the current was swift and certain (downstream when the tide was out, up-

> stream, pushing up from the backwaters when the tide was in). The third third was shallow again. The water brown and murky. Full of weeds and darting eels and slow mud that oozed through toes like toothpaste. The twins could swim like seals and, supervised by Chacko, had crossed the river several times, returning panting and cross-eyed from the effort, with a stone, a twig or a leaf from the Other Side as testimony to their feat. But the middle of a respectable river, or the Other Side, was no place for children to Linger, Loll or Learn Things. Estha and Rahel accorded the second third and the third third of the Meenachal the deference it deserved. Still, swimming across was not the problem. Taking the boat with Things in it (so that they could Prepare to prepare to be prepared) was" (Roy 1997, 203-204).

If we envision the landscape of Ayemenem village from an aerial perspective, a discernible division emerges, demarcated by the presence of the river. On one side of this watercourse lies the familial residence, while on the opposing bank stands the History House—a dwelling steeped in profound symbolism, epitomising the enduring legacy of colonialism and the historical atrocities it embodies. This interpretation aligns with Estha and Rahel's perception, as detailed by Roy (1997), that the house Chacko referred to was located on the other side of the river, within the abandoned rubber estate. This house was associated with Kari Saibu, known as the Black Sahib—a figure who had "gone native," adopting

Malayalam language and mundus, and eventually met a tragic end through suicide. This property became embroiled in lengthy legal disputes after the suicide, but the twins, despite not having visited it, could vividly envision the History House, Ayemenem's equivalent of Kurtz's Heart of Darkness. It was a place shrouded in mystery, having lain empty for years, with few having laid eyes on it. It encapsulated the essence of the historical narrative (Roy 1997, 52 and 53).

An air of danger pervades both sides of the river and within its waters, with neither bank providing absolute security. However, it is in the area around the river or within the river's waters themselves that a semblance of safety can be found. On either bank of the river, the spectre of oppression looms, compelling the innocent souls—namely, the twins and their mother—to seek refuge. In this context, the river, while embodying a nurturing maternal aspect, assumes a maternal fate itself, destined for an inevitable demise catalysed by two pivotal events: the tragic passing of Sophie Mol on one hand, and the illicit love affair between Ammu and Velutha on the other. These two events set the stage for, on the one hand, the expulsion from the garden-river, and on the other hand, culminate in the arrest and subsequent death of Velutha at the hands of the police force. This intricate relationship between the river and the human drama it bears witness to aligns with Sofia Cavalcanti's conceptualization. Drawing upon the insights of Marie Louise

Pratt, Cavalcanti characterises the locale surrounding the river, as well as the river itself, as a "contact zone" (Cavalcanti 2021, 56). This term designates a space where geographically and historically distinct groups converge, establishing sustained interrelations with one another. In essence, it signifies a dynamic nexus where the boundaries of separation are transcended, fostering complex interactions and enduring connections (Cavalcanti 2021, 56). This contact zone serves as the juncture where the Western and Eastern worlds converge, where the touchable and the untouchable intersect. The river assumes a profound significance, embodying primordial vitality and silently bearing witness to the chronicles of History and stories—a presence that predates the arrival of the white colonisers, or the *white* sahibs. It possesses a sacred essence, yet it is also touchable in a sacred manner. From a broader perspective, the river within the landscape adopts the form of a snake, a protective serpent that, unlike its venomous counterparts, cradles its children, akin to a mother's nurturing embrace, when they approach or immerse themselves in its waters. However, this maternal guardian, this protective snake, is fated for demise as mentioned before. Its impending fate is inextricably intertwined with the narrative's central themes.

Sophie Mol's death: the erosion of imperialist and colonizing perspectives

The narrative unfolds with the inaugural event that strains the rapport between humanity, represented by

the Ipe twins, and the natural world, embodied by the Meenachal river. Estha and Rahel, the Ipe twins, are 'dizygotic' twins, arising from separate yet synchronously fertilized eggs, with Estha being the elder by eighteen minutes (Roy 1997, 2). Their parentage arises from a dissolved marital union: Baba, their father, is a businessman, while Ammu, their mother, embarks on a forbidden romance with Velutha, an untouchable, following her divorce from her husband. It is against this backdrop that the twins encounter their half-English, half-Indian cousin, Sophie Mol, the daughter of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, upon her arrival in India. The introduction of Sophie Mol into this intricate familial web adds layers of complexity to the evolving dynamics, marking a significant juncture where human relationships and nature converge. She employs imperial and discriminatory language towards the twins, her cousins: "You're both whole wogs and I'm a half one" (Roy 1997, 16). The way she talks represents the manifestation of her own internalised racism and self-hatred. By employing the derogatory term "wog," she seeks to demean and dehumanise them. Furthermore, her character embodies multiple dimensions within the narrative, representing the white, the different, the anti-colonial, and anti-indigenous perspectives. She serves as a poignant symbol of the enduring legacy of British colonialism in India. Her worldview is profoundly influenced by the racist and paternalistic attitudes prevalent among the British colonialists. Being a mixed-race baby girl, Mol occupies a complex social position characterised by privilege and oppression. On

the one hand, her whiteness affords her a higher social status compared to the Indian characters in *The God of Small Things*. On the other hand, her illegitimacy marks her as an outcast within both the white and Indian communities, exemplifying the intricate interplay of identity and discrimination in the colonial context. She embodies the role of "the uneasy inheritor of an imperialist discourse that threatens to proscribe their own distinctive hybridizing experience of India in all its rich and unruly complexity" (Tickell 2020, 10). Her character encapsulates the complex tension between her inherited imperialist worldview and the intricate, multifaceted reality of India's cultural fusion.

Sophie Mol's exclusion is further exemplified when she accepts her cousins' invitation for a river excursion in a small boat, which tragically capsizes, resulting in her drowning. Initially, she perceives the surrounding nature as unfamiliar, alienating, and primarily estranging: "Sophie Mol was more tentative. A little frightened of what lurked in the shadows around her" (Roy 1997, 291). These words bear a resemblance to those spoken by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel by Joseph Conrad, as both Marlow and Sophie Mol find themselves on a vessel in unfamiliar territories, each grappling with their own distinct challenges and encountering the complexities of the landscapes they navigate. In this critical moment, the river assumes an anti-colonial role, metaphorically "biting" or resisting the imposition of the colonial vision upon the pre-existing landscape. However, the native and indigenous, as represented by the Ipe twins, re-

tains its essential humanity and innocence, as they go to great lengths to rescue their young cousin from the perilous waters: "It was four in the morning, still dark, when the twins, exhausted, distraught and covered in mud, made their way through the swamp and approached the History House" (Roy 1997, 293). This poignant episode stresses the resilience and compassion of the indigenous characters in the face of adversity and tragedy, contrasting with the oppressive colonial presence. Furthermore, if we examine the predicament of Sophie Mol's biological mother, Margaret Kochamma, who endured the loss of her husband, Joe, she embarked on a journey to India in search of solace but found herself bereft of everything, including her cherished daughter. "She had come to Ayemenem to heal her wounded world, and had lost all of it instead. She shattered like glass" (Roy 1997, 263). Yet, it becomes evident that contemporary India can no longer offer the same assurances of wonder and happiness as it did during the era of imperial British rule. The stark contrast between the colonial perception of India as a place of wonder and fulfilment and the challenges faced by individuals like Margaret underscores the shifting dynamics and complexities of the modern Indian landscape.

The forbidden love between Ammu, a touchable, and Velutha, an untouchable

The second episode delves into the ostensibly "impossible" love affair between Ammu and Velutha, a relationship deemed unlawful according to the moral and soci-

etal code deeply ingrained in Indian culture. This code finds its roots in the *Manusmriti,* or *Laws of Manu,* which, despite contradicting most of the principles enshrined in the Indian constitution, continues to influence and shape the conduct of many individuals across India. The ill-fated lovers, Ammu and Velutha, become victims of this code, both at the familial and societal levels. However, it is noteworthy that, on a legal front, only Velutha faces punishment due to a fabricated lie orchestrated by Baby Kochamma and Mammachi and conveyed to Inspector Thomas Mathew.

Velutha faced persistent discrimination due to the caste disparity, a poignant irony as his name, "Velutha," meaning "White" in Malayalam, starkly contrasted with his actual dark complexion. This discrimination was deeply rooted in his caste identity, as his father, Vellya Paapen, belonged to the Paravan community (Roy 1997, 73). From a young age, Velutha began labouring at the "Paradise Pickles & Preserves" factory, which was overseen by the Ipe family. Their interactions were relegated to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House, where they delivered coconuts harvested from the estate's trees. The Ipe family, like much of the society at the time, harboured a deep-seated prejudice against Paravans, and they were prohibited from entering the house or touching anything that had come into contact with the Touchables, including Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi, recalling her own girlhood, recounted the

extreme segregation enforced during that era: Paravans were once expected to move in reverse, using a broom to erase their footprints to ensure that Brahmins or Syrian Christians did not inadvertently defile themselves by stepping into a Paravan's footprint. These oppressive norms dictated that Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed on public roads, could not cover their upper bodies, and were forbidden from carrying umbrellas. Even when they spoke, they had to shield their mouths, redirecting their breath away from those they addressed (Roy 1997, 73 and 74). This historical account underscores the profound systemic discrimination faced by individuals from marginalised communities during that time.

Despite the prevailing discrimination, Ammu found herself captivated by Velutha's physique, integrating him as an integral element in her dreams. She envisioned the contours of Velutha's abdomen, the muscular ridges, becoming taut and rising beneath his skin, resembling the divisions on a slab of chocolate (Roy 1997, 175 and 215). As time elapsed, their clandestine meetings continued to unfold. Particularly noteworthy is the culmination of their love story in the final chapter of the novel, The 'Cost of Living', where their union transpires along the banks of the Meenachal garden-river, illuminated by the moonlight. This pivotal moment unfolds with the river and some other natural elements, such as the weeping bamboo tree, as silent witnesses (Roy 1997, 335), mark-

ing the profound crossing of the boundary separating the touchable and the untouchable. The resulting union carries an air of serenity and, simultaneously, an overwhelming sense of awe (Roy 1997, 337).

> They stood there. Skin to skin. Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts (that wouldn't support a toothbrush) against his smooth ebony chest. She smelled the river on him (Roy 1997, 334 and 335).

This climactic scene symbolises the defiance of societal norms and the profound connection between Ammu and Velutha.

In addition to the various natural elements, Velutha's own father, Vellya Paapen, inadvertently becomes a witness to "Every night. Rocking on the water. Empty. Waiting for the lovers to return" (Roy 1997, 256). In his inebriated state, he discloses these nightly occurrences to Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, who exploit this information to concoct baseless allegations against Velutha. These fabricated charges result in Velutha being wrongly accused of the alleged rape of Ammu, leading to his arrest by the police. Tragically, Velutha falls victim to brutal beatings within the confines of the History House, ultimately succumbing to his injuries. After Velutha's tragic death, Estha is compelled to depart for Madras by the Madras Mail train, joining his father.

The death of the River Meenachal

These pivotal events entail departures that herald significant transformations: Velutha's tragic demise, Estha's journey to reunite with his father, Rahel's relocation to the United States of America, and Ammu's solitary existence. These departures instigate profound alterations within the landscape, particularly along the banks of the Meenachal River. While these characters inhabited the idyllic garden-river, the river itself flowed in harmonious accord with its natural surroundings. However, as they depart, the tranquil environment gradually succumbs to the encroachment of artificial and estranging influences. This shift becomes strikingly evident when the twins revisit their childhood village of Ayemenem and embark on nostalgic walks through the landscapes of their youth. Both of them discern a desolate landscape, marked by the river's plight as it bears the consequences of human actions.

Estha's exploration of the river reveals a grim transformation, where the once-vibrant waterway now languishes in a state of deterioration, tainted by the odious presence of pesticides and devoid of its once-thriving fish population. In this altered landscape, the river's waters have lost their former vitality and charm, transforming into a desolate and contaminated environment. As Estha traverses the riverbanks, he encounters the acrid scent of waste and chemicals procured through World Bank

loans, witnessing firsthand the devastating impact of human intervention on the natural world. The surviving fish bear the scars of fin-rot and painful boils, emblematic of the river's decline. Alongside this environmental degradation, Estha's passage also encompasses a journey through the changing social and economic dynamics of the region, as exemplified by the juxtaposition of newly constructed, ostentatious houses fueled by Gulf money and the older, envious residences clinging to their private domains (Roy 1997, 13 and 15). These shifts reflect the broader transformation of the landscape, from a once-thriving ecosystem intertwined with human lives and experiences to a deteriorating, almost alien terrain that mirrors the disintegration of cherished memories and connections.

Years later, when Rahel revisits the Meenachal River, she encounters a dismal transformation too. Downriver, a saltwater barrage, a political compromise brokered for the benefit of influential paddy farmers, has altered the river's fate. This barrage now regulates the inflow of saltwater from the backwaters, enabling two rice harvests per year but at a significant cost to the river's vitality. Once a grand and imposing presence, the river has dwindled into a feeble semblance of its former self—a meagre, swollen drain, its thin, sluggish waters listlessly brushing against muddy banks, occasionally revealing lifeless fish beneath its surface. A suffocating weed has ensnared its waters, with brown roots resembling under-

water tendrils. Bronze-winged lily-trotters cautiously traverse its surface. The river, once an imposing force capable of shaping destinies, has lost its vigour and become a stagnant, green expanse burdened with foul debris destined for the sea (Roy 1997, 124-126). Furthermore, swimming in the once-inviting waters of the Meenachal River had become a distant memory as children would defecate at its edge, their waste left on the muddy riverbed. In the evening, the river carried away their offerings, leaving a scummy residue. Upstream, people washed in clean water, but downstream, the smell of waste hung over Ayemenem. Therefore, "*No Swimming* signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy" (Roy 1997, 125). The once-feared river is now a mere shadow of its former self. Hence, one can assert that the Meenachal River and its ecosystem have undergone a definitive demise. In effect, the twins no longer encounter the serenity of their childhood but are met with a landscape characterised by aridity and desolation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Meenachal River serves as a poignant symbol of interconnectedness between human narratives and the natural world, exemplifying a profound and intricate relationship. Through the lens of the river, we witness the unfolding of human stories, most notably the tragic demise of Sophie Mol and the forbidden love shared between Ammu and Velutha. These narratives are

intrinsically woven into the river's own journey, reflecting how human and non-human stories are inextricably entangled. The river, once teeming with life and vitality, undergoes a profound transformation, mirroring the shifts in the lives of those it touches. Its gradual death signifies a broader ecological and cultural decay, illustrating the far-reaching consequences of human actions on the natural world. In conclusion, we have to say that the Meenachal River's demise is emblematic of the intricate web of existence, where the fates of both human and non-human entities are intricately intertwined, echoing the profound interconnectedness of all life.

Works Cited

Castellino, Joshua. 2020. "Colonial Crime, Environmental Destruction and Indigenous Peoples: A Roadmap to Accountability and Protection." In Colonial Wrongs and Access to International Law, edited by Bergsmo Morten, Kaleck Wolfgang, and Yin Hlaing Kyaw, 577-602. Brussels: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher.

Cavalcanti, Sofia. 2021. "The Meenachal River as Vital Materiality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *MediAzioni*, no 30: A49-A69, http://www.mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it/. University of Bologna.

Darian, Steven G. 1978. *The Ganges in Myth and History*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

Dehejia, Divya. 2007. "Recognizing the Gods." Columbia University (Department of Art History and Archaeology). Last accessed on October 10, 2023 at 20:38 (Italy). https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gods/hd_gods.htm

Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. 2014. *New Ecocriticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mistry, J. 2009. "Indigenous Peoples." *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Amsterdam: Elsevier BV (1st edition).

Ross, Anne, Kathleen Pickering Sherman, Snodgrass, Jeffrey G., Delcore, Henry D. and Sherman, Richard. 2011. *Indigenous Peoples and the Collaborative Stewardship of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Roy, Arundhati. 1997. *The God of Small Things*. London: HarperCollins Publisher.

Tickell, Alex. 2020. "Postcolonial Fiction and the Question of Influence: Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* and *Rumer Godden*." *Postcolonial Text*. 15, no. 1: 1-20.

Väyrynen, Kari. 2021. "History Culture of Living Experience (Erlebnis): Dangers and Possibilities for Historiography in the Era of 'Experience Society' (Erlebnisgesellschaft)." *NUMERO*, no. 52 History Culture (Special Issue): 89-102.

Wallace, Doris B. 1988. "Secret Gardens and Other Symbols of Gender in Literature." *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 3, no. 1: 135-145.

The Retriever and the Rebel: Horror and the Non-Human Category in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's "The Red Fireflies" (1929) and "Pintu" (1933)

Arcaprova Raychaudhury

Introduction

One of the ways in which horror in literature informs the intersections of itself with postcolonialism is in its relocation of the actual horrors and anxieties that belie Western colonial interventions from what the colonizer experiences to what he embodies. It reconstructs the very colonial experience as the original horrific one, "thus explicitly or implicitly reversing the gaze of European selfhood" (Khair 2018, 435). As a project with a decided stake in the economic opportunities offered by colonized geographies, Western colonialism was marked

by an instrumentalist view of nature – the natural world with its myriad resources, flora and fauna, ecosystems, virgin lands, waters and, most importantly, the laws of nature that predated or were untouched by humans and technology. Nature and its resources were viewed by the colonial project as opportunities for "development" – a ruthless, selfish idea of unfettered material growth, one that had no qualms "[riding] roughshod over local human and environmental interests in the attempt to secure preferential conditions for international trade" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, 32). The "environment," i.e. the immediate surroundings and relationships that were encountered by this aspect of colonial interest was taken for granted as a "space," at the cost of which the colonizing project could expand without restrictions or remorse; relationships of indigenous populations – the original inhabitants of the geographies that the colonizer invaded, such as the Indian Santhals or the Australian Aborigins – with the land were blatantly disregarded in favour of aggressive colonial expansion and their economic greed. Animals, an antithesis to the "human," were otherized without much ado; when viewed as a threat, they were eliminated, when of potential interest for the colonizer, they were fully and remorselessly harnessed. This comprised atrocities against certain animals in colonized geographies, such as the jackal in southern Africa or the dingo in Australia, while the elephant in the Indian subcontinent was brutalized as well as weaponized for its powers.[1] Colonial expansion, therefore, was

1 It might be worthwhile here to mention the politically interesting representation of the scorpion – a potential 'weapon' of

not only limited to the socio-economic or the geopolitical – it was one that also brought about radical and often atrocious shifts in the meaning and nature of relationships and boundaries: relationships with wild nature and animals that the indigenous populations cultivated – one that carried mystical and religious connotations which, more often than not, ensured sustainability, co-existence, and boundaries, such as in Bengali and Santhal cultures – were supplanted by utilitarian, instrumentalist ones that were interested only in "conquering" wild nature and killing/taming its bestial populations for their use. It is, therefore, obvious, that anti-colonial struggles would have to encompass these definitions of "nature," "environment," and "animals" as embodying the shifts in perspectives and meanings. The definition of the environment, when re-read in the light of these struggles, comes to carry not only the interests of the colonizer but also its horrifying effects on the relationships and surroundings both old and new. David Arnold, examining the relationship between "empire" and "environment," elaborates on the idea of the environment as a dual text offering a detailed view of these material and ideological contestations:

> As opportunity and resource, the environment is mobilized to explain the political logistics of empire and the expanding of commodity frontiers. It is equally

threat – in the British colonial imagination, particularly during the Second Anglo-Afghan War: it was pictured as "a menacing, hybrid thing," one that was "[h]alf insect, half Afghan tribal fighter" (Burton 2020, 167).

> used to critique the inherent violence of empire, its territorial appropriation, and its subordination, marginalization, or elimination of nonwhite populations. (Arnold 2015, 54)

Horror as a literary phenomenon thus becomes instrumental, in such cases, in reconstructing the horrific as a category that colonial aggression begets and finds itself on the wrong side of. Nature (the earlier "space") and animals (the earlier bestial and "not human") assume an active status in resorting to the resistive tendencies that inhabit the margins of the colonial experience. Andrew Hock Soon Ng aligns the spatial possibilities of horror to the Foucauldian concept of the heterotopia, a cultural and discursive space existing as the "other" to a given space of reason and culture, which serves as a counter-site where the latter is "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986, 24; Ng 2018, 444). The analysis of such a space can be regarded as integral to the examination of literary horror, with the non-human category emerging as a more effective site for reading the problematics of empire about enabling/resisting the colonial footprint.

While the Byomkesh Bakshi mysteries of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay (1899-1970) have been widely read and critically examined as a non-white "writing back" to the Eurocentric core of detective fiction, the postcolonial legacy of his horror stories, I think, has been somewhat

missed out on. Yet the study of these stories reveals an active addressing of the colonial enterprise, the conflict between Western reason and native belief systems, the question of boundaries and transgression, and the problematics of locating the environment and the non-human concerning the opposing ideologies of colonizers' interference and colonial resistance. Among other stories, "Pintu" (1933) and "Rakta-Khadyot" ("The Red Fireflies," 1929) stand out as particularly relevant in this regard, exploring duly the idea of colonial transgression and indigenous resistance through the deployment of horror. The presence and activities of the titular pariah dog in "Pintu" and the unnamed one in "The Red Fireflies" highlight, together with the ominous stance of the environment in both stories, the banal impact of colonial conditioning; its being ultimately questioned and subverted secures, through the resistive outcomes, the need to revise conditioned causes and align it ultimately towards reclamation of dignities – the ones embedded in and between the non-human category, the environment and the indigenous cultures in colonized geographies – and environmental justice.

The West and its "Other": The Problematics of Space in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's Horror Stories

The settings of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's horror stories feature primarily three locations – the heart of Calcutta, the Bengal countryside, and the Paschim or

the western margins of the then Bengal Presidency, now Jharkhand and Bihar. The city exists as an embodiment of colonial modernity – Anglicized beliefs and attitudes, Western education, the championing of rationality, and technological progress. The existence of the rural is significantly antithetical to the urban spaces and this modernity, as in "Pintu" where rumours of the existence of a spirit in the adjoining wetlands infest the village; at the same time, it presents several opportunities that might serve to justify intervention and, of course, transgression, as is seen, for example, in the abundance of ducks that provide an opportunity for shooting. At the same time, the Paschim stood out as a distinct "other," a settlement doubly colonized; besides being part of the British colonial territories, it became, owing to its resources and opportunities, a second settlement for the Bengali bhadralok population. Ahana Maitra elaborates on the history of this double colonization as she observes:

> [T]he *bhadralok* flocked [to the *Paschim*] as health tourists from around the second half of the nineteenth century in order to flee the epidemics of kala-azar, smallpox, and cholera. Furthermore, colonial discourses on public health and hygiene led many to believe that the inherently miasmic conditions of the tropical plains and the unsanitary living practices of its people were primarily responsible for the spread of these epidemics. *Paschim* was therefore sought to be "made" – both textually and materially – into an "other" of Calcutta, developed not on its own terms

> but as a counterpoint to the "unhealthy" city. Moreover, as professional opportunities for the *bhadralok* began to dry up – since more began to avail of the opportunities of English education than could be gainfully employed in the city – the *Paschim* began to be seen as a land for opportunities. (Maitra 2022, 17)

The *Paschim*, therefore, was invaded by the West in two waves – first by the British colonizer, followed by the Bengali *bhadralok*, both of them bringing with them the transgressive attitude of colonial modernity and reason in their motives and motivations. Encountering strangeness in such cases often included transgressions of pre-colonial belief systems and boundaries, as in the case of "The Red Fireflies" where the old Muslim cemetery poses an "otherness" to the rational and the empirical. The land, moreover, attracted the interests of the European indigo planters who exposed it to the rule of terror and atrocities against the native peasants, and the ideological position of the Bengalis who later bought out these estates from the outgoing European planters did not look too good either. The environment is seen to bear and symbolically convey, through the uncanny, the traumatic impact of these colonial monstrosities, as is sensed by the "spirit-seeker" Barada in the environment of Nilmahal in the story "Nilkar" ("The Indigo-Planter," 1958), written well after Independence:

> A strange rotten unholiness lurked somewhere like the muffled stench of covered drains. The indi-

> go-planter *sahibs* were not just despots – they were evil. There was no sin that they did not commit. The footprints of their sins seemed not to have left the place yet. I remembered my brother's saying – a poison far more dangerous than malaria lurks in the air of Nilmahal; if one stays there for long, one falls, one becomes inhuman. (Bandyopadhyay 1958c, 163-64; my translation)

The tenure of the colonial entitlement to these spaces, however, is often cut short as the consequences seem to emerge in a way that the West fears most, namely the contamination of its own space of rationality and the falling short of empiricism. As the bhutanweshi (ghost-seeker) Barada himself remarks in "Tiktikir Dim" ("The Lizard's Eggs," 1929), "What is most scary in this world is that object of fear which cannot be seen with one's eyes, negated by reason or gotten rid of by any known means" (Bandyopadhyay 1929b, 17; my translation). The boundaries that demarcate the urban spaces of modernity are problematized as the uncanny often upset the commonly perceived sacrosanct nature of these boundaries. Such upsetting often carried "a mordacious critique directed at the changing urban developments of the city" and the banal impacts of its urban "modernity" on the environment (Ghosh 2022, 4), as manifested in the spirit that invades a colonial Calcutta paralyzed by waterlogging and darkness in "Andhakare" ("In the Dark," 1930). It is interesting that in Sharadindu's horror stories, the non-human is often imbued with

an agency that helps manifest the uncanny, as in the case of the fireflies which help shape the outline of the spirit in "Pratidhwani" ("Echoes," 1938). Moreover, such an agency often derides the imposed demarcations between the rational and what this very same rational cannot fathom; it puts rationality to the test by bringing to it the frontier of experience itself, like the bumblebee in "Maran-Bhomra" ("Death and the Bumblebee," 1931) which strays into the spaces of Calcutta, Bardhaman as well as the *Paschim* with the ill-omen of random death, thus exposing the limits of rational understanding and conveying an "unreal" reality heterotopic to the colonial project, its real "spaces" and ultimately its transgressive assumptions.

Perspectives on Nature, Horror and the "Other" in Bengali Literature: Looking at Saratchandra, Bibhutibhushan and Sharadindu

The intersection between horror, nature, and the limits of human understanding is not an altogether unexplored concept in Bengali literature, nor has it been unique to Sharadindu in his time. Bengali fiction often showed horror as one antithetical to reason – believing in ghosts was equivalent to cowardice. In Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's (1876-1938) famous novel *Srikanta* (1917-1933) we find an early example of this interaction between horror and reason: Srikanta, the protagonist of the novel, is confronted by an elderly Bihari gentleman

in the hunting party of the prince, who mocks his disbelief in ghosts; in response, Srikanta takes it upon himself to visit the mahasamsan at night. The conflict of belief and disbelief here soon takes the shape of regional contempt as the Bihari gentleman curses Bengalis and their exposure to Western education as sacrilegious: "You Bengalis sneer at the supernatural because you've read a few pages of English. Bengalis are godless and unclean – un-Hindu" (trans. Aruna Chakravarti, 2011, 88). The idea of a horrible fate awaiting transgressors – including colonizers – is reinforced in the Bihari gentleman's tale through the mention of Goddess Kali:

> He told us of people who had seen Kali and her demons playing a ball game with a hundred human skulls; of others who had heard demoniac laughter. He talked of white foreigners who had lost their lives in their attempts to test the truth of his assertions. (ibid)

Against this staunch belief in spirits – aligned here to the Hindu belief of the wrath of Goddess Kali – lies Srikanta and the Bengali community, ridiculed and dismissed as "Anglicized and atheistic" (ibid, 89). Srikanta, offended by this, goes to the *mahasamsan* – and is horrified by what lay embedded in nature:

> The forest came alive with the moaning and crackling of silk-cotton stems and the skeletons around me breathed deeply. I shivered in spite of myself. I

> shivered in spite of myself. I knew that it was only the wind passing through the cavities of the skulls. But, try as I would, I could not subdue the primeval fear that, however deeply buried beneath layers of conscious reasoning, rose up now to awe and frighten the fear of life after death. (ibid, 98-99)

The above incident does not materialize into the actual manifestation of ghosts, for Srikanta is quickly rescued from the place by the staff of Pyari the courtesan, and the village chowkidar; Saratchandra, too, does not cultivate this issue further, save for the Bihari gentleman ascribing his still being alive to his being a "true Brahmin" (ibid, 106) – a marked instance of Hinduism being a fulcrum around which popular belief and disbelief moved. Also, at a time when Bengali nationalism – one that Saratchandra, too, champions – was at its peak, this incident serves to highlight the way the *Paschim* looked at the Bengalis (Srikanta, though, is no embodiment of colonial modernity; he has lived mostly in the *Paschim*). But the fact that such a menacing face of nature should be revealed to a member of a hunting party is one perhaps most worth wondering about.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950) is yet another famous writer who has explored this concept in his fiction. His *Aranyak* (Of the Forest, 1939), which explores the human experience close to nature, does not leave out the horrifying prospects that might befall

human interventions; it looks at a menacing aspect of nature, whose retributive tendencies often included the supernatural. The incident in the Bomaiburu jungle in the novel is a prominent example: a mysterious spirit, assuming sometimes the shape of a lady and sometimes of a dog, keeps haunting the camp during the survey, as a result of which Ramchandra Amin turns insane. Six months later, the spirit haunts an old man and his son, to whom the land had been rented out for grazing animals; the son eventually dies under mysterious circumstances, having probably been lured out by the spirit. The narrator's perspective on the wrath of nature highlights the need for checking ruthless human intervention and setting boundaries:

> These were forbidding places. The moonlight was like the demoness of fairy tales who took you unawares, seduced you and killed you. These places were not meant to be inhabited by us mortals, but were home to some other creatures from strange lands. They had been living here for aeons, and they did not care for men who intruded suddenly into their secret kingdom. They would not forgo any chance to avenge themselves. (trans. Rimli Bhattacharya, 2017, 71)

Arriving at Sharadindu's experiment with horror and/or the supernatural, one is presented with a sense of historicity as well as religious elements. Muslim beliefs and value systems find a prominent place in his stories: the events in "The Red Fireflies" revolve around a "living"

grave in a Muslim burial ground whose existence dated back to the pre-colonial days – a grave that had, in the past, taken its revenge on a European who had dared to fire at it; in "Nakhadarpan" ("At One's Fingertips," 1958), a colonial-era manhunt succeeds due to the mystical occult practices of Mohsin Sahib, an elderly Muslim gentleman, using a Mughal-era ring he had inherited. A sense of history is evident in these representations: prior to the British, India was under Mughal rule for centuries; Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa were ruled by the Nawab of Bengal. Muslim value systems, therefore, were an important presence. At the same time, Sharadindu does not leave out the Hindu traditions: Mohsin Sahib refers to the potency of mystical powers and their use by Hindus; in "The Lizard's Eggs" the Hindu rite of *pindadaan* in Gaya relieves the soul of a dead lizard. While no definite conclusions can be reached, the interplay of religious beliefs in the context of the supernatural presents ambiguities which, together with a sense of history, can be read as aspects of solidarity in colonial India, much like Saratchandra's nationalism. On the other hand, while Bibhutibhushan develops his idea of the realm of the supernatural, the undead or the invisibilized by incorporating occult Tantric practices in his stories featuring Taranath Tantrik, Sharadindu, through Barada, lays his belief in theosophy when it comes to understanding spirits.

"Pintu" and the Fate of the Non-Human: Colonialism, Conditioning and Guilt

Collected as part of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's young adult fiction, "Pintu" tells the tale of the supernatural on the margins of rural Bengal while symbolically addressing the inescapable concerns for the environment and its fate in the wake of an ever-increasing human intervention. Centered around an unnamed narrator and his hunting companion, a pet pariah dog named Pintu, the story revolves around their encounter with a spirit while hunting in the wetlands of Bengal – an encounter that ultimately costs Pintu his life. Using horror and doom as part of the fate that awaits transgressors at the limits of ordinary experience, the story reveals a grim commentary on what banal human activities may be sure to reap while relocating the agency of nature itself to mete out their fates. The idea of hunting serves to point out the pivotal role of colonial conditioning in the story as the narrator, in the very beginning, indulges in a problematic self-introduction, introducing not himself but his gun, followed by his love for shooting:

> I have a double-barreled rifle. It is a 12-bore, breech-loading rifle – not a muzzle-loading one, that is. Although it has been designed by an Indian gunsmith, it is in no way inferior to a foreign one. It has a range of up to a-hundred-and-fifty yards – point-blank – and can be used to shoot ducks easily, although it is not a duck-gun. It is a favourite of mine.

> I was very fond of shooting ducks. When the streams and canals were flocked by a great variety of ducks, I used to go out, my gun on my shoulder. (Bandyopadhyay 1933, 19; my translation)

Colonial hunting, which replaced the dominant Mughal tradition of hunting in India, was intrinsically connected, like its predecessor, with the display of power and status – albeit with a difference. In *Shooting a Tiger: Big-Game Hunting and Conservation in Colonial India*, Vijaya Ramadas Mandala elaborates significantly on the political and authoritative implications of hunting in Mughal India. Shikar outings in Mughal India, he points out, were way more than courtly leisure and revelry: they were a means to pursue kingly business such as surveillance of the dominions, listening to grievances of people and the army, and making important military, administrative and diplomatic decisions (Mandala 2019, 48-49). While bows and arrows, matchlock guns, and elephants were involved, the shikar expeditions also enabled a display of martial masculinity and physical valour, for example in the killing of wild buffaloes by Mughal courtly men with swords or spears. The political aspect of pleasing the emperor was clear in Mughal lion hunts, where a lion would be lured and trapped by gamekeepers and villagers, enabling the emperor to ultimately approach the net from outside and shoot the lion with a big musket, "bringing the hunt to a triumphant end" (ibid, 51). British colonial hunting in India came to adhere more

to the idea of "fair play," bringing hunting closer to the status of "sport" and distancing it from such pre-colonial methods and means of hunting (ibid, 176). As compared to the earlier "savagery" of using rough and ready methods, violence, therefore, was rationalized and sanitized, and trophy-hunting became a mark of civilization in the colonies. At the same time, colonial hunting as a metaphor might differ from the Mughal tradition in one key aspect – technological prowess. The display of firearms reinforced the superiority of the colonial master in colonized territories, reinforcing imperial dominance. Mandala observes:

> The difference between the Mughal and the colonial period with regard to hunting was that physical valour in fighting dangerous animals was favoured among the Mughal rulers whereas firearms enabled the British to pursue shikar more remotely, as a sport. Mughal hunt as an assertion of masculinity was thus replaced with the British hunt as an assertion of technological superiority and precision in using a firearm. While the possession of guns was an instrumental factor for the British in hunting large predators, successfully and in large numbers, it, in part, also confirms that such firearm control enabled them to display their military credence to the Indian population. (ibid, 52-53)

Technological prowess, therefore, worked firmly to cement the white man's legitimacy of rule in the colony,

fulfilling that aspect of what Ashis Nandy calls a "search for masculinity and status before the colonized" and reinforcing his own identity as master before the subjects through a display of "conspicuous machismo" (Nandy 1983, 40). The shooting of ducks that lived in the rural margins and often destroyed the crops – thereby ridding the local peasants of a certain menace – may be seen, therefore, as signifying what Swati Shresth calls a paternal benevolent colonial intervention (Shresth 2009, 264), a presence whose footsteps the narrator problematically imitates. His description of his gun and his love for shooting precedes his introduction of Pintu – the dog after whom the story is named, who was his hunting companion, acting as a retriever on his shooting expeditions. With Pintu, the narrator's imitative outlook is seen to extend as he posits him as an "other" to the hunting dogs of the West, their pedigree, and their behaviour. Pintu's Indianness is established, in the opening introduction, in terms of an absence of foreign blood: "Pintu was a dog of purely Indian breed – he had not a drop of foreign blood running in his veins; one might as well call him a pariah" (Bandyopadhyay 1933, 19; my translation). While Pintu is not too courageous a dog, his lack of courage, however sarcastically, is attributed to his food habits, that is, the indigeneity of it: "My brother used to say, milk-and-rice have made all of Pintu's courage shrink" (ibid; my translation). At the same time, Pintu's flair for retrieving shot birds from anywhere – be it land, water, or mud – causes the writer to define his habits in

terms of his colonial counterpart, resorting to the English term for it: "In English, dogs of such behaviour are called retrievers" (ibid; my translation). A problematic, pathetic transmitting of colonial conditioning can be seen as the body of the non-human here becomes a site for the etching of colonially intended values and beliefs just like his master. His view of Pintu – however dear a companion – and his imitation of the colonizer's hunting sport in colonized spaces embody what Nandy calls the releasing of forces within the colonized societies "to alter their cultural priorities once and for all" and helping, in the process, "to generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category" (Nandy 1983, xi), resulting in a motivation that is seen to claim Pintu as its victim, both symbolically and, as the story unfolds, literally.

The narrator, along with Pintu, sets out at night to hunt ducks in a swamp twenty miles away from the city, disregarding the anxieties of the local village postmaster, who warns him against the presence of a spirit in the reeds there. The postmaster's cautionary tale of a European *sahib*, who had gone out to hunt there and had not come back, is dismissed, and the narrator proceeds to head out, relying on his gun – thus reflecting the assumed superiority of rationalized violence which flouts the conventions hitherto respected by the locals and, with it, disrupts the placidity of the local ecology, following the footsteps of the colonial master. Just like the idea of

such an entitled "sport," the same rationality also justifies cruelty in logical terms in Bandyopadhyay's other horror stories, as one might observe in Gokulbabu, a professor of logic, with concerning his motives behind hunting in "Kalo Morog" ("The Black Cockerel," 1958):

> He satisfied his bloodlust by hunting doves, wild pigeons, and sometimes rabbits….He had even invented a meaning behind his love for hunting. Living beings are, by nature, violent, and violence is innate in man; one's mental health might be hampered if blood is not shed at times. Hunting, therefore, is a must. (Bandyopadhyay 1958a, 173; my translation)

To Pintu, however, the hunt brings a tragic end. Pintu, as the narrator starts his shooting, repeatedly tries to persuade the narrator to leave the place as a sudden wail terrifies him. The non-human, while lacking language, makes the foreboding consequence amply clear: "Dogs cannot speak, but Pintu seemed to tell me clearly, 'Come, let's go back, this isn't a good place, let's not be here'" (Bandyopadhyay 1933, 23; my translation). At the same time, rationality turns a deaf ear to his pleas; Pintu's sense is turned down, mistaken for his cowardice – but not for long. As soon as a duck is shot, a frightened Pintu and the bewildered narrator encounter the supernatural in the bushes:

> I was surprised and moved towards the bush. The thorny bush did not have any leaves, the moonlight

> fell on it clearly. Having gone within ten feet of the bush, I, too, stood still. I saw the dead bird lying on the ground, and the figure of a woman, clad in a white cloth, was bending over it, as if protecting it, (ibid, 25; my translation)

The spirit of the swamp immediately presents an "other" to the violent intervention of the narrator. She wails at the fate of the dead bird, highlighting the plight of the ecology; her protecting the bird seems to evoke the image of Prince Siddhartha (Gautama Buddha) and the wounded swan, in contrast to colonial ideology and its rationale of "sport" – the consequence of which is etched in the wounded body of the non-human, the duck. More interesting parallels can also be found if one looks at the Banshee, the Irish spirit whose wail signifies imminent death in an Irish family. The Banshee is connected intrinsically to the idea of the Irish homeland: she can be seen as symbolically carrying the message of loss under colonialism across the seas as she informs a writer in America of the death of his father (Yeats 1986, 384). While the Banshee's wail signifies death and loss, it is rendered ecologically interesting in the context of what Patricia Lysaght notes:

> In the treatment of the aural manifestations of the death-messenger, it appeared that the being's cry was frequently compared to that of a bird or an animal, for example, an owl, a jack-snipe, a dog or a fox. (Lysaght 1986, 223)

The fact that the Banshee's wail can get mixed up with animal cries lends animals a new ideological ally in terms of agency, especially if one considers Ireland as a once-colonized territory and its mythical beliefs as an "other" to the British rationale. Yeats, moreover, points out that while the Banshee is mostly a friend of the household, at times she is an enemy too – a wronged ghost who "cries with triumph" (Yeats 1983, 384).

The wail of the spirit in "Pintu," too, turns from one of loss to one of vengeance. Retribution kicks in as she now leads the narrator deeper into the swamp, and he finds himself sinking. He senses the change in the nature of the wail: "I heard the blood-curdling voice, "Aha-ha-ha-ha!" But it was no longer a wail – it seemed she was laughing a laughter of demonic vengeance" (Bandyopadhyay 1933, 25; my translation). Pintu, in a bid to save the narrator, leaps to attack her and meets his death. The death of Pintu doubly redoubles the pathos in the story: weighed throughout against the colonial standards of the retriever, he meets his end trying to retrieve his master. Pintu's fate evokes the plight of the non-human under colonialism, a victim bearing the consequences of ideological conditioning. The rational dismissal of his dissuading – his act of original loyalty and "native" nous – stands out as a betrayal that costs his life. As James Serpell observes in the context of the loyalty of dogs and their being employed in human interest, "The proverbial friendliness and fidelity of dogs may…create a burden-

some sense of guilt when we use these animals in ways that appear to betray their loyalty and affection" (Serpell 2017, 312). The corpse of the non-human companion seems to hold colonialism and its assorted "sport" responsible, its tragic fate magnifying the author's commentary. At the same time, the surrounding resistive nature seems to advocate a rejection of this conditioning, rendered ironically through the narrator as he awakens in a posture similar to the spirit and the duck: "I regained consciousness at sunrise the next day. I was still holding Pintu's body to my bosom" (Bandyopadhyay 1933, 26; my translation).

"The Red Fireflies": The "Other," Demonization, and Resistance

"The Red Fireflies," on the other hand, presents a more uncanny canine. In stark contrast to Pintu, he has no name, no pedigree, and no certainty of origin; strangely demonic in appearance, he at once constitutes an "other" to the colonial category. This is further augmented by the description of the strangeness of the place he inhabits – a strangeness that evades the rational. It is described, even more strangely, by the ghost of Sureshbabu, who when alive, had visited his brother-in-law in Munger for a change of air and had died mysteriously:

> Those who are familiar with the town of Munger know that there is a very old Muslim burial ground

> here by the banks of the river, west of the well-known avenue called Pipar-Paanti. Almost all the graves here, it seems, are more than a hundred years old. The place is neglected. The graves have barely survived, sticking out their ribs amidst thorns and thickets.
>
> In a corner of this ground is a grave of black stone. Many uncanny lores loomed in the town about this grave. I was curious after hearing these cock-and-bull stories. My elder brother-in-law said, the grave is a live one. Fifty years ago, a sahib had fired at the grave. The bullet had cracked open the stone, and blood had come out in spurts. The stain of it has not disappeared even today; now dry, it can be seen on the grave still. And the atheist *sahib* who had fired had not lived either – he had met a horrific end that very night. (Bandyopadhyay 1929a, 7; my translation)

The notion of a "living" grave overturns the empirical association of graves with the "dead"; at the same time, its situatedness is reflected in the pre-colonial ground, away from the doubly-colonized sphere of the *Paschim*, but bearing the wound of colonial intervention. Being alive lends the grave, in this case, an agency as opposed to the perceived status of the "dead" and the presupposed passivity of the same – an agency, the European *sahib* had dared to override and, as the lore went, had paid for with his life. The non-believing Sureshbabu, however, chooses to follow the path of the colonial master and, in a desperate, meaningful attempt to take

a "jab" at the living grave, tries to hurl a stone at it and is momentarily intercepted by the said dog which is first seen curled up over the grave, as if guarding the bullet-wound, and moves away harmlessly when Sureshbabu and his brother-in-law approach the grave in the first place. The appearance of the dog is perceived as a weird "other" in the empirically surveying eyes of Sureshbabu:

> It was black in colour, its height not in accordance with its length – its legs were crooked and extremely short. However, the most scary were its eyes – yellowish and somewhat bloodshot, and lacking pupils. If it blinked, it seemed as if fireflies were glowing in the darkness of the night. (ibid, 8; my translation)

The uncanny appearance of the dog and his guarding the wound inflicted on the "living" grave had made him one with the space in a way that is at once other-worldly and empathetic. The remark of Sureshbabu's brother-in-law Subhash that it was the same dog that, as the tale went, had ripped open the sahib's throat ascribes to him an agency to avenge interventions that violate the "life" of the place. Sureshbabu dismisses the claims to such an agency, by asserting that dogs do not live for fifty years. While he abandons his attempt as "[p]estering a fierce dog does not seem logical" (ibid; my translation), the tussle around logic continues. The West and its "illuminating" influence of rationality come to more pronounced loggerheads with the "superstitions" of Subhash as his wife and his sister, whose eyes "had been opened by the

golden touch of the light of the Occident" (ibid, 9; my translation), joins Sureshbabu against him. The Paschim is problematically othered by associating the region to the west of Bengal with cowardice as Sureshbabu ironically remarks, "I guess not having lived in the land of the khottas has helped me stay brave" (ibid; my translation). Rationalism ultimately comes to take the upper hand as Sureshbabu decides to go to the grave at midnight and mark it as a sign of his courageous intervention – an obvious conquest. His principled rejection of "superstitious" fears regarding violation of the site is further fuelled by an attempt at chivalry – braving fears and "conquering" an obstacle to winning a prize in the hands of the female sex – acts which can be called an emulation of the European "knightly." His sister-in-law fixes the prize for him: "As soon as you emerge victorious, a woman of this household will mark your forehead with the red of her lips" (ibid; my translation). The chivalrous bid to assert masculinity in this case reflects an attempt to negate oft-prevalent notions regarding the alleged effeminacy of the Bengali bhadralok; Mirinalini Sinha elaborates this as she observes:

> It may be conceded that broad generalisations about the mild-mannered and effete nature of inhabitants of certain regions in India or believers of certain Indian religions were long part of the stock of ideas held by Europeans, and even by some Indians themselves. (Sinha 1995, 15)

The same ideas are also reflected in Macaulay in his thoughts on the Bengali people:

> Whatever the Bengalee does he does languidly. His favorite pursuits are sedentary. He shrinks from bodily exertion; and, though voluble in dispute, and singularly pertinacious in the war of chicane, he seldom engages in personal conflict, and scarcely ever enlists as a soldier. (Macaulay 1840, 39)

Sureshbabu's attempt to shake off this yoke, however, leads him to aspire toward the "other," the masculinity of the "manly" Englishman by following the footsteps of the earlier intervening sahib of the popular lore. The aspect of bravery, dangers surrounding the destination, and the prospect of winning a prize at the hands of his loved one makes Sureshbabu's quest a re-enactment of the knightly conquests; his readiness adds to it that aspect of chivalry which was commonly perceived as "the well-nigh unique mark of the Briton" (MacKenzie 1995, vii).

The end, however, comes for Sureshbabu in a way that ironically re-orients his step or, more correctly, misstep. On his way to the grave in the dead of the night, as he throws away his cigar, a pair of red lights – perhaps the bloodshot eyes of the dog himself – appear in the dark, luring him and leading him off the beaten track, and he follows despite himself. Mention may be made

here of W.B. Yeats' "The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows," a retributive story rooted in colonial Ireland, where the British Puritan troopers who committed a massacre at the Abbey of the White Friars at Sligo are led into the forests by spirits only to fall off a cliff, towards certain death. The wrath of the Catholic "other" is shown together with the atrocities that had been committed against the friars as well as against Ireland. The agency of the dead is reflected in the scene witnessed by the soldiers – a scene which is a consequence of their actions:

> Before them were burning houses. Behind them shone the Abbey windows filled with saints and martyrs, awakened, as from a sacred trance, into an angry and animated life. (Yeats 1914, 136)

A similar retribution befalls Sureshbabu too. The earlier rational dismissal gives way as he witnesses the uncanny after he trips, falls, and loses consciousness for a while: "I opened my eyes after a long time. Those two red eyes without a body were bent over my face, observing me closely" (Bandyopadhyay 1929, 11; my translation). The earlier road to chivalry now gives way to uncharted routes as he lies suffering: "I felt, with my whole body, the fact that I have crossed a path of infinite pain" (ibid; my translation) – a pain that avenges itself through the pain it inflicts on him, as it had on the sahib before him. Sureshbabu finds himself lying in the old, dried-up

moat by Pipar-Paanti; nature sides with the pre-colonial in checking his intervention both literally and symbolically. He succumbs to pneumonia, contracted that night, and his retelling the tale as a ghost in Barada's planchette brings to full circle the ideological implications of being "alive" in the context of colonial intervention and the ecology, "inspecting whose lives matter and who and what is always already marked as dead while alive becomes imperative" (Blazan 2021, 15) where the agencies of resistance and retribution are reassigned to nature, animals, and the domain of the alleged deadly and/or invisibilized.

Conclusion

The plight, wrath and revised agencies of nature and animals using the uncanny in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's horror stories raise pertinent questions of reclamation in the face of the colonial project and its ideology of intervention and epistemological dispossessions. Through the use of that unnamed which eludes Western empirical sensibilities, the stories bring to the popular imagination the same need to resist imperialism and its all-pervasive, all-consuming advances. This is in line with what Said notes regarding reclamation of colonized geographies:

> If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an

> act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination. (Said 1993, 225)

By engaging with imagination and the possibilities of such a recovery at that end of the popular cultural spectrum "where so much horror happily proliferates" (Gelder 2000, 35), Bandyopadhyay's stories thus come to a more pronounced, more direct conflict with the machinery of colonial ideology and its dispossessing violence than meets the literal eye. Enjoying high popularity amongst readers and broadcast as part of the Sunday Suspense series, they, therefore, open up interesting avenues of rethinking nature and animals and restoring to them their innate dignities in the wake of debates, questions, and atrocities that surround the Anthropocene and the posthuman in the twenty-first century.

Works Cited

Arnold, David. 2016. "Narrativizing Nature: India, Empire, and Environment." In *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches,* edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, 35-50. New York: Routledge.

Bandyopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 2017. *Aranyak: Of the Forest.* Translated by Rimli Bhattacharya. Kolkata: Seagull.

Bandyopadhyay, Sharadindu. 1929. "Rakta-Khadyot" ["The Red Fireflies"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus*, vol. 5, 6-12. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1929b. "Tiktikir Dim" ["The Lizard's Eggs"]. In S*haradindu Omnibus*, vol. 5, 13-17. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1930. "Andhakare" ["In the Dark"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus,* vol. 5, 17-25. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1933. "Pintu." In *Sharadindu Omnibus*, vol. 4, 19-26. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1938. "Pratidhwani" ["Echoes"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus,* vol. 5, 52-62. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1958a. "Kalo Morog" ["The Black Cockerel"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus*, vol. 5, 173-78. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1958b. "Nakhadarpan" ["At One's Fingertips"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus*, vol. 5, 178-84. Kolkata: Ananda.

_____. 1958c. "Nilkar" ["The Indigo-Planter"]. In *Sharadindu Omnibus*, vol. 5, 161-72. Kolkata: Ananda.

Blazan, Sladja. 2021. "Haunting and Nature: An Introduction." In *Haunted Nature: Entanglements of the Human and the Nonhuman*, edited by Sladja Blazan, 1-19. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burton, Antoinette. 2020. "S is for Scorpion." In *Animalia: An Anti-Imperial Bestiary for Our Times*, edited by Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani, 163-69. Durham: Duke UP.

Chattopadhyay, Saratchandra. 2011. *Srikanta*. Translated by Aruna Chakravarti. New Delhi: Penguin.

Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 22–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/464648.

Gelder, Ken. 2000. "Global/postcolonial horror: Introduction." *Postcolonial Studies* vol. 3, no. 1 (2000): 35-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790050001327.

Ghosh, Ujaan. 2022. "The City Possessed: Ghost Stories and the Urban History of Late Colonial Calcutta." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* vol. 45, no. 3 (June, 2022): 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2022.2090738.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. 2015. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Khair, Tabish. 2018. "Postcolonial Horror." In T*he Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, edited by Kevin Costorphine and Laura R. Kremmel, 433-39. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lysaght, Patricia. 1986 *The Banshee: The Irish Death Messenger*. Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. 1840. "Lord Clive." In *Macaulay's Essay on Lord Clive*, edited by William Henry Hudson. London: George G. Harrap & Company. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/10/items/macaulaysessayon00macaiala/macaulaysessayon00macaiala.pdf.

MacKenzie, John M. 1995. General Editor's Introduction to *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, by Mrinalini Sinha, vii-viii. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Maitra, Ahana. 2022. "Old Landscape, New Babus: A Study of the Representations of 'Paschim' in Aranyer Din Ratri and Dadar Kirti." *Intersections* vol. 2 (2022), 16-29. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7159972.

Mandala, Vijay Ramadas. 2019. *Shooting a Tiger: Big-Game Hunting and Conservation in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP.

Nandy, Ashis. 1983. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Oxford UP.

Ng, Andrew Hock Soon. 2018. "Conceptualizing Varieties of Space in Horror Fiction." In *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, edited by Kevin Costorphine and Laura R. Kremmel, 441-56. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Serpell, James. 2017. "From Paragon to Pariah: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Attitudes to Dogs." In *The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behavior and Interactions with People*, edited by James Serpell, 300-15. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Shresth, Swati. 2009. "Sahibs and Shikar: Colonial Hunting and Wildlife in British India, 1800-1935." PhD diss., Duke University. Duke Dissertations. https://hdl.handle.net/10161/1647.

Sinha, Mrinalini. 1995. *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Yeats, W.B. 1914. "The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows." In *Stories of Red Hanrahan, The Secret Rose, Rosa Alchemica*, by W.B. Yeats, 134-44. New York: The Macmillan Company. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/storiesofredhanr00yeatuoft.

Yeats, W.B., editor. 1986. *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*. New York: Collier Books.

Negotiating Postcolonial Ecologies: Representation of the Disruption of Identity and Natural Harmony in Selected Poems of Kath Walker, Carol Ann Duffy, Vachel Lindsay

Anmana Bhattacharya

> The very ideology of colonization is … one where anthropocentricism and Eurocentrism are inseparable, with the anthropocentrism underlying the Eurocentrism being used to justify those forms of European colonialism that see indigenous cultures as "primitive", less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature.
>
> ~ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010)

Colonization was marked by economic exploitation, social injustice, political subjugation, and cultural oppression and inflicted lasting psychological impacts, eroding local autonomy and leaving societies grappling with enduring losses. The experience of oppression and discrimination had significant psychological impacts on individuals and communities, which not only included the loss of their ancestral lands but also the loss of their self-esteem, agency, culture, language, self-identity, and sense of belonging. Natural resources were also affected by colonisation, as European powers sought to control new territories by introducing foreign species and modifying landscapes for their benefit, leading to far-reaching ecological consequences.

Ecological imperialism, a term coined by historian Alfred W. Crosby, deals with the form of colonial expansion that extends beyond the human population to encompass the exploitation and manipulation of natural environments. It encapsulates the ecological consequences of colonization, wherein colonizing powers often employed practices that disrupted and transformed local ecosystems in pursuit of their economic, social, and political objectives. While talking about Crosby's use of the term, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out its flexibility in intensity and implications as it consisted of everything from 'the violent appropriation of indigenous land to the ill-considered introduction of non-domestic livestock and European agricultural practices' and it has

come at the cost of 'historical specificity', blurring the lines between different types of environmentalism or by 'collapsing imperialism into an all-purpose concept-metaphor that fails to distinguish between general ideologies of domination and specific socio-historical effects.' (Huggan 2010, 3)

The age of exploration and colonization began from the 15th century onwards, one of the significant examples of ecological imperialism is the Columbian Exchange, which resulted in the movement of plants, animals, and diseases between the Old World (Europe, Africa, and Asia) and the New World (the Americas). This exchange had profound ecological consequences, as it led to the introduction of non-native species, the displacement of indigenous flora and fauna, and the alteration of the entire ecosystem. Apart from this, there is the exploitation of natural resources for timber, minerals, agricultural land, hunting and so on which often led to deforestation, soil degradation and a loss of bio-diversity which resulted in long-term disruption of ecological balance and the damage still persists. A form of ecological imperialism is environmental racism which Deane Curtin, the American environmental philosopher defines as 'the connection, in theory and practice of race and environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other.' (Huggan 2010, 4)

The settlers harboured no curiosity or respect for the culture or practices of the indigenous people. The settlers believed that they were 'conferring… the gifts of civilization to the benighted heathen' (Huggan 2010, 7) and had hardly any interest in learning their philosophy. The Europeans introduced the concept of animal husbandry and agriculture. The indigenous people hunted animals for sustenance while the Europeans looked at it as a game for the aristocrats. The native population was unfamiliar with the distinction between 'wild' and 'domesticated' animals, a distinction brought in by the European colonizers. There were Indian groups that loosely used dogs for hunting and the women used hawks to protect their corn but they never owned the animals. The fact that Indigenous men spent their time hunting – the colonialists perceived them to be lazy because, for them, hunting was a leisure activity for the upper classes. As the white settlers encroached on the native lands, initially there were some attempts at agreements. However, time only increased the number of settlers, and more forests were destroyed for livestock and agriculture leading to animals losing their natural habitat and gradually encroaching upon the Indian territories, and the agreements were soon forgotten.

Throughout the history of colonisation, colonialists employed cunning and manipulative tactics to advance their agenda. They used their intelligence and cleverness to deceive innocent indigenous people who were not as

astute or manipulative, resulting in loss of land, homes, and ultimately, identity. The indigenous people with their humble lifestyle were a no match to the colonizers and the former therefore ended up losing their lands, their home, and in the long run, their very own identity. The story of land being measured using ox-hide is quite common which states how the colonialists tricked the indigenous Americans claiming to take only as much land as an ox-hide. 'Given the small size of a single hide, the locals agree, and then the colonizers proceed to cut it into a fine string with which they encircle much more land than was envisioned by the locals.' (Jackson 2013, 31) Something similar is seen in Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Selling Manhattan'. The poem, divided into two sections reflects the white man's perspectives (first four lines) and the Native American's perspective. The poem captures a conversation between Dutch settlers and the Lenape community, who were unaware of the concept of buying and selling land:

> '*All yours, Injun, twenty-four bucks' worth of glass beads, / gaudy cloth. I got myself a bargain. I brandish / fire-arms and fire-water. Praise the Lord. / Now get your red ass out of here.*' (Duffy, lines 1-4)

The introductory italicised lines of the poem serve to emphasise the disproportionate trade that resulted in the acquisition of thousands of acres of Native American land for a meagre sum of 'twenty-four bucks' worth of

glass beads' by European settlers (Duffy). The ensuing verses of the poem poignantly depict the profound loss of the Indigenous peoples' connection to their land which was seen as nothing more than a mere resource by the European colonizer. The choral voice of the Indigenous people highlights the ramifications of this reductive perspective, painting an elegy for a world that was once sacred but soon will be completely lost. Reynolds points out that over the years urbanization has 'gradually replaced traditional subsistence cultures and separated humans from the ecosystems that had nurtured them.' (Reynolds 2007, 16). According to contemporary experts and researchers, the Lenape leaders who negotiated with the Dutch may have believed that they were entering into some land-sharing agreement rather than giving away their land completely, and the glass beads offered by the Dutch were seen as symbols of friendship rather than mere transactional exchange. However, what was mere land to the settlers was of immense signification to the Indigenous people as these lands represented specific lands where 'visions took place, where spiritual beings can be contacted, and where human place in the moral order of things can be understood' (Hendrix 2005, 769) and therefore were closely associated to their identity.

The poem carefully delineates the stark difference between the Dutch settlers and the Lenape people. While the European takes pride in their 'fire-arms and fire-wa-

ter' (no citation) and has only disdain towards the Native Americans and for nature, the Lenape leader has love and respect for the land and nature. To him, they are not just mere resources to be used up without any concern but the very nature that has sustained them for generations, the resources are like guiding and nurturing spirits that look after the well-being of the entire tribe. He knows that everywhere the colonialist has touched the earth, the 'earth is sore' (Duffy). He wonders what the ground or the spirit of water will have to say as the colonizer will destroy and poison them with their activities. The Lenape leader speaks with 'true love for his land', his 'dawn chant', 'starlight psalm', and 'song of sunset' are all celebrations of nature (Duffy). Robin Ridington says, 'Native spiritual traditions live in song, story, and ceremony…. They represent things the way they are. They constitute a language of performance, participation, and experience. They represent the cosmic order within which the world realizes its meaning.' (Ridington 1996, 468) The indigenous people have lived in harmony with the 'world's slow truth', in nature's 'solemn joys and sorrows'; the Europeans will only destroy and inflict harm because their lifestyle is not in sync with nature. (Duffy)

The Lenape leader issues a warning to the European coloniser, asserting that their activities would not bring any good. He puts forward a rhetorical question 'Man who fears death, how many acres do you need / to lengthen

your shadow under the endless sky?' (Duffy). Although not as clever or cunning as the white settler, the Lenape leader is conscious of the fleeting nature of human existence. Human beings are afraid of death, yet they spend their lives preoccupied in their efforts to acquire more land or material wealth, the settler derives their sense of security from possessing the natural resources that were not even theirs in the first place. The natural world is vast and infinite and stands in contrast with the transient nature of human life. The last few stanzas seem to bring out a sense of dejection yet acceptance in the Lenape leader. He has lost his sacred land to the cunning of the European man; their loss will be remembered by nature as the leader expresses his desire to unite with the grasshopper and the buffalo. Even in his loss, he wishes to be one with the nature that has sustained him. The loss of land is beautifully described as 'a boy feels his freedom / vanish, like the salmon going mysteriously / out to sea' (Duffy). The sadness of the leader is shared by the evening as soon enough he will disappear 'into the darkening pines' like a shadow making it seem that they never existed on this land that once was theirs.

Despite not having an American experience, Carol Ann Duffy skillfully and sensitively portrays how the earliest colonizers perceived the New World and vice-versa. By dividing the poem into two parts, Duffy has brought out the very difference in philosophy and ideology between the two races. While the European is a monotheistic

Christian serving their God, the Indigenous population has found their spirituality in nature, and through their worship of nature they find their identity and therefore they aim to preserve it. What is extremely sacred to the Lenape people, the colonizers can only look at it as a resource waiting for commercialization. Yet the indigenous people have lived without any of the exploitation for centuries, continuing with their natural practices and ceremonies to worship their home. 'Cultural identity depends upon the continuation of subsistence practices and ceremonies celebrating the Creator's gifts to the people. Natural resources are therefore synonymous with cultural resources. To degrade one is to destroy the other' (Reynolds 2007, 16). Duffy's use of vivid metaphor and imagery and her use of dual voices create a poignant and evocative poem which makes the readers reflect on the sobering implications of colonization and exploitation of Indigenous lands, cultures, and heritage.

Building upon the theme of environmental devastation and the impact of colonisation on the indigenous populations, Vachel Lindsay's work "The Flower-Fed Buffaloes" utilises vivid imagery to contrast the idyllic North America pre-colonisation with the reality of technological advancement and exploitation. Through its use of rich metaphors, the poem brings out a sense of sadness and loss that comes with environmental devastation. The poem opens with the very image of the North American buffalo, often referred to as the bison, grazing

lazily in the vast landscapes filled with perfumed grass and prairie flowers. This idyllic image is broken by the introduction of locomotives in the picture. By casually overlapping the two images Lindsay strikes the 'the right balance of observation and evocation' as he dexterously creates the 'American past' that has shaped the present nation of 'abundant resources, squandered riches, technological sophistication, exploitation of native Americans'. (Ward 1985, 243)

Through the image of the North American buffaloes, Lindsay speaks about the life of the Native Americans. Like the buffaloes that lived in harmony with nature, the tribes were the same, they were extremely dependent on their land for their food and sustenance and therefore regarded it as sacred. The use of the word 'flower-fed' suggests a harmonious relationship, which was an integral part of the indigenous lifestyle and culture. It is not very difficult to picture the buffaloes and the Native Americans existing side-by-side, deriving their food from the same grounds highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence of living beings and nature and yet never interfering with each other or with the course of time, never having the need to transform their surroundings for any personal gain. The season of spring adds to the pastoral imagery, as it sets a tone of freshness, renewal, and vitality thereby evoking a pristine natural setting. It takes us far away from anything remotely urban conveying a sense of serenity, and purity of the natural

world and affirms its ability to sustain itself without the need for any human intervention. 'For most Native peoples, land and the resources it holds (particularly wildlife) are not simply things – they are parts in a complex web of interrelated spiritual and natural relationships, relationships that put individuals under moral obligations to respect them.' (Hendrix 2005, 769)

The poem takes a sombre turn as the poet introduces the imagery of locomotives and wheat fields. The flower-fed buffaloes belonged to 'days of long ago', and the animals have been replaced by the spinning wheels of the trains while 'tossing, blooming, perfumed grass' have been removed as wheat fields have covered the land (no citation). This shift in imagery conveys a sense of destruction and changes the mood of the poem. The European settlers had little regard for nature or wildlife or for the lives of the Native Americans. They hunted and destroyed with equal fervor. Hunting the buffalo was a common sport among the settlers who arrived with suitable firearms. Once abundant on the continent, buffaloes were nearly extinct due to commercial hunting and due to the diseases brought in by the domestic animals of the settlers. Ward points out that the 'buffaloes were intrinsically noble and otherworldly, threatening, massive, primitive, almost amusing but helpless…' (Ward 1985, 243). Even today, the American bison remains a near-threatened species. The white settlers had no regard for the perfumed grass or the vast fields of prairies. The

land was cleared to make space for locomotives to run, for the cultivation of wheat, for things that the settlers considered useful. They treated the human beings living on those lands exactly like the buffaloes. The Native Americans had neither the arms nor the cunningness of the settlers. They were deprived of their lands, the very source of their sustenance, culture, and identity.

In the last three lines of the poem, the poet adopts a poignant and nostalgic tone as he draws a comparison between the mistreatment of the buffaloes as well as the Native American tribes, particularly the tribes of Blackfeet and Pawnee. The repeated use of the phrase 'lying low' creates a sense of foreboding and loss (Lindsay). Ward says, '…The Indians have been laid low, defeated and buried, even transmogrified as the flowers have been transformed into more useful products…they lie low, … waiting for their time to come again.' (Ward 1985, 243) It is not just a metaphor for death but evokes the idea of an irreversible loss which cannot be compensated for. The consequences of colonisation are not limited to the physical destruction of nature or the decimation of buffaloes and tribes, but also the loss of culture, traditions, and ways of life which were deeply intertwined in a harmonious and sustainable relationship with the world of nature. The last lines are nostalgic yet poignant in their magnitude of tragedy as colonization's profound impact has only brought absence and emptiness. It is almost as if the land is stripped away of its beauty and bounty and

liveliness as the buffaloes and the Native tribes and the prairie flowers have been replaced by lifeless locomotives puffing out smoke and the monotonously coloured wheat fields and that are the consequences of human greed and exploitation.

While writing about how ancient spirituality has been lost in modern-day Western ethics, Reynolds mentions, 'The Judeo-Christian ethic revealed the earth as a gift for exploitation and temporary habitation. Natural resources became disconnected from human identity and spirituality. Heaven, not Earth, became the human spiritual realm' (Reynolds 2007, 16). The indigenous communities are closely tied to the earth, even in their death. Many indigenous cultures have traditional burial practices and ceremonies. The burial sites are chosen based on their cultural significance and spiritual importance and are considered sacred grounds where the spirits of the dead may rest and be united with the land and their ancestors. While burying is a part of the Christian tradition as well, but the deceased is believed to rise above the Earth to the higher spiritual realm of Heaven and be united with God. In contrast, the indigenous people believed that the deceased become a part of the spirits of the earth and this belief forms an integral part of their worldview. They believe that nature itself has various spiritual beings like those of animals, plants, water, rocks – they are seen as living beings capable of influencing the well-being of their communities. Their ancestors,

after death, become intricately intertwined with nature and they guide the communities and their presence is believed to influence the ongoing cycles of life and season.

The mistreatment of sacred land comes out more poignantly in Kath Walker's poem 'We are Going'. The poem appears in an anthology of the same name and it is the first book of poems published by an Aboriginal Australian. The poem thoughtfully explores the impact of colonization in the lives of Aboriginal Australians as settlers who are displaced and eradicated from their familiar surroundings to make space for the European settlers as their destruction not only destroy lives or nature but also erodes the identity and culture of the people of an entire continent. Walker who is more commonly known by her Aboriginal name Oodgeroo Noonuccal, was a writer and member of the Noonuccal tribe. The Noonuccal people are a part of the Quandamooka people from North Stradbroke Island, Queensland, Australia. Growing up in Stradbroke Island, she witnessed several customs of the tribe which were still in practice. Although she was baptized as Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska, Walker in her later life gave up her Christian name and adopted the name Oodgeroo Noonuccal as an expression of her cultural identity and her activism for the rights of Aboriginal people in Australia. Through her successful campaign against discriminatory and anti-Aboriginal sections of the Australian constitution, she became a prominent advocate for Indigenous rights, land

rights, and environmental conservation. Her poetry and her activism were deeply intertwined bringing attention to the social, cultural, and environmental issues faced by the Aboriginal Australians thereby raising awareness towards a positive change.

The beginning of the poem is spoken from the perspective of an outsider who describes the 'silent' arrival of a 'semi-naked band' of people to a little town (Noonuccal). When the poet says 'All that remained of their tribe', it could mean the few surviving people or that silence and subjugation are all that remains of the once vibrant tribe (Noonuccal). The town now stands on their former bora ground, yet no signs of it are visible. The white settlers have taken over their sacred land, and a garbage dump covers the remaining traces of the old bora ring. The term 'bora' refers to both an Aboriginal ceremony and the site of the ceremony. A bora ceremony marks the initialization of boys into manhood and while the aspects of it may vary from tribe to tribe but it usually involves scarification, circumcision, subincision, or the removal of a tooth. The physical rituals are followed by the teaching of traditional sacred songs, religious visions, dances, or lore which are specific to a tribe. The bora grounds are sacred and the ceremony is a way for the tribes to reinforce their spiritual beliefs, social structures, and traditional values. It is a unique yet integral part of the Aboriginal lifestyle and culture. The pattern of bora land may vary from tribe to tribe but

it usually has stone arrangements, rock engravings, and other artworks. Some cultures associate the ceremony with Baiame, the creator spirit.

From the eighth line onwards, the poet shifts to the inclusive pronoun 'we' to represent and express the voices of all the Australian Aboriginals who have been removed from their lands, oppressed, and marginalized as the settlers took over their continent. The tribe has become strangers to their own land, while the real strangers are the white men who 'hurry about like ants' (Noonuccal). The next few lines establish the strong connection the tribes shared with their sacred land and every tiny object of nature and its forces. Their identity lies in the bora ground, in the corroboree, in the ancient ceremonies and laws and wisdom passed down by the elders. A corroboree is a ceremonial meeting of Indigenous people and is characterized by festive celebration or warlike gatherings. In the next few lines, Walker beautifully brings out their history and the deep emotions attached to it. The little town was once their land; where they had their hunts and laughing games. They had their sacred relationship with the lightning, the thunder, the daybreak, and every other spirit of 'nature and the past' (Noonuccal). The Aboriginal Australians see themselves to be a part of nature, they are not separated from it. Their ceremonies, cultures, and emotions are deeply intertwined with the world around them.

In the final lines of the poem, there is an apparent sense of dejection and sadness that takes over as the native people accept their fate and loss. The Aboriginals, now living without their sacred land, are scattered, taking with them their traditional ways of living, their wisdom, and their culture. The far-reaching environmental consequences that have come with the displacement of the Aboriginals from their land are evident. The settlers did not feel the need to protect the environment or the wildlife. The shrubs are no more to be seen. The eagle, the emus, and the kangaroos are also gone from the place. The animals, especially the emu and the kangaroo, represent the unique biodiversity of the land. The animals have either been hunted down, or they have lost their habitat and therefore had to migrate to some other place. There is no more the space for the bora ring, or the corroboree, and as the poet ends with the line 'And we are going', we realize that the Australian Aboriginal has no other option left but to leave everything (Noonuccal). The line can be seen as a comment on how the marginalized voices will be silent in mainstream narratives as they will struggle to retain their identity in the face of colonization, oppression, and other adversities. Healy remarks,

> Aboriginal literature, from the beginning, remained committed to a collective Aboriginal experience. It was, even in the first moments, a literature of wound, vulnerable in its directness, open in its uncertainty,

> and at the same time, reluctant to apply closure to its relations with the surrounding white society. (Healy 1988, 80)

However, Oodgeroo has something different to say about her poem. She says,

> [The poem] is a double-header. Saying we are going was a warning to the white people: we can go out of existence, or with proper help we could also go on and live in this world in peace and harmony. It was up to the whites. Now the whites have proved to us that they're going the wrong way about it. But the Aboriginals will not go out of existence; the whites will. We are going to live; the whites are going to die. (Huggan 2010, 95)

The poem affirms their sacred connection to their land which the white people do not have. The connection to the land is not merely physical but extends to a spiritual and ancestral realm, where it forms the foundation of their stories and cultural practices. The land, with its natural features, holds the stories of creation, providing a spiritual map that guides their understanding of the world and their place in it. If the Aboriginals leave, what goes away with them is the harmonious existence of humans in nature, something that the white settlers could never do. Huggan and Tiffin point out that in the poem there is an 'affirmative recital of shared cultural properties that establishes clear lines of continuity be-

tween the past and the present…' and that the poem 're-establishes a connection with the land that the 'white tribe' has lost.' (Huggan 2010, 94) The lifestyle of the Aboriginals exhibited greater proximity to nature, their cultural practices were rooted in nature – this is something that the settlers could never have; their strive for development would only come at the disruption of an intimate relationship with nature.

What separates the work of Oodgeroo from that of Duffy or Lindsay is that Oodgeroo has the shared experience of colonization and she has actively worked against the discrimination faced by the Aboriginal Australians. She shares her history and identity with the Aboriginal Noonuccal tribe. She took up the name Oodgeroo Noonuccal as an expression of her cultural identity and it reflects her deep connection to her Aboriginal heritage and a desire to reclaim her indigenous identity which had been suppressed. It was a bold act of self-determination, cultural reclamation and symbolizes her enduring legacy as a leader in the Indigenous rights movement in Australia.

A severe consequence of colonization is the assimilation of cultures and identities. The traditional practices, beliefs, value systems, worldview, and ways of life are suppressed or forcibly replaced by those of the colonizers. Simply by taking away the land of Indigenous people, the colonizers were taking away age-old customs and

cultural heritage. Additionally, manipulative or forceful conversions, institutionalisation, and the erasure of identity all contributed to the assimilation process. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley talks about the life of Zitkala-Sa, a Native American child who witnessed and was affected by the government's assimilationist policies which forbade them to practice their religious traditions or speak in their Native tongue. She even talks about how the missionaries cut her hair, which went against the laws of her tribe where only mourners or cowards get their hair chopped. (Stanley 1994, 66-67). Healy quotes the psychologist Erik Erikson, saying that some periods in history have 'identity vacua' and this happens even more to people who are threatened and have to spend their lives in anxiety and dread. (Healy 1988, 83) It is essential to understand the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and conscious efforts must be taken to promote the preservation of the culture, heritage and practices of the indigenous people.

The themes of displacement, loss and cultural disruption caused by colonization and subsequent industrialization is carefully portrayed in these poems. They present history from a different perspective than that of the Europeans, highlighting the invasion of settlers into pristine land and the subsequent human intervention on nature. The poems also address the erasure of indigenous cultures and voices and the struggles of indigenous people to maintain their identity and heritage. Modern-day de-

velopment has always come at the expense of natural resources and the people who remain closely tied to nature. The poems call for awareness, empathy and understanding and give voice to the ones whom the colonizers wanted to suppress. What is also common between these three poems is that they evoke a sense of loss and displacement while acknowledging the importance of preserving and respecting diverse cultures, histories, and identities. Through their poignant imagery and evocative language, they leave a lasting impression on the minds of the readers and invite reflections on the complex and multifaceted issues of displacement, loss of identity, and cultural disruption in contemporary societies.

Works Cited

Duffy, Carol Ann. n.d. "Selling Manhattan" The Open University. (n.d.). Retrieved April 4, 2023, from https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/resource/view.php?id=17594

Healy, J. J. 1988. "The True Life in Our History": *Aboriginal Literature in Australia. Antipodes*, 2(2), 79-85.

Hendrix, B. A. 2005. "Memory in Native American Land Claims". *Political Theory,* 33(6), 763-785.

Huggan, H. T. 2010. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. New York: Routledge.

Jackson, J. B. 2013. "The Story of Colonialism, or Rethinking the Ox-Hide Purchase in Native North America and Beyond". *The Journal of American Folklore*, 126(499), 31-54.

Lindsay, Vachel. n.d. "The flower-fed buffaloes". < https://allpoetry.com/The-Flower-Fed-Buffaloes>

Noonuccal, Oodgeroo. " n.d. Where Are We Going". <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/where-are-we-going-14/>

Reynolds, G. C. 2007. "A Native American Land Ethic". *Human Resuorces and Environment*, 21(3), 16-20.

Ridington, R. 1996. "Voice, Representation, and Dialogue". *American Indian Quarterly*, 20, 467-488.

Stanley, S. K. 1994. "Claiming a Native American Identity: Zitkala-Sa and Autobiographical Strategies". *Pacific Coast Philology,* 29(1), 64-69.

Ward, J. C. 1985. Vachel Lindsay is "Lying Low". *College Literature*, 12(3), 233-245.

Wikipedia. n.d. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bora_(Australian)

Wikipedia. n.d.. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corroboree

Narratives of Resistance: A Critical Exploration of Colonial Legacies and Ecological Violence in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy and Anne Pancake

Sreya Mukherjee

Introduction: The Ecocritical Discourse

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Cormac McCarthy's 1985 historical fiction *Blood Meridian; or, The Evening Redness in the West* and Ann Pancake's 2007 novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. The primary objective of this comparative analysis is twofold. Firstly, it aims to explore the recurrent themes of violent imperialist endeavours in *Blood Meridian* and the destructive practice of mountaintop removal mining activity in the Appalachian region of the United States, as depicted in Pancake's novel. Through this exploration, these narra-

tives jointly illuminate an enduring and intrinsic process of political violence and cultural militarism deeply embedded in the American context. This inherent process is perpetuated through the lens of fetishised identity constructs and hierarchical social systems, which not only engender individuals and communities marked by anger, repression, and guilt but also normalise violence as an acceptable mode of discourse within American society. As Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* presciently observes:

> Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. (Said 1993, 47)

As could be discerned from the above quoted text, Edward Said examines postcolonial cultures and literature from an ecological perspective. He underscores the significant role played by geographical and cultural violence in the establishment and perpetuation of imperialist ideologies and patriarchal power dynamics in both Western and Eastern contemporary contexts. Said's perspective posits that imperialism evolves from being a forceful territorial invasion of foreign lands into an enduring condition characterised by a continuous cultural and political struggle for control over resources, spaces, and

authority. In this ongoing struggle, a dialectic of self vs. other takes shape. Said emphasises that both authoritarian and democratic regimes worldwide are impacted by imperialism to varying degrees, utilising deeply ingrained hierarchical divisions to assert their dominance over indigenous populations or peripheral regions, often by endorsing narrow interests such as "patriotism, chauvinism, and fostering ethnic, religious, and racial divisions" (Said 1993, 22).

This perspective highlights that diverse forms of ecological, economic, social, and human violence are not isolated, sporadic acts by individuals but rather interconnected, organised, and systematic ideologies of subjugation. Imperialism is not merely about distinctions between white and native or the centre and periphery, but primarily revolves around the governance of hierarchies and the enforcement of limited identity constructs.

This paper contends that the ecological violence, encompassing deforestation and pollution, and human violence, including sexual violence and child abuse, depicted in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, illustrates the interconnectivity of humanity with its ecological environment. Rather than existing in isolation from their surroundings, humans are embedded in a complex web of relationships. Spatial violence, as portrayed in these novels, serves as a mirror to the fractures and disparities within American social, cultural,

and democratic systems, which, in turn, tolerate glaring injustices and abuses.

For instance, in *Blood Meridian*, characters like the kid and various American combatants are deeply involved in brutal conflicts, using these as a justification for their callous disregard for the lives of both their adversaries and comrades. This behaviour is driven by a desire to assert dominance in terms of labour, land, and a display of masculinity. Paradoxically, despite their participation in these violent conflicts, American fighters, who are linguistically, culturally, and socially marginalised compared to figures like Judge Holden and other leaders, are relegated to the role of "silent mob of spectators." When they do attempt to voice an opinion, it is often expressed through "muttered obscenities" or "silent headshakes" (McCarthy 1985, 78). These suppressed and silenced American fighters channel their pent-up aggression towards others and women out of fear that their masculinity and authority are under threat.

Similarly, in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, the violent, industrial transformation and degradation of the landscape disrupts the familial and social dynamics among the marginalised residents of Yellowroot. Women like Lace and her daughter Bant are compelled to work in order to support themselves and their families, while men often find themselves unemployed or relegated to menial tasks like house cleaning. Consequently, family

members become resentful and embittered, projecting their anger onto one another. This paper, thus, posits that the socio-cultural and political contexts in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* produce a milieu where isolated and disgruntled white Americans live in virtual worlds, directing their frustrations towards others and themselves.

The second objective for comparing *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* lies in their shared innovative perspective on environmental consciousness as a means of achieving psychological and emotional liberation and self-forgiveness. Within this context, certain characters, such as the kid in *Blood Meridian*, and Bant and Lace in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, exhibit the capacity to cultivate fresh perceptions and connections with their environment, thereby disrupting their fixed fetishised identity affiliations. This transformation assists them in transcending their experiences of oppression and subjugation.

Many ecological scholars and thinkers concur that the history of human interactions with the spaces and places they inhabit unfolds as a narrative of identity suppression, transformation, and rejuvenation. This narrative can either perpetuate or challenge colonial and discriminatory histories, along with their corresponding resistances. For instance, Noël Sturgeon (1997) argues that "an environmentalist politics serves as a fertile ground

for scrutinizing the construction of identity politics because it transcends the confines of human identity shaped by normalized hierarchies of value, as observed in racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism" (18). Sturgeon maintains that hierarchical political structures, exploitative economic systems, and distinct identity constructs operate as interconnected forces of oppression and discrimination across gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. Similarly, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley (2011), following in the footsteps of Said and Sturgeon, contend that the landscape is not a passive backdrop but an active participant in the historical processes, including imperialism. It is an integral component rather than a passive observer of human experiences (9). Postcolonial-ecocritical readings of both the selected novels, therefore, provide a novel vantage point for examining the impact of imperialism on the landscapes, identities, and power dynamics of both the colonisers and the colonised.

The (Post)Colonised American Landscape

Traditionally, the historical narrative of America's Westward expansion has predominantly centred on the progress of civilisation and human development, often overlooking the role of the natural world. However, the unique characteristics of American nature have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's history, both at regional and national levels. Cormac McCarthy's literary

works echo this perspective, offering a revisionist commentary that interweaves human history with the natural world, thereby illustrating the intricate nature-culture relationship (Buell 1995, 7).

McCarthy's interpretation of history and the evolution of American civilisation diverges from the conventional national myth of a triumphant process of claiming a promised land. Instead, his revisionist perspective tells a different story, one of conquest and devastation. While Southern novels hint at the historical context of their region, the most intricate portrayal of history can be found in *Blood Meridian*, a novel situated in the heart of the westward expansion. As Luce has observed, the novel's landscape imagery serves to disrupt the established ethos of the American West:

> McCarthy's landscapes are not the renderings of the pastoral or picturesque or even the sublime west distributed to curious nineteenth-century Americans in the cultural centers back east. Rather, they tend to deconstruct and deromanticize the mid-nineteenth-century west and the imperialism that claimed, tamed and absorbed it as part of America.(Luce 2017)

Likewise, Ann Pancake's novel deals with another American region that is not only ecologically vulnerable but also ravaged by the neo-liberal capitalist aspirations. The Appalachian Mountains, older than the Himalayas, boast

diverse ecosystems that span from temperate to arctic climatic zones. However, on a daily basis, they face deforestation and the explosive removal of layers of mountains to extract coal seams. The displaced soil, known as 'overburden,' is deposited into the valleys, leading to pollution, floods, and the creation of barren lands. Amidst these environmental concerns, mountaintop-removal mining poses a substantial threat to the people residing in the region. These issues are intrinsically linked to the lives of the mountaineers, and it is within this context that Ann Pancake sets her novel. While the ecological damage is evident in the flattened skylines and disrupted ecosystems, Pancake's book vividly places the individuals at the heart of this messy narrative.

Colonisation, Xenophobia and Systemic Ecological Violence

In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Judith Butler advances the notion that power is not merely a force of opposition but, rather significantly, a fundamental element upon which our existence depends. It is also a force that resides within us, constituting and preserving our self-identities. As Butler puts it, what may initially seem like external power, exerted upon individuals and compelling them into subservience, ultimately takes on a psychological dimension that shapes the subject's self-conceptualisation.

In this context, the term "subjection" denotes the dual process of individuals becoming subordinated by power and simultaneously becoming subjects themselves. Its purpose is to establish and perpetuate social categories that render individuals vulnerable to linguistic, psychological, and historical changes. According to Butler, the mechanisms by which individuals are often shaped by submission serve as a means to securely access the advantages of aligning with power. Butler's argument proves to be highly relevant when analysing the power dynamics and identity discourses presented in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. Within these two novels, themes of militarised practices, economic subjugation, and a collective atmosphere of silence, indifference, and complicit consent concerning various forms of ecological and human violence emerge as dominant and revealing features.

In *Blood Meridian*'s narrative, American colonists, from 1849 to 1850, waged systematic, brutal wars against their neighbours, the Native Americans, Mexicans, Indians, Spanish, Apaches, and others, labelling them all as "robbers," "a race of degenerates," and "barbarians" (McCarthy 1985, 33). They did this in the name of protecting civilisation and scientific advancement. As would be expected, American military incursions in *Blood Meridian* promote "ethnotyping," or the clichéd portrayal of individuals classified based on a set of xenotypes that are immortalised in bronze. In contrast to nearby entities

that are seen as inherently different (a derogatory ethnotype), the ethnotype strengthens a desired self-identity (Westphal 2007, 144). Imperialism is both a concept and praxis. In this context, Judge Holden's authority, both as a leader and as a promoter of Western culture, is maintained through his linguistic dominance over his compliant followers. According to Judge Holden, "Words are things. Their authority transcends [the Speaker's] ignorance of their meaning" (McCarthy 1985, 85).

He leverages his linguistic prowess and expertise to awe and persuade the kid and fellow American combatants to engage in his imperialistic endeavour. He declares that "God made this world, but he didn't make it to suit everybody" (19). On the basis of his contorted logic of God's inherent discrimination, he states that "War is God. It's the testing of one's will and the will of another" (248). Interestingly, Judge Holden institutes a secular framework wherein divine or religious influences are set aside. Within this framework, he proclaims a structured hierarchy marked by exclusion, identity clashes, and the dominance of a singular white authority. As a leader, Judge Holden pledges to secure wealth, employment, and authority for the combatant white Americans: "We will be the ones who will divide the spoils. There will be a section of land for everyman in my company. A land rich in minerals, in gold and silver" (35). Consequently, the white Americans perceive themselves as superior to their less civilised neighbours, a euphemism for the

Native Americans, whom they believe require discipline and control.

The need for money and substantial military budgets among Americans in *Blood Meridian* serves to further legitimise xenophobic and hierarchical perspectives toward both the natural world and established societal structures. Judge Holden, for example, lays claim to knowledge in fields such as "ecology," "teleology," "palaeontology," and "science" while he "speaks in stones and trees" (105-6). However, this scientific knowledge is tainted by corruption, economic interests, and political motivations. Throughout the conflicts in the novel, settlements are abandoned, ecological orders are disrupted, and the very landscape is marred by fires, with huts, abodes, and entire villages left in ruins. The violence unleashed during these battles pollutes rivers and lakes, staining them with "blood and dead bodies," resulting in the despoilment of others' lands and natural resources. This victory by American colonisers in *Blood Meridian* is therefore rendered pyrrhic. As Gareth Cornwell (2015) has aptly noted, American militarism in the novel stands as a foundational element of the oppression of the vulnerable, particularly women, and contributes to the devastation of the nonhuman world. He observes that "the entire thrust of the novel is to unseat the anthropomorphic perspective that privileges humanity over the rest of nature" (533).

I concur with Cornwell's argument, emphasising that the spatial and environmental brutality exhibited by the colonisers in *Blood Meridian* underscores a deeply ingrained problematic attitude that relegates women, nature, and animals to subservient and object-like roles. However, it is crucial to recognise that the acts of pollution and deforestation in *Blood Meridian* can also be viewed as calculated methods aimed at obliterating and concealing the history of the colonised and the crimes of the colonisers. Spaces, landscapes, and places inherently bear witness to the history, achievements, values, and memories of their inhabitants. In this context, the Americans in *Blood Meridian* attempt to erase the traces of their transgressions by demolishing the cultural heritage of others (Native Americans), leaving behind "ruined villages, buildings, and old churches," (300) and engaging in the grim task of collecting and searching for the bones of their victims.

Susan Kollin (2001) is of the view that *Blood Meridian* characterises "western landscape that is supposed to be a test of character, bringing out the best in the hero and the worst in the villain, is emptied of its sacred qualities, becoming instead a fully defiled, profaned space" (562). Kollin views the colonial landscape as a battleground where violent conflicts take place, leading to the establishment and propagation of specific types of domination over both humans and nature, along with the creation of hierarchical systems, which McCarthy pres-

ents in his work as "the lack of fully developed female characters in his Westerns and its obsession with Anglo-American masculinity" (Kollin, 2001, 569). Indeed, the aggressive and militarised structure depicted in *Blood Meridian* imparts masculine traits to culture, the economy, and social behaviour. During periods of warfare and heightened displays of physical violence, women find themselves with limited opportunities to participate meaningfully.

James Der Derian in *The Value of Security* (1998) argues that in the contemporary times "out of fear, for gain, or in the pursuit of glory, states will go to war because they can" (30). Der Derian's discussion centres on the security rhetoric put forth by George Bush in 1992, which asserts that "the enemy is unpredictability. The enemy is instability." This rhetoric paved the way for the American war in Iraq, considered as "the enemy other that helped to redefine the Western identity" and "the deterritorialization of the state and the disintegration of a bipolar order" (Der Derian 41). The Iraq war exposed a realm of virtual adversaries and stimuli, prepping the terrain for demographic and territorial violence, while affording governments and administrations unrestricted authority in determining the extent and reasons for employing force. However, the concept of virtual demonisation and the punishment of difference extend to the national level.

This is particularly evident in the context of the Appalachian region portrayed in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, often labelled as an "internal colony" (Anglin 1993, 285) and a "culture of poverty" (Billings 2016, 57). Appalachians are frequently depicted in American media as "backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and complacent people who are complicit in their own subjugation. Simultaneously, these 'submissive' mountaineers are perceived as among the most ruthless and violent individuals in the United States" (Fisher 1993, 1). As they are stereotyped as different and unpredictable, Appalachian residents are perceived as a potential threat to the unity and progressive image of the American nation. Consequently, there is a push to civilize them, and their landscape, much like the colonised territory in *Blood Meridian*, is remodelled to conform to modern developmental standards.

Operating under the guise of developing the underdeveloped Appalachian Mountain region, American authorities grant mining companies permission to transform the area. As described in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, they resort to drastic measures such as "blasting the top off the mountain to get the coal, they had no place to put the mountain's body except dump it in the head of the hollow" (Pancake, 20). This drive for progress and industrialisation necessitates a reshaping of the landscape and the abandonment of the history and ecology of the region, which was once teeming with "strange animals and plants, giant ferns and ancient trees, trapped down

there for 250 million years, captured, crushed, and hard-squeezed into-power" (Pancake, 312). The residents of Yellowroot endure the consequences of this industrial transformation. They breathe in "cancer-causing dust" (83), and their previously lush land deteriorates into a desolate landscape filled with "dead damp leaves," "dead branches," "dead trees," "full-sized dead fish," and "bulldozed and slaughtered trees, hundreds of them" (352). In *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, the monopolised industry of coal economy mirrors the colonial endeavour depicted in *Blood Meridian.* It exacerbates poverty levels, unemployment, and restricts opportunities for existence outside of specific economic structures, subjecting individuals to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983) term "schizophrenic capitalism" (33).

Schizophrenic capitalism perpetuates hierarchical divisions, segregating those in positions of power and socio-political authority, characterised as "the paranoiac despotic signs," from other economic actors designated as "the sign-figure of the schizo as a unit of decoded flux" (Deleuze and Guattari, 260). For instance, foreign workers in Yellowroot experience a lack of meaningful human interaction with the local residents, as their daily lives revolve around basic activities like eating, showering, and sleeping (Pancake, 79). They work without forging cultural or social ties to the places they inhabit. Upon relocating to Raleigh for work, Lace's family becomes immersed in a foreign space as part of their integration

into the free market. However, this new environment proves to be rife with racism and hierarchical divisions. Lace articulates this by stating, "the way people looked at us, regardless of how much money they had. Somehow people knew we were different from them, even before we opened our mouths […] It took me back to Morgantown again, the way the out-of-state students saw us, the way some professors did" (Pancake, 195). This harsh treatment leads Lace to discontinue her university education, unable to tolerate the demeaning attitudes toward Appalachians.

The inhabitants of Yellowroot do not hold an antagonistic stance against science, technology, industrialisation, or integration into American culture, nor do they harbour romantic or idealised notions about nature. They are, in essence, realists. A case in point is Lace, who echoes the sentiments of many in Yellowroot when she emphasises, "I was not against coal mines: My dad and granddad and husband were all miners. I just believe they can do it a better way, a way that would actually give us more jobs and not ruin everything we have" (Pancake, 301). Lace is advocating for a balanced socioeconomic approach that safeguards the rights of her indigenous community and their environment, recognising that "killing the trees … for certain meant the death of Yellowroot" (300).

When the residents of Yellowroot attempt peaceful dissent against their deteriorating circumstances, min-

ing companies respond with repression, even mobilising their workers to counter-protest or speak at permit hearings against the residents, labelling them as "Lyon Strips," effectively turning them into what appears to be a brainwashed, oppositional force (Pancake, 302). Likewise, politicians prove ineffectual in representing the interests of Yellowroot's residents, who quickly understand the disloyalties of West Virginia politicians (275). The fact that peaceful dissent in Appalachia is met with traditional colonial tactics like intimidation, imprisonment, and threats of harm underscores a pervasive preoccupation with security in the United States. It appears that a significant portion of Americans tolerates violence against dissent and even sanctions elements of collective punishment and internal exclusion. Much like the situation in Iraq, Appalachians find themselves entangled in anti-terrorism laws and accusations. As Larry Wilson, the president of Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC), points out, Appalachian people are conditioned to remain silent and repressed, as acts of protest are viewed as "acts of individual sabotage or terrorism" (as quoted in Fisher 73). This campaign of terrorising and silencing the Appalachian community is a deliberate strategy aimed at creating passive, dependent individuals, particularly men, whose inability to take action and effect change undermines their capacity for self-expression.

The prevailing culture of security in the United States reintroduces individuals marked by anger, guilt, and a pro-

pensity for violence. These individuals cope with these negative emotions through self-absorption, dependency, and an overall sense of indifference. Consequently, despite the dire circumstances facing Yellowroot, which clearly warrant a reasonable degree of political and social attention in contemporary democratic America, the majority of the population appears to consciously turn a blind eye. Lace's observation that "Nothing on TV, nothing in books, nothing in magazines looked much like our place or much like us" reflects the internalised feelings of inferiority, fear, and anger harboured by Appalachian people (Pancake, 82). These sentiments hinder their unity as a resistant group and grassroots movement. In contrast to *Blood Meridian*, where the kid and American fighters externalise their anger and violence towards others, the people of Appalachia tend to direct their oppression inward. Within families like Lace and her husband's, they live as adversaries, and their children absorb negative emotions that not only perpetuate their victimisation and isolation but also disrupt their normal patterns of identity.

Bant, for instance, lacks familial love and understanding, and she disrespects her passive and helpless father, projecting her anger and frustration onto her mother, holding her responsible for her choice of spouse: "You're the one married him, how could you not see how he is?" (Pancake, 82). Despite her discontent, Bant is unable to alter the course of her own life. She fails to complete her education and is unsuccessful in finding the right partner

to love. Her brother, Dane, experiences a sense of isolation and guilt stemming from his physical fragility and occupation as a cleaner.

The Anthropocentric Discourse of Gendered Subjugation

Although the historical contexts in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Blood Meridian* significantly differ, their discussions of masculinity and femininity exhibit transhistorical characteristics. In both works, men and women are ensnared and offered up as sexualised commodities within militarised and violent socio-economic frameworks. Jacques Derrida and Carol Adams delve into the intricate interconnections and consequences of the abuse of animals and women on one hand and the military, economic, and political dominion inherent in Western cultures and systems on the other. Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, posits that "the full transcendence to the human requires the sacrifice of the animal and the animalistic," which, in turn, facilitates a symbolic system that permits the "non-criminal putting to death," not only of animals but also of humans by designating them as animal-like (Derrida, 39). Derrida introduces the concept of "carno-phallogocentrism" to unveil the systematic legitimisation and justification of (colonial) violence, mass slaughters, and wars within Western democratic societies. This extends the concept of "the West's phallic" to encompass the notion of "sacrifice in killing animals and in dehumanizing the other" (1).

In alignment with Derrida's postulations, Carol Adams (1990) delves into the "sexual politics of meat" entrenched in Western culture, where masculinity remains deeply entwined with various material, ideological, and symbolic elements. This involves notions that men require meat, possess an entitlement to it, and that meat consumption is a male-associated activity linked with virility (Adams, 4). According to Adams, Western masculinity perpetuates the idea that "the woman is animalized, while the animal is sexualized" (4). Derrida's and Adams' arguments are directly applicable to the American imperialist and capitalist discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been,* respectively. Sexuality in both novels serves as an indicator of conforming to specific, invariably hierarchical gender roles within society, signifying a structured process of identity consolidation in the United States.

In *Blood Meridian*, a multifaceted dynamic unfolds regarding the treatment of native animals upon the arrival of the Americans. American fighters engage in hunting not only for sustenance but also as a means of exercising their dominance over the environment. They shoot various animals, including "goats," "fowls," "deer," as well as "cats, dogs, and sick horses," often resorting to brutal tactics such as "beating the screaming horses into submission," leading to the silent demise of these animals (McCarthy, 137 & 165). While the violence against animals may appear random, it underscores a systematic disregard for ecological equilibrium and the rights of

animals, a stance that doesn't align with the American assertion of civilising the indigenous peoples. Consequently, the maltreatment of animals in Blood Meridian introduces new social, cultural, and political norms, inherently hierarchical in nature.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin shed light on the distinction between the relationship of indigenous peoples and their prey, which was not inherently hierarchical, in contrast to the English perspective. The English believed that hunting symbolised the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humanity over the animal kingdom (Huggan and Tiffin 2006, 58). The adoption of English colonial practices, especially anti-animal ones, by victorious white Americans in *Blood Meridian* reveals deeper identity issues. These Americans celebrate their virility and racial domination by indulging in the consumption of meat and engaging in sexual practices. Following their meals, which include a variety of meats, they partake in acts of conquest, such as rape and sexual dominance over the local girls (McCarthy, 152).

This animalisation and sacrifice of women provide American fighters with a source of self-esteem and meaning in life, derived from their sexual and military supremacy over others. The war-related sexual violence and the widespread public acts of sexual aggression in *Blood Meridian* not only illustrate the gendered aspect of warfare, as sexual assaults are employed as political in-

struments to intimidate and degrade women and their male protectors, but also serve to establish American white power and superiority as beyond reproach and immune to repercussions.

The absence of genuine and natural male-female relationships in *Blood Meridian* serves to underscore sexual violence as an inherent facet of the social fabric and ethnic violence as an inherent element of the political landscape within the novel. American characters do not engage in familial or romantic associations, lacking mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, or daughters. Instead, American men inhabit a dehumanised and unfeeling environment, where space and time merely serve as a backdrop for competing militarised expressions of masculinity. These environmental changes overtly mirror and expose imbalances of power.

Consequently, the recurring scenes of American fighters consuming meat and subsequently asserting their sexual dominance over women lay bare the intrinsically disgraceful nature of the imperialist economy and politics depicted in the novel. Women are deprived of their traditional, honourable wartime roles such as cooking, nursing, or doing laundry. Instead, both white and colonised 'indigenous' women are relegated to roles as "pimps" and "whores of every age and size" (McCarthy, 145). Moreover, white male fighters do not require the services of nurses, as they are dehumanised, sexual-

ised, and subject to sacrifice as well. Both Judge Holden and other leaders, like Glanton, exhibit no compassion or regard for their white subordinates. Injured fighters are either "finished off" or left behind to perish as their leaders ride away (McCarthy, 152). This notion of sacrifice and vulnerability thus extends to both the colonised and the colonisers, affecting both females and males.

In contrast to the masculine and colonial economic system depicted in *Blood Meridian*, the capitalist framework in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* lacks a strong male presence and is notably desexualised. Instead, in Yellowroot, women play crucial roles as agents of development and productivity, even though they remain marginalised and subordinated. Lace, much like many other Appalachian women in the story, transitions from a traditional role as a housewife to that of a working woman at Dairy Queen. Here, we witness "big women and little kids working silent and serious on hot dogs and sundaes," emphasising their dedication to their work (Pancake, 5). Lace and her fellow Appalachian women work tirelessly, often likened to "humped animals." Lace is critical of her husband Jimmy, who is unemployed and in a state of despondency, leading her to remark, "Jimmy sat at home paralyzed, like a girl" (Pancake, 138). In this way, Lace effectively emasculates Jimmy, turning him into a burden and even an adversary.

As women like Lace provide the primary support for their families while men remain at home, Ann Pancake

challenges the conventional stereotype that "men know men have access to the truth, not women," revealing the sexual dynamics within the capitalist structure as rooted in necessity and urgency (10). Lace articulates that "everybody around hers is raised to take it, that's what makes us tough, but especially the girls, the women, are tougher than the men. Women are tougher, because they take it from the industry, the government, and the men" (133).

Lace's words underscore the constriction of space and time in Yellowroot, which becomes a disconcerting and confining arena for internal and external trials, responsibilities, and transformations, encompassing "a complete exchange of gender identity of which erotic behaviour was but one small part" (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 266). Lace's daughter Bant, much like her mother, is dissatisfied with her job, which involves "painting scab walls" (51). Similarly, her 12-year-old son, Dane, expresses his discontent with his role as a caretaker and house cleaner at Mrs. Taylor's, where he is assigned tasks like cleaning the kitchen and bathroom (46). Due to his job and his physical fragility, Dane is perceived as "even more girl than girl" (44).

The phenomenon of men becoming more effeminate and women adopting more masculine characteristics in Yellowroot highlights more profound ecological and socio-economic issues in contemporary America. Within the novel, human and cultural spaces are diminishing

and losing their vitality. The characters are disoriented, leading to disruptions in their life choices and their familial and communal relationships. For instance, Dane expresses his irritation, disappointment, and confusion regarding his father's passivity, stating that it "irritated and disappointed and confused him" (82). Dane's uncertainty about his gender roles and sexuality pushes him to retreat into his dimly lit room, reminiscing about his grandmother, who was more accepting of his softer qualities compared to others like Corey, Jimmy Make, Lace, and Bant who exhibit varying degrees of intolerance, denial, or indifference toward his perceived lack of traditional virility (112). Despite his age, Dane is keenly aware of his deviation from the typical masculine norms in his Appalachian culture, yet he struggles to articulate his feelings and resorts to being a good listener (44).

Gillian Rose's (1996) concept of "Masculine Dwelling" underscores how the distinction between authentic and inauthentic spaces is constructed in gendered terms. Material real spaces are seen as the product of masculinist power, and their materiality is closely linked to their particular form of masculinity. On the other hand, non-real spaces are also perceived as an effect of masculinist power, with their lack of reality serving as a sign of feminisation (Rose 1996, 58-9). Dane's ever-shifting and uncertain real spaces result in a displacement of his relationship with his culture and the natural environment. He grapples with the tension between his masculine imaginative spaces and his subjugating realities.

Similarly, Bant, described as "born with the age in her" (140), along with the Yellowroot landscape, is deprived of normal physical, emotional, and mental growth. Instead, Bant and her surrounding ecological system endure distressing changes and experiences that prematurely age them, leaving them devoid of a tangible existence beyond the narratives established by authority figures. In this context, aging ceases to represent the accumulation of physical, psychological, and social experiences or the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge over time. Rather, it signifies the suspension of time's progress and development, embodying an abnormal physical and psychological phenomenon that suggests an enduring adherence to restrictive discourses. This form of aging is indicative of linguistic, cultural, and ecological deterioration.

The Dialectics of Spatial-Ecological Consciousness and Self Awareness

In *The Plausible World*, Bertrand Westphal suggests that individuals and communities have the potential to deconstruct the authoritative and militaristic aspects of Western culture by envisioning "a new interpretation of the world as plausible, postmodern possible worlds within a dynamic and evolving environment, while eternal truths remain as abstract concepts" (Westphal 2013, 4). Echoing this argument, Jacque Derrida posits that all concepts are "arbitrary signs or outcomes of differentiation" generated by systems of oppression. Derri-

da argues that to attain true liberation, signs require "a structure that precedes any entity they may represent" (Derrida 2008, 99). Both Westphal and Derrida contend that people can transcend deeply ingrained patriarchal and hierarchical connections and beliefs by constructing alternative worlds that are free from preconceived notions and stereotypes.

The characters of the kid in *Blood Meridian* and Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* can be interpreted as embodying a postmodern and adaptable perception of space. This perspective allows them to break free from the repressive bonds and subjugation imposed by homogenisation and oppression in both novels. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid stands out as the only character who challenges Judge Holden's imperialist narrative, recognising that "the judge was a man like all men" (McCarthy 1985, 259). Consequently, he rejects the notion of racial superiority, viewing it as empty: "Whatever his antecedents, he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there a system by which to divide him back into his origins, for he would not go. No old, outdated maps" (270). The kid's detachment from the American empire and its racially biased socio-political structures not only involves the reconfiguration of his connections as a white American individual and the discipline of his sensual needs and desires but also signifies his act of repentance.

In contrast to the kid, Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* gradually comes to embrace her inseparable ties to her homeland. Following her grandmother's passing, Bant reflects on the significance of her emotional connection to the mountains, wondering, "was it worse to lose the mountains or the feelings that you had for it? Now that I'd lost this much, I realized that to not care wasn't to save yourself at all. It was only another loss" (Pancake 2007, 25). Bant's enduring and dutiful bond with her natural surroundings burdens her with feelings of guilt and anger, directed towards herself, her family, and her community, who fail to meet her expectations.

As Bant begins to comprehend the decisions made by others to relinquish their land and community to the mining company, including her repressed father and brother, she develops a new and forgiving perspective on her land and identity. Bant transitions from seeking what is lost to considering how she can find happiness, security, and freedom. Her ability to unite with her community, as she states, "In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope" (357), not only restores the fractured mother-daughter relationship but also rebuilds her Appalachian identity as equal and deserving.

Appalachian people grapple with a significant problem of individualism and apathy, which, in Bant's view, aim to "leave you empty inside" (102). She realises that

coming together with her fellow Yellowroot community members, who share the same feelings of isolation and repression, serves as an act of resistance. Similar to the kid, Bant forges a new connection with nature and place that transcends the symbolic and embodies the genuine conditions of her era and history. Her decision to remain in Yellowroot is based on her desire rather than obligation. Even though the Appalachian region still faces discriminatory practices, Bant boldly asserts that "the machine between us but no fear" (354).

Conclusion

This paper undertakes a postcolonial-ecocritical analysis of the manifestations of ecological and human violence in the novels *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. It posits that violence is a deliberate instrument within ongoing processes of cultural, political, and economic militarisation and securitisation in America, shaping American identity as marked by violence, anger, and gender bias, while also rendering American land as exclusionary.

Within the narrative of the two novels, the characters' perceptions of their homeland are manipulated and tainted, resulting in a perception of their subjugation and injustice as inevitable and predetermined. This underscores the inextricable connection between the American legacy of civilising border regions and the

contemporary American practice of applying double standards to the rights of minorities residing within its borders, such as the Appalachians. Nevertheless, the paper contends that certain characters in these novels, notably Bant and the kid, manage to break free from these constrictive and oppressive cultural and economic roles. They achieve this by reframing their self-identity and that of others, transitioning from a mindset of opposition to one of distinct individuality.

Works Cited

Adams, Carol J. (1990) 2015. *Sexual Politics of Meat*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Anglin, Mary. 1993. "Strategic Differences: Gendered Labor in Southern Appalachia." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 14 (1): 68–86.

Billings, Dwight B. 2016. "Rethinking Class beyond Colonialism." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22 (1): 57–64. https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0057.

Buell, Lawrence. 1995. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. London: Harvard University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1997. *The Physic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cornwell, Gareth. 2015. "Ambivalent National Epic: Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 56 (5): 531–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2015.1019393.

D'emilio, John, and Estelle B Freedman. 1988. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. New York: Harper & Row.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1983. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

Deloughrey, Elizabeth M, and George B Handley. 2011. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Der Derian, James. 1998. *The Value of Security*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

Derrida, Jacques. 2008. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Edited by Marie-Louise Mallet. Translated by David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press.

Estok, S. C. 2009. "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16 (2): 203–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isp010.

Fisher, Stephen L. 1993. *Fighting Back in Appalachia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. 2015. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Jones, Jeremy B. 2011. "Ann Pancake's STRANGE as THIS WEATHER HAS BEEN | *the Iowa Review*."

Iowareview.org. August 1, 2011. https://iowareview.org/blog/ann-pancake%E2%80%99s-strange-weather-has-been.

Kollin, Susan. 2001. "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western." *Contemporary Literature* 42 (3): 557–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/1208996.

Luce, Dianne C. 2017. "Landscapes as Narrative Commentary in Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West." *European Journal of American Studies* 12 (3). https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12259.

Mccarthy, Cormac. (1985) 2010. *Blood Meridian; Or, the Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage International.

Pancake, Ann. 2007. *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. Emeryville, Ca: Shoemaker & Hoard.

Rose, Gillian. 1996. "As If the Mirrors Had Bled." In *Body Space*, edited by Nancy Duncan. New York: Routledge.

Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Sturgeon, Noël. 1997. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action*. New York: Routledge.

Westphal, Bertrand. 2007. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Palgrave Macmillan.

———. 2013. *The Plausible World*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Review of Motherhood and Childhood in Silvina Ocampo's Works by Fernanda Zullo-Ruiz. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, November 2023 · 240 pages ·216x138mm.Hardback - 9781837720750 · eBook - pdf - 9781837720767 · eBook - epub - 9781837720774. Price 75 GBP.

Teeju Bhagat

As the book's title suggests, it construes the connection between motherhood and childhood in understanding the dynamics of the mother/child relationship in Silvina Ocampo's works. This involves an understanding of a specific type of mother/child dyad, highlighting the importance of exploring the maternal aspect in this relationship. This book is a compilation of Silvina Ocampo's work, an Argentine writer. A renowned writer, Silvina Ocampo needs no introduction. Her literary works, along with her collaborations and connections with other notable writers, have not only contributed to the cul-

tural and literary landscape of Argentina but also to the field of Iberian and Latin American literature and art. Her works often explore themes of identity, surrealism, and the human condition. Her stories often touch upon aspects of the human experience, including emotions, relationships, challenges of existence and tryst with the concept of psychoanalysis, particularly drawing on the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

The introduction starts with a quote from Adolfo Bioy Casares, Ocampo's husband which reveals that her writings were marked by a unique and original style, distinct from the work of other authors. Furthermore, the idea that her works may have been influenced by themselves implies a self-generating and independent creative process, highlighting Ocampo's individuality as a writer.

The assortment of Ocampo's works has been divided into two different yet interconnected parts. The first part is called as *Mater* (Mother) emphasizing the role of mothers and motherhood. It explores the representations of different kind of mothers such as the dead mother in *Rhadamanthos*, (pro)creative mother in *El Cuaderno*, the absent egoistical mother in *Las Invitadas*, the mercenary mother in *La Furia* and gender-bending mother in Santa Teodora. The diverse maternal figures provide a glimpse into the complexity of motherhood as portrayed in her stories. The book also refers to many critical thinkers and their theories such as E. Ann Kaplan's work called

Motherhood and Representation, which discusses the concept of "Master Discourses" to examine the theoretical context for Ocampo's exploration of motherhood. The juxtaposition of transgressive characteristics along with the figure of mother as chapter's titles violate the moral and social boundaries and thus, breaks away from the stereotypical and populist narratives created around motherhood. The collective examination of these works provides a panoramic view of Ocampo's exploration of the theme of motherhood. The stories offer diverse perspectives on maternal roles, highlighting the complexity and variability of motherhood in her body of work.

The second chapter delves into the complexities of the story "Rhadamanthos," exploring its layers of meaning and drawing connections to Greek mythology. It examines the story of a woman named Virginia, who, disturbed by the attention a deceased acquaintance receives at her wake, seeks revenge. Virginia spends the night after the wake executing her scheme, writing love letters from a fictitious paramour to the deceased woman to tarnish her reputation. The title "Rhadamanthos" draws an ironic parallel between the character Rhadamanthus from Greek mythology and Virginia, the envious main character. Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and an unbiased judge of the underworld, contrasts with Virginia's vengeful actions. Hence, Virginia, in laying down her own law, equates sexuality with morality and revenge with justice. The deceased woman becomes a contested

narrative space where Ocampo reveals the silencing of the maternal voice amid the ongoing chatter about her.

Chapter six discusses the complexities of the extended metaphor of the deceitful body. Teodora, through her dramatic entrance in the mentioned poem, introduces the motif of gender-bending. She disguises herself as a man and enters a monastery, initiating a chain of binary tensions, such as the division of interior and exterior spaces, seen and heard, and fiction and reality. She faces public denunciations, accused of violating a pure girl and subsequently making her pregnant. The external appearance of her body provides evidence for her accusers to condemn her as a sinner. However, she refers to herself as a "pecadora" (sinner) despite presenting as a man in society's eyes. This raises questions about her self-perception and whether she still considers herself a woman despite choosing to live as a man. While both the poem and the unpublished story establish Teodora as rebelling against conventions, the story provides specific reactions and emotions that are not present in any of the three poems.

Whereas, the second part called as *Filius* (Son), emphasizes the connection of mother and the child, distinct roles of gestation and the subsequent creation of a new space, which is childhood, a crucial phase in shaping individuals and their identities. It examines childhood and its association with subject formation, the most studied

aspect of the family unit in psychoanalysis and critical inquiries of Ocampo's works. It discusses psychoanalysis, foundational theories such as Oedipus Complex and the Mirror Stage, key processes in psychoanalysis related to childhood and how their reformulations aim to unravel the mysteries of childhood by examining how subjects are interpellated by the dominant ideology. However, it also critiques psychoanalysis as it also has its pitfalls, and can hence, lead to ethnocentrism and gender normativity. The theories and interpretations may not be universally applicable, revealing potential biases and limitations.

Chapter twelve echoes tension between Roman Catholic and classical imagery established from the outset, echoing the Catholic binary opposition between the soul and the body. The title introduces the theme, stating that symbols of purity and mysticism can sometimes be more aphrodisiacal than pornographic images or stories. This sets the tone for the narrative, hinting at the complexity and blurred boundaries between seemingly pure symbols and spaces. It brings to light that (im)pure objects that accrue in the story, such as the white dress, gloves, pearl rosary, flower, and missal, create an ironic foreshadowing of the events that will unfold during the communion. The missal, typically a sacred book for religious rituals, becomes a focal point for the tension and attraction between the spiritual and corporeal realms. Unlike previous stories that examined childhood in var-

ious spaces such as a city, body, or estate grounds, "El pecado mortal" delves into the placement of the child within her home, exploring both real and spiritual dimensions. The story is described as a re-creation of a narrative that, in the cultural context of the narrator, would typically be disclosed in the sanctum sanctorum of the confessional. This suggests a confessional or introspective tone to the narrative.

The book's assiduous attempt to give a detailed examination of a subversive motherhood, highlighting its uniqueness as a distinct space that gestates (carries and nurtures) and then engenders (gives birth to) another separate space called childhood. It has intended to engage with subversion of various ideologies and discourses, using psychoanalysis as a primary tool but also incorporating social issues and elements such as race, rape, gender and death. It also addresses various psychoanalytic issues, along with commonplace beliefs about childhood, which are noted to emerge in Ocampo's texts. These issues are explicitly or implicitly addressed as the works tackle the notion of childhood. The book also utilizes Freud's spatial metaphors and Lacan's use of myth linking the primitive mind, the child's mind, and femininity. It also wrestles with concepts of Catholicism, capitalism, cinema, and populist narratives to explore and question the complexities of childhood and motherhood.

Notes on Contributors (in the order of appearance)

Swarnendu Dam: He is the youngest Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Sister Nivedita University, Kolkata, India. He is also a Doctoral (Ph.D.) Research Scholar in West Bengal State University working on Post-Millennial Indian Dystopian Fiction. He is an associate member of the Centre for Studies in Gender, Culture and Media, West Bengal State University since 2021. He worked as a Research Assistant under Dr. Abhijeet Paul, University of California, Barkley on the issue of Environmental and Community Justice. His area of interests are Environment & Literature, Caste & Literature, Crisis Literature and Vulnerability Studies.

Harjot Banga: PhD Candidate at the University of Turin and Genoa, specialises in English Postcolonial Literature in the field of Digital Humanities. He has a wide range of academic interests, including ecocriticism, urban, subaltern, and cultural studies in English-speaking countries' literature.

Arcaprova Raychaudhury: PhD Research Scholar and Senior Research Fellow at the Department of English, University of Calcutta. His research interests are detective fiction, psychonalysis, popular literature and culture, twentieth-century English literature, and postcolonial studies.

Anmana Bhattacharya: She is an independent scholar who graduated from St. Xaver's College and has completed her Masters from the University of Calcutta. She is interested in gothic fiction, cultural studies, critical theory and translation, among other things.

Sreya Mukherjee: Junior Research Fellow at the Department of Indian and World Literatures in The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She is working on the representation of motherhoods in the Indian epics for her doctoral research. Her areas of interest are mythology, women's writing, translation studies and postcolonial literature. She did her M.A. in English Literature from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She completed her B.A. in English Literature from Banaras Hindu University.

Teeju Bhagat: Teeju Bhagat is a PhD scholar and Teaching Assistant in the centre of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Latin American studies in Jawaharlal Nehru university. She is fluent in English, Hindi, Spanish and Portuguese languages. Apart from her interest in languages and literature in general, she is particularly interested in Migration studies, Gender studies, folklore and popular culture. In her M.phil, she worked on the myth of La Llorona.