

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION
AND
CREATIVE IMAGINATION

Social Transformation and Creative Imagination

Editor

SUDHIR CHANDRA

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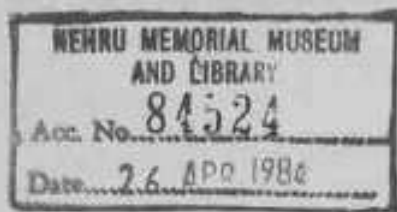
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Preface

The papers in this collection were presented at the third annual symposium of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Held from 7 to 11 February 1983, the symposium had a theme—social transformation and creative imagination—that was designed to effect a dialogue between cross-sections of the human sciences and the arts.

Having hovered about the intersection of history and literature for some years, I was naturally delighted to have been entrusted the task of editing this volume by Prof. Ravinder Kumar, the Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. He had conceived the idea of the symposium and need not have asked anybody to undertake the editing. I deeply appreciate his gesture.

The contributors to this volume belong to a variety of disciplinary background. They are used to certain stylistic specificities. These have been retained, so far as possible, even with regard to spelling of proper nouns and vernacular terms and the use of diacritical marks. The principle of uniformity has been subordinated to the peculiar flavour, or usage, of different fields.

In the preparation of this volume I received ready cooperation from all the contributors, most of whom revised their papers following discussions at the symposium. I am obliged to them. My paper in this collection was edited by my friend and colleague, Basudev Chatterji. Another friend, Geeta Kapur, edited my 'Introduction'. Ravinder Kumar, Anuradha Kapur, Suresh Sharma and Kumkum Sangari also went through the 'Introduction' and offered valuable suggestions. My heartfelt thanks to all of them. My old friend, Lakshman Dewani, lightened my burden by correcting, as only he can, so many proofs. Among the staff of the Nehru Library who

helped in different ways, and at various stages in the making of this volume, I should particularly like to thank Dr Hari Dev Sharma, Shri S.R. Mahajan, Shri J.S. Nahal, Dr S.R. Bakshi, Dr Shila Sen, Ms Deepa Bhatnagar, Shri T.K. Venkateswaran, Shri Vijay Kumar and Shri Surinder Pal Singh.

SUDHIR CHANDRA

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Introduction

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND CREATIVE IMAGINATION

Sudhir Chandra

Words have a bipolar pull. They denote something specific and, at the same time, connote something different. They reflect in this the dialectics of the particular and the universal through which understanding of reality is sought. Things, at one level, seem so bound together as to suggest the unity of all phenomena. Infinite particularity appears at another level. The diverse pulls of the macro and the micro are reflected in the course of the human sciences, as in that of human knowledge in general. Increasingly narrow specialization and endless splintering of disciplines accompany attempts to cut across conventional disciplinary confines. Representing the latter trend, the papers in this volume explore the possibilities of enriching and refining the 'empirical' narrative of the human sciences through intercourse with 'creative' modes of discourse.¹

[The terms 'social transformation' and 'creative imagination' have been used synecdochically to indicate—rather than define—the concerns that inspired the conception of the seminar at which these papers were presented. Social transformation is ordinarily taken to relate to the dynamic aspect of society; and creative imagination is taken to refer to what lies behind artistic creativity. But the two terms could also mean respectively, as transferred epithets, the totality of disciplines—the human sciences—that deal with society as a dynamic entity, and the entirety of the modes of artistic creativity. It is the second sense in which these terms have been used. Such a

usage has an advantage. It so encapsulates the interconnection between the human sciences and artistic creativity as to keep in the foreground their common subject-matter—man in society—even while focusing on their formal distinctions.

Implicit in this formulation of 'social transformation' and 'creative imagination' is a constriction of the domain of artistic creativity, if not also of the human sciences. Man in society may be the subject of all artistic activity, but not its sole subject-matter. There can be artistic 'texts', especially in the visual and musical arts, which are trans-social; although these arts, too, often deal with man in society. As a consequence of this constraint, literature has acquired, in the papers presented here, preponderance over other modes of artistic creativity. Also, 'social transformation' has tended to dominate the perspective. Indeed, this has happened to an extent where 'creative imagination' is almost subordinated to the requirements of 'social transformation'. Yet, ideally, the dialectical relationship between the two deserves equal emphasis with a view to highlighting their causal linkages.

Methodologically, it seems, there is much to commend such narrowing of the scope of an intellectual project. Theoretically, however, the procedure could possibly be faulted. Once the totality of the arts is left out, it could be argued, the theoretical validity of a methodological exercise involving transference from one mode of discourse to another becomes suspect. The argument seems plausible. But convergence of subject-matter in the 'collaborating' modes of discourse is not essential for such transference. Meaningful information can be obtained even from the formal structures of the given modes.

The arts in general and literature in particular attempt to apprehend social reality. So do the human sciences. They operate, more often than not perhaps, at the intersection of 'psychology' and 'sociology'. They are, in the final analysis, attempts at understanding. And understanding implies abstraction. This is the crux of the basic function of both the artistic and the human scientific modes of discourse. The function involves a complex movement between concretization and abstraction.

In spite of the similarity of their basic function, the two modes, in their perceptual process, move in reverse order

between concretization and abstraction. Confining the argument, for the sake of convenience, to 'fictional' and 'empirical' narratives, it could be shown that whereas the former moves from abstraction to concretization in the apprehension of reality, the latter moves from concretization to abstraction. This generalization is obviously subject to qualification. At the epistemo-linguistic level, it could be argued that inasmuch as human perception is in terms of pre-existing categories, there can be no perceptual process that moves purely from the concrete to the abstract. Only in terms of the abstract is the concrete apprehended. The other objection, not unrelated to the first, could be that in so far as different human science disciplines have their distinct methodologies and theoretical assumptions, a generalization about 'empirical' narrative would have to take cognisance of the varying degree to which 'facts' are *initially* seen as independent of and *eventually* used for theorization.

Seriously limiting though these qualifications are, it would be wrong to argue, as Lucien Goldmann does, that in the human sciences, as different from mathematics and physico-chemical sciences, the progress of knowledge proceeds 'from the abstract to the concrete'.² For, these limitations do not invalidate the observation about the paradoxical movement of the perceptual process in the arts and the human sciences. Taken for granted in any comment about the mode of human perception is the tension caused by a two-fold resistance: the resistance of reality to mentally constructed structures; and the effort of man to break through the perceptual constraints of given cognitive structures. The movement of knowledge is not one in which one set of procrustean constructs leads autonomously to another. It is, rather, made possible to the extent freedom is exercised from pre-existing categories in the act of perception.

Besides these limitations, the observation about the reversal of movement between concretization and abstraction in the two kinds of narrative is subject to a serious formalist aporia. For, arguably, it rests eventually on what Barthes so picturesquely, though exaggeratedly, described as the 'referential illusion'.³ This, in fact, is a critical aporia. Its acceptance would negate the viability of methods that transcend the

bounds of the human sciences.

It is easy to deal with the formalist objection to the extent it is advanced on the basis of practical considerations. Without even attempting a theoretical defense, one could meet the objection on the ground of practical needs. Marc Auge seems to be doing this when, after dismissing interdisciplinarity as a myth and a pretentious name given to the anxiety of each discipline, he concedes that the myth is required not only because the phenomena studied by the collaborating disciplines are identical, but also because of the possibility of acquiring a more systematic approach.⁴ But the formalist aporia does something more. It questions the very validity of the exercise: each mode of discourse has its own form—its own structure, logic, rules of internal consistency, notion of facts and data, as also its own idea of reality—which rules out the possibility of transference or displacement from one mode of discourse to another.

Be it on practical or theoretical grounds, the resistance to interaction with a different mode of discourse is shared by all the disciplines just as the need for it is shared by all of them. With regard to the arts, the formalist argument rests on the autonomy of the 'text' which, it is argued, can be examined only in its own terms. The context—historical, cultural, ideological or psychoanalytic—is taken to be irrelevant to the understanding of the 'text'.

The stress on achronicity that structuralism brought in sociology and anthropology, thereby distancing these disciplines irrevocably from history, continues to enjoy respectability in spite of post-structuralist attempts to 're-chronologize' the narrative. Psychology would not even brook being docketed as a human science; instead, it would stake claims to elevation as a 'science'. So would linguistics. Philosophy, without necessarily renouncing its right to the status of an overarching discipline that would lay down the very principles of knowledge—define the very act of knowing—offers theoretical sustenance to disciplinary insularity. Similarly, history keeps oscillating between grandiose expansionist designs and a narrow parochialism that refuses to rise above the fetish of facts.

Whatever its theoretical justification, this insularity has caused, to borrow Raymond Williams' felicitous expression,

'a widespread retreat from the problems'.⁵ Not surprisingly, dissatisfaction with the performance of the human sciences is being increasingly felt by their patrons and practitioners alike. Saul Bellow conveyed this dissatisfaction, and also stressed the need for closer collaboration with the arts, in his description of the novelist as 'an imaginative historian who is able to get closer to contemporary facts than social scientists possibly can'. So did Lukacs when he rejoiced in the fact that history had 'moved to the foreground', and sadly added, 'not, alas, in the academic world but in the imagination, speculation and writing of novelists, all kinds of novelists'.⁶

One possible response to the expression of such dissatisfaction—even though voiced by some of the most sensitive and gifted people of our times—can be to deny its validity and contend that it stems from a notion of the function of the human sciences which, given their structural limitations, they cannot satisfy. This would arguably be a valid response. But it would suggest too sharply defined a view of the scope and functions of the human sciences. A more self-critical response would discern in this view a tendency to take the actual and the hitherto practical, as against the potential, to be the real limits of a given intellectual domain. And intellectual 'fields' cannot have stable boundaries.

Modes of discourse are, simultaneously, autonomous and externally defined entities. They have their own internal consistency and logic. Theoretically their potential for innovation, modification and expansion may be subject to certain limitations. Beyond that imaginary point, one mode of discourse would cease to be itself and occasion the birth of another. It is doubtful if the potentiality of a mode of discourse and the direction of the realization of this potentiality are amenable to accurate anticipation. Which is why an element of human arbitrariness creeps in the structuration of a mode of discourse at a given point in time. What is, consequently, determines our notion of what ought to or can be.

Presuming, despite their internal variations, that the arts and the human sciences represent two different ways of apprehending the reality of man in society, what is the case for interaction between the two? Confining the discussion, once again for the sake of convenience, to 'fictional' and 'empirical'

narratives, one could begin with the very perceptive distinction Walter Benjamin made between 'critique' and 'commentary'. He argues:⁷

Critique is concerned with the truth of a work of art, the commentary with its subject matter. The relationship between the two is determined by the basic law of literature according to which the work's truth content is the more relevant the more inconspicuously and intimately it is bound up with its subject matter. . . . If, to use a simile, one views the growing work as a funeral pyre, its commentator can be likened to the chemist, its critic to an alchemist. While the former is left with wood and ashes as the sole objects of his analysis, the latter is concerned only with the enigma of the flame itself; the enigma of being alive. Thus the critic inquires about the truth whose living flame goes on burning over the heavy logs of the past and the light ashes of life gone by.

It is both as a critic and commentator, in Benjamin's sense of the terms, that the human scientist can interact with the arts. But in both capacities he is liable to be questioned. If it is only as a commentator that he goes to the arts in search of additional data, or a specific kind of data not easily available from his own conventional sources, he is not taking this extra trouble for the most significant reasons. Even if he is not taking a 'Euhemerist' view⁸ of the texts used by him, he is held back by a positivistic notion of 'facts'. For what Lucien Goldmann dismisses as the literary sociology of content⁹ is by no means the profoundest reason for such an interdisciplinarity. On the other hand, the exercise appears exceptionable to the pure aesthete, formalist and the structuralist on the ground that an externality is being sought where none exists. The meaning, to them, of each word and each sentence is determined only in relation to the other words and sentences of the same text.

It is, however, at the level of critique that the human sciences can most profitably interact with the arts. But the exercise entails a posture that necessitates a drastic alteration of such critical notions as facts, evidence, verifiability. The posture even threatens to obliterate the distinction between 'fictional'

and 'empirical' narratives, and, by extension, between the arts and the human sciences. Not quite, though. For the distinction would remain if the dynamic quality of different modes of discourse is kept in mind and their potentiality constitutes the basis for such a distinction.

A key notion that is introduced to distinguish between the arts and the human sciences relates to referentiality. The 'fictional' narrative, according to this criterion, does not necessarily have a reference to any external reality; the 'empirical' narrative, on the contrary, must of necessity bear faithful resemblance to an objective reality. The former is judged on the basis of sense, and the latter on the basis of reference. The goal of the former is *vraisemblance* while the latter must aim at resemblance. Verification, naturally, is a problem that the former is unconcerned with and the latter in no position to ignore. 'Fictional' narrative is a 'free' composition which, because it enjoys 'an autonomous existence', 'cannot be corrected by contradictory information from the realm of experience'. As against the referential 'empirical' narrative, the 'fictional' narrative is seen as a 'non-referential composition' even when the possibility of 'potential references to reality' is conceded.¹⁰

As a device to chart the space of a given mode and to mark it off from the others, attributing exclusive key characteristics to specific modes performs an essential definitional function. But it threatens to become dysfunctional when this exclusivity is seen as axiomatic and inviolable and interpreted in terms of its absolutist implications. Various modal spaces are, consequently, frozen and hermetically sealed off. Thus, for example, pushing the notion of non-referentiality to its logical limits, Karlheinz Stierle insists that 'what belongs to the sphere of fiction cannot simply be removed from it and transferred to the general context of knowledge.'¹¹

Such concern for theoretical consistency is touching. Almost valiant. But, ironically, it rests on a fallacy. It seeks the absolutist imperatives of a division that is recognizably pragmatic and fluid. It views as fixed a phenomenon that is dynamic, transmutable and liable to both fusion and fission. It ascribes to different modes of cognition a unity that, in the final analysis, can belong only to cognition *per se*. It discerns in the structural specificities of different modes of discourse an

insuperable obstacle to inter-modal transference, ignoring that each mode of discourse has its own fiction and it is through the fallibility suggested by this fiction that the case for inter-disciplinarity is strengthened.

That the idea of the non-referential, in contradistinction to the referential, is not quite convincing even to its proponents would be revealed by the use of a slightly altered nomenclature for designating the same thing. As a binary proposition to the referential, non-referential may have a logical or semantic function. As a descriptive category for a man-made 'text', however, it seems to overstrain a bit the imaginative powers of human comprehension. Hence the use of autoreferential instead of non-referential. 'Fictional' narrative, following the discovery of the difficulty inherent in the use of the term non-referential, becomes autoreferential while the 'empirical' narrative retains its simple referential character.

Implicit in this alteration is an admission of the essentiality of reference; no matter if the essentiality is a function of the operational limitations of human imagination. The change may even be (mis?)construed as a definitive answer to the formalist aporia. Whether that is so would depend upon the level at which the formalist aporia is taken to hold good. In any case this semantic modification constitutes a brilliant methodological manoeuvre. While conceding that there is no escape from referentiality, it safeguards the sovereignty of the artistic 'text' by locating the reference within the text itself.

In the brilliance of the manoeuvre, however, lies its vulnerability. Once the inescapability of reference is conceded, it seems difficult to keep extra-textuality out as a matter of theoretical insistence. It still remains open, within the limited framework of formalist poetics, to argue that the artistic 'text' is a finished product that ought to be appreciated in its own terms without reference to the raw material and the process that makes the production possible. Whatever the criteria of aesthetic appreciation—sense, intelligibility, beauty—formalist poetics can still insist on treating the 'text' as a universe unto itself. Resemblance to reality can still remain irrelevant to the excellence of an artistic 'text'. What becomes untenable in the face of the essentiality of referentiality is the denial of context. It is at this level that the formalist aporia does not seem

to hold good.

The debate between formalists and the proponents of contextuality often results in convenient illustrations being put forward to buttress the rival positions. The former cite texts that seem to bear no recognizable affinity with the world of our experience, and argue that in artistic texts the manner is/ can be the matter, the composition itself the very theme. The latter, on the contrary, make their point by alluding to naturalistic or realistic texts. We would do well to avoid an easy partisan stance.

Referring to Mallarmé's deliberate organization of his fiction in a way that would rule out the possibility of any mimetic illusion, Stierle comments: 'Mallarmé's theory marks the beginning of a tradition that considers autoreferentiality an essential feature of fiction, thereby excluding every possibility of a quasi-pragmatic reading.' There are, no doubt, fictional texts that presuppose a straightforward quasi-pragmatic reading. But there also are other texts that require a reflexive reading. Novels like Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* disclose their meaning only against the horizon of a second reading, thus turning their composition into their very theme.¹² Todorov makes a similar point and selects Rimbaud's *Illuminations* as an illustrative text. Here is an utterly private work, too specific to permit a reference even to the interior world of the author from which it has sprung. *Ecriture*—the writing process—constitutes, in such a work, its own reference; there is only manner and no matter. Manner, in fact, is the matter.¹³

In the elaboration of his formalist poetics with the help of the *Illuminations*, Todorov, interestingly enough, neglects the implications of the following quotation from Rimbaud himself: 'Your memory and your senses will be only the food of your creative impulse.'¹⁴ Now, if my memory and my senses have been only the food of my creative impulse, their shape has been metamorphosed in the 'text' produced by this creative impulse with the help of this memory and these senses. However metamorphosed, why can the memory and the senses not be felt through the text which is this metamorphosis? Todorov is justified when he makes fun of Euhemerist critics

by suggesting that 'this warm February morning' or 'the flooding of the previous month'—both of which occur in the *Illuminations*—may or may not correspond to a particular morning or flood. But does that matter? There are more reliable ways of ascertaining the facts of flood and temperature than vague poetic fragments painfully gleaned by a euhemeristically minded critic. But this does not prove either the un-wisdom or the impossibility of getting clues from art—and more than clues—for reconstructing aspects of reality that it is the business of the human sciences to reconstruct.

This aspect is dealt with at length by Michel Leiris whose testimony, in this context, seems to carry particular weight because of his intense and abiding concern with decoding the enigma of the self and *écriture*. A poet and an ethnologist—an extraordinary combination for understanding man in society, the 'self' and the 'other'—Leiris has felt compelled to turn to himself again and again and essay a series of autobiographical forays. As a poet Leiris abstracts beyond recognition concretely felt states of mind. As an autobiographer he plumbs the depths of his interiority to trace the attractive literary product back to an often ugly naked reality. Believing that 'literary activity in its specific aspect as a mental discipline, cannot have any other justification than to *illumine certain matters for oneself at the same time as one makes them communicable to others*', Leiris observes that 'one of the highest goals that can be assigned to literature's pure form, by which I mean poetry, is to restore by means of words certain intense states, concretely experienced and become significant, to be thus put into words.'¹⁵ The process is reversed in the autobiographical forays which constitute 'a backstage revelation that would expose, in all their unenthralling nakedness, the realities which formed the more or less disguised warp, beneath surfaces I had tried to make alluring.'¹⁶ Leiris, it may be reiterated, is writing about what could be the most autoreferential form of literature, poetry.

The ever so tenuous, residual as it were, reference to the lived-in world, as also its successful concealment in the artistic 'text', take us back to the distinction Benjamin made between subject matter and truth content, a distinction on which he posited 'that basic law of literature according to which the

work's truth content is the more relevant the more inconspicuously and intimately it is bound up with its subject matter'.¹⁷ In the artistic transmutation of the lived-in world the semblance of reality is transgressed in order to capture its essence with so much greater fidelity.

Literature, like art in general, only too willingly permits such transgression in a variety of forms. The human sciences need not ignore this essence and the insights it offers simply because of the absence of a perceptible resemblance to the external likeness of reality. That there is little resistance to the utilization of naturalistic and realistic works of art for the historical or sociological reconstruction of reality is indicative of the hold exercised on the human sciences in general by the external likeness of reality. That this is done without any serious scrutiny of the notion of realism shows the strength of this hold. A work of art is habitually taken to be realistic if it corresponds to the current collective gestalt of reality.

But even at this level, while the demand of 'facticity' is reasonably satisfied, there are clear limits which cannot be transgressed without in turn being supposed to be violating the disciplinary integrity and methodological purity of the human sciences. Take, for example, history which offers, perhaps, the model for 'empirical' narrative. Anonymity is of the essence of the 'fictional' narrative. Real people, throbbing and pulsating, are brought to life. But they are anonymized; anonymized even when lifted from real life. History, on the contrary, makes a fetish of the proper name. If prosopography means a significant addition to the stock-in-trade of the historian, as it obviously does, history would aim at rehabilitating as many as possible of the 'great unknown' from all walks of life. But prosopography is not history. It merely provides the raw material—a rich mass of individual biographies—which is organized in a particular manner and used for abstracting certain patterns or relationships. Concretization plus abstraction constitutes history. Yet, the hold of the concrete is so powerful that characters from even a 'realistic' literary work would at best be mentioned parenthetically in the text or cited in a foot-note. The historian may present a rich plethora of biographical details of, say, peasants who can be verified to have actually lived, and use it to eventually portray a

'composite' peasant. Having moved from the concrete to the abstract, the historian is happy with his own abstract or composite portrayal. But similar portrayals in fiction cease to be reliable simply because they belong to the domain of fiction. Such positivistic suspicion and the methodological constraints it imposes need to be questioned.

More so because there are aspects of the reality sought to be grasped by the human sciences—especially those relating to subjectivity or consciousness—that the arts, especially literature, reveal through concealment or refraction. A phenomenon so elusive as consciousness—whether individual or collective—cannot be apprehended except through methods that would, more often than not, seem violative of one methodological requirement of a particular discipline or another. This, of course, is not an invitation to methodological promiscuity.

What it means is a measure of freedom to innovate. Justified, even necessitated, by the conception of disciplines as dynamic cognitive categories, the innovation lies, in the main, in asking questions of a body of material that it has conventionally not been used to answering. For, the mode of questioning—which is a function of the content of questions—can produce unsuspected suppleness in the material to which these different questions are addressed. Thus 'texts' that, according to certain conventions within one discipline, are considered autoreferential, and therefore without an external referent, so often yield generous extra-textual evidence. To tap the hidden evidential potential of a particular kind of material new methods may at times have to be devised. But the familiar methods are rarely found shy of dealing with new types of material.

The realization of the potential of a kind of material specific to a particular discipline—specific in terms of its utilization *per se* or the *mode* of its utilization—and of its specific methodology implies the utilization of the resource base of one discipline through the methods and for the purposes of another discipline. It is essential that a modicum of respect be shown, in the course of this interaction, to the basic rules of the collaborating disciplines. It is this need for minimal conformance that makes interdisciplinarity the difficult, even questionable, exercise it is. More so when the interacting

entities happen to be such dissimilar modes of discourse as the human sciences and the arts; for then, as we have seen, the process of transference becomes not only methodologically but even theoretically problematic.

We believe—hence this volume—that the human sciences can, through interaction with the arts, break through their residual positivism and the ossifying constraints it imposes, imperceptibly and therefore so effectively, on their cognitive schemes. But this is possible only if sensitive regard is shown to the peculiar modes of functioning of the creative imagination. The arts, it is true, are not a monopoly of aesthetics. Also, there are among theorists and critics serious, often ideologically polarized and bitterly partisan, differences (not that the human sciences are ideologically more innocent). Yet there is a general consensus about the identification of key problems of artistic creativity, and resultant methodological convergence. Some of these major concerns relate to such significant issues as the possibility and locus of meaning, the validity of interpretation, the theory of genres, or the nature of the subject/author of artistic 'texts'. The very awareness of such concerns tends to induce more refined thinking on basic questions like the notion of 'fact', the nature of evidence, or the mode of validation in the human sciences.

The rule of minimal conformance apart, there can be no readymade blue-print for the kind of cross-modal interaction and transference the possibility and need of which inspired the idea of this seminar on 'Social Transformation and Creative Imagination'. Its practice will be its methodology. To formulate an inter-disciplinary methodology would spell the end of inter-disciplinarity.

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The Nature of Imagination in the Context of Aesthetic Creativity and Social Transformation

G. C. PANDE

I. The Nature of Imagination

BY IMAGINATION I do not mean any peculiar faculty inhering in the mind conceived as a substance but rather an aspect or function of the mind conceived as a flow of consciousness. Consciousness represents itself as a subject in relation to objects appearing to lie beyond itself. The immediate content of consciousness claims to represent reality, apparently by presenting a form which resembles the form of reality. Mental representations, thus, become nothing but images or semblances of reality. As a consequence, as the presentation of form, whether as a concrete sensuous image or an abstraction, imagination would appear to be constitutive of the very cognitive nature of the mind.

Now this conclusion seems to flatly contradict the verdict of commonsense which holds that imagination is a free or arbitrary activity of the mind while cognition strictly depends on the object. Here we have a division of mental functioning into two with passivity and dependence on the one hand and spontaneity and activity on the other. While a certain distinction between the active and the passive modes of mental functioning is undeniably attested by experience, the more crucial and debatable assumption underlying the commonsense view is that of epistemological realism. The assumption seems to be that

in cognition the mind opens up like a window, as it were, and we stand face to face before external reality. In imagination, on the other hand, the mind seems to project, as it were, images or pictures from within itself and they may or may not correspond to reality.

Such a view is plainly untenable. Even in the case of perceptual knowledge it would exclude the possibility of hallucinations and structural illusions. What we see of the moon is plainly an image, not the moon itself. In the case of rational knowledge, its very corrigibility shows that its immediate content cannot be regarded as reality itself.

Two conclusions may, thus, be drawn at this stage—one, that we cannot think of imagination without thinking of an activity of the mind which is in some sense free or undetermined by the activity of the object it claims to represent; two, that the content of knowledge not being reality, it has to be regarded as something which stands in some determinate correspondence with reality. Imagination, thus, is a representation which is in some sense not determined by any corresponding reality. Cognition, on the other hand, is a representation which is in some sense determined by a corresponding reality.

We may now revert to the point sought to be made in the opening paragraph, *viz.*, that imagination is a constitutive factor in cognition. To combine this with our more recent conclusion that imagination lacks necessary correspondence with reality, we might say that if a cognitive representation is the function of reality in the sense that reality is a causal factor in the production of the representation effect, imagination proceeding from the nature and condition of the cognitive apparatus is a necessary concurrent factor in the production of the same effect as also in its reproduction within purely subjective experience or abstract cogitation. Imagination is not cognition but its precondition.

In its purely logical aspect cognition is inevitably judgmental, whether explicitly or implicitly so. Now all judgments presuppose logical forms or archetypal ideas, and imagination may be said to be that activity of the mind which enables it to concretize its innate ideas in terms of particular object-constructs or to abstract them from the concretely given representations of objects. These two functions of imagination may perhaps be called

'projective' and 'abstractive', the former proceeding from within outward, the latter in the reverse direction. As a psychological fact, cognition may be considered a causal and temporal process in the psyche in which imagination may be said to be the constructing activity which is expressed in a series of linked transformations and functions proceeding from the initial causal stimulation to its judgmental formulation. In every case imagination remains the form-giving, form-determining activity of the mind. It also remains bipolar in as much as it is rooted in pure forms as well as the images following sensory data.

Since it may be suspected that this notion of imagination is too wide, it may be useful to distinguish imagination from what it is not. Imagination *per se* is not cognition because cognition refers its content to reality whereas the content of imagination as such means no more than a possibility. For this very reason again imagination is not a practical activity which claims to produce an effect on the plane of reality. It must be distinguished from sensation which is wholly contingent and particular and from its aftermath regarded as 'decaying sense' because the latter is not a form-giving but a form-losing process. Memory, again, has a cognitive orientation and is wholly constrained by the causal operation of past experience. On the other hand, reflection, abstraction, and contemplation are forms of imagination. Moreover, introspection, verbalization or symbolization, and judgment necessarily presuppose imagination though they normally use it in a cognitive or practical context.

Before proceeding further to examine the characteristics of imagination, it may be desirable to comment briefly on the concept of 'reality' which we have used in distinguishing cognition and imagination. The distinction of reality from unreality may be conceived in several different ways. It may be conceived as the distinction of actuality from mere appearance or illusion as, for example, when we distinguish the rope as the real substratum behind the illusory appearance of the snake. One may say here briefly that the distinction in such a case ultimately rests on the causal efficiency of the actual entity and the lack of such a quality in the illusory object. The real snake can bite, the illusory one cannot. The well-known Buddhist definition of reality formulates this by saying *artha-Kriya-*

Karivām sattvam, reality is causal efficiency. On the other hand, reality may be distinguished from ideality as, for example, when we distinguish the motion of bodies from the ideal principles underlying them. Unlike the previous case in which appearance makes a falsifiable claim to be a positive or causally efficient reality, we have in the present case an appearance which does show the characteristics of positive reality but fails to be intelligible by itself and hence leads beyond itself to a kind of being which lacks actuality but is logically required by actual things.

We may, thus, conclude that while unreality is characterized by a false claim, a claim which is contradicted by practical experience, reality seems to have two grades. One is characterized by actuality and lies within the domain of cause and effect. This plane of reality has been described by Vedantic and Buddhist thinkers as *Vyavahārika* or *Paratantra-lakṣṇa*. The ideality of rationally intelligible principles constitutes a different sort of reality. It is self-subsistent but non-actual, a kind of archetype or matrix of whatever is to have actuality. Practical reality, thus, has a fugitive existence but it exemplifies in whole or part a permanent pattern or form. To connect this with the earlier discussion we may say that cognition implies that its object is directly or indirectly actually attested by experience whereas imagination merely implies the possibility of such direct or indirect attestation. Imagination is content with form alone and at its purest apperceives archetypal forms. At its lowest it contains the reverberations of perceived forms in memory. In between it proceeds *pari passu* with reason—theoretical, moral or aesthetic—to connect forms and things and make judgment possible. Imagination as such does not represent practical reality, but it represents possibility including within itself those essential and ideal forms which constitute the permanent standards of reality and truth.

It follows that imagination is not the arbitrary construction of images or their arbitrary association, although such a process or faculty is quite commonly given the name of imagination, a practice which is unfair to the high office of imagination. The emphasis on arbitrariness is really due to the failure to appreciate the spontaneity or autonomy of imagination which may be obscured but is not annihilated by a dim state

of intelligence or the disordered reverberations of memory. An excellent example of this may be seen in revelry, fantasy and dreaming. These may range from the moronic to the prophetic. But all the time they seek to give form to some inner perception of meaning or idea. Where the mind of the subject lacks, normally or temporarily, a clear inner grasp of ideas, its dreams also lack coherence and lucidity. Nevertheless, dreams are constructed of vivid and significant image sequences even though these sequences may be very short and changeable. Where normal persons are concerned, their dreams contain far more inner order and sense than would appear from the outward coherence of their imperfectly recalled fragments. James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* would dispel anyone's doubts about the aesthetic creativity with which dream-language is instinct. What is true of dreams is also true of natural languages, archaic pictographic and ideographic scripts, myth and ritual, art and literature. In all these areas concrete images are expressive of intuitive ideas, though the coherence and explicitness of images vary greatly.

This reveals a remarkable feature of imagination, viz., its capacity of combining the apparently disparate qualities of experience as well as reason. It shows intuitive immediacy as well as intelligible or significant expressiveness. Some thinkers regard intuitive immediacy as the exclusive privilege of experience and some even limit experience to only sense-experience. Reason, then, becomes a purely mediate and discursive principle. Since this dichotomy is obviously bridged in knowledge, it would seem reasonable to postulate a mediating principle with which imagination has been identified. Both Dharma-kriti and Kant adopt this procedure. But it seems to gloss over the contradiction with which they begin. If reality is somehow given in experience but not conceived or judged without the superimposition of forms contributed by the mind, it is obvious that either all knowledge suffers from a transcendental error or the original forms of the mind must be the original forms of reality. Imagination is either a transcendental source of error or a transcendental source of knowledge.

Logical and mathematical forms have an undoubted inevitability and practical validity. But whether they represent eternal verities or merely the innate tendencies of the human

mind remains a moot question. A similar question may be raised about the transcendental elements of the essential symbolic and exiological forms. Language and myth, morality and art are grounded in transcendental forms or ideas. Grammar and hermeneutic, exegetic and rhetoric, *vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta* and *Mīmāṃsā* are attempts at formulating the 'logics' of such areas which cannot avoid appealing to transcendental elements. That is why they were sought to be developed as *tāstras* and distinguished from merely empirical disciplines such as *vārtā*.

Imagination, thus, is neither an imitative representation of the actual world nor its arbitrary or irrational misrepresentation. It is not an imitative representation because experience itself is not a representation but a complex effect of what is actual while the actual itself being a wholly fugitive particular is as such ungraspable within the analytic-synthetic network of consciousness. A communicable representation of the actual is impossible because such a representation necessarily uses forms, types and images which have an ideal reference. Nor is imagination *per se* indifferent to truth. Imagination, like speech, may deceive but deception cannot be regarded as habitual or normal. Otherwise, to say the least, there would be no point in holding such conferences as ours.

We may conclude this section by defining imagination as a transcendental function of the mind by which it gives symbolic expression to ideal truth which may be the implicit truth of the actual world, an ideal to be realized by it, a standard set above and beyond it, or a self-sufficient eternal verity. It is creative in the sense that while it does not imitatively reproduce the actual world of experience or theory; what it represents has the vividness or convincing quality of appearing to belong to reality. It is free or autonomous in the sense that the categories of its world are not determined by the categories of any other merely given world. Its creativity and freedom do not reflect its anti-noetic or non-noetic character but only its transcendentality. Imagination is neither mere fancy nor simple cognition. It is a superior and foundational function which may be described as the vision and expression of essential form. It helps perceptual judgment to build the forms of the everyday world, it helps reason to build abstract conceptual structures, and it helps prophets, visionaries, poets and artists to

build images and symbols expressive of an ideal vision.

II. Imagination in Art

Having tried to clear what may be called the metaphysical decks of the discussion we may now proceed to its specific historical and social context. Several different points of view may be distinguished at the outset. A common view has been that imaginative works are primarily intent on entertaining the reader and are indifferent to matters of truth except that they must have such verisimilitude as would not jolt the 'willing suspension of disbelief' in the given audience. Another equally common view is that a work of imagination must instruct the audience though indirectly and enjoyably. A third view holds that an imaginative work seeks to effect a qualitative change in the psyche through a process of suggestion which awakens self-knowledge. Still another view regards the works of imagination as essentially self-expressive and unique without any ulterior purpose of any kind.

On the first view, what the artist represents imaginatively is a selection of possibilities which takes social reality for granted in two very important respects, *viz.*, the existing condition of taste and the acceptable limits of credibility. No attempt is made here to represent either social reality as such or any ideal world. Reality and unreality are mixed together in acceptable and entertaining proportions. Social transformation, then, only changes the technical conditions of production by altering tastes and credibility. The inadequacy of this view would be apparent the moment one questions the nature and source of the entertainment which creative imagination is supposed to provide. The entertainment is often supposed to result from the representation of things which entertain in real life. This deserves to be rejected outright because if it were so, art would be quite unnecessary. Everyone would be free to imagine what entertains him. What is more, not all entertainment is valued by people of good taste. Nor is social opinion in itself any guide in the matter, for it always includes a wide spectrum of tastes. Thus the mere imitation of social reality neither provides entertainment nor ensures good taste. Creative imagination must invent and appropriate an skilled mode of representation within the

standards of good taste. In such representation what excites admiration is the skill of representation, not the reality represented. Again, what moves the audience is the mode and intensity of representation which no longer corresponds to reality as given in common experience. If a work of imagination affords entertainment, it does so by a creative transformation of reality, that is, by a transformation which has no precedent nor any model in nature.

Analogous problems arise in the case of the instruction which imaginative works are supposed to afford. Neither factual nor theoretical information helps or hinders the effectiveness of imagination in its own distinctive function. '*Nā hi Kaver tīrāt-tamātreṇa nirvāhaḥ*' and that is because facts as such are value-neutral. The distinction of theory from poetry, on the other hand, is too obvious to be laboured. As a result, if literature or art merely reproduces or popularizes the ideas which form the proper content of scientific or historical works, it can only be inefficient conceptually or be propagandist, *i.e.*, it will be part of the same practical activity rather than of imagination.

If, however, we take instruction in a moral or spiritual sense, then this view would be indistinguishable from the third alternative presented above. Moral and spiritual transformation, from catharsis to metanoia, depends on a change in self-knowledge and to awaken that a work of imagination has at least to represent the subject and his world in a non-habitual mode. In representing reality, then, imagination must transform it and view it from a deeper point of view.

It is true that the appeal of a work of imagination is to a certain extent intrinsic and characteristic. This may be seen most clearly in non-representational arts like music. Imaginative forms in such arts appear to have an intrinsic enjoyability expressing, as it were, in a sensuous medium the inner harmonies of the soul. Here, if anywhere, one could speak of the 'Absolute shining through the veil of sense', and here would apply most accurately the description '*bhagnavarana cid eva rasāḥ*'. And perhaps it has been justly said that 'all arts aspire to the condition of music'. All the diverse paraphernalia of sensuous forms and representations of reality and unreality function merely as indirect means for the return of consciousness to itself through the mediation of an adequate form.

We may conclude this section by saying that a work of art entertains in the sense that it reveals a value, it instructs in the sense that it educates the soul, and all the time it functions by presenting forms which are expressive of a meaning for the self. This expressiveness of forms is nothing natural or causal. It is like a multilevel communication where patterns of signs and symbols function as a language, language itself functioning polyphonically through subterranean psychic associations even as it functions conventionally. The sensuously obvious or conventional forms in which imagination moulds its medium finds a counter-point in the pure forms of higher immediacy or self-consciousness which it evokes through the former. Aesthetic imagination, thus, is subject-centred, not object-centred. Its contents has a necessarily objective aspect but it is presented in an immediate intuition where the very division of subject and object appears obliterated in an experience which is akin to the felt experience of value. The objective content of imagination is quite different from what obtains in practical or theoretical consciousness. If imagination is contemplative, aesthetic imagination is a kind of felt contemplation which has sometimes been called enjoyment.

The social reality of habitual, everyday life is not what creative imagination intends at reproducing. Nor is it a hand-maiden to social science or practical politics intending to insinuate some doctrine or ideology. Creative imagination does not imitate the actual world. If it imitates anything it is the ideal world which contains the essence of the actual in all its possibilities. This is, of course, not to say that an imaginative work is a complete conspectus of ideality any more than a scientific or historical work. Despite its aspiration for depth and universality, an imaginative work is always, to quote a remark of Yeats apropos to the poems of Ezra Pound, 'a fragment from some Master'. Only the Divine seer has the perfect synoptic vision of all possibilities in their perpetuity, in and out of time, and only His imagination is truly creative. '*Kavir manisi paribhuh svayombhu Yathātathyātorthan vyadadhaecchasvatibhyāḥ samabhyāḥ*'. If God is the true seer and poet and creator, all human poets are so only by a fitful and fragmentary participation in His imagination as dimly reflected in human consciousness.

If we now advert to the question of social transformation in relation to creative imagination, it would follow that this relationship may be conceived on the analogy of the relationship of social change to language. Imagination creates a symbolic structure which enters the actual communication world of an age through the intervention of conventions which are subject to historical change. As a consequence symbolic structures in art and literature may be rendered archaic or obsolete like languages or linguistic styles and usages by socio-historic changes. But this obscuration by time is not absolute since it is at least partly remediable by education. A final and irreducible discontinuity in art will arise only on the assumption that such a radical discontinuity obtains in the history of human consciousness and society.

✓ There are undoubtedly theories of man and social change which posit such discontinuities in history but they rarely proceed from any appreciation of the transcendental creativity of imagination. They are also generally realistic in tenor and make the being, especially the social being, of man the source of his consciousness. Attributing primacy of *Praxis* they make imagination willy-nilly imitative or propagandist. The Marxist point of view is paralleled by radical evolutionism or historicism. All of them militate against the basic continuity of human consciousness and regard the dialogue between the past and the present as essentially limited and short-lived. Against this one would like to submit that once their conventional aspect is mastered, it is the works of creative imagination that reveal the universality of man. Homer's portrayal of clans and tribes, Shakespeare's portrayal of the aristocracy, or Tolstoy's portrayal of the peasantry are only incidental contexts in which the universal humanity of man is made to reveal itself. The fison of Altamira does not depend for its imaginative effect on some obscure and long lost ritual of the old stone age. Nor is the appeal of the Padmapani from Ajanta dependent on a lost age or faith.

It is a great illusion that substantial reality lies in material things or causal forces, for the idea of reality includes not only the idea of doing and being done with but the idea of permanence. In a way this cancels the reality of matter and force. If something is characterized by power, it will exercise that

power and cease to be. It will necessarily lack permanence. But what is real which does not endure? Again, what is an object which is not the content of experience? Its reality or value, thus, can only be discovered in and through experience and to make this discovery one needs to explore experience contemplatively. It follows that to find the universal essence of man and its historical discoveries and interpretations, one needs to attend in most important sense to the human tradition of art. This tradition does not then become essentially dated by social history. It rather contains within itself a quint essential history of social transformations.

Creation as Transformation

(A notion of imagination as creative transformation envisaged by certain ancient Indian literary critics and its application in the field of music.)

MUKUND LATH

THE IDEA OF creative imagination naturally suggests artistic activity. Activity such as that of the writer, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the dancer, the architect and the like. These, we generally think, are the homeground of creative imagination. Though, as has been justly pointed out, every human endeavour whether of thought or action presupposes it, or, at least, needs it in order to be significant. The writer comes first in my list because we who deal in words tend to think of literature before any other art, as is amply borne out by our proceedings here. But I have another, a more important, reason for listing him first. Reflections over the writer's art, that is, literature, has a longer history and a greater depth of critical self-awareness in India than with respect to any other art, a fact which is perhaps true of most cultures.

Indian literary criticism gives great attention to form. This makes some of its concepts and formulations relevant not only to literature, where the content is as important as the form, but also to the more 'formal' arts such as music, dance, architecture. I think, we need to discuss these arts, too, and relate the creative activity in them to changing social milieu. As I am more familiar with music, most of my comments in this

direction will relate to music—and that too Hindustani music—and its history. What I have to say is rather exploratory, and I hope it will be imaginative enough to save it from being merely fanciful.

The first part of my paper will be devoted to presenting, in outline, a concept of literary creativity conceived by Ānandavardhana and treated in detail by Rājasekhara, in which the idea of transformation plays a key role. The new, according to these ancient Indian critics, is created through imaginatively restructuring the old. This, one may point out, has always been true of all arts everywhere. Artists, be they poets, painters, sculptors, architects, or musicians, work within a tradition. They are heirs to a body of forms, that is, of 'given' creations, which guide and shape their own endeavours. Transformation, in other words, is manifestly an inherent process in any artistic creation. Artists learn by copying and create by transmuting. This is even more obvious in traditional cultures, where a new work is deliberately modelled on the old.

The importance of Ānandavardhana and, following him, Rājasekhara lies in the fact that they have conceptually articulated the role and significance of the transformatory function in artistic creativity. These Indian critics, so far as I know, are the only ones who have consciously *theorized* about this function, even though its *use* has been common enough in all arts everywhere. They distinguish between kinds and modes of transformation, and Rājasekhara categorizes them in detail. They also distinguish between creative and non-creative transformation. Their discussion is worth recording in itself, but for me what they have done in the field of poetry will serve as a prelude for a similar attempt in analysing the creative process in music, a formal, non-representational art where creation plainly involves transforming the given.

Alaṅkāraśāstra, the name given in India to the literature of critical thinking concerning *kāvya*—the general term for imaginative writing—produced some of its most penetrating works over a period of two to three centuries, between the 9th and the 12th, mostly in Kashmir. Some of the questions which occupied the critics were: What is *kāvya*? How is it distinct from other writings? What is its purpose? What is *rasa*? How

and in whom is *rasa* aroused? These were hotly debated issues and many insightful ideas and theories came up as a result of prolonged discussions lasting over numerous generations. Related to these were the questions regarding the nature and operation of creative imagination.

Interesting in our context, I believe, is the answer given by Ānandavardhana to the last question as to how the creative imagination operates. Ānandavardhana discusses it in the last section of his remarkable work, the *Dhvanyāloka*, written sometime towards the end of the 9th century. It became one of the most influential critical works in India concerning *kāvya*. A century after its composition the celebrated Abhinava Gupta wrote an equally influential commentary on it which he named the *Dhvanyālokālocana*, renderable, perhaps, as 'The eye-opener to the *Dhvanyāloka*'.

The critical thinking of the period we are speaking of was pursued in an ambience of general philosophical theories and debates. This, I think, lends it a lasting depth and universality, even though this character has also been responsible for disparaging comments by historians oriented towards the impressionistic criticism of the 19th century West. To them Indian critical thinking was too general, too distant from the phenomenon it dealt with. Moreover, in this view, even where it came close to what it dealt with, it was much too formalistic. But it is just this character which makes it significant for me here.

Before getting on to what interests me in the *Dhvanyāloka*, let me briefly introduce it in the perspective of Indian poetics. The idea of *rasa*, one of the central, or perhaps the central, concept in Indian aesthetic thinking was initially outlined by Bharata, the semi-mythical author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a work on theatre belonging in its present form to the beginning of the Christian era. Translating the term *rasa* is a tricky problem. It is difficult to think of a simple, single equivalent word or phrase, such as 'dominant moods', 'feelings', 'basic emotions', 'sentiments', 'ethos' or the like. Anything but a long discursive explanation can only oversimplify, and thus distort, a complex concept which, as it stands, is definitive of the aesthetic realm in general as well as of emotions savoured through the experience of *kāvya*, emotions thus rendered as being in some sense 'trans'

or 'extra' normal. My intention, in this paper, is not to discuss *rasa*, except indirectly. I will assume in my readers a familiarity with the concept.

Bharata had outlined the notion of *rasa* in connection with drama. More complex issues concerning the nature and number of *rasa*, the mode of its evocation, the distinction between emotion in the *rasa*-state and ordinary experience, and the like, were taken up much later, mostly by the Kashmiri theorists of the period we have spoken of. It was argued that *kāvya* in general, of which drama, termed *dṛśya kāvya*, was but a species, gave rise to *rasa* in ways analogous to drama. Semantic issues were also involved in discussing *kāvya*, for *kāvya* uses words as its medium. The problem before the *ālaṅkārikas* was: What distinguished the use of this medium in *kāvya*? After all, words are also used in scientific, injunctive and other writings. It is in this area that Ānandavardhana's chief contribution lies. The semantic theories he had inherited argued for what may be called a pragmatic, commonsensical or 'literal' concept of meaning. Ānandavardhana contended that words mean in many expressive, emotive ways not envisaged in this semantic scheme which took only the denotative sense into account.¹ Words, he said, not only depict; they also evoke. Their power cannot really be understood within any semantic scheme which takes only logical relations into account. They have a largeness or aura of multiple meanings which they express through psychological, rather than logical, relations. He called this aura of meaning or 'meaningfulness'—if one may use this word—*dhvani*, which I think can be best translated as 'echo'. Abhinava, in explaining it, speaks of *anurāgana* or 'resonance'.² The *kāvya*-ness of *kāvya* lies in its powerful use of the potency of *dhvani* in words. It is, Ānandavardhana further argued, through the transliteral, often multivalent and thus multi-splendoured, echo of meanings in words that *kāvya* generates the experience of *rasa*.

Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, which literally means 'light on *dhvani*', is divided into four chapters called *udyotas*, literally 'illuminators'. He believed that in *dhvani* he had discovered a new, revolutionary principle, which could illuminatingly transform all previous theorising concerning *kāvya*. In the first three *udyotas* of his work, Ānandavardhana occupies himself

with demonstrating that linguistic usage cannot be fully comprehended without accepting *dhvani*. He explores the various modes and ways of its operation showing how all that is fruitful in previous theorizing can be more meaningfully subsumed under its workings.

In the fourth *udyota* Ānandavardhana speaks of how an awareness of the workings of *dhvani* can give us—meaning the poet and his audience, *kavi* and *sahṛdaya*—an insight into the process of creation. The *udyota* begins with the proclamation that imagination is capable of infinite novelty (*pratibhānantyam*). Interestingly, however, the capability of creating something new is defined as the capacity to renew, that is, to give an 'old' established theme, motif, image or expression a new freshness by restating it with a richer nuance. The creative use of *dhvani*, says Ānandavardhana, can impart newness to a poetic statement though it be a restatement of older, 'given' material (*vāṇī-purāṇakavīnibaddhārthasamsaparsāvatyapi navatvamāyātī*). He gives a few instances to illustrate his contention. The illustrations show how an established *mazmūn*, to give a familiar term from Urdu-Persian literature, signifying poetic theme or substance, becomes enriched in the hands of a greater poet who can wield his words with a greater suggestive power. An old poem in the hands of a creative poet is transformed into a new work.

It would be helpful here to take an example given by Ānandavardhana himself. Quoting a well-known verse from Amaru, he places against it a newer poem on the same theme or *mazmūn*. The freshness or the originality of the new poem, he says, cannot be denied, despite the force of the original.

Amaru's poem is:

*tūnyam vāsagrham vilokya tayanādutthāya kīñcicchanañ
nidrāvyāṇupāgatasya suptam nirvāṇya patyurmukham
vītrabdhām paricumbya jātapulakāmālokyā gaṇḍasthalīm
lojjānamranukhi prīyeṇa hasatā bālā cirañ cumbitā*

Certain that they were alone in the room, the young bride slowly raised herself a little on the bed. She gazed long at her husband's face as he lay feigning sleep. Thinking that he was really asleep, she planted a kiss on his cheek. No sooner than she did this, she saw the hair on his face tingle with pleasure.

Overcome with shyness she at once hid her face. Laughingly, her lover hugged her and gave a long kiss.³

Rendered in Sanskrit, it is a charming scene, chiselled in its artistry. None would easily dare to tinker with it. Yet a later poet modelled his own poem on it and produced perhaps a greater masterpiece. What he did was to rearrange the same scene, infusing it with a greater depth and inwardness. The author of the newer poem is unknown. Perhaps Ānandavardhana knew the name but does not mention it.⁴

The poem in Sanskrit reads:

*nidrūkaitavināḥ priyasya vadanairvinyasya vaktram vadhūḥ
bodhūbhāsaniruddhacumbanarasāpyābhogalolam xhitū
vailakṣyādvimukhibhavediti punastasyāpyanārambhinaḥ
sūkāṅkṣapratipatti nāma hṛdayam yātam tu pāram ratek*

As her husband lay feigning sleep, the young bride placed her cheek softly against his, forcibly restraining herself from the bliss (*rasa*) of kissing him passionately. And yet she throbbed with joy (*ābhoga*). He too remained unmoving lest she move away, embarrassed. Thus holding themselves back from what they intensely desired to do, their hearts were yet transported beyond/to the summit of/eros.

The playful movement of the earlier scene here becomes totally still, the outer movement transfigured into a vibration within. The action, so internalized, transcends the realm of drama, becoming pure poetry: It can no longer be rendered on the stage.⁵ The poet certainly succeeds in handling his model imaginatively, metamorphosing his given material into something new and original. Such transformation, in Ānandavardhana's view, was nothing short of creation.

He cites, in this connection, an interesting opinion held by some critics who denied the very possibility of original creation in poetry. These critics argued that the purpose of poetry was to express universals of experience (*anubhāvyanubhavasāmānyam*). Such universals were finite in number and common to all men at all times, past or present. And, as such, they had already been expressed by earlier poets leaving nothing for modern poets to say. If, nevertheless, a new poet felt that he was

making an original utterance, this was mere feeling, just make-belief (*mānamātram*). Ānandavardhana rejoins that if this view were true we would have had no original poetry after Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, the epic considered the *ādikāvya*, the primal poem, in Sanskrit literature. For one would be inclined to assert that Vālmiki, the archetypal, paradigmatic poet, had already expressed the universals of experience. But this is patently absurd. It goes against the overwhelming judgment of *sahṛdayas*, discerning lovers of poetry, who recognise great poetry and poets after Vālmiki.

The *pūrvapakṣa*, the view which denies the possibility of new creation, argues, in reply, that all that is new in a so-called new poem is the use of new expressions for the same old things. In answer Ānandavardhana asserts that a new word inevitably implies a new meaning, a new content (*vācya*) because words are inextricably (*avinābhāvena*) linked with their meanings or content. New expressions cannot but imply a new content.

Ānandavardhana admits that resemblances—*saṁvādah*, 'conformances' he calls them—do exist between the creations of poets. Some may be involuntary since, as he says, minds of men work in similar ways. However, this is not to deny the possibility of entirely original poetic creation. Just as nature, he remarks, can always create a new object in spite of the endless variety of what it already has, so can a poet.⁶ But having said this he exhorts poets not to be afraid of *saṁvādas*, not to desist from a deliberate model-oriented practice and reliance on handling existing material. For this can be done creatively, resulting in new, 'original' poems.

Saṁvādas between poems can be, according to him, of three kinds: (1) *pratibimbavat*, that between a man and his mirror image; (2) *ālekhyavat*, that between a man and his representation in painting; a painting necessarily transforms what it paints (The kind of painting which Ānandavardhana and his contemporaries would have known, such as that of Ajanta, transforms quite palpably.); and (3) *tulyadehivat*, that between two men similar in looks but with distinct identities of their own.

Only the third kind of *saṁvāda*, is creative; a poem reconstituted with the same elements as those of its model, but infused with a new self or spirit. Ānandavardhana does not go into

the details of how the three types of *sainvādas* are to be distinguished in actual poetic practice. He leaves this to the judgment of his reader, assuming that one who had studied the rest of his work will be able to arrive at the details on his own. The example we have quoted from him earlier is certainly, in his view, an instance of creative transformation, that is of the *tulyadehivat*.

Inspired perhaps by Ānandavardhana, another theorist, Rājasekhara, whose career followed soon after that of Ānandavardhana, used a similar scheme for analysing poetic creativity.⁷ His work, or what survives of it, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, is a manual for poets, intended as advice concerning how best to develop their art. It is in the context of plagiarism, *parārthaharaṇa*, that Rājasekhara discusses ways of handling older material. He goes into much greater detail in discussing the matter than Ānandavardhana. For, unlike his predecessor, he was talking to poets about the techniques of their craft—*kavikarma*—not only delving into principles.

Rājasekhara uses the phrase *parārthaharaṇa* to mean appropriating something written by another. Yet *haraṇa*, if creatively done, he says, is not *haraṇa* but *svikaraṇa*, 'assimilation', a legitimate, indeed commendable, poetic practice. *Svikaraṇa* operates through creatively transforming given material.

Rājasekhara classifies various ways of handling older material on the basis of what he calls *yonī*: source. He has three basic categories of *yonī*: (1) *anyayonī*, a new poem of which the source is transparent, where one can easily make out the model on which it is based; (2) *nilīnutayonī*, 'concealed *yonī*', where the older poem is transformed beyond recognition in the new; and (3) *ayonī*, a poem without a source, an entirely original, non-model-oriented creation. Rājasekhara further subdivides the first and the second of these categories into sub-classes. But the third, *ayonī*, has no sub-classes; it is not really a way of handling older material but a category in itself. It cannot be further classified, for how can one prefabricate categories for the entirely original?⁸

Rājasekhara subdivides *anyayonī* into two broad classes: (1) *pratibimbakalpa* and (2) *ālekhyakalpa*. These parallel the first two classes in Ānandavardhana (the suffix *kalpa* here is synonymous with *vat* of the earlier classification). Rājasekhara de-

scribes the *pratibimbakalpa*—what may be called the “mirror-image” class—as no more than rewording an older poem in new terms; thus making a change which does not alter the *paramārtha*, the ‘essential meaning’ of the given.⁹ This is an uncreative category, as in Ānandavardhana. But, unlike Ānandavardhana, Rājasekhara grants some creativity to the next class, namely the *ālekhyaprakhyā* (*prakhyā* is also synonymous with *vat*)—he was after all writing of the poet as a craftsman and could not keep his standards too stringent. He defines *ālekhyaprakhyā* as making a given theme or subject-matter seem different through somewhat touching it up, refining it, making it more elegant (*saṁskārakarma*).¹⁰ The example he gives is illuminating. He quotes an old verse which describes the black snakes twined around Śiva’s neck, with their hoods raised, as sprouts emerging from the dark, world-destroying poison stored in Śiva’s throat—the poison having sprouted due to the life-giving waters of the close-by Gaṅgā dripping on them. This verse became the model for another which makes a minor variation in the metaphor. The new verse describes the white snakes twined around Śiva’s locks as sprouts emerging from the root-like half-moon the god wears in his matted locks, watered by the near-by Gaṅgā. The language of the second verse closely follows the first and is obviously modelled on it. We have here a clear case of a variation on a theme, though admittedly a minor one.¹¹

The two categories which Rājasekhara considers really creative are the *tulyadehitulyā* and the *parapurapraveśatulyā* (*tulyā* is another synonym of *vat*)—he commends them with the words: ‘*so’yaṁ ullekhaṇānānugrāhyo mārgaḥ*,’ ‘it is a recommended path worthy of mention’; in recommending *ālekhyaprakhyā*, he does not use the extra adjective, ‘worthy of mention.’

Ānandavardhana had spoken of *tulyadehivat* as an apparent outward similarity but a marked inner difference between two poems. Rājasekhara inverts the definition: he defines *tulyadehitulyā* as a poem apparently differing from its model in content yet having a clearly felt inner resemblance.¹² He gives two examples, each differently expressing a theme common in Sanskrit poetry: ‘an extraordinary object needs an extraordinary home.’ The first poem expresses the idea thus: Horses are common objects and can live in any home, but only a king’s

palace is a proper home for an elephant, or else they should be left in the forest. The second, a purportedly derivative poem, expresses the same idea through a change of metaphor: a diamond deserves a royal home or it had better not be taken out of the mine where it belongs.

Rājasekhara's examples are not as inspired as those of Ānandavardhana or Kuntaka, to mention another theorist. They are not convincing as examples of creative writing. But we are concerned here not with Rājasekhara's critical judgment of poetry, but with his analytical categories which remain formally valuable, whatever the aesthetic value of the illustrations he gives to demonstrate them.

The *parapurapraveśa*, the other broad sub-class under *nihnatayoni*, is not recorded by Ānandavardhana. The word literally means 'a person who has entered an alien town.' He would look different, transformed by the new surroundings. Rājasekhara defines this suggestive term more discursively as 'keeping the root idea or motif of the model but changing its context—its 'entourage,' he calls it, using another evocative word.¹³

Each of the four categories recorded above has eight sub-classes. It is interesting to see how Rājasekhara makes his subdivisions, illustrating each with a verse. His is a very formal approach; he gives us quite a structural analysis of the ways and techniques by which a given poem may be transposed or transmuted. He sounds startlingly like a musician, recounting the different ways in which given musical pieces or themes may be varied. Each variation bears a name, some colourfully figurative, given, it would appear, by practising poets.

I would like to list here some of these variations—without quoting the examples Rājasekhara cites as illustrations—mainly to project more vividly his formal approach, suggestive of the practice of musicians.

I will begin by listing a few of the eight sub-species he classifies under *pratibimbakalpa*, which in his view was transformation not deserving to be called 'creative.' I will mainly list those which rely on structural change. The very first is termed *vyatyastaka*—a name which may be rendered as 'scattering the sequence'. It is defined as 'changing the order of parts without affecting the whole.' The second is *khaṇḍa*—meaning 'a segment'—which consisted of using part of a larger theme. The

third is *tail.bindu*—literally 'a drop of oil'—defined as enlarging or rather spreading out a brief idea in a manner resembling the spread of a drop of oil on water: considered an ugly shapeless spread. Another is *naṭanepathya*—'an actor's costume'—a transformation which merely translates a poem into another language, like an actor changing his dress. In music this could mean changing the words of a tune without making a change in the music.¹⁴ These, I think, are enough to indicate what Rājasekhara is trying to do. He adds that making variations of the above kind only stamps a poet as a nonpoet, revealing a lack of creativity (*kaverakavitvadāyī*).

Ālekhyaprakhyā, which Rājasekhara allows to be a creative mode of transformation, also has eight sub-species. Many of these, significantly, are structurally similar to those of the earlier non-creative mode. *Vyutkrāma*, defined as the reversal of a given manner of stating a theme (*kramenābhīhitasyārthasya viparītābhīdhānam*), is really no different from *vyatyastaka*, where the change consists of a rearrangement of parts.

Another variation, *navanepathya*—'new costume'—is the same as *naṭanepathya* of the earlier category. Similarly, *uttamya*—'an earring'—defined as 'giving importance to a subsidiary idea' can be equated with the earlier *khaṇḍa*.¹⁵

The difference consists in the addition of a new dimension, namely creativity, which cannot be reduced to structure. What was just a transformation becomes here a creative transformation. Rājasekhara quotes a verse from an earlier critic to express this idea. The entire range of available matter, says this critic, is given to the poet for transformation which can be effected like an actor who uses colour for transforming himself through make-up.¹⁶ The simile of the actor has been used again; but notable is the phrase used for expressing the idea of the kind of change effected, *anyathātvamivārecchati*: 'achieves a distinctive quality.' Creative handling makes it a *felt*, qualitative change, though the structural base of the process remains the same.

There are some interesting sub-divisions of the remaining two categories, the *tulyadehitulya* and *parapurapraveśasādṛśa* which could be listed and discussed here. But I think we have had enough of Rājasekhara. What I have in mind is not to discuss him but draw from him some cues in understanding creativity

in music.

I need not stress, to begin with, the key role of improvisation in Indian music, or, in other words, the basic transformational approach towards the given material. In poetry, at least sophisticated *kāvya* poetry, the same verse is, ideally speaking, handed over exactly as it was composed. If transformations have taken place, the reason is that the transmission process has not been quite as ideal as one could wish. Two different copies of the same poem are—or should be—identical. In Indian music there are few genres where such an ideal is even sought. In Ravindra Sangita or in film songs one does seek to make different renderings replicas of the original. But these are recent genres. Moreover, the attempt at exact replication is a recent ideal in music, introduced from the West, where transformation is the prerogative of the composer. He alone may transform given material to create something new. But once a composition is given final shape it has to be rendered, ideally at least, exactly as given. Some transformational role is allowed to the conductor who may 'interpret' a work in his way. But this is, in many cases, because of ambiguities in the scores of given compositions.¹⁷ In any case, the transformation that does take place remains much below even the level of Rājasekhara's first category, the *pratibimbakalpa*. The performance of a Western symphony is an attempt to produce a mirror image of the original. Rājasekhara's *pratibimbakalpa*, despite its name, 'mirror-image like', is more than producing a replica, a copy, of a given work. It is, we have seen, a transformational category, however insignificant the *quality* of the transformation.

In Hindustani music, a transformation, that may fittingly be termed *pratibimbakalpa*, is certain to creep in between any two rendering of the 'same' piece. This happens in all traditional musical genres, whether light or classical, whether a *dhun*, a *ghazal*, a *qawwālī* or a *thumrī*, a *khyāl*, a *dhrupad*. No two renderings of a piece in these forms, even by the same musician, are exact replicas. If we still speak of the 'same' piece it is because we judge the transformation to be insignificant, or in other words *pratibimbakalpa*. A transformation there is bound to be, its quality or degree depending on the genre; its total absence would be a rare thing, needing, indeed, an unusual, out-of-the-ordinary effort.

The reason is that musical education itself consists of training in the techniques and norms of improvisation. True, a musician is also taught certain more or less pre-set forms. But his handling of these has to be essentially improvisational. The more *fātrīya*, 'classical', the form, the greater, one might think paradoxically, the role of improvisation. Thus, improvisation is central to *thumri*, *tappā*, *khyāl* and *dhrupad*. Transformation is built into the very making of any particular performance in any of these forms.

In analysing and judging such music, transformational categories, such as those of Rājasekhara, can plainly be of great help. When we speak of two performances or renderings of a *ghazal*, *thumri* or *khyāl* being the 'same', the identity in such cases can be meaningfully understood only in terms of a *pratibimbakalpa* likeness. A later rendering is never exactly a replica of the earlier one. There is bound to be some rearrangement of parts. We speak of the two as being the same because we feel no real change has taken place—there is no *anyathā-bhāva*, to use a phrase from Rājasekhara.

This raises a question. Can we delineate the structural details of what I have, following Rājasekhara, called the *pratibimbakalpa* in music? His model, I should think, will not serve as more than an analogy. Music does not use words in which form and content can be analytically sifted with convenient ease. Music is form alone. Or, at least, the content in it is inseparable from form. The distinction of word and meaning, so essential in poetry, is meaningless in music. Analytical categories applying to poetry, however structural, cannot be used for music without important modifications and alternations. Details will have to be worked out, though, I must confess, I have as yet not made a move in that direction.

But if we have to work out any details at all we must first seek to answer two crucial questions: What is 'given' in music that the musician seeks to transform? How and with what does he do it?

In seeking to answer these questions, I shall be speaking of the 'classical' forms alone. Though what I have to say may be seen at the end of my analysis to apply also to the relatively lighter forms of Hindustani music. The answer to the first question is obviously: a *rāga*. In classical music what a musician

is taught are *rāgas* which are his 'given'. But the 'given' in this case is a peculiar 'given'. It is not a pre-formed structure which a musician has simply to reproduce. A *rāga* is a generalized form. Take the description of any *rāga* and what you will have is a general description of its form: rules and norms concerning the tonal path the *rāga* should traverse—its *antaramārga* as the ancients aptly called it; the scale (*thāt*) to be used; the notes to be emphasized, weakened, dropped, jumped over, to be more significantly interlinked, to be used in ascending or descending, obligatory bends or twists to be made between them, and so on. Given this, any *rāga* can in principle be realised or given concrete form in a number of different ways. But this is true only in principle. In practice certain crystallizations have taken place, crystallizations made by generations of creative musicians, to which a new practitioner becomes heir. These crystallizations are a musician's 'given'. They are not, however, fixed or frozen entities. They cannot be reproduced as replicas; though, of course, they have elements which are relatively more stable, such as the *bendish*.¹⁸ But a large part of their form remains fluid and malleable.

These crystallizations, I think, can best be described as styles. We have in Hindustani music four major styles of rendering a *rāga* (not to speak of sub-styles—*gharānās*—within these): *dhruvad*, *khyāl*, *thumri*, and *tappā*. I believe that in order to seek an answer to the second question I had asked earlier, namely, how and with what does a musician create and transform a *rāga* (for every creation itself involves transformation, using improvisation as it does), we must look for the structural basis of musical style.

But before I analyze further, I must deal with an objection that is bound to arise concerning what I have just said. I have spoken of four styles in which a *rāga* can be rendered, implying that any *rāga* can be rendered in any of these styles. The immediate objection would be that this is simply not true. *Thumri* is sung in only a handful of *rāgas*; so is *tappā*. There are *rāgas* of more recent origin in which *dhruvad* is not sung,¹⁹ others, such as *Khamāj* and *Bhairavi*, in which generally *khyāl* is not sung. Yet *dhruvad* and *khyāl* are the two encompassing, inclusive styles in Hindustani music, most *rāgas* can be sung in both. We should, therefore, it may be argued, speak of only

two styles of rendering *rāgas*. The other two are not truly universal styles, being limited to a few *rāgas*.

I would, in reply, like to argue two points. One, it is true that presently the *thumri* and *tappā* styles are confined to a very few *rāgas* and are in this sense lame styles. But this is a relatively recent development. Earlier these styles were as broad-based as the *khyāl*. There existed *thumris* in all the *rāgas* in which *khyāls* were sung. Tradition bears this out. For evidence, one has only to pick up the two collections of Lucknow *thumris* published by the U.P. Sangeeta Nataka Akademi and look at the list of *rāgas* in which Lallan Piyā and other equally famous singers had composed *thumris*. One of these two collections is devoted entirely to Lallan Piyā, a singer who lived into the twentieth century.²⁰

This might at once prompt a question: Why has *thumri* declined and so speedily? I will not let this question distract me here and move on to my second point which, in fact, follows from the first. The fact that *thumri* could mould any *rāga* to its stylistic needs, just as *khyāl* does today, certainly proves that it is capable of being an encompassing, universal style like *khyāl*, even though in practice it no longer does so.

The same can be said of *tappā* which is almost on the brink of total disappearance. It is today a style without any vitality. There are very few *tappā* singers and the total number of *tappās* one hears may be counted on one's fingers. Yet there was a time when *tappās* were sung in a so-called serious *rāga* like *Puriyā*.²¹ I would maintain that even if this were not true, the possibility of its becoming so would still be undeniable. Indeed, if there is any style that deserves resurgence it is the *tappā*.

Before I take any further step in speculating on the structural basis of musical style, I would like to point out that style relates not only to structure but also to sensibility. A change in style is an index of a change in sensibility. And sensibility is related, in howsoever tenuous and not-exactly-definable a manner, to *milieu* and hence to history and transformations in society. Consider the four major musical styles we have been speaking of. Their marked difference in musical idiom and hence the different sensibilities they express need no comment. The severe, sombre *dhrupad*, with its austere lines and curves,

is a world removed from the mellifluous *khyāl* of which it is the parent. The 'effeminate' eighteenth century social milieu of the court of Muhammad Shah, known as *Rangtīlī*, 'the colourful one', in which *khyāl* as we know it took shape, was far removed from the more 'heroic', war-like, rough period between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries when *dhrupad* emerged out of the earlier *prabandha* form. *Thumri*, lighter in feel and approach than the *khyāl*, emerged out of *khyāl* in the nineteenth century. The *tappā* was born of *thumri*. The genius behind this intricate filigree-like form was a Punjab musician named Shorī Miyān, said to have been trained in the *thumri* style. Other influences moulding the classical *tappā* are not very clear. The form does not seem to have much more than its name in common with the popular folk *tappā* of Punjab. Its link with the *thumri*, however, is clear enough.

The historical aspect of the emergence of these styles is certainly suggestive of some connection between these successive transformations in music and something 'akin' in the emergent social milieus which nurtured them. But with a formal art like music it is difficult to pinpoint the nature of this connection; to speak concretely of what was 'akin' in the social structure. In music, where form and content are inextricably merged, the style *is* the sensibility. We cannot separate the expression from what it expresses. We cannot, consequently, speak of any concrete factor in a social structure which music represents or mirrors.

To return to the question of style, I find the category of *tulyadehivat* quite illuminating in understanding the relation between *rāga* and different styles of rendering it. The *tulyadehivat*, according to Ānandavardhana, occurs when two poems are similar in appearance but different in spirit. What happens to a *rāga* rendered in different styles is analogous. The tonal structure of a *rāga*, its *antaramārga*, remains recognizably the same even with a change of style (otherwise we would not be speaking of the same *rāga*). Yet a great difference can be felt in spirit. We can recognize, say *rāga* Bihāg, in a *dhrupad*, a *khyāl*, a *thumri* or a *tappā* as the same *rāga*, but the Bihāg in each of these cases is expressive of a very different ethos.

Conversely, the *tulyadehivat* can also help us to form a criterion for judging if a new style has been achieved. Today it is

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the *khyāl* alone where significantly new and exciting experiments are being made in style. The similarities in two *dhrupad* renderings of any *rāga* by two different musicians can, I feel, be more often than not appropriately termed *pratibimbavat*. At best, with a more sensitive, creative musician, it does not move beyond the *alekhyavat*. The reason is that *dhrupad* is a closed, confined style. Transformations are strictly circumscribed and not allowed to stray beyond prescribed limits. This is what allows *dhrupad* to retain its strength and character. But this also prevents it from producing such different styles as we have in the *khyāls* of Amir Khan and Kumar Gandharva, to take two tellingly extreme examples. The difference between these two *khyāl* styles is surely in the *tulyadehivat* class.

Though I am tempted here to speculate on the sensibility, or rather the gamut of sensibilities, that modern *khyāl* embodies and their relations with today's *milieu*, I must now turn to the analysis of the structural components of musical style, the raw material with which it is constituted.

At this point I would like to introduce a rather unfamiliar technical term, the *sthāya*, which I find promising in making the analytical attempt I am aiming at. Śārṅgadeva defines *sthāya* as '*rāgasya awayavāh sthāyāḥ*', '*sthāyas* are the limb of a *rāga*.' The actual music of Śārṅgadeva's days, that is the early thirteenth century, is no longer available to us, except in imaginative reconstruction; our own music is in many essentials a legacy from it. However, it is clear from Śārṅgadeva's descriptions that in speaking of *sthāyas* he has in mind musical phrases, idioms, melodic figures, and the like; in other words, organic structural units of a kind a musician would use to 'build' any *rāga*. He has a long list of *sthāyas* which he apparently considers the basic limbs, organic 'building blocks' for constructing a *rāga*—any *rāga*. The *sthāyas*—from the root '*sthā*', 'to remain'—are the 'constants, which a musician handles in order to make his improvisations.

Modifying Śārṅgadeva a little, I would like to speak of *sthāyas* as the smallest organically meaningful structural units into which the totality of melodic movements in a *style* may be reduced. Following Bharata, I would like to call *sthāyas*, *geyamātrkāḥ*. Let me explain. In speaking of dance, Bharata distinguishes between two basic categories of dance: the *nṛtya* and

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the *nṛtta*. The *nṛtya* was mimic in purport; one could not speak of *nṛtya* without *abhinaya*, mime. But *nṛtta* was purely formal. Bharata calls it a dance which has no connection with the meaning of any text.²² But expressing textual meanings was central to *nṛtya*. In analysing the structure of *nṛtta*, Bharata speaks of basic units of movements which he terms *karana*s. He also calls them *nṛtta-mātrkā*s: literally, the 'mothers of dance', so named because these in larger clusters constituted the dance as a whole.²³ Abhinava Gupta's comments in explaining the meaning of *karana* are significant. Abhinava describes *karana* as a bodily movement which has the quality of grace (*gātrāṇām vilāskṣepa*). He further qualifies it as the smallest movement which is non-pragmatic, not made with a utilitarian purpose, and yet having the sense of a single unit.²⁴ A *karana* is, in other words, the smallest aesthetic block into which *nṛtta* may be analysed. Clearly, *sthāya*, as I have spoken of it, is a notion analogous to *karana*. This is why I have also called it *geya-mātrkā*, 'the mother of song'. *Sthāya* in my sense is the smallest unit into which a musical style may be broken.

Even in common musical parlance we do speak of different *sthāyas* in connection with different musical styles, though we do so loosely. Expressions like '*ṭhumri kā āṅga*', '*khyāl kā āṅga*', '*dhrupad kā āṅga*', '*ṭappe kā āṅga*', (the *āṅga* of *ṭhumri*, of *khyāl*, of *dhrupad*, of *ṭappā*) are common among musicians. *Āṅga* in such usages is neither unambiguous nor precise. But an important aspect of the meaning of *āṅga* in such contexts is plainly structural. *Dhrupad kā āṅga* means melodic movements typical of the *dhrupad* style, such as *gamak*, *sūt*, and the like. Listed together and further analysed, such movements can yield typical *sthāya* units of the style.

Though I have not made the necessary detailed analysis for identifying and listing typical *sthāyas* of various styles, I believe the exercise will yield fruitful results. The *sthāya* approach can be helpful not only in understanding style, but it may also be valuable for understanding the transformation of one style into another. For if *sthāya* can be seen as the basis of style, the transmutation of *sthāya* can be shown to be an important basis of the emergence of a new style. We, in fact, do speak of such a process when we say, for example, *dhrupad ke āṅga ko khyāl mein dhāl liyā*, 'The *āṅga* of *dhrupad* has been moulded

into that of *khyāl*'. Mutating a *dhrupad āṅga* to render it into a *khyāl āṅga* is common practice among musicians, a fact which can easily be demonstrated.

REFERENCES

1. Before Ānandavardhana, Indian semantics, or what may be called its main strand, postulated a *lakṣī*, 'a power' in words termed *abhidhā* through which they directly denoted their objects. *Abhidhā*, it was believed, was aided by another 'power' termed *lakṣaṇā*, which came into play when *abhidhā* landed into obvious logical absurdities, as in common usages like, 'I drank five glasses', 'He passed through hell', 'John is a rat'. The function of *lakṣaṇā* in such cases was to restore the denotative *abhidhā* sense through simple 'logical' connections or associations. Thus 'glasses' = 'what they contain'; 'hell' = 'suffering', and 'rat' = 'the unpleasant habits or properties of a rat'. Here the function of *lakṣaṇā* ended. It merely came to the rescue of *abhidhā* when usage showed such waywardness. It did no more. One can see, however, that 'hell' and 'rat' in these sentences cannot be reduced to any simple denotative meaning. They have a suggestive aura which cannot be tied down to *abhidhā* and this is one reason which led Ānandavardhana to argue for *dhvani*, an evocative 'power' in words, beyond *abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*.
2. Abhinava on *Dhvanyāloka*, *udya* 1, *kārikā*, 13; see p. 241, vol. 1 of Dr. Rāmasāgara Tripathi's edition of *Dhvanyāloka* (Motilal Banarsidas, 1973). Abhinava says: 'evaṁ ghaṭṭīnīhrādusthāmīya' nuraṇāt-mopalakṣito vyūṅgyopārtho dhvanirīti'.
3. I would like to put in a remark here by way of introduction. The notion of *rasa*, I had said, was conceived by Bharata in the context of theatre. The dramatic manner of depicting *rasa* tended to become normative and a marked dramatic element is present in much Sanskrit poetry. Amara's poem pictures a scene not unlike a dramatic tableau though not entirely frozen or static: it has a situational quality easily seen as an intense moment of heightened drama. My translation aims at outlining the dramatic scene described, the rich poetic nuances are, of course, lost.
4. Ānandavardhana rarely names the author of a poem he cites or a theory he contests. Such practice was not uncommon among *śaṅkārthas*.
5. Significantly, this verse, unlike the earlier one, uses purely verbal, 'poetic' devices to great effect. It has two instances of the figure called *virodhābhāsa*—apparent contradiction or paradox: (1) The girl is described as *niruddhacumbanarosā*, 'deprived of the bliss of kissing'—and yet *ābhogalolā sthīrā*, 'vibrating with joy'—*rasa* and *ābhoga* acting as synonyms here. (2) The other instance, occurring in the last line, is obvious enough. Its effect is heightened by a subtle double entendre

on the phrase *sākāṅkṣapratipatti* which means literally 'unfulfilled desire', but also, as a technical term in grammar, 'an incompletely formulated sentence', which 'wants' something before it can make sense: a sentence left hanging in the middle of sense and nonsense as it were. An utterance such as, 'Fortunately I . . .', for example, which demands additional phrases such as, 'was there', or 'had money', or 'could hang on to the cliff', or the like to make sense.

6. *Dhvanyāloka*, *udvṛta* 4, *vṛtti* or *kārika* 10. The passage reads: **tathā hi jagatprakṛtiyutitakalapaparamparā'vlebhūstavittravastuprapaṇcā sālī pamaridāntā parikṣāparapadārthanirmūnāsaktirīti na lakṣyate'bhidhātum. tadvadeyaṁ kōvyasthūtrānantābhīḥ kavimatibhūrapabhuktīpī nedānīn parihiyate pratyuta navaṇavābhūryutpattibhīḥ parivardhate.*
7. Rājasekhara quotes Ānandavardhana at the beginning of the 5th chapter of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*. In a stray verse attributed to him, he praises Ānandavardhana's concept of *dvaṇī*. See *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, G.O.S. edn., edited by Dālal and Shastri (Baroda, 1934), p. 156. It is not unlikely that Rājasekhara was not directly inspired by Ānandavardhana in this matter, but that both were drawing from a common tradition current among critics and poets.
8. Rājasekhara does speak of three very broad 'kinds' of *avyāṇī* poems, making a distinction on the basis of subject-matter: *laukika*, 'this-worldly', concerned with things of this world; *alaukika*, 'trans-worldly', concerned with the gods; and *mītra*, 'mixed', concerned with a combination of the two. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, chapter 12. But this classification is radically different from the others in principle; its basis is not how the new transforms the old. Any corpus of poems can, in fact, be classified as *laukika*, *alaukika* and *mītra*.
9. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, chapter 12:
*arthāḥ sa eva sarvo vākyāntaravivacanā paraṁ yatra
tadaparamārthavibhedān kavyān pratibimbakalpan'xyāt'*
10. *Ibid.*:
*kīyatēpi sāmukhīrakarmajā vastu bhinnavadbhātī'
tatkathītamārthacaturāirūlekhyaprakhyamīti kavyam'*
11. The two Sanskrit verses from the 12th chapter of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* are:
(a) *Jayanti nīlakaṇṭharyā nīlāḥ kaṇṭhe mahāhayaḥ
galadgaṅgāmbusaśikṣitakālakāṅkurā iva'*
(b) *Jayanti dhavalavyāḥ lambhorjūṭāvalambīnāḥ
galadgaṅgāmbusaśikṣitacandrakandāṅkurā iva'*
12. *Ibid.*:
*vijayasya yatra bhede'pyabhedabuddhirnīlāntasādeṣyāt'
tattalyadehitulyān kavyān bodhanti sudhīyo' pi*
[Note the phrase *bodhananti sudhīyo' pi*; 'even those with a good mind venture to compose thus.']
13. *Ibid.*:
mūlākyān yatra bhavetparikarabandhastu dūrato'nekāḥ'

taraparapurapravesapratiṃśa kāvyān sukavibhāṣyam

[Note *sukavibhāṣyam*: 'it is a procedure worthy of a good poet'.]

14. Śārāṅgadeva, the author of the famous 13th century epitome on music, the *Saṅgitaratnākara*, categorizes *vāggeyakāras* (composers) into three classes. The best are those who compose both the music and the words in a song. The lesser ones are those who borrow another's music, merely composing a new song for it.
15. For sub-species of the *ālekhyaprakhyā*, see chapter 13 of the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*.
16. Ibid. The verse runs as follows:
so'yañ bhāṣitvālekitrūṣamasto vasturistaraḥ
nājavadvāṇīkāyogādanyathātvamivārechati
17. In music, as in many other arts, a degree of what may be termed 'interpretation' is involved in even faithfully copying a work. A copy in music can never be a mechanical copy in the sense that two copies of the same poem are. Such copies can only be produced on a gramophone or a similar device. A musician reproducing an original cannot do so mechanically. For reproduction itself is an art, a process which is bound to leave some imprint of the artist on the work he copies. He cannot but interpret as he copies. But interpretation, in a significant sense, comes in only when the original is uncertain, not given in its entirety, and thus having parts or aspects capable of alternate renderings.
18. A composition 'fixed' in its melodic contours, set to a certain rhythmic cycle (*tālā*), and often forming the nexus around which improvisation takes place.
19. When I say 'sung', I also imply 'played', for the musical styles I am speaking of apply to the manner of rendering a *rāga* irrespective of whether this is done in singing or playing.
20. *Thumri Saṅgraha* compiled and notated by Gangadhar Rao Telang, Lucknow, 1977. *Lallan Piya ki Thumriyān*, compiled and notated by Bharatendu Bajpai, Lucknow, 1977. We gather from the introduction of the latter work that a direct disciple of Lallan Piya died in 1950. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Lallan Piya himself was alive at the beginning of the twentieth century.
21. Dr Prem Lata Sharma, Head of the Department of Musicology, B.H.U., recently told me that she heard a musician from Bihar sing a most intricate *jappā* in *Pūriyā*, properly maintaining the *rāga* form. Apparently, a tradition of *jappā* singing, which has disappeared from the rest of north India, survives in a remote corner of Bihar.
22. *Nṛpatāstra* (G.O.S. edn.) Vol. 1, 4, 262. *Nṛtta* is here spoken of as '*na gītākārthasambādham na cāpyarthaśya bhāvakaṃ*'.
23. Ibid.: 4, 31 and 4, 59-60. There is a suggestion in the second passage that the *nṛtta-māṭṛkā* is a unit even smaller than the *karāṇa*, but for my purposes the question of their equivalence is irrelevant. I take them to be equivalent for the point I am making here.

24. Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 28-33: "*heyopādeyaṇīṣayakriyābhiḥ vyatiriktā yā tatkrīyā karaṇamityarthaḥ . . . pūrvakṣetrasamyogatyūgena samucitakṣetrāntaraprāptiparyantatayā ekā krīyā tatkaraṇamityarthaḥ*". [A (graceful) movement distinct from those made in connection with avoiding the undesirable (*heya*) and achieving the desired (*upādeya*) is *karaṇa* . . . a single movement from one point to another appropriate point is *karaṇa*.]

A 'Middle Path' Social Philosophy: Norms Reflected in Early Pali Literature

PRATAP CHANDRA

REASONS FOR A pervasive ignorance of and apathy towards Buddhism are varied. Practising Buddhists form a minuscule minority today, confined to certain border areas. Most of them are neither vocal nor interested in spreading their faith. Buddhism's role as a determining factor in our social life is at best peripheral. It is only natural, in these circumstances, that most scholars have only the injunctions and prescriptions coming down from the *smṛtis* and *Dharmasūtras* in mind when they think or speak about Indian social philosophy. That the first generation Buddhists had proposed an altogether different set of social norms in their day remains a little known fact.

Paradoxically, on the other hand, no other aspect of ancient Indian thought and culture has been subjected to such bitter and cantankerous scholarly disagreement as Buddhism. Ironically enough, the views of the preacher *par excellence* of 'middle path' have largely been interpreted in extreme terms. If one section portrays the Buddha as a conformist at heart with certain professed reservations, the other presents him as an unrelenting rebel. Both the sections seem convinced that there could be no third alternative. The international acclaim which Buddhism came to enjoy in subsequent centuries appears to have proved the biggest stumbling block to its objective and historical understanding. After all, we in India know only too well that veneration has nothing to do with understanding, much less with practice.

No other corpus of religio-philosophical writings has as much heterogeneity of both form and content as the Buddhist literature. This stems directly from the fact that this literature was composed over a period of nearly fifteen centuries by thinkers with vastly different assumptions and temperaments. There is another complicating factor. Though unquestionably a product of Indian genius and milieu, with an inherent right to be regarded as the mirror of the Indian situation over a long period, a substantial part of this literature has not been found in India. Some of it was not even known to other sects and schools in ancient India. The whole of Buddhist Pāli literature was discovered by devoted Western Indologists in the countries of south Asia during the last century. But for their efforts we Indians might not have even heard of the existence of Pāli language and literature. The position with regard to Buddhist Sanskrit literature is scarcely better. Several very important Mahāyāna as well as Sarvāstivāda texts are now available only in their Chinese and Tibetan versions. There are schools of Indian Buddhism, like the Satyasiddhi, about which we learn nothing from the Indian sources. Mercifully, all this has not led the vast majority of Buddhologists to doubt the authenticity of Buddhist literature as such, and we can still talk about the Buddhist standpoint on the basis of this corpus.

For three reasons this paper has been limited to early Pāli literature. First, no single paper can do justice to the ideas developed and reflected in a body of texts of these proportions. Secondly, later Pāli literature and the whole of Sanskrit Buddhist literature had no contact with or roots among the masses. They cannot be treated as authentic reporting on their times *a la* early Pāli literature. Finally—and this is the crux of the matter—most of Buddhist social thinking appears to have been done by the Master and his immediate disciples whose utterances and dialogues with fellow seekers and outsiders are recorded in early Pāli literature. A discussion of social norms reflected in early Pāli literature would thus really amount to a discussion of the bulk of Buddhist social philosophy.

Pāli literature has usually been divided into canonical and acanonical. However, all canonical Pāli literature is not early. The third 'basket' of the *Tiṭṭaka*, literally 'three baskets'—the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*—was admittedly put together centuries after

the demise of the Master, and does not claim descent from him. This collection of seven works is noted for its analysis of all the mental and physical conditions but has little or no social philosophy. The acanonical writings include the *Milindapañha*, perhaps the last Pāli text to be composed in India, the various commentaries on the canon by Buddhaghosa as well as his *Visuddhi-magga*, written mostly in Sri Lanka, a compendium by Aniruddha, called *Abhidhammattha-sangaho*, and some secular works like *Alankāra-sangaho*. All these works can be regarded as later Pāli literature. Early Pāli literature comprising the first two baskets—*Vinaya-piṭaka* and *Sutta-piṭaka* in contrast has always enjoyed a peculiar kind of sanctity since it is supposed to be *Buddha-vacana*, the Master's own words. As a matter of fact, however, the Buddha does not act as the central figure in every dialogue. Many of his eminent disciples, who could perhaps be called his co-workers, also figure in several passages.

The *Vinaya-piṭaka* is really meant for the home-forsaking monks and nuns, rules of discipline governing the monastic life being its primary subject-matter. Yet, since the editors occasionally provide background information on what necessitated the framing of a particular rule, it contains valuable information about the social conditions of the day. The *Sutta-piṭaka* is sub-divided into five *nikayas*—*Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, *Anguttara* and *Khuddaka*; the last again being a collection of fifteen works, including such well-known Buddhist texts as the *Jātakas* and the *Dhammapadam*.

Is it reasonable to regard an avowedly religious and philosophical literature like this as related in some way with creative imagination? Does it belong to the same genre as poetry, drama, fiction or folk literature? On the face of it, the answer must be in the negative. The editors and compilers of the *Tiṭṭaka* certainly did not aim at providing aesthetic delight or even edification. Their total preoccupation was with deliverance from the seemingly unending rounds of births and deaths. The Buddha stresses again and again that his teachings were not addressed to those who saw no ill in existence *per se*, who were not averse to enjoying worldly pleasures. Moreover, the happenings recorded in these works are all claimed to be real and not imaginary. Every dialogue begins with 'Thus have I

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heard', followed by a recollection of a particular event by one who was personally present there. Yet, there is scope for creative imagination in these passages. Since a number of these dialogues involved common people or rival teachers, views concerning society and its ideals necessarily found place in them. It is quite apparent from these works that the Buddha objected to a great deal going on around him. How could he demolish the current norms without proposing an alternate set, and how could he lend credence to this alternate set without presenting what was claimed to be an objective account of the origins of society? Creative imagination gets as much free play in this latter task in Buddhism as it does in other religious and even secular literature. Evidence of an obviously unverifiable nature was being 'dug up' to substantiate a pre-conceived standpoint.

If the *Vinaya-piṭaka* account of the origin of these two collections can be trusted—and so far only Oldenberg has raised serious objections against doing so¹—they are more than two and a half millennia old. Since a certain waywardness was noticed among some monks following the news of the Master's death, his immediate disciples and associates felt the need to record all that they had seen and heard so that his own words could be preserved for posterity. These texts, having been explicitly put together to serve as a guide for future generations of Buddhists, enjoy a special significance from the point of view of social philosophy also.

As in the case of Buddhist literature in general, there are some complicating factors that warrant a modicum of caution with regard to this aspect of Buddhist writings too. First of all, there is considerable debate about the region of the Pāli dialect.² The issue becomes relevant since there is no way of knowing whether the Buddha himself used this medium or whether Pāli texts are mere translation. The earlier opinion regarded the eastern region as the home of Pāli. This was also the region to which the Buddha belonged, and there are certain marked similarities between the languages and dialects of eastern India and Pāli. However, the Buddha himself had ordained that his message was to be propagated in the local dialect. Since the Pāli canon, as it is today, is supposed to have been 'carried' to Sri Lanka by Mahinda and Sanghamittā,

children of Emperor Aśoka, who belonged to Vidisha in north Madhya Pradesh, other experts conjectured that central India must have been the home of Pāli. Any sociologist of knowledge will perceive the deeper implications of this debate. In the absence of any hard evidence one way or the other, it will serve no purpose to pursue the matter further. The fact remains that Pāli is an exclusively Theravāda medium, not in use by anyone else but still widely taught and learnt in the Buddhist monasteries of south Asia, the region of early or Theravāda Buddhism. The Pāli texts, both early and late, were really discovered in these monasteries and a Theravādin ruler, the King of Siam, had financed their publication.

Secondly, it may be noted that a gap of nearly four and a half centuries exists between the reported compilation of these 'baskets' and their actual writing down. In fact, there is no record of their redaction in India. It was done in Sri Lanka towards the end of the pre-Christian era. This long gap has given ample material for speculation, inducing some savants, like Mrs. Rhys Davids³ and Radhakrishnan⁴, to suggest that in its extant form the canon is largely a monkish creation with very little in it from the Buddha himself. There is, however, little agreement on this among competent scholars.

Finally, the way Pāli language and literature disappeared from this country is both inexplicable and unparalleled. Absolutely nothing is heard about Pāli after the story of Aśoka's son and daughter. Later Buddhists themselves do not seem to be aware of its existence. The canon came to be rendered into Sanskrit; but one knows not from which language or dialect. In Sri Lanka, however, Pāli remained a vigorous living language and most of the works classed as later Pāli literature were written there in the following centuries.

II

Attempts have been made to establish a link between early Buddhist ontology and social philosophy. Since such a linkage can have deep implications for the subject under discussion, these attempts deserve a closer look.

Some writers, Jennings⁵ and Trevor Ling⁶ for instance,

believe that the Buddhist approach to social questions was in a way predetermined by their 'altruism' or 'non-individualism'. Buddhism was in some sense opposed to the very being of an immutable, permanent and blissful self. It regarded as the worst kind of heresy the equating with self of any one or all of the five constituents of human personality. If man's self has been denied, it has been argued, then all selfishness and egoism stands condemned. A denier of individuality could not stop short of denouncing individualism without contradicting himself. According to this viewpoint, the Buddha attached greater importance to the group than to the individuals constituting the group in obedience to this ontological position.

Some other writers have conjectured that, since the birth and dispersal of Buddhism closely followed the eclipse of tribal republics based on primitive communism and the establishment of monarchies and some kind of an urban culture, the Buddha's all-pervasive concern with *dukkha*, pain or misery, was a response to this newly emerging situation. Pain inhered not in existing but in living amidst rapacious people. Moreover, the Buddha had designed his Order on the pattern of vanishing tribal republics, a system with which he was well-acquainted personally. This was his formula for getting rid of an unpleasant present.⁷

Denial of the reality of self is undoubtedly one of the original contributions of Buddhism to the philosophy of religion. If no other sect or school could think in such terms, the reason lies in the patent psychological difficulty in unrelentingly adhering to the dynamic mode of thinking. Even those who realize that all is changing do feel the need for positing something impervious to change behind the phenomena. The Buddha did not do so. However, there is no basis whatever to read either materialism or altruism in this standpoint. The Buddha rejected only a particular notion of self which might have been current in his day. A living principle separate from and independent of body is essential for the doctrines of moral retribution and reincarnation. The notion of self which early Buddhism rejected does not seem to be either Upanisadic or Sāṃkhya or Jaina. According to it, self is not only immutable and free from decay and disease but is also something wholly under one's own control. This notion can find place neither in an absolutistic system nor

in a thinking which has respect for experience.

The Buddha, this needs being stressed again and again, has been the only preacher of a religion whose commitment to empiricism and realism was total. Deliverance itself depended not on any mystical insight but on knowing the things as they really were. There could be no question of denying self as far as it was a subject of experience. However, as three great Western thinkers realized centuries later, a static, fixed entity could not be the subject of experience. In their own different ways, Hume, James and Whitehead felt the need of positing a continuously changing, stream-like self. Acceptance of this type of self can by no stretch of imagination be termed altruism or non-individualism. Altruism, in any case, is a value-laden concept with a very definite behavioural implication. An early Buddhist monk was not altruistic in that sense, even if the later Mahāyāna came to acquire it in the form of its Bodhisattva doctrine.

The Buddha's stress on the painful nature of existence *per se* could be viewed as an escapist response to the growing problems of his day, had he been the only one or even the first to take that position. He was in fact neither. The Upanisads, the Jainas, the Sāṃkhya system, and even the much-maligned Ajivikas were all one in holding this view. And they were either older than or contemporaneous with early Buddhism. Why should the Buddhist emphasis on *dukkha* be singled out as an instance of escapism?

Misery in existing, it may be pointed out, really resulted from two presuppositions which were nearly universally accepted in ancient India. These are a lack of belief in a personal Godhead and, by implication, in a continuous process of creation of bodies and souls. It was not possible to feel enthusiastic about the world without any purpose. The Semitic thinking, in contrast, views this world as God's creation and thus finds good reason to serve the divine purpose. The Buddha in one passage even went to the extent of asserting that the acceptance of a divine creator would amount to a denial of free will.⁸ Since this world virtually became a prison-house owing to these unquestioned presuppositions, deliverance from rounds of existence soon became the over-riding concern of all serious-minded people. Even those disciplines which were

not metaphysical in nature, such as medicine, grammar and logic, felt obliged to prescribe ways for deliverance. There is not sufficient ground for doubting the Buddha's religious earnestness.

Nor is it possible to accept the view that the Buddha fashioned the *Sangha* or Order on the pattern of vanishing republics. True, the *Sangha* had a corporate personality; it was a close-knit society where everyone had a right to censure a breaker of rules of discipline. But did the tribal republics also work on the basis of a rigid and unrelenting set of pre-ordained rules? Were they also collectives of men and women sharing the same goal? The *Sangha* was not a spontaneous growth. Moreover, the Buddhist Order was not the only one. The Buddha must have had before him a model after which he fashioned his Order. Men and women disenchanted with worldly existence and determined to seek deliverance through self-training and arduous discipline had to be organized not only to ensure safety and security but also for providing training, by preaching and by practice, to the novices. *Sangha* was born out of this felt need. The primary causes of bondage according to the Buddha were attachment and ignorance. He felt convinced that anyone living as an active member of society, contributing to production and partaking of its pleasures, would never get over attachments. Hence the need for a society of forsakers.

There is, in fact, no real connection between the social philosophy and ontology of early Buddhists. Those who experience difficulty in seeing this are perhaps unable to see that, unlike the later monks who were in love with a cloistered monastic life, the Buddha and his early disciples simultaneously belonged to two bipolar worlds. Their prime concern was with deliverance. So the *Sangha* occupied most of their thoughts. But the Buddha did not underestimate the value and importance of society. It was, after all, a society of sympathizers (fellow-travellers?) who provided succour to the monks and sent people to join the Order. The Buddha regularly visited the homes of his lay-followers, accepted their hospitality, solved their problems, and settled their issues. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* is exclusively addressed to the monks and nuns. But the *Sutta-piṭaka* contains a large number of dialogues the Buddha had with kings, generals, ministers, traders and others. In

these dialogues his concern for society becomes transparent, though these contain little or no ontology. In spite of his unambiguous stand that only a home-forsaker could win deliverance, the Buddha neither advised nor expected everyone to renounce worldly life. He held out the hope of a happy life on earth or in heaven for those who did not swerve from the narrow and straight path of virtue, though he could not promise them *nibbāna*.

III

Buddhist social mores originated in a definite and more or less ascertainable milieu and at a definite historical juncture. The early Buddhists were by no means writing on a clean slate. They were responding in their own way to a situation which was already thousands of years old and well-established. The situation which played an important role in shaping the psyche of the Buddha and his associates inevitably imposed certain constraints on the development as well as the character of Buddhist social philosophy. Some idea of this situation is necessary if one wishes to assess the nature of the Buddhist departure.

An unusual degree of plurality appears to be the most notable characteristic of the early Indian situation. Archaeological finds of the last few decades as well as the earliest stratum of Vedic literature leave no doubt that the regional landscape was dotted with tribal settlements. Since cultural anthropology has established with a high degree of probability that every tribe must have a set of practices and a body of beliefs to invest it with a group-personality, it can be assumed that a number of practices and beliefs too were there. Hard evidence suggests that these tribes belonged to several racial stocks, with different physical appearances. The place of the Aryan tribes in this set-up seems to have been blown out of all proportions. As far as one can ascertain, the Aryans were merely one among many, no matter whether they were indigenous or they came from outside. A critical study of ancient texts gives no reason to think that they started the process of acculturation in India or that their beliefs and practices

eventually were adopted by all the other tribes.

With the growth of population, a stage must have been reached when the tribes (*grāmas*, which had no spatial connotation in early times) felt obliged to move out to newer places in search of food and water. The Sanskrit word for fight or struggle, *samgrāma*, literally means the coming face to face of two *grāmas*. Fights must have ensued to the great benefit of the large number of beasts inhabiting the dense tropical forests. Before long the responsible leaders of different tribes must have realized the futility of such fights. A *modus vivendi* had to be found. The tribes had to become parts of a bigger whole, but in such a way that none lost their peculiar group-identity. A rigid structure had to be evolved to meet the threats to survival. But there was no need to impose a uniform set of practices and beliefs.

Extolling the virtues of treating everyone as one's kin, stressing again and again that the Truth was one though wise men expressed it in different ways, survival of wholly incompatible beliefs and practices within the same community even to this day, and the doctrine of incarnations, all seem to lend credence to the scenario outlined above. A papering over of the cleavages was achieved in this way. In the process, however, the Indian situation acquired a unique characteristic. The survival needs taught us at an early stage of our development that there was no need to bracket form and content. Plurality has its own logic. It can be both strength and weakness. If it fosters tolerance or even respect for alien points of view, it also makes one somewhat indifferent to the content. Even today the Hindu society all over the country is, or leastways was till recently, uncompromisingly structured. At the same time there have been vast differences of beliefs and practices. This situation can hardly be explained unless we make a distinction between form and content.

Pioneering historians of Indian thought and culture became so enamoured of a single-establishment, unilinear historical model that this most remarkable peculiarity of the Indian situation and its logical implications escaped their attention. They could not see that a radically plural situation could not be comprehended within the framework of their model. Those brought up in a Semitic milieu might have failed to notice

this Indian peculiarity because it was foreign to their own way of looking at things. Semitic culture does not separate form and content in this way. A lack of critical self-awareness perhaps permitted Indian historians to follow their Western forerunners blindly. As a result, a less-than-objective picture of ancient India has come to be firmly established and has been colouring our perception of ourselves. Buddhism is one of the worst victims of this methodological lapse.

One reason for a wider interest in Buddhism in recent decades is its allegedly 'anti-establishment' stance. This proposition assumes that there was only one religio-philosophical establishment in ancient India—the Vedic—and that the other currents were either its off-shoots or dissenters, a proposition that, as observed earlier, merely shows a failure to grasp the logic of plurality. Since the beginning of Indian civilization there had been several such establishments, each one of them treating itself as *the* establishment and the others as heresies. Each such establishment had its own body of dogmas, cult and devout believers. Words like 'dissent' and 'protest' are out of place in such a situation. The appropriate expression would be 'alternatives'. An arrangement that made no attempt to straitjacket thinking would not only permit but also respect such alternatives. How else could the same householder who gave alms to the Buddhist or Jaina monk also be the upholder of the Vedic ritualism?⁹

The Vedic establishment was the first to come into being. Besides its cosmogony and ontological beliefs, it also propounded the world's first social philosophy. Starting with the *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *Rgveda*, the Vedic social philosophy kept on developing till the end of *smṛti* literature. It was, however, obviously weighted in favour of a particular section of the society. This could not but lead to the emergence of suggested alternatives in which either some other section became the privileged one or the very notion of placing any one section above others was opposed or rejected. Any account of Indian social philosophy should take into account this entire dialectical development.

Buddhist social ideals should be evaluated against this backdrop. Dedication to structural rigidity along with total freedom in the matter of, or indifference towards, the content was

already well-established when the Buddha came on the scene. There can be no denying that he felt deeply dissatisfied with the situation. Suggestion of an alternative would otherwise become meaningless. The main question which needs an answer is whether the suggested alternative embraced both form and content, or whether, like a host of other religio-philosophical teachers of ancient India, the Buddha, too, was only an innovator of content. It may be added that the kind of revolutionary change we moderns have in mind really aims at altering a given or building a new structure. Total preoccupation with content may characterize a reformer but not a revolutionary.

The issue boils down to this. Was the alternate social philosophy authored by early Buddhists revolutionary in the sense that it demanded structural changes or was it merely a reform movement? Some modern writers, perhaps inspired by a zeal to find all good things in ancient India, have sometimes failed to keep this vital distinction in mind.

IV

Ancient societies all over the world felt called upon to justify their stratified structure. Though this justification could come only from flights of speculative imagination and had to be accepted on faith, its value in the eyes of believers remained unquestioned. No early social philosophy could afford to neglect this question, no matter whether it viewed society as an organic unity or as the outcome of a social contract. The need for reflection on this issue was all the greater in a milieu which set such store by structural rigidity.

The *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *Rgveda*, perhaps the best-known Vedic passage, pictured the universe on the analogy of human body. It had for its organs and limbs not only celestial bodies but also the four sections in which the Vedic social philosophers divided the society. Since this is the first loud thinking on social origins in India, if not in the world, it can be said that the Indian social philosophy began with the acceptance of the theory of organic unity. The earlier strata of Vedic literature go all out for promoting a unity-in-diversity. The *Puruṣa-*

sūkta might also be cited as an instance of this over-all motive. It not only binds all the sections of the populace in a natural unity from which no one can opt out; it also marks out the functions of different sections and, by implication, stresses that every section is of equal value to the society as a whole.

Psychologically this was good strategy. However, whether the protagonist of this profoundly influential viewpoint realized it or not, organic theory also pre-ordains a stratification by birth. The *Purāṇic* and classical literature can provide several examples of how attempts at a vertically upward movement were foiled. It has been an oft-repeated platitude that the *varṇas* were based on functions. The fact of the matter is that no one was ever allowed to change his *varṇa*, be it a sage like Viśvamitra, a menial like Śambuka of *Rāmāyaṇa*, or a tribal like Ekalavya of *Mahābhārata*. Moreover, organic theories leave limited manoeuvrability to the individual inasmuch as an organ has value or usefulness only as long as it is part of a body. Plato and Aristotle had pitted this point of view against the Sophists in the belief that it could counter the growing individualistic thinking. It is difficult to ascertain whether a similar motive inspired the *Puruṣa-sūkta* also. But one wonders if imposition of duties depending upon birth could have won a wide acceptance in those days of free thinking. Lower castes might not have had the option to adopt the functions of the upper castes, but the upper castes laboured under no such constraints. A *brāhmaṇa* like Paraśurāma or Droṇācārya could behave like a *kṣatriya* and even *kṣatriyas* could behave like a *brāhmaṇa* as long as they did not claim to have become one. Objection was to Viśvamitra's attempts to become a *brāhmaṇa*, not to his being a *ṛṣi*.

According to extant evidence, the *Puruṣa-sūkta* ideas were known to early Buddhists, albeit in a garbled form. They could also see that the *brāhmaṇa* claims of superiority were considerably strengthened by this passage if they did not directly stem from it. The original purpose behind the fostering of such legends—unification of disparate elements—had already been achieved sometime before the advent of Buddhism. Now these were serving merely as tools in a class-struggle. As in other contexts, the Buddhists had decided to tackle the cause rather than get bogged down with the effect.

If the *brāhmaṇa* claims of superior birth and attendant benefits were sustained by the organic unity viewpoint, what better strategy could there be than to opt for social contract? The Buddhists, consequently, invented an altogether different legend to 'explain' the origin of the four *varṇas*, and to relate it with larger socio-moral issues in order to win greater credibility for it. The Buddhist legend is more thought provoking and is not merely descriptive.

Beginnings of social stratification form the subject-matter of several long passages from the earliest parts of the Pāli canon. The Buddha himself has been shown discussing this matter with certain *brāhmaṇas*. In every instance the starting point of the discussion is provided by the *brāhmaṇa* claims to the highest position in society on the plea that they were Brahmā's own offspring.

The Buddhist creation-myth is highly instructive and deserves a fuller treatment. Origin of the caste system has been elevated to the cosmological plane by the Buddhists, though in a manner quite distinct from the Vedic. An altogether different type of underlying mentality can be discerned here. Continuous change or becoming is what distinguishes the Buddhist approach, and their creation-myth is no exception.

Like other strands of Indian thought, Buddhism also views the universe as timeless, without any beginning or end, but with periodic dissolution and re-emergence. Consequently, the Buddhist narration of this event is always in present continuous tense. This is how the Buddha opens his statement in one of the passages:¹⁰

There comes a time, Vāseṭṭha [Sanskrit Vaśiṣṭha: the name is suggestive] when, sooner or later, after the lapse of a long, long period, this world passes away. And when this happens, beings have mostly been reborn in the World of Radiance, and there they dwell, made of mind, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, traversing the air, continuing in glory, and thus they remain for a long time. There comes also a time, Vāseṭṭha, when, sooner or later, this world begins to re-evolve. When this happens, beings who had deceased from the World of Radiance usually come to life as humans. And they become made of mind, feeding on rapture, self-lumin-

ous, traversing the air, continuing in glory, and remain thus for a long, long time.

The inconsistencies and/or linguistic inaccuracies of this passage perhaps testify to its great antiquity. The Buddhists visualized a series of spheres (*lokas*) arranged in a hierarchical order. The World of Radiance has been conceived as the zenith. It was supposed to be the sphere of the non-material with nothing in common with the lower spheres except impermanence. Yet, all the epithets used here are essentially material. It is difficult to imagine how there can be birth and decease in this kind of existence or what the meaning of 'traversing' is. These lapses, however, need not detain us since the message is loud and clear. What deserves attention is the following.

No divine agency has any role to play in the passing away or re-appearance of the universe. Early Indian thought as such had no place for what the Semitics call the Creator. Everything happens strictly according to a pre-determined plan or law. But there is no reference, here or anywhere else, to the planner or law-giver. Secondly, the Buddhists explicitly reject the possibility of eternally young and immortal gods of the Hindu pantheon. All the categories of gods—and there are several, including Brahmā-gods—are as much subject to the law of birth-and-death as any other being. The Brahmā-gods get deluded into thinking that they were immortal only because they were the first to take definite shape. Otherwise they are like anyone else. Thirdly, though the early Buddhists always claimed to treat the five constituents of personality on a par, the present passage appears to indicate that they consciously or unconsciously rated the non-material above the material. This is borne out by their belief that while body was destroyed with the 'passing away' of the world, the mental aspect (*manomaya*) did not; and also by the top position of the non-material in the hierarchy of spheres. Material world is a later evolution and considerably inferior to the earlier phases. Most important of all, enough care has been taken to facilitate the establishment of the theory of functional origin of the four castes. All mankind had a common origin, pre-empting the scope for higher or lower births. This would later

find echo in the Buddha's ridiculing of the *brahmana* claim of a special kind of birth. There can be no doubt that the whole scheme is carefully thought and worked out.

The earth was not there when beings descended from the World of Radiance. It has not been clarified on what the descent took place, but it has been stated that earth appeared in due course according to its own laws. The radiant beings tasted it and found it palatable. This may be supposed to approximate the original sin, if one could stretch a point. The Buddhists appear to have a different motive in providing this element. Taste of earth produced craving, caused the loss of luminiscence and thus ordinary human beings emerged. Taste is a sense-pleasure. For the Buddhist the bondage must be traced to sense-pleasures and cravings. Can it be said that the very coming into being of man amounted to bondage?

The ordinary man naturally could not feed on rapture. He needed material sustenance now that he had a body to maintain. Rice, which used to stand ripe and ready in the fields all the year round, fulfilled this need. Consumption of rice, however, brought in the next stage of development. Difference of sexes as well as sexual lust are supposed to have been a result of eating rice. It is notable that, unlike the Vedic milieu, here sex has been unambiguously declared immoral and undesirable. When people saw a coitus, they exclaimed: 'How can one being do such things to another!'

This stage of development also lasted a long time. There was no need for sowing or reaping. Men and women could go and bring in enough rice to last for a single meal. But then, like sense-pleasures, craving and sex, human nature fell a prey to laziness and greed also. The *coup de grace* was provided when some men started reaping rice for hoarding. The process was completed with this. The bountiful nature, which cared so much for the pure man, denied all co-operation to this newly emerged evil species. Rice was no longer available for the asking. One had to toil for it. Seasons appeared and man's struggle for existence truly began.

This is the natural setting for the emergence of private property. As long as no sowing, nurturing and harvesting was needed, conditions of primitive communism could prevail.

There was no need for parcelling out pieces of land for individual ownership. This may or may not be an acceptable explanation for the origin of private property. The point is that as early as the 6th century B.C. responsible social philosophers were feeling obliged to provide an explanation at all. Since the origins can be traced to progressive human depravity, perhaps it cannot be said that early Buddhism approved of private property.

The same greed which caused the emergence of private property also instigated people to breach the property laws. Those who could not produce enough felt no compunction in stealing from adjoining fields and misappropriating other people's labour. This, of course, could not be allowed. In the beginning the guilty were admonished and let off with a warning. But this did not discipline the non-respecters of property rights. Creation of a specialized agency for law enforcement became necessary.

If the world and human society really evolved in the manner outlined here, social contract would appear reasonable. There should be no private ownership of land; but if circumstances have forced it on mankind, it must be protected. Alarmed by the rise in crimes, people said: 'What if we were to elect a certain being who should be wrathful when indignation is right who should censure that which should be censured and banish him who deserves to be banished?' A portion of the produce was offered to the person thus chosen, admitting by implication that the protector of property had a right to live off surplus produce. The offer was made to 'the handsomest, the best favoured, the most capable, the most attractive.' This premium on physical appearance rather than on abilities of mind and character is indeed curious.

Two interesting epithets are used for the elected person. One is the *mahā-sammata*, 'the great elect'. This term is encountered in the *Mahābhārata* also. The ring of social contract is unmistakable. T.W. Rhys Davids informs that *Mahā-sammata* was the name given to the legendary progenitor of the solar dynasty to which the Sakya clan of the Buddha claimed to belong. The other epithet is no less interesting. *Khattiya*, Pāli variant of Sanskrit *kṣatriya*, has been derived, unlike the Sanskrit original, from *kheta* or farm. *Khattiya* was one who protected the

kheta. This further reinforces the functional element in the origin of castes.

Origins of the other three castes, too, have a functional bias. The term *brāhmaṇa* has been derived from 'bāhenti' which in Pāli means 'putting away'. It has been stated that those *khatriyas* who put away worldly pursuits and evils, lived in the forests on charity, and meditated, became known as *brāhmaṇa*. One could see some similarity between the *ksatriya* of the Vedic lore and the *khattiya* here in the matter of functions. But there is not much in common in views regarding the functions of a *brāhmaṇa*. The Vedic establishment never suggested that the whole *brāhmaṇa-varṇa* could be regarded as a class of home-forsaking ascetics given exclusively to meditation. But, then, the Buddhists had their own notion of what an ideal *brāhmaṇa* should be like, and perhaps here they are talking about him. They knew well that real *brāhmaṇas* were not ascetics.

The position in regard to the remaining two castes further testifies to this cleavage between the Vedic and the Buddhist views. The term *vessa* (Sanskrit *vaīśya*) has nothing to do with *viśa* or farm. It has been derived from *vissa*, meaning various in Pāli. Those occupying themselves with various trades were known as *vessas*. *Suddas* (Sanskrit *śūdras*) are not serving menials in the present account. They are hunters or those who subsist on forest produce. Information regarding the last two castes is rather perfunctory, as if they did not matter much to the early Buddhists.

It is clear from this description of the origin of the castes that, like other responsible social leaders of his day, the Buddha also saw much merit in structural rigidity. Survival needs demanded that specialized agencies be created and society be organized in more or less rigid categories. It is nowhere mentioned that one could change one's caste at will. The first two castes, as pictured here, were really two sections of the same caste; and yet the possibility of a son of a *brāhmaṇa* reverting to his ancestral *ksatriya* caste has not been contemplated even hypothetically anywhere in the canon.

Some knowledgeable writers see Buddhism as a paradigm of egalitarianism in ancient India. In their opinion, while the Vedic establishment was committed to uphold the inequities

caste system, the Buddha and his associates were not. Thus, Ambedkar, an eminent lawyer and the founder of the Neo-Buddhist movement in Maharashtra, avers: 'No caste, no inequality, no superiority, no inferiority, all are equal. This is what the Buddha stood for.'¹¹ One would hesitate in going all along with Ambedkar. True, the Buddha debunked the *brāhmaṇa's* claim of superiority. Unlike the latter, he proclaimed that working for one's deliverance was the birthright of every human being. There could be no Śambūkas and Ekalavyas in the society of his dreams. Some of the leaders of the *Sangha* did belong to the lowest stratum of society. According to the Buddha, every caste has good and bad people. A person must be judged by his/her actions and not by birth. All this must have looked like rank deviance to some hard-boiled priests, as the post-Buddha orthodox writings clearly demonstrate. Yet, it will be going against the extant evidence to say that the Buddha did not believe in castes. Putting a question-mark against social stratification as such would have amounted to questioning the need for a rigid structure. The Buddha does not seem to have been quite prepared to go so far. Perhaps his faith in the middle path allowed him to so temper the caste system as to base it on social contract rather than on organic unity, make it truly functional in origin and liberalize the notion of caste duties; but it did not encourage him to question the very need of having a caste-based social order. His primary field, like that of most or perhaps all others outside the Vedic establishment, was content. Even inter-caste mobility is conspicuous in Buddhism only by its absence. The Buddha was prepared to treat a *sudda* as a fellow wayfarer or associate; but not once did he entertain the possibility of raising the *sudda* to the status of a *khattiya*. That a *khattiya* was the highest-born and superior to all others including the *brāhmaṇas* in exactly the same way in which the *brāhmaṇas* claimed to be superior, is what the Buddha seems to have stood for.

Buddhist animosity for the *brāhmaṇas* and *vice versa*, which became known at an early stage of Indological inquiries, has given rise to a great deal of speculation. Perhaps it helped strengthen the single-establishment picture of early India which was already fixed in some influential minds. Scholars got so carried away by the spicy language used by the opposing part-

ies that the somewhat complex nature of this relationship escaped some of them. They could not draw appropriate conclusions from the fact that, the Buddha's strong language against them notwithstanding, *brāhmaṇas*, even affluent priests enjoying royal patronage, have been shown coming to the Buddha for advice and guidance, sometimes on matters like the fruits of *yajna*. A fresh look on this issue will help a fuller understanding of the Buddhist social norms.

There are two wholly different and perhaps mutually exclusive ways in which the term *brāhmaṇa* has been used in the early Pāli literature, though the editors and compilers have not bothered to keep them separate. On the one hand is the real *brāhmaṇa*, member of an establishment busy feathering its own nest. The Buddha and his comrades had no liking for this entire group and no opportunity was missed of undermining, downgrading or condemning it. In sharp contrast, there is the ideal *brāhmaṇa*, a paradigm of virtue. The Buddha often spoke of the *brāhmaṇas* as they used to be in 'ancient times' and claimed to have deep respect for them. The Buddhists also felt the need to specify what an ideal *brāhmaṇa* ought to be. The *Dhammapada* devoted a full chapter to this.

From the point of view of social history it is the real *brāhmaṇa* who matters. The ideal *brāhmaṇa* does not, and does not have to, lay claims to supremacy. The Buddha has been shown tackling such claims by the real *brāhmaṇas* in two ways. Negatively, he makes fun of the *Puruṣa-sūkta* legend as it was understood by him. On the positive side, he advances 'proofs' to establish the inferiority of the *brāhmaṇas*.

The passage referred to earlier starts with Vāseṭṭha telling the Buddha that people of his *brāhmaṇa* caste claimed to be of the best social grade, clear complexioned (Sanskrit *varṇa*), and, having been born out of his mouth, to being the genuine children and heirs of Brahṁā. Arguably, this is the form in which the Vedic legend had percolated down to the masses with whom the Buddha maintained close contact. The Buddha's answer is evidently designed with the common man and his mode of reasoning in mind. 'Brahminees, the wives of brahmins, are seen to be with child, bringing forth and nursing children. And yet it is these womb-born brahmins who say that . . . brahmins are genuine children of Brahṁā, born from

his mouth. . . . By this they make a travesty of the nature of Brahṃā'.

In another passage, the Buddha does not stop at merely arguing against the *brāhmaṇa* claims. He tells *brāhmaṇa* Ambaṭṭha that a *brāhmaṇa* may eat with or even marry a woman not pure of descent on either side of her lineage, but a *khatt'ya* would not. This argument shows that, as in modern times, in the Buddha's times also commensal and marital relationships constituted the touchstone of purity. In this passage the Buddha has been reported as declaring in so many words that the *khattiyas* were higher in *gotta* (Sanskrit *gotra*) than the other castes. As if to provide an actual instance of the *brāhmaṇas'* inferiority, the Buddha informs poor Ambaṭṭha that the *gotta* to which the latter belonged descended from the slave-girl of the ancestor of the Sakya clan.¹²

This last passage clearly shows that the Buddha's commitment to egalitarianism was exactly not what some of his modern followers imagine. There is not a word against the practice of organizing people in certain pre-determined categories on the basis of birth (for *gotta* can have no other significance) rather than treating the whole society as one group with honour reserved for character, moral stature or intellectual prowess. The Buddha appears keen not only to contest the claims to superiority made by a rival group but also to make similar claims for his own group. His negative treatment of the *brāhmaṇa* claims seemed to suggest that similar physiological beginnings constituted a good enough ground for him to treat all mankind as equal. The next passage, however, leaves one thoroughly puzzled. If all men were equal and no group could claim to be above others, how could the Buddha's own group be an exception? Does protection of private property or maintenance of law and order entitle one even to greater purity of blood?

What could account for the fact that, his strong comments on them and their ancestors notwithstanding, the Buddha did not alienate or antagonize *brāhmaṇas* as a class? As has been pointed out by Gokhale,¹³ 117 monks and 17 nuns, details of whose enlightenment have been preserved in the *Thera-gāthā* and *Theri-gāthā*, belonged by birth to the *brāhmaṇa* caste. This is 40.8 per cent of the total number of persons figuring in

these two canonical collections. The *khattiya*s accounted for 22 per cent, *veśya*s for 29 per cent, and *sudda*s for 8.2 per cent. Another list of leading early Buddhists provided in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* has an even larger share of *brāhmaṇa*s: 43.9 per cent. All this seems to suggest that, as within other caste groups, there were haves and have-nots among the *brāhmaṇa*s also. While some of them, if the canon can be believed, were living in luxuries, a large proportion was impecunious. Perhaps people belonging to this latter group attached greater importance to the ideal *brāhmaṇa* of whom the Buddha spoke so much while feeling dissatisfied with the way many members of the group actually behaved. These people must have felt drawn towards the Buddha, whose transparent simplicity and genuine detachment could not have failed to impress any fair-minded person.

The early Buddhist stand on the origin of castes is thus hardly revolutionary in character. The Buddha did feel that the way one group was promoting itself was unfair to the lower castes. But he sought structural modifications only to remove these irritants which were not really major in nature. Since the rejection of the very notion of superiority/inferiority would have obliged him to forswear the *khattiya* claims of superiority, he could not bring himself round to go that far.

V

Position of women under the Buddhist dispensation and/or in that segment of society which could reasonably be supposed to have been under Buddhist influence may form another clue to the nature of Buddhist deviance. As in the case of the caste system, too much appears to have been read in the Buddha's attitude towards women.

Miss I.B. Horner, an outstanding Pāli scholar and pupil of Mrs Rhys Davids, is perhaps primarily responsible for spreading the impression that the Buddha was some kind of a champion of womankind.¹⁴ If it can be assumed that the *Manu-smṛiti* reflected the social norms followed by a larger section of society in the Buddha's day, there will be much to commend Miss Horner's conclusion. There is no doubt that the position of women progressively declined under the Vedic

establishment and by the time the *Manu-smṛiti* came to be formalized woman was no better than a chattel. She was generally regarded as a live property with no will or capacity for judgment of her own. She was required to be under the domination of father, husband and son at different stages of her life. She could neither inherit nor manage property. There certainly were women philosophers in early times. But Gārgi and Maitreyī of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* were the last members of this class, and this text is much older than both Buddhism and *Manu-smṛiti*. The Jainas, of course, had, and still have, their Order of Nuns. But they were as much outside the Vedic pale as the Buddhists. As far as the Vedic establishment was concerned—and the bulk of society undoubtedly came under its sway—woman's position was far from enviable.

In contrast, the early Buddhists show great respect and consideration for women as a class. In one canonical passage, the Buddha has been shown consoling the unhappy parents of a newly-born daughter with the words that the birth of a daughter should cause rejoicing because daughters are more affectionate to their parents than sons and they spread more happiness. Unhappiness at the birth of a daughter appears from this passage to have been a common phenomenon those days. Which makes the Buddha's observation all the more significant. Similarly, in another passage we read that the daughter-in-law of Anāthapiṇḍika, a lay follower and friend of the Buddha, was ill-tempered because she was enormously rich in her own right. She shouted at everyone and was uncivil in her ways. The Buddha was requested to persuade her to mend her manners, which the Buddha did rather successfully. This passage clearly shows that women could not only inherit but also manage their own property, uninfluenced by any men, including their in-laws. Such women could hardly be described as chattels. Lastly, a whole canonical collection—the *Therī-gāthā*—is devoted to preserving for posterity the moments of enlightenment of a large number of *therīs*, 'elderly nuns'. In a number of important canonical passages nuns like Vājirā and Dhammadinnā figure as main speakers. The editors and compilers of the canon, in fact, make no distinction between men and women as far as intellectual matters are con-

cerned. The Buddha obviously was not in agreement with the dominant and older establishment on this point as well, and had decided to part company with it.

Yet, the 'middle path' mentality is once again evident here. The Buddha was obliged to frame certain rules, keeping the special security needs of the nuns in mind. For this one may not find fault with him. But he did not stop at this. He was evidently not prepared to go beyond a well-defined limit.

The Buddha's attitude towards women comes out clearly in the episode relating to their admission to the Order. Five hundred women, mostly Sakya and led by the Buddha's own aunt and step-mother, approached the Buddha for ordination again and again. Finally, he admitted them to the Order. But he did so with poor grace, making pessimistic predictions about the future of the Order. Admission of women, he prophesied, had halved the life of the Order. The Buddhists were neither the first nor the only ones to have women philosophers and nuns. Yet, perhaps, they were the only ones to underscore the role of attachments and sense-pleasures in human bondage in a way that really makes it basic. Nearness of women could act as a diversion for monks. This is the only thing that can be said to extenuate the Buddha's attitude. But, then, this makes woman more an object than a person in her own right. After all, she also has a right to salvation. If women are responsible for arousing carnal desires in men, so are men for doing the same in women.

Moreover, a woman had to take seven vows before she could be ordained. One of these was that she would keep standing in the presence of a monk, irrespective of the seniority and intellectual calibre and achievement of the two. Similarly, while the monks could freely choose their place of residence for the four months of the rainy season, known as *vassāvāsa*, nuns could not. They could live only where some monks were already staying. This was required not only for ensuring their safety, but also because there were certain ceremonies which monks alone could conduct.

It is a measure of the unwillingness of faith to face facts that in spite of mentioning these discriminatory vows, Ambedkar refuses to draw the obvious conclusion that the Buddha did not treat women at par with men. Instead, he attributes the

following words to the Buddha: 'I hold that women are as much capable as men in the matter of reaching Nibbana. . . . I am not an upholder of the doctrine of sex inequality.' The Buddha, in fact, never made any such assertion. On the contrary, it was explicitly held that if a husband-and-wife team jointly entered the Order, the wife would have to stay one step behind in the hierarchical gradation of stages leading to final deliverance. She could gain her deliverance only after taking birth as man, and that too after her husband's emancipation from the bondage.

Far from taking up cudgels on behalf of oppressed women, the Buddha does not even treat them as an oppressed lot. He does show some compassion towards them; but it hardly has the ring of a departure, even of a marginal nature. It is possible that the *smṛti* law did not prevail in the circles to which Anāthapiṇḍika and his family belonged. It has been pointed out by competent authorities that Vedic establishment as such came to gain ascendancy in the modern Bihar region much later than it did in the western region. Moreover, the story seems to suggest that the fact of the daughter-in-law being rich in her own right was nothing unusual; and the Buddha says nothing for or against this practice. Viewing the Buddha as an emancipator of women on the basis of such incidents is perhaps not quite warranted. A 'middle path' approach knows tinkering but not completely breaking apart. One feels tempted to compare the Buddha's attitude towards women with that towards the two lower castes. He cared. But not beyond a point.

VI

What kind of relationship did the Buddha have with the socio-political establishment of the day and what could this relationship do to his social philosophy? This oft-repeated question was posed for the first time by a savant, Oldenberg, in the last century. There can be no doubt that the Buddha's own social background and the company he kept could not have left his thinking wholly untouched. But can one say that he was, wittingly or unwittingly, espousing the cause of some particular section of the society?

According to the canon, the Buddha had among his friends,

if not patrons, rulers like Bimbisāra of Magadha and Pasenadi of Kosala. The former is unanimously treated as the first 'imperialist' or 'expansionist' prince in India's recorded history. The latter, too, was supposed to have been very rich and powerful. Influential traders like Anāthapiṇḍika—the man who bought the Jetavana by covering the whole property with gold pieces only to gift it to the Buddha—were also close to him. In spite of this, there is not much direct evidence to show that the Buddha either plumped for the divine right theory or preached some kind of 'opiate' to ensure the interests and position of such friends. He made no secret of his profound admiration and concern for the republican polity, and thus attacked monarchy indirectly. For illustrating the meaning of 'total control', he cited king Pasenadi and his relationship with his subjects in one passage. Moreover, he had nothing but condemnation for creature comforts, sense-pleasures and such other 'fruits' of royalty and riches. It is difficult to understand his motives, if any, for the preservation and perpetuation of these 'fetters'.

Two points can be mentioned as indirect evidence to suggest his inclination towards the haves of the society. First is his attitude towards the institution of slavery. Like every ancient society, India had this institution from the very beginnings of her history. The percentage of slaves was enormous. Perhaps they outnumbered the masters, particularly in the tribal republics. The Buddha seemed to know the meaning of social justice, and yet he had not a word against this practice. Of course he did not extol its virtues the way Plato and Aristotle did in ancient Greece. However, while the slaves were allowed to join the Order in the beginning, later it was decreed that they could do so only with the permission of their masters or after getting freed. This virtually amounted to closing the door to them.

Slavery was perhaps not as harsh in ancient India as elsewhere. There are instances of runaway slaves founding religious sects. All the three important Ājīvika teachers—Makkhali Gosāla, Pakuddha Kaccāyana and Pūraṇa Kassapa—were slaves belonging to the lowest stratum of the society. Yet, after they became well-known religious preachers, even kings like Ajātasattu visited their hermitages barefoot. The Buddha's

treatment of slave applicants for admission to the *Sangha* becomes all the more inexplicable in view of this fact. In one passage he does show happiness at preventing the slaves from moving about with tears rolling down their cheeks. It would perhaps be anachronistic to expect that he should have pleaded for the abolition of this institution. Even the runaway slaves-turned-teachers did not do so.

The case of army deserters is similar. At a later stage their entry into the Order was also barred.

VII

Passing judgment on an ancient religio-philosophical tradition is neither easy nor methodologically desirable. Such traditions can be comprehended only within the framework of their own postulates and professed goals. Their points of validation lie within them; they do not depend on extraneous factors for their legitimacy and credibility.

All these more or less universally acknowledged truths, however, do not dissuade us from treating these traditions like any other historical event. Looking for continuities is perhaps a psychological necessity. History evokes such strong sentiments in us only because it plays a crucial role in shaping our self-awareness. Discovery of something valuable from our present-day point of view in the utterances of a revered name invests it with a kind of sanctity which it could not have otherwise acquired. The picture of Buddhism that is stabilizing gradually is rendered comprehensible when one pays attention to this.

In a situation marked by structural rigidity but total freedom in the sphere of content, the number of suggested alternatives cannot be limited. The Pāli canon itself provides information about a horde of speculative dogmas and approaches current in its day. Yet, the historical significance of the Buddhist alternative is undeniably greater since it is one of the two such alternatives which proved durable, became far more acceptable, and later spread to several other countries and regions. Moreover, it shows a far higher level of rational thinking and theory-building.

The Buddha did not inspire people to challenge the structure. But, then, none except the naive materialists, the Lokāyata, did so within a circle so limited that it could be dubbed peripheral. Ancient India had nothing comparable to the Greek Sophists who questioned the very need of having a society. From the early texts of all the sects it is difficult to imagine that the notion of oppression, exploitation or injustice had taken shape. Viewing every phenomenon, every event as a necessary consequence of the working of a universal physical and moral law known as *Rta* perhaps partly explains this. Does it also explain the almost universal inclination towards structural rigidity?

For a modern reformer, the Buddha's ideas can be of great utility and value. The Buddha did deal a blow for egalitarianism, albeit in a limited way. Far reaching structural changes necessary for creating an exploitation-free society are beyond the scope of Buddhist social philosophy.

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The Human Condition in Puran Bhagat: An Essay in the Existential Anthropology of A Panjabi Legend

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IN THIS PAPER I have attempted to analyse the human condition, in a number of crises, in the narrative of Puran Bhagat. The point of departure is the version of the legend of Puran, composed by a popular Panjabi bard, Qadiryar, in the early years of the nineteenth century.

The legend is constituted of six principal *dramatis personae*: Puran, his father, Raja Salwan of Sialkot, now in Pakistan, his guru, Gorakh Nath, and the three women: the mother of Puran, Icchran, Salwan's second wife, Luna, and the beautiful princess Sundran. The disequilibrium caused by Luna's infatuation and Salwan's execution of Puran is sought to be balanced by the motherly affection of Icchran, and the love of Sundran, whose gift to the psychic comportment of Puran is the supreme sacrifice of her life.

This legend is an important conceptual discourse of our culture. It deals with the compunctions of public morality and collective consciousness. It moves along the development of individual psychic crises. The two meet and interact in a number of situations where the questions of duty, honour and revenge are raised, where the collective dharma confronts the existential assertions. The logical sequencing of the narrative is highly dynamic. The events move with extreme rapidity, and invariably lead to their logical conclusions.

Condemned by the astrologers to avoid his parents, Puran grows in the darkness and deprivation of a dungeon for twelve years. Immediately after his advent in the light of human relationships, he is enticed by his stepmother, Luna, who, rejected by his public morality, gets him executed by his father, Salwan; and, another period of twelve years in the forlorn darkness of the deserted well begins. Then comes Guru Gorakh Nath, who restores Puran his limbs, and sends him to beg alms at the palace of princess Sundran. The encounter with Sundran leaves Puran a complete wreck, for Sundran commits suicide when Puran leaves her for good. Luna subjects Puran to physical torture to neutralize his mental turbulence. Sundran tortures herself to inflict the sharpest cut on Puran's psychic wounds.

It is a discourse of extreme polarities. We move from darkness to light, from treachery to affection, from extreme laxity in principles to extreme austerity and discipline of yoga, from absolute detachment to absolute involvement. There are dehumanizing factors which make Puran a monster of a man. There are humanizing constituents which attempt to bring Puran back to social normalcy. The cultural discourse of the narrative tries to resolve some of these problematics which are the perennial themes of our tradition. But the discourse of the narrative is not a thesis or a statement of facts. It decomposes the constituents within the context of a constituted whole. In other words, as it unfolds certain mysteries, it wraps up other predicaments. In the end, it manifests itself as another riddle to be solved with the help of other similar creative texts.

But, as I have tried to demonstrate towards the end of this paper, it is precisely the nature of the creative act that is at stake. It is continuous dialectical process. Its contradictory strands lead to compositions whose ends are always loose. They can be stretched in many directions. Several interpretations are possible, and each interpretation has serious consequences for our cultural development. The creative evolutionary process of a culture is not based on sentimental impulses; its development follows the incisions of intellectual operations. I have attempted one such incision on the cultural discourse unfolded in the legend of Puran Bhagat.

II

There are six basic thematic units. The first theme refers to the birth of Puran in the house of Raja Salwan of Sialkot. The moment is surcharged with the confrontation of destinies. The Brahmans tell the Raja to avoid seeing Puran for the first twelve years, as the encounter of son and father portends disaster. The servants obey, and Puran is taken to a closed dungeon. Poet Qadiryar aptly refers to Puran's entry from one darkness (of the womb) to another. The opposition of light and darkness, of mysterious depths and sharp truths is obvious. Both mental and physical atmospheres are disturbed. Characters and destinies are at stake.

The second theme refers to the main crisis of the narrative. After twelve years of confinement, where he has had the usual training of a prince, Puran steps out into the world of human relationships and intrigues. He is ceremoniously escorted to the audience of his father. There are celebrations and sacrifices. Salwan is overjoyed. The proud father dreams of the marriage of Puran and the happy days ahead. This is not to be.

Due reverences paid to his father, Puran is led to see his mother, Icehran, and the stepmother, Raja Salwan's second wife, Luna. The sight of Puran so captivates Luna that she forgets the social relationship of being a "mother", and entices Puran with her charm and solicitations. Puran remains steadfast in his role of a stepson and withstands all temptations. Luna takes it as a challenge to her very being. She pleads gently and offers all the pleasures of the world. She argues that as she did not give birth to Puran, she could not be his mother. When all this fails to move Puran, she threatens and cajoles. Puran at once accepts the challenge. He would rather die than leave his dharma. Luna is transformed immediately into a revengeful ogress. As Qadiryar puts it: she would drink his blood to satisfy her thirst of revenge.

The ball is set rolling and there is no going back. The third thematic unit of the narrative is a logical consequence of the second. Luna organizes a plot. She convinces Raja Salwan that Puran wanted to seduce her. She has been insulted and disgraced by this tempestuous son, of whom he is so proud,

Ichchan recovers her eyesight.

With Raja Salwan and Luna, the encounter is of another order. The king would like to be blessed with a son, for he has had none to play in his palace, deserted as it is without the giggles of a child. Puran probes the past, and reminds him of a son, named Puran, who was executed. When Raja Salwan begins his narrative, Puran exhorts Luna to come out with the true sequence, if she desires the boon of a son. As the truth is revealed, and Luna is humiliated, Puran advises Salwan to forget the past. She did what she could; but what he, the father, did, was never done by any other father. All the same, he gives him a grain of rice, with which Luna would conceive, and give birth to a warrior son, but later she would suffer like the mother of Puran. A gift of humiliation and revenge, all wrapped up neatly in the yogic tradition of discipline and austerity.

And finally, the identity is revealed. Salwan and Luna are in the terrible presence of Puran. The Raja pleads and requests Puran to take over the reigns of the kingdom. Puran refuses flatly: if you cannot govern your dominion, let it go to the dogs. Who cares for me? You are only ashamed of your deeds, and want to cover up your crimes. Go home, my brother would sit on this throne; he would be a great warrior. I got what was destined for me. The way I was turned out of my city, no prince was ever so humiliated. What my father did was never done by any other father in any age. . . . And Puran leaves Sialkot for good.

III

The human condition in the narrative of Puran is the condition of sex and violence, of discipline and austerity, of heightened emotions and extreme egocentric personalities. Each sequence of the narrative is charged with existential crisis of the being who can never forget himself. The self is above all emotions. All the *dramatis personae* are wrapped up in the most unyielding cover of self-deceit and self-assurance. But it is also a narrative of extremely disturbed persons, and a discourse of utter frustration. Every sequence leaves a certain psychic trace which cannot be obliterated by all the physical violence that

everyone tries to subject the other to. There is also self-negation and torture. But the self never leaves. The ego predominates. Memories never leave the inner layers of the tormented self. The narrative moves from one crisis to another.

It is not a discourse of resolutions. The underlying logic of physical or mental violence only pushes one sequence into another. As a cultural discourse, this narrative could be an attempt at a discursive confrontation of upright yogic steadfastness with the ways of the world. Not only Puran, but also all the others who participate in this high drama of extreme psychic tension, are always left high and dry in mid-air, with an acute sense of loneliness and frustration. The touch of yogi Puran is not the touch that heals. It invariably ends up inflicting another merciless sharp cut to the already open wound.

Let us retrace some of the sequences in this psychic context. Raja Salwan had been yearning for the birth of a son. But as soon as the son is born, he is told to avoid him. He is not destined to see the face of his son for twelve years. The son-father confrontation is predicted even by the astrologers. Puran goes from one darkness to another. As Qadiryar puts it, the father imprisons his son on the day of his birth, on the day of rejoicing. By any reckoning, Salwan is not a happy man. During these twelve years of Puran's confinement, Salwan indulges in another amorous adventure. He marries a low caste but extremely beautiful young girl, Luna. Like any rich and powerful person, the Raja is able to have a beautiful woman at home, notwithstanding his age. But the marriage is only physical. She is not his companion. He is infatuated. He desires her. She possesses him, but he does not possess her. As such, both Salwan and Luna are two highly frustrated beings locked in the intolerable physical stronghold of the palace.

On the other hand, the ever-prevailing absence of Puran must always haunt Salwan. The son is born. The son is growing. But the father is not destined to observe the developing child when he could have had an imprint on him of his fatherly affection. He would encounter only the young man with the frustration of twelve years of confinement. The son is already an adult when they first meet. And, obviously, they do not get along well. For minor enquiries of Salwan, Puran's answers

are curt. As Qadiryar puts it, Puran does not hesitate to argue with his father. The ministers advise the Raja not to mind such impertinent talk. Puran would grow. He is an adolescent.

The encounter with Luna is a natural sequence. Luna is literally a captive of the wealthy king. His desire for her is obvious. But she cannot communicate with an old hog, however rich and powerful he may be. And if there was any compulsion, the advent of Puran releases that. There is confrontation of social, conventional morality, dharma, and the psychic existence of the beings. Luna is courageous. Puran is steadfast. But there is a reason for Luna's will to cross the threshold. She has been a captive for a long time. Her human condition is miserable. She has probably been meditating on her destiny in the confinement of her palace. She is a wild bird in a cage. Puran seems to have opened the door. But apparently he shuts it back with a bang.

The triangle of human relationship is, however, complete by now. Luna possesses Salwan, but he does not possess her. On the other hand, Puran possesses Luna, but she does not possess him. The relationships are misplaced. The desires criss-cross. But, all is not lost. The logic of confrontation gets entangled. Everyone of them recognizes their strength. Desires and passions notwithstanding, they rely on ill-gotten false authority and possession.

Luna knows that she possesses the king. He is her prisoner mentally, even though she is in his physical captivity. Rejected and insulted by Puran on the basis of conventional morality and collective consciousness, she challenges him on the basis of equally false and undesired hold on the Raja. When her existential being is challenged, she transforms herself into an ogress with the help of the man, and his authority, she hates. On the other hand, condemned by the customary social authority of astrologers and public morality to first spend twelve years in a dungeon, and now adopt a respectful behaviour towards those he has not grown up with, Puran accepts Luna's challenge, and is ready to die for his social dharma.

Salwan's mental state is no different. It is obvious from the Luna-Puran sequence that Salwan never really possessed Luna. His life with her could not have been very happy. For the first

time probably, then, after this Luna-Puran quarrel, Luna seems to be the king's beloved queen for whom obviously Salwan would do anything. In this false and concocted atmosphere of devotion and love, Luna sets out to practise treachery and revenge on the one she really adores.

The lopsided relationship between the father and the son cannot be easily ignored. Conventional morality obliges Salwan to consult the astrologers and act in accordance with their prediction, whatever it may be. And what is their prediction? That the father and the son should have no contact with each other for twelve long years. But this non-contact is the most frustrating mental contact that has apparently already broken their nerves under extremely heavy strain of keeping themselves separate. This unusual situation of presence-absence is tortuous. The astrologic non-relation had already set in motion a psychic relation which burst into hatred at the very first occasion.

During this period of non-relation with his son, and Puran's mother, Icchran, Salwan had tried to establish the relationship with Luna mostly as a psychic cure. But the relationship was unnatural and unconventional. Luna was of low caste. She was too young to be his companion. This only frustrated him more. Mentally, Salwan was already a wreck, when Luna suddenly appealed to him in the name of love, which had always escaped him. He fell into the trap, and went ahead like a mad dog to cut the roots of his own family tree. Puran's mother, Icchran, tried to bring back the balance and normalcy missing in the royal household for such a long time, but to no avail. Puran's advent was the only element that could normally harmonize the extremely imbalanced psychic situation of the entire family. But the backlog of heightened tensions was too powerful to let these *dramatis personae* stop, look and think. Against their own will, against their best judgment, they were all carried away by the hurricane of passions.

And what about Puran, who is being brought up in a dungeon, without mother and father? He knows, his father is the king, and he would one day inherit his throne, but he cannot have any contact with him. It is one thing for a child to be an orphan; quite another to be very near, almost in the presence, close vicinity, of the parents, and yet to be without

them. No wonder, in this most inhuman situation imposed by the public norm of the sacred texts of astrology which are supposed to govern the lives of men, Puran grows into a little monster. From twelve years of seclusion and privation, he is suddenly, without any preparation whatsoever, thrown into a world of human contact, confrontation with the authority of the father-king, and the infatuation of the young stepmother-queen. Both of these forced, sudden relationships are immediately transformed into non-relationships. In such a situation, violence was the only logical means of exit. In this mad house of extreme disequilibrium, nothing short of Puran's execution could seem to resolve the problematics of the existentially blocked enclosure.

And what a violence it is! Both Salwan and Luna are pushing their beings downhill. Puran, who would perpetuate the house of Salwan, Puran whom Luna wants to possess, is sacrificed at the altar of passionate non-existence. In one way, it is the supreme sacrifice for both of them. Though blinded by the tempestuous nerves of revenge, they temporarily seem to forget their very existence. Puran is Ichran's son. It is normal for her to plead for his life. But Salwan-Luna-Puran triangle brings about a certain upheaval in the relational accord. Salwan loves Luna, who loves Puran. The cycle of psychic possession is obviously in the reverse order. Puran possesses Luna, who possesses Salwan. The one on whom you have authority is not the one you love. However, the relationship is transparent, and none is deceived. One can only torture one's most loved one. And, as far as resistance is concerned, which is epitomized in the discourse by the most resolute stand of Puran, it can emanate only from the being who is at the crossroads of all the three protagonists. Naturally, Puran is the nucleus. He is the nerve centre. It is he who has disturbed the equilibrium, however tenuous it was. Hence he must quit.

The punishment administered to Puran by Salwan's executioners is in consonance with the turbulent situation he has gone through. He is not killed. Only his hands and feet are cut, and he is hung in the darkness of the deserted well. From the darkness of the womb, he is thrown into the darkness of the dungeon as a result of his contact with the sacred books of his culture.

Now, from the dungeon, he goes to the darkness of the well in complete immobility. In the dungeon also he was immobile. He was mentally aware of the presence of his parents and the world around, but following the dictates of public morality, he was not allowed to move. After the jolts of the contacts with his father, and a woman, the two poles of human relationship, he is condemned to an immobility, where his body and mind are intact, to meditate on his destiny, his non-relations as well as his relations. The world is still around. Salwan and Luna are alive outside the well. Nothing could obviously be more tormenting than this absolute helplessness caused by his upright defence of public morality.

In this immobility Puran must reflect upon his fleeting but most consequential contacts. He would never forget Luna. He would never forgive Salwan. Guru Gorakh Nath would come and heal the physical wounds. But the psychic wounds will forever remain unhealed. Each turn in the logical sequence of the discourse will only increase the severity of the pain, which would remain hidden and unspoken until the last encounter with Luna and Salwan, when the scores are settled, when these non-relations come in violent confrontation.

Compared to what Puran had experienced in the dungeon, the seclusion, darkness and immobility in the deserted well are far more severe and acute. In the dungeon he was a child. Though deprived of his parents, he had the company of his servants and councillors, who helped him grow and acquire the necessary human awareness. In the deserted well he is an adult. He has had a contact with sex, the most essential ingredient of manhood, and a confrontation with the authority of his father, an obligatory step in the development of individual consciousness. It is with this confrontation that the psychic umbilical cord is broken. Puran is now on his own. He must face all alone the world without, and the world within. During the sudden confrontation, he made use of the cudgels of collective consciousness; now he must reflect upon the consequences of using this collective consciousness to assert and realize the urges of his individual consciousness. The world within the deserted well and the world without are in a strange contact. The extreme physical immobility and unfettered imaginative, individual conscious psychic flights are in perfect harmony.

The deserted well represents the dark, fathomless prison-hole and also the absolute freedom of mind.

The deserted well, moreover, is the symbol of nature as opposed to culture. Rejected and humiliated by culture, Puran finds himself in the world of wild plants and birds of the jungle. But it is not the traditional open free world of nature. Puran has the freedom of a prisoner. He is immobile. This is the gift of culture. His immobility is caused by human intervention. It is dictated by the norms of social consciousness. But in this immobility of cultural compunctions, he is the only witness to the wild nature around. He observes the wild growth of plants. He watches the nesting of the birds, their births and their deaths, their amorous plays and their struggle for survival. In many ways, Puran is initiated into the order of nature, which is no less ruthless than the one he has just gone through in the intrigues of the kingdom. This nursery of nature is just the opposite of the school of the dungeon which was controlled by all the paraphernalia of culture.

The contrast is extreme. In the dungeon Puran was never alone. It was, no doubt, a darkness of deprivation; but it was not really the solitary confinement he is now undergoing. In the deserted well the adult Puran meditates on honour and revenge, individual sexual urges, and the taboos of the society. As such, even before he encounters Guru Gorakh Nath, Puran has been initiated into the individualistic mysteries of yogic experience. It is here that he acquires the power of patience and meditation. It is in the solitary confinement of nature that Puran acquires new insights into the truth of culture.

But, obviously, this acquisition reinforces and reintegrates the already highly individualistic and, as it happens to be highly egocentric tendencies in the psychic comportment of Puran. This contact with nature is not complementary to cultural evolution as Rousseau would have it; it is in direct contradistinction to the ways and norms of ordinary cultural behaviour. It certainly heightens the velocity of the confrontation of individual and collective consciousness. Like the twelve years of the dungeon, the twelve years of the deserted well is again a preparatory period which nurses and nourishes the psychic wounds inflicted by culture.

Gorakh Nath restores the limbs of Puran and brings him back

to normal human condition. He asks him to go to Sialkot to see his parents, but Puran refuses. He is not yet mentally ready to face his adversaries, and pleads to be initiated into the order of yoga. Guru Gorakh Nath accepts him in his fraternity and converts him to the yogic discipline. This step takes Puran still farther from the profane life and personal ambitions. The order of Gorakh Nath requires extreme austerity and negation of all human impulses. In the beginning Puran was a prisoner of public morality. Now he is in the grip of even stronger norms of religious discipline. Gorakh Nath preaches avoidance of all that is worldly, all that satisfies the normal human appetite of sex and hunger. He is to be a mendicant for whom this world of senses does not exist. He has to follow the dictates of the highest dharma. As the disciple of Gorakh Nath, Puran has to lead a life under far more severe constraints than he had done as a prince within the confines of public moral order.

Yet, he has to live in this world of flesh and ambition. As a mendicant he is supposed to go to the city to beg for alms. There is a clear distinction and opposition between the monastic life outside the city and the profane life of the city. But both are related. The yogi must live away from the city, but must depend on it for his physical existence. There is no cohabitation of the physical and the spiritual. But both are in consonance. Both must come in contact with each other. Both must confront their respective positions in complementary needs, but diametrically opposed ways and ideals of life.

The codisciples of Puran tell him to go to the palace of the princess Sundran for alms. They inform him that she never descends from her apartments and sends only her maidservants. No mendicant of the order of Gorakh Nath has ever been able to see her. They would be surprised if he, who claims to be a descendant of the mighty kings of Sialkot, can oblige princess Sundran to come down to his presence. Led unwittingly by their veiled challenge, Puran leaves for Sundran's palace with the blessings of his guru.

At the palace, the inevitable happens. The maidservant of Sundran offers alms to Puran, which he duly refuses, and insists on the audience of Sundran. The princess is furious, but relents as she listens to the description of the handsome figure of the new yogi. She invites him in. Puran resolutely

refuses to cross the threshold. He was obliged by his order to come as far as the gate of the palace; beyond that he would not budge. He declares in no uncertain terms that he is no ordinary yogi. He is of noble lineage. In other words, he is of the palace, but, bound by the constraints of his order, he cannot cross the threshold of the palace.

Princess Sundran is also caught in the same dilemma. She is not only of the palace, but also leads the life of the palace. She is willing to meet Puran, the prince, not Puran, the yogi. If she steps out into the world of Puran, she loses her identity, and then the meeting is of no consequence to her.

As expected, Puran is steadfast in his role of a mendicant. Hesitatingly Sundran condescends. She showers upon Puran gifts of pearls and diamonds. Puran is yet a novice. He does not realize the significance of these precious stones. These are not the usual offerings to an ordinary mendicant. These riches are the gifts of the palace to a prince, who is only camouflaged as a yogi. When Guru Gorakh Nath refuses to accept these glittering objects of the profane world, Sundran plays another trick. She prepares the choicest dishes of the royal house, and accompanies Puran to the *dera* of Guru Gorakh Nath.

The guru is highly pleased with the devotion of the princess, and grants her a wish. Sundran immediately cashes on the sacred promise and gets Puran as her reward. This is too much and too sudden for Puran. The guru prepares him for renunciation and discipline. But at the first opportunity, he thrusts him into the very illusory world he has commanded him to avoid. Puran is compelled to move from one human condition to another, either by the force of public morality or by the discipline of the highest religious order. Characteristically, he reacts violently. No sooner than he is at the palace, he slips away, leaving Sundran high and dry, in the midst of her most ecstatic moment. No wonder, she succumbs to this terrible grief.

The same poet Qadiryar, who had blamed Luna for treachery and deceit, cannot help composing some of the most beautiful verses of his poem, describing Sundran's anguish. Who is to blame for this tragic end? In the case of Luna, one could talk of the mother-son intrigue, the infatuated woman and the dutiful son; no such accusation could be placed at the conduct

of Sundran. Princess Sundran was enticed by yogi Puran, however unconsciously it might have been. In the beginning, she had refused to descend from her guarded palace. But Puran had insisted on her audience. Did he want to prove to his comrade disciples that he was, after all, the prince-yogi he had claimed to be, and that the princess could not refuse him his due place? Anyway, once they met, they did not want to cross the threshold of the palace. In other words, they refused to go to each other's world. Yet, none of them could resist. However reluctantly, the first step was taken by Puran. It is he who went to Sundran's palace. There was, no doubt, hesitation at the threshold. The yogic discipline had reminded him of higher obligations. But Sundran was already there. The two beings were only involved in a human encounter; it was also a confrontation of two egocentric attitudes. Sundran tried to resolve the dilemma by following Puran, but, as Qadiryar puts it in one of the most beautiful lines in his narrative, Puran led Sundran away with the finger of his charm.

Whatever the pretensions of the yogic order, the yogi Puran, as described here by Qadiryar and remembered ever since by the Panjabi consciousness, is the phantasmatic romantic hero, who is handsome but unfaithful, who is austere and obdurate, but who deceives the innocent princess. The yogis are unreliable, they are stone-hearted. Sundran warns all other girls to beware of these mendicants who loot young hearts, and care not for their anguish. The whole town cries for her misfortune. When Sundran falls from the palace, the walls of the city are blackened, and the populace wails for the beautiful princess who has been betrayed. Puran entered the city of beauty and happiness. He left it deserted and desolate.

Before Puran reaches the *dera*, the news of Sundran's death has already reached Gorakh Nath, who apparently does not approve of his disciple's behaviour. Perhaps he had conceived of a more prolonged affair. It could be a test of a yogi to live with the world of passion and yet avoid it, as is usual in the rites of initiation. But Puran was made of another clay. Once he was told to conform to certain austerities, once he had taken certain vows, he was not going to let anything slip through his fingers. In any case, the monster of the dungeon and the deserted well was only further hardened by yogic ordeals. There

could be no let-up in such a mind.

But the greatest shock of Puran's life is that his desertion of Sundran is disapproved by Gorakh Nath. There is no formal remonstrance. But as Puran arrives in the *dera*, Gorakh Nath advises him to go to Sialkot to see his parents. There could be two possible interpretations. Either Gorakh considers Puran now ripe enough for the final encounter with the world; or he is scared of this monster of a yogi who has, in a way, outstretched even the limits of Gorakh Nath's own yogic order. Whatever the cultural or existential explanation, there is no more any place for Puran in the *dera* of Gorakh Nath. He is too much for that assembly of ordinary mendicants. Shocked and baffled, Puran obeys his guru, and leaves for Sialkot.

One can well imagine Puran's predicament. He is being shuttled from one place to another. In each encounter he leaves nothing but disaster. Either he is tortured, or some one else suffers because of his supposedly spiritual ideals. What obviously must unnerve him most is that even his own guru did not take kindly to his extreme posture. The sequences of events follow each other with such rapidity that he hardly has time to breathe. In the *dera* of Guru Gorakh Nath he seemed to have realized the ideal of his life. His past behavioural pattern was just the stuff needed for such an ideal. But this, too, let him down. Before he could adjust to this new way of life, he had already crossed its limits.

Puran's predicament was whether or not to cross the threshold of the palace. Personally, for him, it was not a difficult step. He simply followed the rules of the book. But he never imagined the consequences. He never, even once, stopped to think of Sundran as a person. The other disciples taunted him to oblige the princess to descend from her palace. His charm and his steadfastness combined with his noble lineage could easily achieve that. But he was not mentally prepared to handle the psychic predicament of Sundran. It was quite easy to stand up to the passion of Luna. The collective consciousness supported him all the way through. The sentiments of princess Sundran were of a different order.

Broken and disheartened by the farewell gesture of his guru, Puran follows the road to Sialkot. When Raja Salwan asks yogi Puran for the boon of a son, for no child plays in his

compound and his palace is deserted, Puran would have wondered on the strange opposition of the deserted well and the deserted palace. Apparently, where the son Puran is, there is life, where he is not, there is desert. But this was not so not long ago. He was chased from the palace like plague, and thrown into the deserted well. Was the well in the wilderness, after all, not such a deserted palace? Puran had taken the light of the house of Salwan with him; in spite of his supposed act of aggression, disobedience, and impertinence, he had left the palace all deserted.

That severest of punishment had, after all, satisfied none. Salwan had been yearning for a son. Luna must have been tormented both for the lack of a child, and due to her guilty conscience, for she had lost both her beloved and her household. Her life with Salwan even before was not a happy one. The little encounter with Puran left her completely shattered. Salwan had waited for twelve long years to see his son. Within a day, he had transformed frustration into desperation. The angry and jealous Salwan had acted in a hurry. The action had left him completely empty and deserted. It was not just any palace, but Salwan's palace, which was like a desert. And the cruel irony of the situation was that, however justifiable his act, he himself was responsible for his tortuous state of mind.

The operation continues. Puran inflicts another cut on the wound he has just opened. He asks Luna to reveal the truth of the incident, if she desires a son to her. Luna bursts forth. The truth cannot be hidden from the yogi. What was personal torment until now, becomes a public affair. For the last twelve years, she must have been tortured because of the false accusation which had served no purpose and brought no harmony into the Luna-Salwan relation. There was none before. Once Puran had destabilized whatever false conjugal union there was between the husband and the wife, there could not be any peace in the aftermath of that bloody incident. Now that the truth is revealed, Salwan is furious. The triangle is again complete. But the roles are reversed. Salwan would have none of Luna, but Puran counsels patience. It was not her fault. She did what she could, whatever her impulse commanded her to do. But Salwan, yes, his father Salwan, did what no father had done ever before. Anyway, Puran gives him a grain of rice,

the symbol of fertility, with which Luna would conceive, and give birth to a mighty prince.

Salwan must now keep his unfaithful wife, and lead a life of utter frustration. Until now their marriage had not been consummated. The grain of rice of Puran would help this undesired union, and a son will be born, naturally a son-brother to Puran. Indirectly, Luna has also achieved what she longed for. The child of Luna will be due to yogi Puran's blessing. He will be born or fertilized by the grain of Puran. There is nothing that Salwan can do about it. In anger, he had got rid of his rival-son. In helplessness, he has to accept all in utter humiliation and disgrace. When the truth was not revealed, there was emptiness in the compound, and the palace was deserted. When the truth is revealed, the compound will be filled with the laughter of a child, and the palace will abound with life, but this laughter and this life will not be Salwan's. He will now be a ghost in the resounding environment of the high walls of the palace.

When Puran's identity is revealed, Salwan asks his son to inherit his throne, and bring light to the dark house of his father. Puran refuses flatly: If you cannot govern your kingdom, let it go to the dogs. I would have none of it. For all these years, I have suffered the weight of tormenting memories, only God knows what I have borne. I will have none of you or your belongings. I am a yogi. I must go.

But what kind of yogi he really is? A yogi who has been nursing his wounds, a yogi who had held the norms of the highest exigencies of his order, a yogi, who has been completely dehumanized, a yogi who has suffered, and who now must make everyone suffer for ever and ever more. The resolution to the crisis of the house of Salwan, prescribed by Puran, inflicts a permanent wound, which will simmer and squeeze at the slightest movement, and continue to increase progressively in the severity of its pain. His blessing of a son to Luna includes the curse that like his mother, Iechran, Luna too would be tormented when her son would leave her. He actually does in the second sequence of the narrative, not discussed here.

Puran's meeting with his mother, Iechran, is the only gentle and humane episode in the whole narrative. But it becomes a side-affair in the general context of the sequences of relation-

ships. In any case, it does not deter Puran from the path of psychic confrontations that he seems to have chosen for himself.

IV

This analysis of the sequences of the legend of Puran follows the constituting process of the narrative. It is quite different from the usual interpretations which move along either the collective social norms, as is the case with the poet Qadiryar himself, whose version is our point of departure, or the conditioning factors of the socio-economic course of our history. All these conditions have to be taken into account by any critic who ventures into such an enterprise. But for us a cultural myth or a legend is primarily a cultural discourse whose logic is not always apparent at the manifest discursive level. The creative process is necessarily a semiotic process. The signs and symbols which constitute a given narrative represent not only the traditional values attached to them, they also derive their significance from the mutual interaction they have with each other. One can always condemn or approve a given act on the basis of so-called public morality or collective consciousness. But this collective consciousness is constantly and obligatorily in confrontation with individual consciousness. This is precisely the motive force which brings about social transformation.

Social change is inherent in the very constitution of society. A social structure is never in complete harmony. Its different constituents are invariably in a certain composition of disequilibrium, which needs to be deciphered, not only at certain specific points but also in its entire framework. Every human impulse must by definition have a psychic history. One cannot just brush aside the confinement of a child to a dungeon on the basis of an astrologic prediction without properly analysing its possible repercussions. After all, but for this confinement, Puran could not have acted the way he did. Had little Puran been playing in the garden of Salwan, the latter may not have even married again. Secondly, how far it is psychologically legitimate to expect a child to have a respectful attitude towards his stepmother? And, conversely, is it really natural for a young stepmother to consider another's child as her own?

In any case, how can one expect normal public behaviour from a person who has been imprisoned for twelve years, who has grown up without the sight of his parents, whose psyche has developed under the curse of traditional astrology? Above all, what does it really mean that father and son shall not behold each other for twelve long years? The confrontation of destinies is writ large on the entire canvas of the painting that is being slowly constituted, but the contours of which are laid down on the very first day.

A cultural discourse is not a cultural resolution. It is an attempt to solve the riddle of human condition in the form of another riddle. What cannot be stated or explained in simple terms, in the form of language, is presented in the form of a semiotic constitution. As such, several interpretations are always possible. They are all legitimate. In fact, within the culture itself, there are several attempts at such semiotic constitutions. After all, it is not the only legend of the culture. It is one of the several attempts at resolving the riddle of human condition, which remains always an enigma in the general context of the creative activity of a given people. This is really the creative process. Man never stops constituting the logical sequences of his impulses. The process of decomposition is not only at the individual analytical level of comprehension; collective consciousness also constantly participates in the continuous process of pulsional forces which give rise to evolutionary historical configurations.

The decomposition of a human situation involves the decomposition of all the psychic components which constitute a given personality. The interaction is at the psychic level. The psychic constitution of a being is due to the cumulative process which begins from the very beginning. This is why once Puran is condemned to darkness and to deprivation of his parents in the dungeon, and the parents are deprived of the laughter of the little child, the psychic compunctions, which will lead them from one sequence to another, are the logical consequences of the entire narrative. When Gorakh Nath restored the hands and feet of Puran and admitted him to his fraternity, he should have known what was at stake. Puran was no ordinary disciple. He would not only learn and excel in the austere discipline of yoga; he would carry with him, into the traditional

path of yogic constraints, the twelve years of the dungeon, the confrontation with Luna and Salwan, and the immobility of the deserted well. One thing follows another. The interaction of impulses is double-edged.

It is not possible for the human constitution of Puran to forget his contact with Luna, the only woman of his life, and the immediate consequential contact with the jealousy and wrath of his father, Salwan. He had twelve long years to meditate on his human condition in the solitude of the deserted well. By the time he goes back to Luna—a logical compulsion and a sentimental journey back into the depths of his memory—he has had another, but quite different, contact with a woman in the person of Sundran. In the case of the first confrontation, he was supposedly the victim, at least at the physical level, if one ignores the tormented vacillations of Luna. In the latter case, the situation is of another order. It is Sundran who suffers physically. But how can one ignore the consequential fact that if Guru Gorakh Nath, the guardian of public morality and religious sanctions, was shaken at the demise of Sundran, Puran could possibly escape the psychic fall-out from this tragic Sundran-Puran contact? Luna obviously did not know all of this. She has, in her psychic comportment, only the first confrontation and the following execution of Puran. No doubt, she also nursed her wound for a long time, but this period at Sialkot refers only to the deserted palace. It is bereft of the high drama that is now being played elsewhere.

The nucleus is Puran. His scene of action changes place. The rest of the *dramatis personae* must wait and suffer until he comes back. But it is no more the same Puran that Salwan and Luna now meet. No doubt, he probes the past. He makes them swallow the bitter pill of the truth of the earlier incident. He is revengeful and cruel. But his cruelty is now cold-blooded. He no more acts on the impulse of the moment. His memory is surcharged with other deeper cuts which he is obviously not willing to share with any one.

If one wants to come to this conclusion for the sake of argument, Puran emerges from this saga of internecine psychic warfare in the form of a new yogi, who perhaps not only outstretches the traditional limits of yoga, but also surpasses his guru, Gorakh Nath. This is also, of course, the final test of a

master that his disciple must go a step further. Only that way can the tradition continue in the dynamic confrontations of the discipline. The psychic monster of the darkness of the dungeon, hardened by the immobility of the deserted well, becomes a monster of a yogi, before whom even Guru Gorakh Nath must bow in reverence. After all, in the normal process, there is always an inbuilt elasticity of adjustment in the contours of public morality, collective consciousness, and the highest ideals of spiritual austerity. No one really believes in their absolute adherence. And here comes Puran, who not only follows them like the rules of a textbook, but far surpasses them in their uttermost outer limits.

This argument leads up to a blind alley. Do we then approve of Puran's reactions in each confrontation, and condemn and discard all other human impulses as low and unworthy of our cultural behaviour? Obviously not. Were it so, there would not have been this legend. Like all legends, like all creatively constituted discourses, this legend began with a certain problematics, it untied certain knots; but, in this process of successive resolutions, it constituted innumerable other riddles, which the cultural creative faculty will continue to decompose and recompose ever after.

The psychic imbalance of Puran is being restored by two women. The one is, of course, his mother, Iechran. The other is Sundran. Luna is responsible for the first major emotional disequilibrium, but she neutralizes the effect with the physical torture that Puran is subjected to. In the case of Sundran, the situation is different. Not only is it Puran who insists on her audience in the first place, it is Sundran who tortures herself for his sake. She makes the supreme sacrifice of her life. When Luna meets Puran for the second time, he is a grief-ridden yogi. Towards Luna and Salwan, he has the sentiments of revenge. A great wrong was done to him. He can justify his act. The entire cultural consciousness supports him.

But, no matter what justification he probably had in the beginning, in the initial response of Sundran he cannot blame the one who is no more, who has de-existentialized herself, who has apparently freed Puran of her obstacle. But what is not manifest is immanent. Since he cannot react to Sundran, he is psychologically immobile; in this immobility neither

nature nor culture will help him. He must suffer her memory for ever. Her violence to herself has obviously cleansed her of all human impurity. If one ventures to say at this stage of the analysis, Sundran's sacrifice humanized the austere disciple of Gorakh Nath. What the guru could not do, she did. And the guru was not so wrong, after all. It was he who so willingly gave the gift of Puran to Sundran. Does it refer to one of the yogic precepts that woman is the greatest teacher of man?

The semiotic system of the legend seems to have been constituted of two main signs: distance and memory. The distance involves both space and time. The antagonists are separated in the dungeon and the palace, or the deserted well and the palace. But this separation is never forgotten. Each actor of this drama is a prisoner, both physically and mentally. The distanciation gives them time to think of their own self and the other at the same time. Since one cannot forget the other—the other who is present next door, who is planning and scheming, the other who is either a tyrant or a victim, the other who is there in the compulsion of the verdict, whose confrontation is also a foregone conclusion, as each period of forced separation is very clearly demarcated—existentially one is completely immobile. There is always the other end of the distance and the time.

In other words, in this distance the memory of the other is the immobilizing factor. One is never really free even in solitude. The spatial distance is a period of introspection. But the deep traces of the psychic wounds inflicted by the other hinder spiritual progress, if one dare use this expression in this context. However, one cannot escape this dilemma. After all, the hero is supposed to be a yogi or a *bhakta*, the one who should be uninvolved, whose meditation should be in a detached atmosphere, who should ponder over the Absolute. The logical sequences of the narrative do not leave any door for a spiritual exit. Puran and all the others are bound to each other by the passions of love, hatred and revenge. They twist and turn each other's destiny.

The apparent solution that the legend tries to provide is the deliberate separation of the opposites. The astrologers knew that the father and the son would collide. So the best way to avoid confrontation was to separate them. This is a normal judicial practice. The collective tradition could not foresee the

aftermath of the slow cooking fire of twelve years. Fire is the image that Qadiryar uses again and again. When Luna meets Puran, she is consumed by the fire of sexual passion. When Salwan listens to the false story of Puran's advances, he is burnt with the fire of anger. Puran is the only one who never lets the flame of his inner fire emerge in the physical world. He controls his fire. This is the role of the yogi. But, his fire burns slowly and surely, and his victims find no exit ever. Sundran is the only one who outwits Puran. She is his victim, but she is not revengeful in the ordinary sense of the term. She turns inwards, tortures herself, and quits. For once, both the arcs of distance and the memory of the other, present on the other side of the wall, are broken. Puran is freed of this constraint which helped him to constitute his psychic path until now. He can go back to Salwan and Luna, and react. But no such thing is possible for Sundran. She is gone. Her absence is irretrievable.

The immobilities of the dungeon and the deserted well were existentially controlled immobilities. They were within the grasp of Puran's psychic vision. There was always another end to it. The radical disappearance of the other is a new phenomenon in the spiritual culture of Puran, the disciple of the great yogi, Guru Gorakh Nath. There are hence two types of distance in this legend: the distance of the dungeon and the deserted well, which is marked, and the distance of the physical annihilation of Sundran, which is unmarked. Puran was physically surrounded by a certain configuration in the former case. He was still a novice. The mental training of the future yogi was controlled, it followed certain specific contours. Now he has acquired the maturity of a pilgrim. He has been freed of all collective constraints. He can wander in the wilderness of the jungle, or in the vast spaces of the civilized world; he will always be existentially immobile. This newly acquired freedom will be far more difficult to keep within the spiritual grasp of yogi Puran. But now that he has reached a certain stage of mental conceptualization and does not need the other end of the spatial distance, he frees himself even of the other that was always present. The last encounter is a sort of a sentimental journey into the depths of his fathomless memory. He is able to existentially dominate the situation, and, with a jerk, he breaks the last thread of the umbilical cord that still bound

him with the world around. Now he must be ready to face the world within.

V

Such questions can be raised *ad infinitum*. All that I want to point out in this brief paper is that we should take our cultural discourses seriously. The traditional heritage is a resultant of a constant struggle of collective consciousness and individual efforts to meet the exigencies of human condition. The past is immanent in the present psychic comportments. Its crystallization requires the analytical incision of the highest order. One can say that it is an effort at reading too much into ordinary human facts. This is where we are certainly mistaken. No human situation is so simple as to be explained merely in terms of manifest norms of our tradition. Our life is governed by the power of signs. After all, the three women in the life of Puran point to three complementary forces working to blend a psychic path that leads man to his professed ideal. One should not hasten to look for morals in such legends. The creative process both unfolds and hides the contours of human riddles. The jigsaw puzzle has to be seen in its entire constituting process. The constituted whole of the semantic universe of Puran gives us an insight into one specific case of such a micro world, which may or may not have universals across cultures, may or may not adjust to the regional psychic compunctions. But the analytical process of logical unfolding must continue. Man must make incessant efforts to comprehend the world of creative ensembles around him.

Social Transformation and the Creative Imagination in Sikh Literature

SURJIT HANS

SIKH LITERATURE COMPRISES the *Ādi Granth*, *Janamsākhis* and *Gurbilās* works. These divisions have their formal aspects. Inasmuch as the birth of a literature, the rise of a genre and the disintegration of a form are pointers both to creative imagination and social transformation, an attempt is made here to chart the course of the Sikh literary forms in terms of this dialectical relationship.

Sikh literature, in fact Panjabi literature, starts with Guru Nanak. Very little is known about the social causation of the birth of the Panjabi vernacular. There is a vague realization that the literary output of Guru Nanak is indirectly connected with urbanization under the Lodis. The centre of Guru Nanak's creative imagination is the disintegration of the Hindu world under the impact of Turkish conquest. The profundity and comprehensiveness of Guru Nanak's vision warns us how painfully difficult it is to come to grips with reality. The critically revolutionary moment of Guru Nanak's vision is that he judges the contemporary reality from an 'ideal' Hinduism with an intense awareness that revivalism (to speak in current vocabulary) is dead.

"Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken for granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon specific social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and

maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social 'base' for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This base may be called its plausibility structure."¹ The plausibility structure of the 'Hindu' world was destroyed by the Turkish conquest of Hindustan.

There are frequent references to the disintegrating effect of the Turkish conquest in Guru Nanak. God has changed into Allah. The Hindu gods in places of worship are 'subject to taxation'. It is now the *shaikhs*' turn to lead; the pitcher for ablution, the *āzan*, the *namāz* and the *musalla* are supreme. The followers of God dress themselves in blue, not in saffron. Men have changed even their linguistic habits. They call their father *mian*.² The *satyuga* is lost in the remote past. Even the Gods of the succeeding two *yugas*, Rama and Krishna, are forgotten. The *veda* of the *kaliyuga* is *Atharva*, and the name of God is Allah. The Turks and Pathans now rule and the blue dress prevails.³ The *qazis* misadminister a new law, the *Shari'at*. *Kaliyuga* forces the acceptance of Semitic books and the *Qur'ān*. The *purānas* and Brahmanical scriptures have gone down. God has changed into *Rehmān*. The Khatri (Kshatriyas) have 'abandoned their religion' to learn 'a foreign tongue'. Now the world has only one caste; the traditional religion has gone down and under.⁴ In *satyuga* men were ruled by contentment and dharma, in *trētā-yuga* by celibacy and heroism, in *dvāpar-yuga* by purity and asceticism, and in *kaliyuga* by fire and falsehood.⁵ However, Guru Nanak's intense feeling about his age does not point to the fact that it was exceptionally characterized by political chaos, oppression and corruption. It simply means that for him the world of Hinduism was dead.

This is evident from his portrait and 'greater pre-occupation with the Hindu society'.⁶ The Hindu helps the state in collecting taxes on cows and Brahmans, and incongruously believes that plastering the floor with cowdung would lead to redemption. Despite his *dhoti*, a mark on his forehead and his rosary, he lives on gifts from the Muslims. He worships secretly, but in public he flaunts his smattering in ruling class culture. It is time to get rid of this elaborate hypocrisy.⁷ The corrupt *qazis*

and the Muslim rulers behave like cannibals. The Khatri functionaries under them, though wearing the sacred thread, wield knives on the necks of the subjects. The Brahmans ritually sound conch shells in the homes of the Khatri. They, too, partake of the ill-gotten gifts. They live off falsehood. Dharma and sense of honour have taken wings. Falsity is reigning supreme. The Khatri wears a mark on his forehead and wears a reddish *dhoti*, but wields the knife to butcher the subject classes. He presents himself before the Muslims in blue clothes. He pretends to venerate the *purānas*, but he works for men who are called *malechh*. He eats *halāl* meat, but he would ritually mark his place of eating against the unclean. These unclean trunks of men are putting on acts. They wash their mouths. But their minds remain unclean.⁸

As a religion Islam, too, was not fulfilling its essential social functions. Tawney has observed that religion is concerned with something more than personal salvation. It is the sanction of social duties and the spiritual manifestation of the corporate life of a complex, yet united, society. The state is something more than an institution created by material necessities or political convenience. It is the temporal expression of spiritual obligations. It is a link between the individual soul and the supernatural society of which all men are held to be members. It rests not merely on practical convenience, but on the will of God.⁹ Guru Nanak's denunciation of the ruling classes is significant in that the rulers lived off the society without being able to sanctify its complex of activities. If a spot of blood can make a garment unclean, surely those who suck blood from the people cannot have clean minds.¹⁰ The Hindu officials occupying the lower rungs of administration are only junior partners in exploitation. To rob others of their right is as sinful to a Muslim as the eating of pork, and to a Hindu as the eating of beef. The gurus and *pirs* lend their approval only to those who do not accept illegal gratification. Not by glib talk but by truthful living does one go to heaven. To garnish *harām* with condiments cannot turn it into *halāl*. A man only earns falsehood by false acts.¹¹ A mere interview does not result in justice. Offering and taking of bribes is a common practice. Justice is rendered by the ruler when his palm is greased. To pray in the name of God in such circum-

stances is a waste of breath. Men are human only in appearance; they act like dogs when they order about.¹² Guru Nanak looks upon administrative corruption as a necessary part of the disintegrated and delegitimized society in which knowledge, virtue and spirit have shrunk into nothingness.

Before going into the devices of creativeness, it is useful to speak of Guru Nanak's audience. This group is both the locus of social transformation and the repository of creative imagination, though its specific articulation is the result of Guru Nanak's genius.

An analysis of the theological imagery of Guru Nanak's *bāni* indicates that he addressed himself largely to itinerant traders, shopkeepers, artisans and bond-servants of the magnates. *Vanjāra*, the word for itinerant trader, signifies soul, man, devotee and sometimes God Himself.¹³ Apart from the use of 'trade', 'itinerant trader', 'merchandize', 'commodity', 'capital', 'counterfeit', 'treasury' and 'profit', the use of 'magnate' as an epithet of God is socially significant. In some compositions the pattern of redemption is closely modelled on shopkeeping which makes its sociological import quite obvious.¹⁴ The equivalence of the world of trade with the supramundane is the basic spiritual idiom of Guru Nanak.¹⁵ An entire hymn is devoted to the description of slave who is the symbol of Sikhism.¹⁶ This social group is the locus of the spirit of Sikhism. 'The lowly are the possible recipients of grace and Nanak associates with them.'¹⁷ Guru Nanak's sympathy with the lower status groups is the obverse of his harsh politico-administrative criticism. The two moments are joined in the sociological position of the early Sikhs whose voice and inner spirit Guru Nanak is. They were householders who aspired to be 'as pure as water in the Ganges.'¹⁸ Their life of toil had a concomitant belief in the spiritual equality of all the *yugas*. Living in the present, they rejected the idea that *kaliyuga* was necessarily evil.¹⁹ Importantly, rituals held no attraction for them.

A word about the aesthetics of the *Ādi Granth*. The Sikh Gurus are so conservatively faithful to Guru Nanak that the aesthetics of Guru Nanak are the Sikh aesthetics. The constitutive idea of beauty is a specific historical fact based on a social group, its attitudes, outlook, fears and expectations, and the

political agenda. According to Guru Nanak, a few things are naturally beautiful. Fascination with ordinary beauty is not enough; it leads to 'existential horror'. Only the godly cannot be praised enough; none other is beautiful in comparison with them. Beauty is a moment of redemption. The Sikh *Panth* is an institution of salvation. Thus the organization and the historic task of the Sikhs are part of the aesthetics.²⁰ The structural analysis of the hymns of Guru Nanak reveals three things. Guru Nanak is very selective in the choice of experience. The experience is conveyed and interpreted at the same time. This type of communication calls for delicate formal resources. The result is that his compositions naturally convey what, in fact, are Sikh doctrines.²¹ There are other forms in the *Ādi Granth* besides the hymns or *shabds*. Structurally they are formal variations on the *shabd*. From the last quarter of the sixteenth century, i.e., from the times of the fourth Guru (regnant 1574-81), persecution of the Sikhs at the level of provincial administration was in the air, though they were safe in Akbar's greatness. In the situation, occasional poetry comes into its own. Guru Ramdas has compositions on the Sikhs who are too poor to see the Guru²² and on the rivals²³ who carry tales to the administration. Guru Arjan (r. 1581-1606) writes on the illness of his son, the digging of the tank of Golden Temple, the attacks of a Mughal *thānedar*, a memorandum against the Guru, and the famine of 1595.²⁴ Occasional poetry is unliterary to the outsiders and sheer artistic to the insider. The crux of occasional poetry lies outside it, in whether or not it is able to win friends and influence people. Occasional poetry would find its acme in the *gurbilas* genre.

II

Keeping in mind the social transformation of itinerant merchants, shopkeepers, artisans and slaves into a sizeable group and then into a flourishing 'community' during the sixteenth century, one can say that the basic form of their creative imagination is largely the Sikh *shabd* as practised by the first five Sikh Gurus. The collection of the compositions of the Sikh Gurus along with those of the low-caste *bhagats* and others led to the compilation of the *Ādi Granth* in 1604. This is the great tradi-

tion of the Sikh scripture. Echoing this is the little tradition of the *janamsākhi* writing which is closely related to the *shabd* aesthetics. The *janamsākhis* are the prose, narrative counterparts of the poetical, theological *shabd*.

A *janamsākhi* portrays the 'wonderful exploits' of the founder of Sikh religion. It is designed to advance the cause of popular piety. A *janamsākhi* narrative widens the emotional horizon of the reader to effect a particular religious orientation. Even the 'facts' about the 'blessed one' are given according to 'scripture and tradition'. The *janamsākhi* writer dedicates his work to Sikhism and *Panth*. Modern readers of *janamsākhis* need not be unduly worried about the mind-boggling miracles contained therein. To be so worried would mean to be ignorant of the 'medieval vision'. To us the natural and the supernatural are realms apart whose mutual connections are problematic. Not so in the traditional society. An ordinary man daily expected and looked for the manifestation of the supernatural in the natural. Hence the *janamsākhi* miracles.

An ordinary reader is fascinated by the sheer artistic splendour of the *janamsākhis*. The principle of *janamsākhi* is like that of medieval mosaic or stained glass window. A *sākhi* may be undistinguished, colourless, without a narrative, devoid of intellectual merit and unpartisan. Yet the whole work weaves a valuable pattern of stories to be informed by a specific religious outlook to advance a sectarian cause. Only *Ādi Sākhian*, *B-40* and *Purātan Janamsākhi* (a misleading description because it is not old in terms of chronology) are really Sikh *janamsākhis*. They discuss the nature of Guru Nanak's guru-ship; how he was Guru without having a guru; his relationship to God and his successors; how Guru Nanak could be a Sikh (disciple) of his successor, Guru Angad; the 'indistinguishability of the spiritual flame' of Guru Nanak and his successors; the Guru's relationship with his Sikhs and his *Panth*; the withdrawal of the evil influence of *kalyuga* from the Sikhs; and the greater spiritual virtue (in the original sense of power) of the Sikhs. They also support the orthodox line of the Sikh Gurus.

The Sikh principle of living only in the present finds its expression in the *janamsākhis* in the changing outlook on the Mughal Empire. In *Ādi Sākhian* the Mughal Empire is 'everlasting'. After the execution of Guru Arjan in 1606, it is 'long

lasting' in *B-40*. The two variant readings of the *Purāṇ Janamsākhi* simply copy the last two versions. In *Bhai Mani Singh Wālī Janamsākhi* the Empire is a gift to Babur by Guru Nanak only to be returned to the Sikhs.

The *janamsākhis* have been the best-sellers of Panjabi literature from the late sixteenth century down to the modern times. The Sikhs have paid the greatest compliment to the *janamsākhi* genre by inflicting it with continual interpolations. Only obscure and esoteric works have the good fortune of being unspoiled by accretions. The *janamsākhis* constitute a dialectic between Sikhism and the ordinary Sikhs to show how the faith affected popular piety which, in turn, influenced the idea of Sikhism. They are written in a language that the people understand. Their prose follows a spoken rhythm that is different from the cadences invented by penmanship. They hold the reader's attention with a menagerie of motifs. Yet the palm goes to fictional imagination.

A narrative has a built-in uncanny meaning to it. No wonder religion speaks in parables. The *janamsākhi* narratives are attractive in themselves; they are more so because of their peculiar religious hold. The Handalis invented a unique story in *Bhai Lalo and Malik Bhago*. Guru Nanak is staying with a poor carpenter. A local magnate invites him. The invitation is declined. Guru Nanak is sent for to explain. He holds the poor man's fare in his right hand, the rich man's delicacies in the left. He presses them both. Blood flows from the rich viands; milk comes out of rude bread. The story is a product of Handali preoccupation with, and the claim of having created, a religion of the low castes. Understandably, the narrative has received a socialist gloss in modern times.

The orthodox *B-40 Janamsākhi* has invented a narrative for a basic Sikh tenet—the merit of meeting an exalted soul (*gurmukh*) who, by implication, can be the Guru himself. A venerable Sikh asks the question on the merit of meeting a *gurmukh* only to be sent to a spot in the jungle. He finds only two crows sitting on a tree. He is sent again. To his disappointment he finds only two swans. He is told to try again. He finds a handsome couple under the tree, to be told in turn that his very sight has turned crows into swans, swans into men, and that he himself is a *gurmukh*. Two sectarian *janamsākhis*, i.e.,

Mehrbān Janamsākhi and *Mani Singh Wālī Janamsākhi*, suffer from poverty of narrative invention, which, in turn, becomes an evidence of their 'bad faith' as they have tendentious things to say in the name of Guru Nanak.

Bālā Janamsākhis have their inspiration in *Wādī Janamsākhi* of *Bāhā Handāl*. Handālis believe in spiritual inequality, especially of women and Muslims; redemption by compact in an earlier age; religion without scripture; instantaneous spiritual climb and fetish spirituality. They speak against the Sikh *Panth* by implication and snipe at the Sikh Gurus. They have pre-empted themselves from adopting any attitude towards the contemporary state. Like later-day believers in 'economism', they uphold the cause of low castes, with Jats in the leading role, only to the neglect of their political activism.

Mehrbān Janamsākhi and *Bhāī Mani Singh Wālī Janamsākhi* are halfway houses. The former does not accept the line of succession after Guru Arjan; the latter is tinged with the *udāsī* idea of vedantic gnosis which makes any adept *udāsī* an equal of Sikh Gurus. Hence the *janamsākhi's* silence on the question of Guru's succession.

The *janamsākhis* are urgently relevant to modern creative imagination. Modern criticism is saddled with the problem of autonomy of art *vis-à-vis* its attempt to fulfil 'ideological' ambitions. Quite a few think that 'autonomy' and 'ideology' are contradictions in terms; others, not so. The *janamsākhis* are a resounding proof that it is a pseudo-problem. Autonomy and ideology are not a problem to the *janamsākhi* writer. He is writing precisely to convey his ideology through his autonomous *janamsākhi*. To him the problem is not only soluble but a challenge and an opportunity. It is not a matter of argument but of artistic achievement. The *janamsākhi* writers are the subtlest minds and finest craftsmen of the language. Reading them rightly is itself a joy and reward. Such masters can inspire hope for the future of Panjabi literature.

Seventeenth century is the provenance of *janamsākhi* writing when rival sects within Sikhism hoped to convert men by literary means. They are a part of religious debate between orthodoxy and dissidence. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 was a repetition of an earlier martyrdom. It definitively killed the genre. After this *janamsākhi* lost its

reason of being. A new militancy was called for. Eighteenth century *janamsākhis* are so unoriginal that they have to rely on mutual borrowings and unintelligent interpolations. The end of creative imagination in the *janamsākhi* mould is itself a massive historical evidence.

Finally, *janamsākhis* are closely modelled on *Jātakas*, a fact which intriguingly points to some kind of survival of Buddhist tradition. I am grateful to W.H. McLeod whose erudition of the *janamsākhis* has made their understanding possible to the modern historian.²⁵

III

The next stage in the social transformation of Sikhism in the eighteenth century marks the dispersal of the original social grouping of the Sikhs and its replacement by free-floating elements who were welded by Guru Gobind Singh (r. 1675-1708) into the *Khālsā*. Under the impact of persecution the Sikhs were driven out of the Panjab or into the countryside. The leadership of the *Khālsā Panth* gradually passed to the cultivating Jats about the last quarter of the eighteenth century because of their sheer demographic weight. The newer creative imagination is embodied in the *Gurbilās* form. It is the formal opposite of *janamsākhi*. *Gurbilās* sets out to cultivate a militantly heroic spirit with a built-in social urgency even at the cost of doctrine, whereas the *janamsākhi* aspires to be ideologically correct. The rise and fall of *gurbilās* has its parallel in the oppressed themselves becoming oppressors.

As every practising historian knows, with Marx, history is full of surprises. Equally so is the birth of a literary form. *Gurbilāses* are the linear descendants of the apocryphal *Bachittar Natak* (circa 1690s) whose formal constituents were wholly fortuitous.

Bachittar Natak is a mythological account of Guru Gobind Singh. It literally means 'the strange miracle'. Miracles are ordinarily witnessed by proxy, based on hearsay and deemed to have happened in the past. Guru Gobind Singh is a 'strange miracle' because the divine is manifest in the here and now of history, which also stands for divine intervention in history. This

is the basis of the eighteenth century Sikh idea that their struggle for political supremacy is divinely sanctioned. Guru Gobind Singh is at par with incarnations, but himself not an incarnation. He is with them, not of them. He is a *Bachittar Nātak*. Guru Gobind Singh is the spirit of the Master who has taken upon himself the burden of the servants. He epitomizes in his own person the idea of *Guru Panth*, i.e., the divinity of (Sikh) collectivity. Guru Gobind Singh is against empty religions which are without virtue, i.e., power, and incapable of achieving anything. It is explicitly stated that the primordial struggle of good and evil pertains to the here and now of living men.

A comparison with the *janamsākhi* outlook is instructive. In the *Mehrbān Janamsākhi* God ordains that he who sees, hears or follows Guru Nanak will be redeemed. In the *Bachittar Nātak* he has to wage a war against the enemies of God in order to be redeemed. More importantly, divine intervention in the mundane world is suggested in the actual events in the life of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh idea is to earn 'merit' by waging a relentless war for the sake of the *Panth*. *Bachittar Nātak* introduces a new and historic motive in Sikhism. Persecution is the obverse of divine approval of their struggle. Martyrdom itself becomes a proof of the legitimacy of Guru Tegh Bahadur's succession (1665) to the *gaddi* of Guru Nanak. It is expressly stated that those who endure persecution abide by their love of God (in Sikhism); the ones scared by hardships latch themselves on to Hinduism or Islam. Guru Gobind is portrayed as an earthly potentate and a spiritual Master. The mythological royal genealogy of Guru Gobind Singh constitutes, in fact, a legitimization of secular power of the divine Master.

Bachittar Nātak suffers from doctrinal, historical and artistic limitations. The author does not know where exactly to place Guru Gobind Singh in cosmogony, history and polity. The transcendently immanent God suffers from anthropomorphism. The meters used are not those of the devotional poetry of the *Ādi Granth*. Militancy has conjured a new versification which has a hypnotic effect in its sonorous improvisations. Though it has been mentioned that the traditional order has been undermined, yet there is no nature in *Bachittar Nātak* and hardly a visual metaphor. The confused medley of images,

meters and the constituents of *Bachittar Nātak* epitomizes the variegated social composition of the followers of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs have gradually and painfully started entering into history. This is a work of nascent history which, under the stress of circumstances, is more faithful to the ordeals of the future than to the silent details of the present.

Gur Sobha was written by Senapat in 1711, three years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh and the beginning of the temporary establishment of Sikh power by Banda Bahadur. *Gurbilās Dasvin Pātishāh* by Sukha Singh, written in 1797, marks the formal culmination of *gurbilās*, paralleling the Sikh rise to power. *Gur sobha* is in the service of the *Panth* and for redemption. The author prays, for himself and the reader, for a 'strong steadfast' faith in the *Panth*. It tells of the miraculous life of Guru Gobind Singh by closely following *Bachittar Nātak*. It strongly advocates the doctrine of the divinity of collectivity. *Gur sobha* is an excellent source on the ideological legacy of Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru sobha copies the formal devices and uses the meters as also the battle descriptions of *Bachittar Nātak*. There are echoes of the earlier work in the portrayal of the mission of Guru Gobind Singh and the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The work does not fight shy of making theological departures. According to Sikh doctrine God and Guru are one. But the author makes Guru Govind Singh the physical presence of God. Unorthodoxly, Guru Gobind Singh reverts to primordial essence after his death. Losing everything, the Guru is 'detached unmanifest' after the battle of Chamkaur.

Guru Gobind Singh's struggle against evil amounts to fighting worldly wars. He makes the Guru in the image of a battling hero into whose mould the Sikhs would try to shape themselves in future. His emblematic picture in precious stones and weapons stands for spiritual sovereignty and temporal power.

The author says that the Guru personally supervised the battles. The Sikhs were taught to fight in serried ranks. They learnt a number of guerilla tactics in the siege of Anandpur. The future guerillas would quote the authority of these tactics against the advocates of pitched battles. Their ideal of martyrdom in an unsalvageable situation made military sense.

The author of *Gur sobha* is deeply involved in the theological

status of the *Khālsā*. *Khālsā* is the *sangat* (congregation) of the earlier Gurus. *Nām* demands one to join the *Khālsā*. He extends the idea of the 'ego-oriented' (*manmukh*). In Guru Nanak a non-Sikh is not-necessarily a *manmukh*. He is so, along with the 'rivals', in the third and the fourth Gurus. *Gur tobha* makes a non-*Khālsā* (not a non-Sikh) *manmukh* by following the precedent set by the Gurus. It criticizes the non-*Khālsā* from the theological standpoints of *kāl* (death) and *hukm* (divine command). The author, thoroughly conversant with Sikh theology, declares that only a *Khālsā* can be *guru-mukh*. The *Khālsā* is declared to be the institution of redemption. He points out that 'battle' is the theological essence of the *Khālsā*. Guru Nanak had made godly man peerlessly handsome. *Gur tobha* declares that the heroic *Khālsā* is so.

The author makes Guru Gobind Singh support the doctrine of the divinity of collectivity:

The *Khālsā* is my image
I am with the *Khālsā*
From the origin to the end of being
I manifest myself in the *Khālsā*

Significantly, he makes the Guru an independent ruler of Anandpur. By making Guru Gobind Singh a paragon of heroic virtue, emphasizing the Guru's military tactics, establishing the divinity of the *Khālsā* and giving them a legacy of independent rule, *Gur tobha* becomes in the early eighteenth century the *de facto* manifesto of Sikh rule.

Gurbilas Daswin Pātshāhi of Sukha Singh comes after the heroic age of the Sikhs. Despite being an ideologically heterodox *udāsī* work, it is an excellent work on the nature of politics and the new social imperative of the Sikhs. The portrayal of the *Khālsā* is innovative enough to have contemporary relevance. An orphan seldom finds honour. The *Khālsā* was born out of God, sword and *Dev*. It has the combined power of gods, men, ghosts and *pisāches*. The *Khālsā* is unique in making the *Chandi* appear. Born of God, the *Khālsā* is invincible. It is a mine of knowledge, *tapa*, *Siddhis* and *char padārth*. The *Khālsā* has the physiognomy of Guru Gobind Singh. In *kaliyuga*, only the *Khālsā* is an institution of saints. Guru

Gobind Singh gave the *Khālsā* the garb of sword.

It is the religion of the oppressed created by the tenth Guru. *Kaliyuga* stands for the rule of low castes. There is no religion except the religion of sword. Sticking to rituals is playing in the hands of the Mughals.

Kaliyuga has broken the traditional caste system. That is why there is no *gyān*. The Muslim rule had polluted the earth. Thus there was no real Hinduism; even the earth-supporting bull was quaking. There were Kshatriyas to defend the traditional religion which made for the power of yoga and charity. Sukha Singh, along with his co-religionists, understands that one is religious to the extent of one's power. The Sikhs are the new Kshatriyas. It is Sukha Singh's greatness to be so faithful to the implicit meanings of Guru Nanak's vision which history had made explicit. He so explicates the theological term *rāyoga* as to give it the meaning it did not possess before. Similarly, he makes a new contribution to the idea of *abichal*. It meant initially the line of Guru succession and later the city of Amritsar. Sukha Singh makes it the 'Sikh kingdom on the bones of the enemies'. Significantly, he does not fail to mention that the *Khālsā* consisted of oilmen, Brahmans, barbers, *luhanas*, grocers, Aroras, carpenters, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, water-carriers, potters, shoe-makers, and scavengers.

The author represents the transitional phase of Sikhism. He makes Guru Gobind Singh explain Islam from the Sikh standpoint, which was really a reflection of the imperative of the Sikh rulers to 'deal' with the Muslim subjects. He is doubtful if Malwa or Majha is going to the centre of Sikh kingdom. The author is equally diffuse on the question of the divinity of collectivity which had made the Sikh survival and rise to power possible. The doctrine had its nostalgic appeal; but it was dangerously useless to the rulers of principalities. We have a tentative statement on the opposite principle of the divinity of *Granth* which makes religion a 'private' affair, limiting the scattered individuals to their apolitical horizons.

Thus *gurbilās* is a form invented by and concerned with social urgency and political programme. The writing demands not only thorough familiarity with Sikh theology and history but also their reinterpretation. Without this obligatory reinterpretation the *gurbilās* would collapse. *Gurbilās* is the form of

creative imagination of 'conscientization' in struggle. *Gurbilās* magnificently rises to the political occasion. It is also the most developed form of occasional poetry, which we came across in Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan.

Gurbilās Dasvin Pātishāhi by Koer Singh and *Gurbilās Chhevin Pātishāhi* by Sohan Kavi are slighter works of Sikh rule. *Gurbilās Dasvin Pātishāhi* is markedly Hindu in its overtones. Guru Gobind Singh did not consider himself Guru. He created the *Panth* at the instance of Devi for whom he sacrificed a sixteen year old girl. One and a quarter lakh of Sikhs, too, were sacrificed. The Guru was, like Shiva, the son of Devi. All the gods contributed their 'power' to the Guru's invincibility. Hanuman gave him briefs; Vishnu, hair; Devi, weapons. The author calls the *Khālsā* the 'original form'. Contrary to Sikhism, *kaliyuga* has evil influence. The 'five-beloveds' of the Guru were his companions in an earlier *yuga*. Guru Gobind's departure from Patna is described in the manner of Ram leaving Ayodhya. Anandpur is Brindaban. Mata Gujri, mother to the Tenth Guru, dies like Sita, for the earth to close on her.

The changed political situation makes the author say that Islam is as good as Sikhism. We are far from the days of Guru Nanak when Islam was the bringer of *kaliyuga*. He naturally upholds the principle of the divinity of *Granth* to the exclusion of the divinity of collectivity in the service of the ruling oligarchy. Ironically, Koer Singh is contemptuous of the people—a blasphemy for the eighteenth century Sikhs. 'Woman, subjects, land and wealth are faithful to none.' People are to be kept on the leash by the administrators. The author has invented a calumny against the Malwa Sikhs—they are half-mad. The real reason for it is that the cis-Sutlej Sikh principalities have accepted British suzerainty. The work is conciliatory towards the Muslims. The traditional Sikh enmity with the 'Turks' has changed its meaning. Now the 'Turks' are only those Muslims who were oppressors.

Gurbilās Dasvin Pātishāhi has the stamp of the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Some kind of equilibrium had to be maintained between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Sikh rulers could present themselves as the leaders of Hinduism by making their Gurus Hindus. Only during this time the people

could be abused for having ushered *kaliyuga* in with their sins. The individual could involve himself with the *Granth* in his apolitical subjectivity.

Gurbilās Chhevin Pātishāht of Sohan Kavi, written during the last decades of Sikh rule, is a still slighter work. The author sets out to answer the question as to why Guru Hargobind assumed a militant posture when the first five Gurus were peaceable. He portrays Guru Hargobind strictly after Guru Gobind Singh. He attributes all the qualities of the *Khālsā* to the Sikhs of the earlier Guru. Similarly, the nature of Guru-Sikh relations is the same.

Gurbilās Chhevin Pātishāht declares that the worship of *Akāl Takht* in the Golden Temple is more important than the worship of God. It enjoins the Sikhs to visit different *gurdwāras* for different kinds of boon like sons, sons-in-law or redemption. *Bāntis*, too, are cure for different illnesses. Preparing the 'sacred pudding' is the most meritorious act. Every chapter of the work helps the reader in one way or the other. Guru Hargobind, too, is going about visiting and making arrangements for the upkeep of the *gurdwāras* like a neophyte.

The author introduces a Jat motif in the work, which had so far been the prerogative of the Handālīs. Baba Buddha anointed the five successors of Guru Nanak. He was their closest adviser. The author makes him an equal of Guru Nanak. Baba Buddha is the maker of Sikh rituals at the Golden Temple. His son inherits his *gaddi* to be equally honoured by the succeeding Gurus.

The work has neither a religious ideology nor a political programme to advocate. In its form it is a hybrid of *janamsākhi* and *gurbilās*. Marriage follows battles; the succession of a Guru goes with the killing of butchers. The work is a pointer to 'the decline of religion and magic' in the Sikh rule. But it reflects the times and concerns of Sikh overlordship. The 'Hindu' Gurus were useful in winning the support of Hindus. The Muslims had to be conciliated in the interest of the stability of the kingdom. The social mobility of the Jats is expressed in the mythology of Sikhism. The veteran Sikhs were probably scattered, like the early Bolsheviks, in looking after their lands, running the administration and leading the campaigns. Already a tiny minority, they were thinly spread over the Panjab,

giving the new Sikh converts an opportunity to bring in their emotional baggage of magic and orthodoxy. The changing material conditions of the Sikh ruling classes paved the way for the collapse of the *gurbilās* genre.²⁶

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The World of Wāris

J. S. GREWAL

ON REQUEST FROM friends, as Wāris Shāh likes to tell us, he wrote afresh a narrative of the love of Hīr, leading to her union with Rānjbā. All afresh, because others had written on the theme before. His idea was to replace them through deliberate thought and creative effort. His work was well received in his lifetime, finding admirers, transcribers, readers and listeners. Wāris Shāh felt satisfied with his achievement: his verses possess, he claims, aesthetically the effect of magic and spiritually the meaning of the *Qurān*. Through God's grace he expected his name to shine in the world. His work, popularly known as *Hir-Wāris*, is by now a classic.

To say that 'lyric poems are social facts, just as potato crops, tractors and new industries are' is to state the obvious. Every work of literature is the product of a given social situation. Since creative writers are 'antennae sensitive to social and cultural change', it should be possible to unwind literary works as social documents to know something of the changing historical situations which produced them. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that literary works are a direct reflection of social transformation. Creative imagination is to be discovered rather than assumed in the case of every writer, in fact in the case of every literary work.

The *Hir-Wāris*, according to the author himself, was completed at Malka Hans, a town in the lower Bari Doab of the Punjab, in 1766. He also tells us that he belongs to Jandiala. It was near Gujranwala, the capital of Sardar Charhat Singh Sukarchakia, the grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Wāris

Shāh says further that he is a disciple of the Makhdūm of Qasur. The town of Qasur was at that time a stronghold of the Pathans. Wāris Shāh thinks of himself as a Sayyid and refers to himself at one place as a Shaiikhzāda. Not much is known of the rest of his life. He was born some time in the first quarter of the 18th century and died before the birth of Ranjit Singh in 1780. He thus lived in a period of many a political change involving social re-adjustment.

Indeed, there are allusions in the *Hir-Wāris* to contemporary events: a battle fought at Chunian between Abdus Samad Khan, the Mughal governor of Lahore, and Husain Khan of Qasur for whom Wāris Shāh uses the title of Nawāb; a commander's camp plundered by the Pathans of Qasur; Nadir Shah's invasion of India; Ahmad Shah Abdali's occupation of the Punjab; his action against Adina Beg Khan in the Jalandhar Doab; his expedition against his own governor in Kashmir; the sack of Mathura and the desecration of Amritsar. There is only one reference to a non-contemporary event: the siege of Chittor by Akbar. This event was associated with a legend about the digging of the step-well at Goindwal, a place with which Wāris Shāh was familiar.

More significant than allusions to contemporary events are similes and metaphors bearing upon administration. The *sūbedār* of Lahore is happy to get his letter of appointment. But *sūbedārs* remain worried for money to pay the troops, and they get transferred. Accounts cannot be kept properly without the indispensable *diwān*. The *mir bakhshi* loses his baggage, and the *mir-i-shikār* his falcons. The *faujdār* is transferred, dismissed, reinstated or he is on the move, mutilating people, while the foot-soldier is rounding up culprits, and the cavalryman is resting with his blanket spread under a shady tree. The *qilā dār* is on the defensive, besieged in his own fort. The *āmīl* misappropriates and the *qāzī* takes bribes. The salary of the troopers is in arrears and the soldiers are out plundering the countryside, or running away from battle. *Jāgirs* are contracting and *ta'alluqas* are being lost. Deductions are made from salaries long over due. There is no profession worse than service.

The ideal ruler of Wāris Shāh possesses extensive territories, treasury full of gold, efficient artillery and large cavalry; he is

benevolent and just; his administration is clean; and the laws of the state are observed. But the actual rulers of the day are those who were rolling in the dust till yesterday; there is no peace; there is no justice; thieves have become *chaudharis*, and ruffians have become eminent persons; bandits stalk the land, and people are left to their own devices to deal with them; robberies take place in broad day-light in towns and villages. The roles of the strong and the weak are clearly marked: the former fearlessly grasp and the latter helplessly weep. Wāris Shāh has all praise for the life of concord that is no more, and bewails the discord that prevails. He yearns for the city of peace.

II

It is generally believed that the new rulers of *Hir-Wāris* were the Sikh rulers of the third quarter of the 18th century. This assumption is based on the statement made by Wāris Shāh that, at the time of his writing in 1766, Jats were the *sardars* of the country and virtually every house was a state. His Jats have been identified with the Sikhs simply because the Sikh rulers were predominantly Jat and extremely numerous. We know, however, that there were new rulers who were not Sikh but who were regarded as Jats by Wāris, like the Sials and the Kharals close to the town where he was writing. The non-Sikh rulers, too, were quite numerous. The statement made by Wāris Shāh that the Punjab was plundered by *dals* has been assumed to refer to the Sikh *dals*. For this assumption, too, there is no justification. If we pay close attention to the vocabulary used by Wāris Shāh we find that it contains words and phrases which would be taken as characteristically Sikh: *Shabad*, *sangat*, *matā*, *bhog*, *piram-piāla*, *āqī*, *sewak*, *bhujangi*, *bhaij*, *gurnat*, for example. When Wāris says that the Jats have become the rulers of the land, we may be sure that he means precisely what he says.

Whether Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, the Jat is the subject of ridicule and ignominy in the masterly invective of Sayyid Wāris Shāh. The Jat has 21 'layers' to his character. He should never be taken at his word. His manners are despicable; he removes his own turban to use it as the seat for his hind parts. Wisdom

dawns upon him only when he sits on the dung-heap. The Jats offer their daughters for the night to wayfarers, and they sell their married daughters to outsiders. They are as unreliable as the goldsmith, or the butcher. They are *thaggs*, thieves and highwaymen. Their heroes, too, are the thieves and the highwaymen. Even their *panchas* are respectable only in appearance: they wear the beard of a *shalkh* and the knife of a butcher. They kill their daughters. They indulge in usury and other unlawful things. They ridicule the pious. They are indifferent to justice and fairness. They resort to ruse and subterfuge. The greater the resources of a Jat the more haughty and reckless he is. Their only redeeming feature appears to be their sense of honour: tribal, clannish and familial. Nonetheless, they belong to the category of the *kamin*.

Wāris Shāh denounces the Jats not simply because some of them have become the rulers of the land but also because of their social background. The political change involving a certain degree of the reversal of social roles was not to the liking of Sayyid Wāris Shāh. He is rather explicit on this point: the *ashraf* are going down and the *kamin* are coming up. The scums of the former social order are becoming the elite of the new dispensation. Indeed, Wāris Shāh is acutely caste-conscious. He uses the word *achhut* for the outcaste. The two ends of the social ladder for him are Sayyid-Shaikh and the *chandāl*. He does appreciate good conduct in an individual irrespective of his caste; but heredity remains all important. The Jat women themselves say that they cannot be the equals of the Qureshi women. It is as difficult for the son of a *chūhrā* to become a *sayyid* as for the sheep to give birth to horses. People laugh at the Khatri who wrestles with a *chūhrā*, because the Khatri has already lost the game having been touched by the untouchable. To refer to someone as one of the low caste is the height of contempt. Even the *jogi* of Wāris Shāh takes pride in having been the hereditary *faqir* of seven generations. Like *mochis* and *telis*, the Jat cannot become a *faqir*. The low caste are not entitled to enter the religious profession. But the irony is that they have come into political power. Identifying himself with the socio-religious elite of the land, Wāris Shāh was inclined to identify himself with the ruling class which had disappeared.

III

In the eyes of Wāris Shāh, the social roots of an individual are as much in his *watan* or *des* as in his caste. The first question that Hir puts to Rānjhā is about his *watan* as well as his *zāt*. To leave one's *des* is to lose one's roots. Those who belong to another *des* are strangers. Wāris Shāh appears to identify *des* with the area in possession of a particular tribe or clan or a sub-division of the clan. The sub-divisions consist of 'cousinhoods' in which the concept of the *sharik*, involving property relations, is extremely important. The *chaudhari* of the *des* holds a crucial position. Maujū, for instance, is the *sardār* of the cousinhood, has a large family, is respected by all, and is recognized by the government of the day as the spokesman of his 'cousinhood'. Chūckak's *chaudharāi* becomes *rāj* at least for his daughter. Besides the family and the 'cousinhood', the clan as a whole serves as the source of authority and social control. Each clan or 'cousinhood' has a band of warriors called *katak* or *bāhar*.

Larger than *des* is a geographical sub-region. Wāris Shāh refers to Mājhā, Rohi and Patti as sub-regions. He also thinks of the low-lying area on both sides of a river as a sub-region: Ravi, Beas, Chenab, for instance. Logically, he can refer to the Jats of the Chenab, or the songs of the Chenab. Overarching the *des* and the sub-region is the country of the Punjab. Wāris Shāh looks upon Rūm and Shām, Khatan and Chin, Lankā and Kām rūp as distinct lands. Bengal is a distinct country. The 'east' up to Delhi is not the Punjab. Kabul and Qandhar are not a part of the Punjab. Kashmir is a distinct country. By this process of elimination, the land of the five rivers is the Punjab par excellence for Wāris, though its boundaries are not specifically mentioned. The consciousness of a distinct regional identity of the Punjab provides an important clue to the world of Wāris.

Wāris Shāh feels more at home in the countryside or the small town than in the city. In the countryside of the *Hir-Waris*, there are tribes other than the Jats, like Gujjars and Dogras; but the Jats are dominant as peasant-proprietors with their 'cousinhoods' and *chaudharis*. Wāris Shāh assumes the existence of proprietary rights in land. He is familiar with the formal procedure for the division of landed property among

individual heirs, with which the *qāzi* is associated on behalf of the state and *panchas* and *chaudharts* on behalf of the 'cousin-hood'. The proprietary right is so clearly established that an individual owner does not lose it even if he remains absent from the village for a number of years.

The Jats combine cattle and sheep rearing with the cultivation of land. They grow cotton, sugarcane, wheat, rice, *mūng*, *masur* and *jawār*. They regard rice boiled in sweetened milk as a luxury, and wheat is superior to other grains. Wāris Shāh is conscious of the importance of the weather for the cultivator; the timely rain and the untimely hail or dust storm. Wāris Shāh sees the possibility of a famine always lurking in the background. Apart from the peasant-proprietors, there are tenants and landless labourers working on daily or monthly wages. Watchmen are employed before and after harvesting. There are other people living in the countryside: *tarkhāns*, *lohārs*, *ghumārs*, *chūhrās*, *nāis*, *tellis*, *chamārs*, *dūms*, *bharāis*, *darzis*, *julāhās*, for instance. Then there are migratory *bāzigars*, mendicants and pedlars. Khatris and Bāniās are connected with the village as money lenders, traders and shopkeepers. There are goldsmiths in the villages to make ornaments, and weavers to make cloth. Some varieties of cloth, however, come from the towns and the cities.

The towns are the centres of administration, trade, and manufacture. There are references to the wall, the markets, the *bāzārs*, the *havelis*, and the storehouses in the towns. The Khatris and the *khajās* are associated with the *bāzār*, and so are the *baniās* with trade and shopkeeping. The *shāhukārs* make use of the *hundī*; the *sarrāfs* act as money-changers; and the *banjārās* provide transportation, linking the towns and the cities with one another. Money-lending at high interest is not uncommon and many a debtor remains unable to repay. Fruits come from Kabul and Kashmir, and horses from the countries beyond. The cities and towns specialize in certain manufactures, like *bāfta* in Qasūr, *dastār* in Bajwāra and bows in Lahore. The rich in general live in cities and towns rather than the countryside. Several other categories of people, marked by their caste or profession, live in the towns: Bhābras, Aroras, Brahmans, Pathans, Mughals, Rajputs, Sayyids, Shaikhs, goldsmiths, makers of bangles, tailors, tent-makers,

dyers, *bhatiārās*, *qaserāx*, *thuthiārs*, for example. The range of Wāris Shāh's experience of the secular world thus appears to be rather large.

IV

Wāris Shāh is thoroughly familiar with the doctrines, beliefs and practices of Islam. The basic position of Sunni orthodoxy is well represented in the *Hir-Wāris*. Allah is the one all-powerful God; his *hukm* and *razā* cover all that happens in the universe; submission to Him is the duty of all human beings. Muhammad as the *rasūl* or the messenger of Allah is the seal of the prophets; he is necessarily sinless; *mu'jaza* or *karāmāt* is the proof of his prophethood; he will intercede for his *ummat* on the Day of Judgment. Wāris Shāh believes in the *Qur'ān* as the revealed word of God, in angels and Satan, in Paradise and Hell, and he is equally reverential towards the first four *khalifās*.

Wāris Shāh assumes that it is obligatory to observe what is lawful and to avoid what is unlawful. However, of the four pillars of Sunni Islam, he emphasizes the importance only of *namāz*. Wāris Shāh represents the *mullā* as the guardian of orthodox tradition: his mosque is the house of God, and no impious person is to be allowed to come in; to grow long hair and to wear clothes up to the ankle is not to be allowed; those who do not observe the law are to be shunned; and no association is possible with the enemies of God. In the eyes of his opponents, however, the *mullā* himself is a curse: he demonstrates his knowledge of the *shari'at* but he does not act in accordance with it; he is insincere; he misuses the *hujra* as well as the mosque; he indulges in illicit sex; he is so enamoured of good food that he always expects to hear the news of some death. Wāris Shāh refers to opposition between *kufr* and Islam, but the more significant opposition for him is between the *mullā's* Islam and *tafiqat*.

Wāris Shāh's reverence for the Sūfī form of Islam is quite obvious. In the opening verses of the *Hir-Wāris* he praises God for creating the universe on the basis of love. Love is the status of *pīrs* and *faqīrs*. Wāris Shāh is fascinated by Mansūr al-Hallāj more than by any other Muslim mystic. At one place,

he identifies himself with Mansur who pronounced *an'al-Haqq*: 'I am the Truth'. Wāris Shāh emphasizes the importance of austerity, the control of *nafs*, renunciation of earthly desires and hopes, *sidiq* and remembrance of God. To die to one's own self, or *fana*, is an important doctrine with Wāris. It leads to *baqā*, or eternal life in God. To behold the face of God (*laqā, didār*) is more important than going into Paradise. The heart of 'the lover' is the throne of God. The *faqqar* is the veritable image of Allah. As one with God, the *pīrs* and *faqirs* can change the natural course of things: they possess the power to perform miracles. Wāris Shāh feels proud of his affiliation to the Chisti order of Sufis founded by Fariduddin Shakarganj of Pakpattan. Indeed, those who serve Shakarganj, the perfect *pīr* among all the 22 *aqtāb*, themselves attain to *pīrī*. It is because of him that the Punjab remains free from sorrow and suffering.

Without a proper appreciation of Wāris Shāh's affiliation to Sufism it is impossible to appreciate the *Hir-Wāris*. Towards the end of his work he claims that he has written an allegory in which Hir symbolizes the soul and Rānjhā symbolizes the body. In the last stanza of the *Hir-Wāris* this allegory is elaborated. It has been shewn convincingly that, if treated as an allegory, the *Hir-Wāris* has to be pronounced a failure. It does not imply, however, that the ideas, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of Sufism do not leave a deep imprint upon the work of Wāris Shāh. For instance, Hir is killed by her own kith and kin, and on the news of her death Rānjhā sighs like Farhād and his soul departs from his body. Wāris Shāh says that they have both left the *dār-i-fana* and gone to the *dār-i-baqā*. The result of true love on the earth is the same as the result of Sūfī's union with God. That is why, although the love of Hir and Rānjhā does not end in union in their earthly lives, Wāris Shāh says in the very beginning of his work that he is writing about their union. The *Hir-Wāris* treats of '*ishq-i-majāzi*' and a *tamsil* of '*ishq-i-haqīqī*'. The emotions and experiences of the latter are transferred to the former, adding altogether a new dimension to his depiction of earthly love.

The ideas and emotions of mystical love find expression in the work of Wāris in many ways. Love is the flame of fire. It is difficult to bear the brunt of love. The eyes of the beloved

are murderous. Separation from the beloved is a life-consuming anguish. To be perfect, one has to love unto death. The inaccessibility of the beloved intensifies the feeling for union. To Hir's unwelcome husband Saida, she appears to be the perpetual snow on the mountains of Kashmir. Rānjhā feels that he can empty the ocean by throwing out all its water with his bare hands to meet Hir on the other side. The beauty of Hir is comparable to 'the night of power' (*laila't-ul-qadr*), the 27th of Ramzān on which the Prophet received his first revelation from God through Gabriel after witnessing a blinding illumination: to look at Hir is to earn the merit of a pilgrimage.

It is in the context of mystical love that not only the Panj Pirs but also Bālnāth, the guru of the *jogis* who treat woman as the tigress of the night, bestow Hir upon Rānjhā; the former through their blessings and the latter through direct divine sanction. Hir's feeling of longing for Rānjhā on the mere possibility of a meeting is expressed by Wāris in terms which can be appreciated only in the context of mystical love. A large number of stanzas on the condition of Hir after her meeting with Rānjhā, in which every possible effect of sexual union is depicted, assume intense mutual desire in both the lovers. The feeling of Hir on the mere remembrance of Rānjhā is depicted in terms of a profound emotion: the red dress received from the Kherās now burns her body like the flame of fire; the house itself frightens her; she loses interest in every occupation; she cannot bear the presence of any person; and she has the feeling as if she is going to be embraced in a moment.

Furthermore, the insistence of Wāris Shāh on transience and the moral drawn from it are extremely significant. There is no need to put up large enclosures because the entire 'property' eventually consists of six feet of land, the 'country' of every man and woman being eventually the grave. Youth is a dupe and beauty is the guest of a few days. Many a bird sits on the tree of life but none makes a lasting nest. Human life is a game that is eventually lost. The world is a dream; it is a wall of sand; it is the shadow of a cloud; it is the congress of men brought together by the wand of a magician. There is no need, therefore, to run after riches, to sell one's faith, to betray one's

love. Everything will perish save the integrity of the *walṭs* of Allah who consecrate their lives to '*ishq-i-haqiqi*. This is true also of Hir and Rānjhā who consecrate their lives to '*ishq-i-majāzi*.

The emphasis of Wāris Shāh on the immanence of God in his work is an essential legacy of Sūfism. The man of God sees Him in every thing: *hamah-ū-ast*. God is in every thing: like the thread in the beads of a rosary, like life in living beings, like the intoxicating effect in *bhang* and opium, like the red colour in the green leaves of *mehndī*, like light mingling with light, like the breath of life. The implication of this idea of immanence is presented by Wāris through an interesting logic. If God has given eyes to see, it should be bad only for the blind to look at a beautiful woman. Mahadev uses his eyes to bow before Parbatī. Rāos and Rājās gamble their heads for beautiful women. The 'lovers' are allowed to look at everything. Therefore, see the entire creation; look at the whole universe. The *jogi* of Wāris Shāh wanders in all (*chār*, literally four) directions to look at God's creation.

V

It may be a mere coincidence, but Wāris Shāh does look at things rather closely. He can see the leaves sprouting in many colours after the rains. Dry gardens suddenly come into colourful life. He can see the evanescent hues of the clouds gathering and breaking up. He can see the migratory birds in flight, and hear the morning chirping of little birds nearer home. He can see the sudden swift attack of the birds of prey. He is familiar with the habits of domestic animals. He can observe agricultural tools on the floor, the walls and the ceiling in peasant homes. He can see in minute detail the peasant at work in the field, and his wife at work in the home.

The empirical observation of Wāris Shāh comes out clearly in his images: the bear wrestling with the master using his stick from behind; the *Suthras* with black marks on their foreheads beating sticks; the dogs licking empty vessels beside the woman scratching her belly while churning milk; the mattress being jerked to throw out the dust absorbed; the dagger being sharpened on the sharpening wheel; the beautiful maiden

swaying to and fro on the back of the camel; the *jogi* on the road loaded with *chipi*, *khapri*, *phauri kunda*, *danda*, *bhang* and *post* on his back; the buffalo breaking loose from the rope tied to its legs for milking to run away from the frightful *jogi*; the *gatar* picking grains from the heap; the lizard moving its head up and down; the goat thrown on the ground to be slaughtered on the *Id*; the pearl bead moving down the silken thread; the *dum* running away after getting cash at the time of marriage; the obstinate donkey being beaten; the potter rounding up his donkey; the washerman bringing down *khes* with a thud on the washing-board; the widow sitting dazed on the funeral pyre.

VI

Wāris Shāh's observation is not confined to secular matters. We can see the *sanyāsīs* and *bairāgis* with hands on the hilts of their swords ready to fight. We can hear the followers of Sayyid Jalāl chanting loudly. We can see the hanging locks of the *madāris*. We can observe the *Mundiās*, the *Godaris* and the *Jangams*. Nearly all the contemporary religious groups and sects of the Punjab find mention in the *Hir-Wāris*: the Rāmānandī Bairāgis, the Udāsīs, the worshippers of Krishna, the followers of Kabir, the Qādirīs, the followers of Namdev, the Naqshbandīs, the Shī'as, for instance. There is a close connection between some occupations and popular religion: the *chamārs* following the cult of Tīhrā, the tailors believing in Namdev, the boatmen worshipping Khwāja Khizr, the weavers believing in Hazrat Shīs and the potters in Hājī Gilgo, the *telis* following Hassu Telī, for instance.

To receive the maximum attention from amongst the non-Muslim systems of religious belief and practice is that of the *jogis*. Their outward appearance is unmistakable. They smear the body with ash, wear locks over their head and large rings in their ears. They carry with them *singī* or *nād*. Wāris Shāh is familiar with many of their practices: concentration on Shiva with closed eyes, suspension of the breath, celibacy, visiting places of pilgrimage, going to the Siddh *Mela* in the western Punjab, begging food from door to door, for example. Wāris Shāh is familiar with their beliefs too; their idea of *sunya* and

anhad, their ideal of detachment, their faith in miracles, their idea of obedience to the Guru, and their belief in nine Nāths, for example.

It is highly significant that Wāris Shāh tends to assimilate the *jogis* with the *sūfis*. Like the path of the *sūfis*, *jog* is a very difficult path. Like the *sūfi*, it is necessary for the *jogi* to practise *sabr*, *zikr* and *'ibādat*. The *jogi*, like the *sūfi*, should remember Allah all the time. The *jogi* has to cleanse his heart, like the *sūfi*. The *jogis* of Wāris Shāh also believe that God is within man. The counterpart of the *hamah-ū-ast* of the *sūfis* is the *sarab-mai Bhagvān* of the *jogis*. The *jogi* is *Allāh-wālā*. The term *faqqar* is applicable to both the *jogi* and the *sūfi*. Naturally, Wāris Shāh can bracket the *siddha* and the *wali*.

Wāris Shāh kept his ears open to listen to myths and legends current among the people of the Punjab. Many a legendary, mythical and historical figure finds mention in the *Hir-Wāris*. From Persian literature the great poets Sa'di and Hāfi are mentioned; from Greek history Plato, Aristotle and Alexander. There are references to Adam, Zakariya, Khalil, Yunas, Ismā'il, and Mūsā from amongst the prophets. There are others mediated through Islamic lore: Sulaimān, Naushirwān, Shaddād, Yūsaf, Farhād, Imām Husain and Hasan. From the Punjabi tradition, there are references to Rājā Rasālū, Rājā Bhoj, Rāwan, Kumbhkrna, Ram Chander, Sita, Lachhman, Bālī, the Kairons, the Pāndvas, Bhīm, Dropadī and Bhishma. There are references also to Indra, Kans, Hiranyakshipu, Durgā, Mārīch, Rund-Mund, and the like. The single-minded devotion and complete dedication of Dhanna is mentioned. Wāris Shāh reveals almost equal familiarity with the Hindu and Muslim components of tradition in the Punjab. It is rather interesting that figures from both the traditions are often included in the same stanza: the Pāndvas and Imām Husain, Gopi Chand and Far'aun, Yūsaf and Sohni-Mahtwāl, for instance. This juxtaposition is extended to the social institution of marriage when *lāwān*, *phere*, *aqd* and *nikāh* are bracketed together. For Wāris 'the people' include both the Hindu and the Muslim components of the Punjabis.

VII

Ideas, idioms, proverbs and values drawn from the people find expression in the work of Wāris. In his philosophic comment Wāris can refer to the everlasting life of those who earn good name through praiseworthy acts. The popular idea that every person eats and drinks what is preordained finds expression in the statement that those whose *chog* is not finished do not die even if the heavens fall down. Habits once formed are impossible to discard. Like the time past, good fortune cannot be recalled. The sound of the drums beaten far off is more fascinating. Occasionally, theology is combined with popular ideas. For instance, when God is gracious He orders the stars of good fortune to exert their influence. Occasionally we can see a philosophical idea being given a popular form. For instance, none can change the *qudrat*. Though the term refers strictly to the personal power of Allah, the verse in question gives the impression of immutable and impersonal forces at work.

Generally shared values are also expressed by Wāris. Fidelity to salt is a common value. In doing good there should be no delay. *Yāri* does not behove a married woman and nose ring the widow. Once you hold one's hand for support, do not leave it. The modest maiden keeps her eyes on the ground, and her tongue tied. The weak and the helpless can only invoke the name of God to get something from the rich. Manliness consists in not betraying a secret. Not to marry the girl to whom a man is betrothed, or to tolerate someone else marrying her, is dishonourable. Occasionally, there is social comment: the thief enters the mosque in old age, and the loose woman is keen on pilgrimage. A woman fond of the good things of life in the neighbourhood of dishonourable men is a source of trouble for her husband.

Wāris Shāh reveals his familiarity with the people at large in his use of proverbs. Rānjhā tells his sister-in-law that she leads him to the roof and takes away the ladder. The Kherās quarrel with the barber after having asked him to shear their beards. Ashes once gone to the Ganges do not come back. It is the height of impertinence to come for the fire and to appropriate the house. It is the height of dissimulation to conceal thievery

by clever talk. One way of hunting with the hound and running with the hare is to hand over things to the bandit and to beat the drum for mustering support after his departure. It is the surest sign of short-sightedness to expect the donkey to guard the heap of barley, or to ask a hungry man to guard rice boiled in sweetened milk. It is ludicrous to send out a widower with the proposal of a betrothal. The cattle do not die because the crows wish them to. If you do not know the rate of *hing*, do not ask for the rate of *kastūrī*. Such proverbs are skilfully woven into verses to bring home the point.

VIII

There is plenty of music and dance in the world of Wāris, and there is some drama. The *dhādīs* sing heroic deeds, and many a story of love is sung by *dūms* and others; the tales of Sassi and Punnun, Shrin and Farhād, Sohni and Mahiwāl, and, of course, Hir and Rānjhā. There are several occasions for folk songs, connected especially with marriage. Wāris Shāh specifically refers to *ghori* and *vail*, and to a particular song sung on the arrival of the bride. Rānjhā as *jogī* is so enamoured of music that he can tell Saida, posing ignorance of the situation, to let his wife die so that the colourful music of formal lamentation (*vien*) could be heard.

Rānjhā himself is presented as the master of music. His flute is simply enchanting. There are several other musical instruments which are heard by the people. There are professional dancers to entertain people, especially at the time of marriage. But more important are the folk dances and games, some of them accompanied by music: *giddhā*, *sammi*, *luddi*, *jhummar*, *kikli*, *pabbi*, *chicho-chich kandholiān*, and *addi tuppā*. Then there are professional *naqliās* and *behrūpiās* presenting short skits or showing their skill in impersonation for entertainment. Two of such impersonations are specifically mentioned: the *sāngs* of the *chūhrī* and the *bhil*. Much of the folk literature is oral, but some of the themes are being reduced to writing by creative writers. In communication, too, formal letters sent through messengers play some part. The persons who want to send such letters are more than those who can write them, or read them. In markets and *bāzārs* public announcements are

made. Code messages are conveyed through the beats of the drum, and news and rumours are carried far and wide by wayfarers and travellers.

The world of Wāris is as much a world of magic and charms as of dance and music. All the supranatural beings are not in the heavens; some of them invisibly inhabit the earth; the *jinn* as mediated by Islamic culture, and the *bhūt* and the *diēn* with their cultural roots deep in the soil of the Punjab. They take possession of human beings, and something has to be done about it. Not strong or bold enough to wreak vengeance openly, some resort to *jādū* and *tonā* to harm their enemies. A pinch of dust duly charmed and thrown over a person can result in his madness. Conversely, one despaired of response in love can resort to charmed herbs and magical instrumentalities to influence, or possess, the object of his love. There are professional people to counter the effect of charm and magic, and to whisk away the evil spirits. The *mullā* can use written verses from the *Qur'ān* as an antidote. The *jogī* can use counter-charms. The *vaīd* can try his recipes. But the most professional person to deal with the phenomena is the *māndārī*. On the whole, several devices are used: *ta'wiz*, *phūk*, *mantar*, *jhūrā*, and the like. In a single passage Rānjhā as *jogī* impresses upon Sehti, Hīr's sister-in-law, that he can do almost everything by way of charms and counter-charms.

The *jogīs* in general are associated not only with miracles, magic and charms but also with the use of intoxicants: *bhāng*, opium, *post* and tobacco. Occasionally, they can use *dhatūrā* and *akk*. Addiction is called *'aml*, literally action. The *saqqar* in general does not remain much behind in the use of intoxicants. What is left for the layman is alcohol which is significantly called *darū*, or medicine. The general attitude of the people towards the use of intoxicants is one of indulgence, if not appreciation. Only Hīr feels anxious about Jogi-Rānjhā using *akk* and *dhatūrā* which might undermine his health. Even in this she appears to be an exception. In any case, *akk* and *dhatūrā* are supposed to be poisons rather than intoxicants.

IX

The world of Wāris is not without women. But they are con-

fined to the village and the home. In Takht Hazārā we meet the wives of Rānjhā's brothers. They are presented as the source of discord between the brothers, and the accusation is suggestive of their influence over their husbands. The wives of the bigamous boatman, Luddan, feel so attracted to Rānjhā that the boatman feels virtually black-mailed to ferry him across the river. Hir is beautiful and young and enjoys complete freedom in the village as the daughter of its *chaudhari*. Rānjhā is employed as a cattle-herd in the interest of the 'cousinhood' on her recommendation. She is not expected to see him alone, much less to fall in love with him. Her love becomes a source of shame not only for her family but also for the whole 'cousinhood'. She persists in marrying Rānjhā to which the ultimate objection comes from the 'cousinhood'. Traditionally, there have been matrimonial ties between the Sials and the Kherās but never between the Sials and the Rānjhās. Hir could persuade the members of her family, and even the *qāzi*, but not the 'cousinhood'. However, she is expected to recognize the authority of her parents, her brothers and the *qāzi* as the representative of formal law.

Marriage as a social institution is not the concern of the individuals to be wedded. Hir accepts the norm against her will and goes to Rangpur, the village of her Kherā in-laws. Normally she would have returned to her parents from time to time but she is not allowed by the Kherās to leave Rangpur. She is expected to work in the home of her in-laws, and to have sexual intercourse with her husband. But she does neither. She is an exception. Her sister-in-law, Shti, is a strong willed, resourceful young woman who is not prepared to stand any nonsense. She, too, has fallen in love with an outsider who is not even a Jat; he is a Baloch. She succeeds in eloping with him, but she is lost for ever to her parents, the 'cousinhood' and the *des*. She, too, is an exception. Hir's mother is indulgent towards her; but she is helpless as her guardian and adviser. Hir's mother-in-law is critical of her; but she, too, is equally helpless.

On the whole, the woman's position in the world of Wāris remains subordinate to that of the man. As a source of possible dishonour and actual expense in the future, the female child on its birth runs the risk of being killed. As a young

person she has to observe the social norms and to respect the authority of her parents and her brothers. As a wife she has to subordinate herself to her husband. As a mother, eventually, she has to depend upon her sons. Like males, some females are sold in slavery. Whereas some men have more than one wife, every woman is expected to remain faithful to her only husband, in his lifetime and after his death. The widows of Wāris Shāh do not marry again. A few of them burn themselves on the funeral pyre of the deceased husband.

Nevertheless, the woman is generally believed to be faithless. The young woman is suspected of falling an easy prey to temptation. In the verbal battle of the sexes in the *Hir-Wāris*, men are said to be false and women to be truthful; but only once. Men are said to possess all the good qualities, and women all the bad. In the entire history of mankind, they have been known for their deception, tricks and guile. The subordination of woman to man is indicated by Wāris when he compares the woman without the man with cultivable land without water. The comparison is significant. The woman is the source of procreation. Also, she is the ornament of the home, and the centre of man's emotional life.

X

Wāris Shāh lived and wrote in a period of political turmoil and change. But the world he conjures up depicts continuum much more than change. We have seen that he likes neither the political change nor its social implications. Is it possible that he is seeking compensation and refuge in things, which take centuries to evolve and last longer? There is no doubt that Wāris Shāh depicts the socio-cultural life of the Punjab, falling within the range of his experience and observation, as it had evolved in the centuries past. In terms of space, he does not confine himself to the setting of his narrative, and he goes much beyond the 18th century in time. He does this largely by the transference and compression of his experience, observation and knowledge.

Only in this context can we understand and appreciate the tendency of Wāris to catalogue in order to be comprehensive.

In the imaginary *maktab* attached to the imaginary masjid in which Rānjhā stays for the night and has an altercation with the *mullā*, the instruction imparted appears to cover all that was being done in the *maktab*s and *madrasas* of the Punjab, past and present. Rānjhā has complete mastery over 30 classical *rāgas*, besides many forms of popular music. Rānjhā is adorned with ornaments and dresses which would not be available probably in any single village. We have already seen that although Wāris feels drawn primarily to the *sūfis* and the *jogis* in the field of religion, he enumerates dozens of religious groups and sects. Similarly, though he is concerned mainly with a few castes, he enumerates dozens of occupations and castes. The dowry of Hīr contains every possible item which could be given in dowry. The fire-workers show their skill in more than a dozen items, which may be all that was known in the field of pyrotechnic. About a score of the varieties of rice are cooked. The items of sweets and other eatables touch nearly two scores. Over twenty kinds of ornament are prepared for Hīr. When Hīr is believed to have been bitten by a snake, the *māndārt*, the *faqir*, the *vaid* and the *bhat* do everything that their professions enable them to do, and Jogī-Rānjhā claims to know the antidote for the bite of about 30 kinds of snake. He is also familiar with over 30 diseases. He claims to be familiar with all the works of Indian, Perso-Arabic and Greek medicine.

XI

Hīr-Wāris has many dimensions. We have touched upon only some. I am sure that I have not fully grasped this classic. It is clear, however, that Wāris Shāh was acutely conscious of the political change that was coming about in the Punjab during his lifetime. It is equally clear that he liked neither the change nor its social implications. May it be suggested that his sensitivity is at the root of his creative response?

At one level, Wāris Shāh may be seen as seeking refuge in Sūfī Islam with its ideal of *laqā* or *didār* as the supreme purpose of human life. More essential, however, is his treatment of *'ishq-i-majāzī* on the analogy of *'ishq-i-haqīqī* which trans-

forms the quality of his literary creativity. His work becomes an earthly alternative to the heavenly city of peace as a source of refuge and reassurance, evoking in the process the continuum and the normative through his imaginative identification with the Punjab and its people.

To me personally, the *Hir-Wāris* would not have made much sense if I had not known the history of the Punjab from sources other than creative literature. Also, Wāris Shāh does not tell us everything. But he tells us more than what we can find in all the formal works of history put together. The products of creative imagination, seen in their proper historical context, add altogether a new dimension to our understanding of social transformation.

An Urdu Poet's Response to the Decline of Values in the 18th Century

SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI

DOES POETRY HAVE a social purpose? Should it have a social purpose? Should it, in order to be good and valuable, work side by side with the forces of social change? Should the poet be always concerned with improving the world morally and socially, and also perhaps politically? Should poetry aid and abet what Iqbal called "forces of life"?¹ And does poetry lapse from its high station unless it reacts to, and directly involves itself in the social and political reality in such a way as to take sides, to judge, or to plead? Does a poetry that does not seem to be aiding and abetting the "forces of life" necessarily aid and abet the forces of death, or at least of stagnation? We have become familiar with these and similar questions due to the advent of Western ideas in our country during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For our own poetics, and indeed nearly all Eastern poetics, has never addressed itself to these questions, has in fact never considered them relevant or worth-while so far as the study of poetry is concerned. The Indian mind saw all art as the embodiment of one reality; and that reality was ultimately self-supporting so long as the work of art had artistic integrity.

There is a story² about a king who went to a sage to learn sculpture. The sage told him that he could not learn sculpture unless he knew painting. When the king asked to be taught painting, the sage replied that he could not learn painting unless he knew dancing; and knowledge of instrumental music

was essential in order to know dancing; again, knowledge of vocal music was essential to instrumental music. Thus all art was really one: it was an exercise in balance and harmony. It had a function, but no purpose. The theory of the *rasas* was essentially a statement of functions. Each *rasa* was seen as the essence of a basic mood, and it evoked that mood in the spectator or reader when it was represented or evoked in poetry. 'The poet's way' (*kavi vyapara*) was not a set of rules telling the poet how to react when faced with a certain social situation; it was the unique way the poet saw and described things.

Among the Arabo-Iranians, poetry was seen to be a matter of words, and sometimes even beyond words, because poetry might try to create meanings which words could not effectively convey. Ibne Khaldun's famous dictum that poetry is made of words is an echo of the *Qabus Name* of the Iranian king Amir Unsurul Ma'ali (died 1098) who said³ that poetry should not be without an artifice and arrangement of words, and that whatever can be said in prose should not be said in poetry. A century later, Nizami Aruzi stated⁴ even more clearly that poetry is an artifact, an artifact through which the poet can present small meanings as large, and large meanings as small. Much before these two Iranians and the Spaniard Arab Ibne Khaldun, Ibne Qutaibah, the first major theoretician in Arabic literature, wrote in the 9th century that all poetry should be judged by aesthetic canons.

Both the unity and continuity of the tradition, that poetry is a matter of senses and of the mind and is not a sociological exercise but an exercise in words, can be seen in a speech that occurs in a *dastan* written by a comparatively obscure author in Lucknow in 1900. The *dastan*, as is well known, is perhaps the most traditional of all prose narrative forms in Indo-Iranian literature, and its authors always worked within the traditional assumptions about the nature of literature. Qubad, the king in the *dastan*, has heard a poem being recited, and has premonitions of death. His grandfather and protector, Hamza, tries to take his mind away from such morbid thoughts. The author, Ahmad Husain Qamar, has Hamza speak to Qubad thus: 'Light of my eyes, the pronouncements of poets have no credibility. It is futile to be affected by their themes. The poet is concerned with verbal niceties and conceits; he will put into

verse whatever theme occurs to him, even if he runs the risk of becoming irreligious. The reader should look to the niceties and conceits, and not believe the content to be true.⁵ There is nothing original in these formulations, but that is exactly what I want to emphasize.

The assumptions that underlie these words have always been the basis of the theory of poetry in the East. These are: poets make fictions, not objective realities; poetry is a verbal artifact, but it is also the expression of the poet's own perceptions, and these perceptions may be opposed, or unacceptable, to established beliefs; poetry should be judged in terms of its own beauties. This is how the 10th century theoretician Nayaka distinguished poetry from law and scripture on the one hand, and stories on the other. In stories, primacy was to the substance; in law and scripture, it was to the letter (of the law). In poetry, primacy was to the way a thing was said or expressed.⁶

The Chinese did have a concept of poetry being related to occasions. They have it even now to a certain extent. But 'being related to occasions' was a convention, not a function of poetry. Poems could be occasional, in the sense that they were supposed to describe the poet's emotions at parting, meeting with his friends, going to battle, thanking someone for hospitality, and so on. Poems could also be historical or autobiographical. The main point was that just as in classical Tamil poetry the speaker, and the situation which occasions the poem, are identified indirectly through conventions, the Chinese poem was expected to be about a certain moment in time or location in space. The poet was expected to be himself at all times. The great aim was to achieve, and express in the total poetry, the balance between the forces of the Universe, symbolized by Earth/Sky or, to use the standard words, Yin and Yang. The poet was not seen as socially irresponsible or irresponsible, any more than he was seen as decidedly responsible and responsive. Such considerations were of no interest.

It is to Plato that we owe the origin of the questions which I put at the beginning of this paper. This is not surprising. For nearly all the bad things, and many of the good things in Western thought can be traced back to Plato. From his theory of the Essences, he derived the theory of imitation, placing the poet on the same level as an artisan. This theory cast such a

spell on literary theorists that M.H. Abrams sees all European literary theory after Plato up to the eighteenth century as a struggle to explain poetry in terms of the Platonic metaphor of the mind as reflector of Essences.⁷ In this struggle, *Mimesis* or imitation was sought to be explained as 'reflection', 'representation', 'feigning', 'copy', or 'image'. (Sir Philip Sidney also uses 'counterfeiting' and 'figuring forth' to explain what he thought was Aristotle's meaning of *Mimesis*.⁸) But all efforts, at any rate up to the 19th century, to get rid of the albatross of imitation only resulted in greater entanglement. The systematic importance given to the term 'imitation', or its interpretations, may have differed from age to age, or even critic to critic, but whenever a theorist got down to the fundamentals, imitation appeared, even if in one of its many disguises like 'reflection' and 'image'.

Though his *Poetics* is supposed to be an answer to Plato, Aristotle's failure to effectively refute the theory of imitation, rather his confirmation of its fundamentals, only helped to establish the fact that Plato was sceptical about the social and intellectual value of poetry. This resulted in literary theory always being on the defensive; it could not refute the theory of *Mimesis*, and yet it had to find justifications for poetry. Replies had to be found to Plato's formulations that philosophy, not poetry, is directed to ultimate truth. Philosophy makes its appeal to Reason, poetry to mere emotions. Poetry 'feeds and waters the passions'⁹ while philosophy starves them. Poetry 'impairs the reason' and its power to harm 'even the good (and there are very few who are not harmed) is surely an awful thing.' All this is because the poet is not made by nature, nor is his art intended 'to please or affect the rational principle in the soul.' His creations have 'an inferior degree of truth' and he is 'concerned with an inferior part of the soul.' So poetry, being an imitation of the inferior sort, and by definition being addressed to the inferior part of the soul, was to be banished from the State. It could be re-admitted if its defenders proved that she is not only 'pleasant, but also useful to States and human life'.

All Western defenders of poetry, from Aristotle onwards, set about to prove that poetry is not only 'pleasant, but also useful to States and human life'. Plato had provided the clue in a

passage in *Ion* by saying that 'not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine.' But this was the wrong sort of clue, because when the Renaissance rediscovered the Greeks, it tried to formulate rules about how the divine power worked. So far as 'usefulness' was concerned, poetry was seen to imitate Nature, or Man, or his Higher sensibilities or Reality. Auerbach explains that as far as Dante is concerned, 'Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth—among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing.'¹⁰ Another way out was to claim that poetry was involved in life, by being criticism of life, or being passionately concerned about it. This last, though generally true, is no special characteristic of poetry. Yet it has held great sway throughout the history of modern Western ideas on poetry. Even Auden, who angrily remarked that poetry was not something like a city which could be 'done' by a tourist, or a novel which could be condensed, fell prey to it. Commenting on a line of Hardy's, 'I never cared for life, life cared for me', Auden snorts: 'Never cared for life?—Well, *really*, Mr. Hardy!'¹¹ One should have thought that when the poet takes care of poetry, life takes care of itself. But Plato's ghost still frightens many of us with excommunication.

II

My point in writing this longish preface is to emphasize that it is not always proper to impose Western norms on classical Urdu poetry, or to interpret it in terms of Western canons. The complications that Western poetics created for itself were unknown to classical Urdu poetry whose character remained medieval until about the beginning of the twentieth century. Efforts to understand it outside its own poetics often resulted in serious miscomprehension, or woeful misjudgment. The progressive critics, for example, found Urdu poets sadly lacking in social awareness. They found them living in ivory towers or in unreal worlds. They were angry at them for not rebelling against the oppressive society and politics of their times. They derided them for being unaware of change, for being willing

victims to exploitation, or for not caring about what was going on around them. Later on, when the fashions changed somewhat, or when they found that their own poetry could not exist in isolation from their own tradition, and needed both justification and strength from classical roots, they began to look for (and of course find) protest and social comment and criticism and philosophical dimensions of a social conscience even in the *sufistic* or lyrical utterances of those very poets whom they had earlier taken great pains to reject with contempt. Writing in the last years of the nineteenth century, Hali condemned Urdu poets for their unrealism, their immorality, their lack of interest in moral reform, and despairingly said that the unholy pile of poetry stank worse than a public latrine, and even the angels trembled to see it. Hali found many good things to say about Urdu poetry, and he did say them. But he was unhesitating in condemning it as 'useless'. For according to the lessons of the protestant ethic that he had learnt, the fruit of labour was always sweet, and there was no other fruit, and Urdu poetry did not seem to exhort people to labour and action.

It is obvious that both Hali and the progressives missed the point. In fact, the progressives missed it twice: once in condemning Urdu poetry as socially irresponsible and unrealistic, and again in imagining that even though not directly activist, Urdu poetry did have a social and philosophical conscience. For these issues were never debated in our poetics. Not that they did not exist, but they were considered irrelevant. The poet was always at liberty to say what he wanted to say. There were conventions of form and language, there were also traditions of themes and attitudes. But since the poet never felt himself to be on trial, as poetry was in Plato's Republic, he was never on the defensive, and did not see any need to assert his 'usefulness' in pragmatic terms. The poet was concerned with writing about private, public, or conventional emotions and experiences with maximum originality and finesse, subject to the constraints placed on him by the poetics which determined the nature of poetry for him. In Ahmad Husain Qamar's words, he wrote on whatever themes took his fancy, and did not care if he ran the risk of being called irreligious. He was happy so long as he did not violate the canons of his poetics.

He spoke of life and pain and sorrow and the mystical dimensions of the human experience. He was angry or sad or disdainful or artificially tragic or genuinely stricken as his mood or moment dictated. He avoided overt comment, but he was never silent. As Mir said, 'silence causes death.'

You are poets, don't keep silent; silence now causes death.
Talk, say some poetry, tell us some poems.¹²

So this was the creative status of the classical Urdu poet. Even in the *ghazal*, which was mainly a lyrical utterance, the poet could be satirical, or whimsical, or humorous. But if he wanted to make more overt comment on life or letters in his day, if he wanted to express his disgust or disdain or bitterness more directly, he had other genres open to him. One such genre was the *Shahr Ashob*. It is true that the classical Urdu poet was not a social activist; nor did he have a political consciousness; he did not need these things. But he did observe life around him, and whenever he wanted to, he told us about what he saw. The *Shahr Ashob* was a genre tailor-made for telling people what the poet saw in contemporary life. Like all classical genres, it had its conventions. One convention was that all professions should be listed, and the impoverished or demoralized state of the members of each profession should be depicted with humour, or satire, or bitterness, or disgust, or in a combination of all these attitudes. No philosophical or political lessons needed to be drawn from such poems; they were what they appeared to be: a personal expression of dissatisfaction or regret. There was no call to action, because the poet's attitude was in a sense individualistic. He was not expected to exhort people to anything, except maybe to the Good Life, and that too was largely a matter of choice.

Although convention played a large role, the superior poet nearly always managed to say or suggest things in the *Shahr Ashob* which were not strictly demanded by convention. In one such *Shahr Ashob*, the eighteenth century poet Jur'at voices his protest against the decline of values in his times. Rather than describe only professions and their sorry state, he also takes up classes and categories of people and shows the honourable dishonoured, the mean and the selfish gaining ascend-

ancy, the illiterate and uncultured posing as sophisticated gentlemen. Time is out of joint, the poem says. And Time has given the upper hand to the undeserving, while the truly deserving smart under insults and neglect and deprivation. The meaner professions—the pimp, the prostitute, the quack, the bird catcher—rule the roost; the cowardly have become bold and insolent, the disciple presumes to instruct his teacher, and the dwellers of stately mansions have become homeless. The poem expresses all this through a central metaphor of birds. The bulbul, the sweet singing dweller of the garden, is being opposed by a crowd of raucous, or ugly, or petty birds, each of them claiming to sing better than the bulbul. The metaphor of birds and their voices gives a double unity to the poem. It suggests a universal chaos of sound, and also provides a key symbol to stand for the superior poet (the author himself) and his adversaries, the newly arrived poetasters who have no culture or education, but have the confidence born of the consciousness that the times are opportune for unauthentic persons like them. Perhaps they do not even realize that they are unauthentic. Perhaps they believe that they are actually superior.

Thus the poem at one level depicts the degeneration of the quality of social life, by telling us about how uncharacteristically the different classes of people are behaving, or are being made to behave. This listing of different types of people or professions in a state of decay or unnatural pernicious growth, gives a paratactic continuity to the poem. The refrain, which is dextrously dovetailed to the last line of each stanza, strengthens the effect of parataxis. On another level, the metaphor of birds comes into play and makes the poem rather more closely knit than mere parataxis could allow. The chaos of sound becomes a symphonic cacophony. The superb originality of the central metaphor, and the vast reach of the poet's vocabulary in finding suitable bird names raise the poem to a level higher than a conventional *Shahr Ashob*. The bird metaphor also adds an extra dimension to the poem. Apart from being a protest at the general decline in values and quality of life, the poem also becomes a protest against the decline of literateness and literary excellence. The poem suggests no solutions; it does not need to. The villain is Time, and there is no defence against Time, except consciousness. And the poem does awaken

our consciousness, and gives us an insight into the loneliness of the bulbul, and also his courage. It also makes the reader a party to the crime, for it is the people who make Time what it is.

Much of the poem's force derives from the consistency with which the bird metaphor has been applied, and from the bird names themselves, many of which are untranslatable, and some untraceable. The word play also contributes a lot; unfortunately all of it is untranslatable. In force and anger and scorn, the poem reminds one of Pope, about whom Bonamy Dobrée said that emotions came to him with a sense of the outer world, a burning rage, an icy scorn more searing than fire. Pope would not have been ashamed of this poem.

III

The rather unexpected author of the poem is Yahya Man Jur'at popularly known as Shaikh Qalandar Baksh Jur'at. Kucha Rai Man, a street named after his grandfather, still exists in Delhi. The grandfather died in the Nadir Shahi massacre of 1739, but the family remained reasonably affluent for some time after this tragedy. Jur'at was born in Delhi in 1748; he was in Faizabad around 1775, and came to Lucknow about 1777 along with his patron Nawab Muhabbat Khan. He lost the use of his eyes in Lucknow when he was about 35 years old. Loss of patronage reduced his circumstances substantively, and he died in poverty in 1809. His reputation as poet has never declined, but he has always been regarded, somewhat unjustly, as a poet of immature mental powers, much given to lightly erotic or shallowly sentimental and unambitious verse. Comparison with his great contemporary Mir (1722-1810) has been inevitable. Inevitably, Jur'at has suffered in that comparison. But poems like the one we are studying now, reveal a toughness of mind which quite belie his popular image of a sort of permanent adolescent, much given to 'petting and necking', as Mir is reported to have said.¹³ It is true that his *ghazals* lack the complex dimensions of meaning which mark great poetry. But he was a not-inconsiderable poet. In this poem he shows himself to be a subtle craftsman too, again belying his

reputation for slipshodness.

The poem has twenty-three five-line stanzas; the first four lines of each stanza rhyme, and the fifth is the refrain which is repeated through the poem. Thirty-four birds, eleven animals, twenty-two professions and twenty-seven classes (or types) of people are mentioned. This totals up to 94. To mention such a large number of things in just 93 lines in accordance with a design and yet prevent the poem from becoming a litany of names is a feat of rare poetic organization and verbal intricacy. In terms of categories, the classes and professions break down into artists (including poets and painters), provincials, urban citizens engaged in the so-called lower professions, manual workers, and specialist professionals like soldiers, doctors, bird catchers, and so on.

This wide sweep creates the impression of a whole society gone bad, a society where values are hung upside down, where the noble has become base. This has come about not only because things and people and principles which were good have fallen on evil days. This is also because bad and base people and things have acquired power and prestige. Sophistication, gallantry, good breeding, literary excellence are at a discount. Boorishness, brazenness, opportunism are the order of the day. There is nothing directly about the moral and political decline of the ruling classes, a theme which finds a prominent place in the *Shahr Ashobs* of Sauda (1713-81).

Jur'at's immediate target in this poem was a minor contemporary Poet called Zahurullah Nava. Nava and Jur'at were on bad terms, perhaps due to professional reasons. It is not clear who fired the first salvo in the battle, but Jur'at and Nava seem to have been engaged in their bitter feud for several years. The poems of Nava have survived in obscure manuscripts.¹⁴ No one seems to know much about them. In fact, Nava's only claim to fame is the present poem of Jur'at. Other poems of Jur'at against Nava and some other enemies survive; some of them are in extremely bad taste and are also marred by a hard and brazen obscenity. It is only in the present poem that Jur'at's voice seems to cut across time and space and personal grievance and stands plain even after nearly two hundred years. One reason for this could be that Jur'at has not made the poem a statement of personal rancour directed against

Nava, but has expanded the resentment of his personal injury into a metaphor for the general, painful mess that he saw around him. Yet, other poets have done this, without achieving a similar effect, which must therefore be attributed to the originality of the idea (of using the bird metaphor) and the consistency and linguistic verve with which the metaphor has been applied.

The poem opens with a half-hearted suggestion that it is the sky (the traditional perpetrator of injustice in Urdu poetry) which has caused the time to go out of joint. It plunges into the main theme straightway. Alienation is suggested, but not followed up:

The cheapest carpet-weavers now pass by
 In orange shawls bestowed by the sunset sky,
 Trapped in the body, my spirit is grieved and stirred;
 Isn't it time for Doomsday, when the bald blackbird
 Tries to make her voice prevail
 In the presence of the nightingale?

The word for 'sunset sky' is *shafaq*, which also means 'munificence, kindness'; the first meaning of *shafaq* ('the redness of the sky at dusk') fits admirably with the golden colour of the 'orange shawls' (*dushala-e-naranji*). The translation misses the word play in the second line where *shatranji* ('a cheap carpet') meshes with *lail-o nahar* ('day and night'), because *shatranji* suggests *shatranj* ('chess', 'chess board') which uses a black and white squared board; the black and white of the chess board agrees with the black and white of day and night. The word for 'sky' is *charkh*, which also means 'a turning wheel' or 'circle'. This again fits with *lail-o nahar* ('day and night') which are caused by the turning of the earth. In the fourth line, the poet has *zahir-e hashr* ('the appearing of the Doomsday'). The first word of this compound (*zahir*) is also the first part of the name of Jur'at's victim, who was called Zahurullah Nava. In the refrain, the first word is *huzur*, which is a phonetic palindrome for *zahir*, and the last word is *navasanji* (translated as 'make her voice prevail'). *Nava* is also the last part of the victim's name, Zahurullah Nava.

In stanza seven, there are no people, only birds and animals. Yet the word play is equally, if not more, subtle:

Blue sky, we suffer under your frown!
The lynx thinks to stare the panther down.
The tail-docked fox holds the tiger at bay,
The shifty-eyed parrot, looking their way,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

The first line contains the worlds *be mihr* ('unloving') and *andher* ('injustice'). *Be mihr* also means 'without the sun', and *andher* suggests *andhera*, meaning 'darkness'. So the two words operate together at another level. In the second line, the word for 'lynx' is *siyah gosh* which literally means 'black-eared'. So the imagery of blackness spills over to the second line; 'blue sky' in the first line and *siyah gosh* ('black-eared') in the second line are linked to the grey-eyed parrot, who 'turns his eyes away' in the fourth line. The idiom used is *ankhen pherna* which means 'to be calculatedly indifferent; to be disloyal', and is used especially for the parrot in Urdu. *Chalan* in the fourth line has been translated as 'in the same way'. In Urdu *chalan* literally means 'walking', 'practice', and therefore agrees with the movements of the lynx and the tail-docked fox described in the second and the fourth lines.

The poem defies translation; the translation on which this study is based is about the best that one could do. The Urdu poem stands as a major pronouncement of both regret and protest. Yet, in spite of the chaos, the bulbul does not give up singing. The poem thus becomes the symbol of the poet at all times.

NOTE

The text of the poem is based on *Kulliyat-e Jur'at*, vol. II, pp. 253-56, edited by Iqtida Hasan, and published from Naples, 1971. The readings of many words have been corrected by me. The translation was made by myself and Dr. Frances Pritchett, of Columbia University. Dr. Pritchett also supplied a copy of the Naples text. The dates of Jur'at are

based on *Kulliyat-e Jur'at*, edited by Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Aligarh, 1971.

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IN THE PRESENCE OF THE NIGHTINGALE:
A *SHAHR ASHOB* BY JUR'AT

The cheapest carpet-weavers now pass by
In orange shawls bestowed by the sunset sky.
Trapped in the body, my spirit is grieved and stirred:
Isn't it time for Doomsday, when the bald blackbird
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale?

The sky gives kingship to those who begged for scraps,
Grass-diggers now have emerald shawls as wraps.
How vile that fishermen fish up ranks and banners!
How foul that the female owl, devoid of manners,
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

Country bumpkins now write Urdu verse—at least, they try.
Carpenters now are painters—as soon as their pictures dry.
In short, it seems injustice now goes from bad to worse:
The *shyāmā* with plucked feathers, born to be perverse,
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Those who sold their wares from trays are now considered great,
He who lived in an outhouse now has a fine estate.
The doorkeeper's mansion is known for its lofty size,
The dried-up jungle babbler—what a strange surprise!
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Cobblers wear gold-embroidered shoes, and stroll about in state,
Potters give up earthenware and dine from silver plate.
Shavers of pubic hair now make up poems to recite,
What a disaster—even the pied mynah, day and night,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

Sweepers strut with their noses in the air,
Ne'er-do-wells now have luxury to spare.
Flower-sellers have a hundred gardens to show,
Who likes the cawing, when the female crow
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

Blue sky, we suffer under your frown!
The lynx thinks to stare the panther down.
The tail-docked fox holds the tiger at bay,
The shifty-eyed parrot, looking their way,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

He goes to fly falcons, on arrogant feet,
Who used to sell weaver-bird chicks in the street.
The banyan-tree goblin goes jabbering around,
The water-hen, as poetry's value is drowned,
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

He who sold matches or reeds as his trade
Has made his own flag and commands a brigade.
This world's garden breezes strike my heart with chill,
When the naked-legged baby bird, cracking its shell,
Tries to make its voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Those who once trapped sparrows and sold them, to get by,
Those fowl-born men now fly high in the sky.
When the small kite dares to look the eagle in the eye,
Then the crow's wife, the *koyal*, with a raucous cry,
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Pimps and cockolds now flourish daggers and knives,
With the sharp weapons we gave them, they threaten our lives,
How strange it is, O ancient-ceilinged sky,
That an old decrepit shrike, wafer-like and dry,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

Now they seek to trap the Bird of Meaning as he goes,
They who once wore nose-rings, and lived by catching crows.
When the carpet-spreader, in arrogance, on a noble throne has sat,
Then from ruined Pithaura, the half-dead bat

Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

How can those outsiders dream of writing Urdu verse?
Their dialect is rustic and their idioms are a curse!
When such as these with the water of poetry have wet their tongue,
Then the wild partridge, seeing what God has done,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Now poetry is credited to their account, who look
At a beauty's slim white neck, and think of a ledger book!
Since even Panjabi phrases in Urdu now are heard,
Of course, feeling entitled, the foolish bank-mynah bird
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Those quacks who have only snake-oil to sell
Are 'Doctors' now, with a huge clientele,
When winds of folly blow in this garden like a gale,
Then, bobbing his head, the painted quail
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

The brave now fear for their honour and its fate,
While the eunuchs glare at them with boldness and hate.
When fruitfulness is claimed by the castor-oil tree,
The wretched fan-tailed warbler too, since he has eyes to see,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Resignation now is all that's left for the well-born,
He who posed as a gentle swan now speaks to them with scorn,
When the bee-eater can brave the tiger's claw.
No wonder the crooked nightjar, with his twisted jaw,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

Those who carried dirt to brick-kilns by the donkey-load
Now have Turk and Arab riders follow them on the road.
When a whore presumes to fight with a Rustam among men,
Naturally the small red waxbill copulates and then
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Mansion-dwellers now find their houses desolate,
Lime-sellers have mansions now, and live in pomp and state.
The low have swelled to twice their size, with all that has occurred,
The bud eats its heart out, as the white-eyed bird
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Through usury and extortion they have millions these days,
They who were given pennies for freeing captive bluejays.
Did you ever before know the parrot beaten by the parakeet?
No wonder the black-headed waxbill, emboldened by this feat,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale!

The puppeteer averts his gaze from his old friends and old place,
The shifty-eyed pimp now looks you in the face,
When the crane and the sauras think their voices sweet,
Then even the *naclava*, grinding his teeth,
Tries to make his voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

In business his prestige is particularly great
Who once was known as a bird-brain and a feather-weight.
When the grass-nester claims to be a Phoenix, then
What cause for surprise if the dried-up wren
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale?

The enemy has vainly thought to equal Jur'at's verse,
Crows who copy swans forget their own gait, and end up worse!
He should renounce all jealousy, go and give him the word—
The rose merely laughs when, with ruffled wings, the little sunbird
Tries to make her voice prevail
In the presence of the nightingale.

Literature and the Colonial Connection

SUDHIR CHANDRA

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE colonial connection reflect something of the essence of colonial consciousness. These attitudes, especially during the earlier stages of the colonial contact, often combine in varying proportion hostility towards and willing acceptance of the alien presence. So that Caliban and Ariel, as models of two opposing responses from the colonized,¹ are little more than a convenient heuristic device to isolate traits that remain inextricably enmeshed in real historical situations. This paper seeks to examine some of the complexities of colonial consciousness as revealed in Indian responses to British rule during the later nineteenth century.

A significant feature of these responses was the knotting together of an acute sense of subjection, and its resultant urge for freedom, with a sense of grateful loyalty to British rule. This fact has been noted by scholars. But its nature has remained elusive, blurring thereby the comprehension of social anastomosis in colonial India. In a large measure this is owing to the excessive preoccupation of historians with the formal objectives, programmes and pronouncements of organized associations and political leaders. In the process are left out those critical segments of social consciousness that relate to the unconscious, and to the unresolved contradictions of the conscious that imperceptibly affect political behaviour and influence social and moral choices. This paper attempts to delve into colonial consciousness through an analysis of contemporary literature. It will be readily agreed that literature

illumines the depths of social consciousness better than the conventional sources of the historian's raw material.

The staple for this paper is taken from Hindi *litterateurs*. As compared to some other Indian languages, Hindi entered its modern literary phase rather late. Yet in their basic structure, responses to the colonial impact in Hindi literature were similar to those elsewhere. Regional variations relating to such matters as the nature of early political consciousness² and exposure to English education and to new political ideas and institutions do not appear to have impeded the growth of an almost identical colonial consciousness in the country as a whole. This similarity in the thought and response structure of colonial India also cut across the apparent politico-ideological divisions between 'moderates' and 'extremists'. These divisions, at the level of political organization, might have manifested real differences of perception of the possible. But in terms of implicit assumptions both shared an uneasy ambivalence about the colonial connection. Rejection of the connection, no doubt, progressively got the better of its acceptance. But the dominance of rejection, at the level of consciousness as distinguished from political goals, was perhaps never total.

I

Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85) was the man who, with the help of a zealous group of literary followers, ushered in the modern period of Hindi literature. Without ceasing to write in the conventional erotic and devotional style that virtually negated the writer's freedom of form and theme, he broke away from the traditional sensibility and carved out the lines on which modern Hindi prose and poetry would develop. For him, as for those of his contemporaries who chose to transcend conventional literary constraints, the tussle between the old and the new was an existential reality that did not admit of a simple resolution. It was not possible for them to follow the prevailing ideal of literature and produce works on themes and in forms that had been venerably laid down. Literature for them was an instrument for carrying out their multifaceted obligations to their country and society.

Born in an ancient rich family of Banaras, Harishchandra was a devout Vaishnava. Proud of his cultural heritage, he was aware of the ills besetting his society. Not averse to change *per se*, he aimed at refurbishing his society without eroding the bedrock of tradition. This reverence for his culture and tradition as also the anxiety about the existing distortions operated within the context of alien rule. The problems that he and his society had to grapple with seemed so intractable that the present could acquire a meaning only with reference to the past and the future. The past alone held out a promise on behalf of the present; and its fulfilment lay a few generations away into the future.

All issues relating to social reconstruction got interlinked eventually with the key question of freedom and subjection. Consequently, barring his conventional erotic poetry, almost everything that Harishchandra wrote was imbued with a patriotic concern. Even his conventional devotional poetry, for example, carried a political message and pestered God with entreaties and admonitions about the state of his country. In this, as in many other things, he set an example for his followers who also began to use the devotional form of prayer for non-metaphysical, patriotic ends. Not content with appealing to the educated sections alone, Harishchandra appropriated folk forms, like *holi*, *kajari* and *lavani*, in order to convey his message to the masses.³

Another evidence of the intensity of the social commitment of Harishchandra and his contemporaries is provided by the fact that all of them were practising journalists and some of them courted risks and losses while conducting their own journals at a time when journalism—vernacular journalism at any rate—was still to become a profitable business. In fact, the distinction between journalism and imaginative literature had not yet crystallized and the convergence between the two was eminently suited to a situation in which manifestation of social concern was inhibited by the constraints of an alien dispensation. That as a journalist Harishchandra should have earned official censure was a measure of the threat he posed in a region that had barely begun to feel the tremors of nationalist political activity in the organization of which Bengal and Bombay were taking the lead.⁴ At the level of agitational

politics, too, Harishchandra involved himself with whatever public movements managed to reach the North Western Provinces. He was actively associated, for example, with the public meeting held in Banaras as part of the famous civil service agitation organized in 1877 by the Indian Association of Calcutta.⁵

What were the views of this politically conscious pioneer of modern Hindi literature with regard to British rule and the question of freedom and subjection? By way of an explanatory preface may be cited three assessments of his views to show the selective way in which, in different historical circumstances, his ideas have been analysed. In a long biographical note written in 1904, a year before the partition of Bengal spurred the emergence of extremism, Radhakrishna Das (1865-1907)—a first cousin of Harishchandra and a *litterateur* in his own right—was at pains to prove that Harishchandra was loyally disposed towards British rule. This exercise he considered essential in view of a controversy that had somewhat clouded Harishchandra when he was alive. The controversy related to Harishchandra's loyalty. Radhakrishna Das considered it his duty to posthumously clear Harishchandra of any suspicions of disloyalty. The biographer squared this loyalty with patriotism by explaining that for Harishchandra conveying the woes of the people to the ruler was in keeping with the demands of loyalty.⁶ The second assessment is that of Braj Ratna Das, a descendant of Harishchandra, who argued in the mid-1930s that Bharatendu was loyal because in the contemporary circumstances loyalty was an essential component of patriotism.⁷ Finally, in the first decade of Indian independence, Ramvilas Sharma, an eminent Marxist literary critic, described Harishchandra's patriotism as the full moon, and extended the metaphor to peremptorily dismiss his 'loyalist deviation' as mere spots on the moon.⁸

These assessments are obviously affected by an extraneously influenced desire to see as crucial and dominant one of the two aspects of Harishchandra's response to British rule. It may, however, be more fruitful to avoid an either/or approach and focus on the complex and interactive nature of Harishchandra's attitudes towards the Raj.

Harishchandra was less than twelve years old when he wrote

his maiden poem. It is striking that this poem, written in the conventional mode and reflecting little literary sensibility, was composed on the death of Prince Albert (14 December 1861), the husband of Queen Victoria.⁹ At nineteen he wrote another loyal poem, again in the conventional hyperbolic mould.¹⁰ This was occasioned by the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to India. On the eve of the Duke's visit to Banaras, Harishchandra even convened a meeting of the notables and poets of the city. The following excerpt from his preface to *Sumananjali*, the collection of poems presented on this occasion, conveys something of his attitude towards the British connection:¹¹

With the co-operation of some of my esteemed friends, I convened a meeting at my house on the 20th January and invited many respectable and learned Pundits and Gentlemen to attend it. The meeting was formally opened by me by reading the biography of the Royal Prince in Hindi, and in conclusion requesting the gentlemen present on the occasion to adopt suitable measures for the address. The Pundits of the city expressed their great satisfaction, and read individually some Shlokas [verses] Sanskrit (sic) expressing their heartfelt joy on the advent of the Royal Prince to this city. The verses are entered systematically into this book. The meeting then broke up. The gentlemen present on the occasion evinced great joy and loyalty to the Royal Prince for which this small book containing the expression of their sincere loyalty, is most respectfully dedicated to his Gracious feet.

It is significant that this preface was originally written not in Hindi—which would have lent a naturalness to the kind of idiom used in it—but in English which was hardly suited to expressions like 'most respectfully dedicated to his Gracious feet.'

In 1871, when the Prince of Wales was taken seriously ill, Harishchandra wrote a poem to pray for his speedy recovery.¹² Three years later he wrote a poem of twenty couplets on the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh with Princess Mary of Russia.¹³ In this poem Harishchandra made a very slight departure from pure panegyrics of the earlier loyal poems, suggesting feebly that Indians might be rewarded by

the Queen if they managed to salute her unitedly. The couplet carrying this suggestion was so worded as to make it difficult to interpret it as more than an indirect exhortation to Indians to get united. But there was not even the hint of any criticism of British rule.

Harishchandra was twenty-four when his poetry celebrated the royal wedding; in the remaining eleven years of his life, too, loyal poems flowed from his pen. But they were not mere panegyrics. They were rather used as occasions to voice Indian grievances. The first in this series was a poem written to welcome the Prince of Wales to India (1875). Conventional in form, like the earlier loyal poems, it was more directly indicative of India's plight. The country was described as a wreck and its progeny as emaciated and destitute.¹⁴

In yet another poem written on the same occasion, Harishchandra provided a more forthright, albeit guarded and couched in loyal panegyrics, description of India. This poem was inspired by and modelled after one by Hemchandra Banerji (1838-1904), a leading poet of Bengal. In it, Harishchandra asks the princes and peoples of the country to welcome the Prince, and invokes 'Mother India'—'Bharat-Janani'—to arise, take the Prince in her lap, and bless him. 'Mother India' is taken by surprise. She cannot understand why the Prince has come to India, a land plunged in darkness. Referring at some length to her glories of yore, she points to the revival of her old friends, Greece and Rome. She contrasts this revival with her own grovelling condition and laments that she continues to be the mother of slaves, forever nursing the agony of subjugation; the British should forget their mighty position and feel affection for the people of India, she suggests, and asks the Prince to assure his mother, the Queen, of the steadfast loyalty of Indians whose sufferings she should remove. With this plea and tears in her eyes, Mother India blesses the Prince and disappears.¹⁵

Two years later, in the preface to a long loyal poem, Harishchandra observed that Indians had an intrinsically loyal temperament.¹⁶ The critical tone of his loyal poems, however, sharpened progressively. On the outbreak of the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878), he exhorted Indians to side loyally and bravely with their rulers. Gleeefully he challenged those 'fools'

who had considered the Hindus¹⁷ 'disloyal'—the English word is used in the Hindi poem—to witness the loyalty of the people. But even this hortatory composition soon became a dirge on the decline of a people who had once been famous for their valour.¹⁸ By the time the Afghan war ended and Harishchandra wrote to celebrate the termination, the dirge had become a direct indictment of British rule. This poem begins with the expression of surprise that there should be such rejoicing. What this rejoicing? Have the taxes been repealed and the land revenue abolished? Has the entry of Indians into the civil service been facilitated? Have the restrictions on newspapers and dramatic performances been lifted? The war has brought, says the poet, glory to the English and given a new fillip to their trade; but for Indians it has brought nothing but sorrow. This remarkably effective poem ends on a feebly optimistic note: having brought the futile war to an end, the Liberals, it hopes, would no longer burden Indians with unnecessary taxation.¹⁹

Similarly, when Harishchandra wrote on the occasion of the British conquest of Egypt (1882)—the poem was read at a public meeting attended by the district collector—he drew a vivid contrast between the past and present conditions of India.²⁰ But the contrast was drawn not so much to bemoan the present plight as to express joy at the revenge, howsoever small, of the past. For, to him it was a belated nemesis that Indian soldiers should have contributed to the British success over Muslim Egypt; India had for centuries been trampled upon by the *yavanas* (meaning in this context the Muslims), but now Indian soldiers had 'once again brightened the face of Bharat-Janani—with iron pens they had engraved the Aryan might on the *yavana* heart.'²¹

The expression of loyalty was not confined to poems occasioned by specific events. Harishchandra's work in general, like his later loyal poems, combined expressions of loyalty with increasing discontent and awareness of subjection. For example, two of his patriotically political plays, *Bharat-Janani* (1877) and *Bharat Durdasha* (1880), dwelt on both the destructive consequences and the regenerative possibilities of British rule in India. Despite their elegiac tone and pessimistic thrust, they reiterate and lend credence to the contemporary belief

that but for British mediation the ruin of India would have gone on uninterrupted.²²

This tendency was so strong as to make light of even considerations of anachronism. Thus, in 1878, in his Hindi adaptation of Vishakh Dutt's *Mudrarakshas* (a Sanskrit play dealing with an episode pertaining to Chandragupta's accession to power during the fourth century B.C.), Harishchandra could with perfect equanimity introduce, between two Acts, a song wishing a long life to Queen Victoria.²³ This small song encapsulated his attitude towards British rule. It commemorated Victoria's reign in which one could see in reality what one had heard about the fabled rule of Lord Ram (*Ramrajya*); but it also portrayed the people living in this beneficent reign as too poor and too effete to be able to seek relief.

It is a coincidence pregnant with historical significance that like his maiden literary venture, one of Bharatendu's last literary efforts also was a pre-eminently loyalist exercise. When the British national anthem—not atypically for the times, Harishchandra looked upon it as *the* national anthem—was sought by the rulers to be translated into all the Indian languages, he volunteered a Hindi translation of it in 1884.²⁴ In this year he wrote another loyal poem which was addressed to Lord Ripon.²⁵ This was the last working year of his life. He died on 6 January 1885.

But alongside, and increasingly embedded into, this consistently expressed loyalty was a critique of British rule. It began to take shape as criticism of isolated grievances in the *Kavivachan Sudha*, which Harishchandra started in 1868, and later in *Harishchandra's Magazine* (1873-74).²⁶ A public lecture by him on the promotion of Hindi, delivered in verse in 1877, indicated that the critique was gaining in substance as the essence of alien presence was beginning to be grasped. In a poignant question, he asked his audience: 'How come, as human beings we became slaves and they kings?';²⁷ and exhorted them with a rhetorical question: 'How long would you suffer these sorrows as slaves?'²⁸ He warned against the debilitating tendency to rely on foreigners for salvation, and spurred them on to cast aside their fear and dissensions and stand up to uphold the dignity of 'Mother India'. In this appeal can be clearly discerned intimations of Gandhi's clear and sharp understanding

that fear provided the basis for the continuation of British rule in India. Moreover, in a stanza that could go home to the meanest intelligence, Harishchandra singled out 'drain' as the *raison d'être* and chief evil of foreign rule:²⁹

The people here have been beguiled by the power and trickeries of the machine. They are daily parting with their wealth and gaining in distress. Unable to do without foreign cloth, they have become the slaves of alien weavers.

It translated into the language of the common man the two symbols—Manchester and 'drain'—in terms of which the exploitative relationship between Britain and India was progressively being seen.

In *Bharat Durdasha* (1880), in a single hemistich that has since become immortal and been repeated *ad nauseam*, 'the flow of wealth to foreign land' was described as the worst blow dealt by the 'English raj'. Rising prices, recurring famine and disease, and growing taxation, too, harassed the people. But these seemed mere corollaries of the ceaseless flow of wealth abroad.³⁰ The 'drain' appears almost obsessively in Harishchandra's work. Even in a play like the *Nil Devi* (1881), located in medieval times and dealing with the Hindu-Muslim question, he felt impelled to refer to it. Employing the stratagem of prognostication to neutralize the charge of anachronism, he listed growing irreligion, ignorance, lethargy, superstitiousness, cowardice and proneness to slavery as the evils that plagued contemporary Indian society. But he chose for special stress the harm wrought by the craze for foreign goods and emulation of foreign ways.³¹

Here was an attempt to discern a causal relationship between the nature of foreign rule and the mental habits of the ruled. Viewed thus, the 'drain' was not only an essential requirement of the British presence in India; it was sustained by the Indians' eagerness to buy imported goods. Realization of its devastation induced the hope that curbing the habits that sustained 'drain' would erode the imperial connection. It also gave a filip to the nascent urge for *swadeshi*, and Harishchandra called upon people to patronize indigenous manufactures and even formed an organization for the purpose.³²

It may be mentioned, in passing, that in the relationship that Harishchandra, like many of his contemporaries, perceived and described, an important link was missed—the link provided by the vested material interests of Indians themselves. More than any other Indian, Harishchandra should have seen it clearly. For behind the admittedly earnest rhetoric of checking 'drain' through the instrumentality of boycott of foreign goods and promotion of Indian manufactures lay the dismally revealing fact that he could without any qualms insert in his *swadeshi*-promoting journal an advertisement to the effect that his own firm, Messrs. Harishchandra and Brother, had 'received various fresh goods direct from England per steamer Cathay, consisting of new and choicest novelties of the season that are not to be had in the Indian markets.'³³

Personal limitations apart, the critique of British rule continued to develop around its exploitative economic aspect. In 1881, Harishchandra wrote *Andher Nagari Chaupatta Raja*—a political satire adapted from a popular tale. In this indictment of British rule in India, he exposed the reality of corruption, arbitrary lawlessness and exploitation that lay behind the facade of *Pax Britannica*. Writing in everyday language and employing humour to telling effect, he showed how the white *sahebs* had 'digested the whole of India' in order to fill the coffers of Britain.³⁴

In a small poem written in 1884 (the same year in which he translated 'Long live our Queen Empress' and wrote in praise of Ripon), Harishchandra contrasted the seductive facade and the exploitative reality of British rule. For this *expose* he chose a conventional verse form, called *mukari*, in which the first three lines are predicative and the last line startlingly reveals the subject. Appropriately called '*mukari* for modern times', the deadly simplicity of this poem is difficult to convey even in a free translation:³⁵

Sucking stealthily the entire juice from within,
Smilingly grasping body, heart and wealth;
So adept in making glib professions,
Is it your husband? No, the Englishman.

Having comprehended the 'true' nature of foreign rule,

Harishchandra could see its consequences in their totality. What appalled him in particular was the general apathy owing to which foreign rule was taken for granted instead of being a source of gnawing uneasiness. With deep anguish he noticed the 'animal-like existence' of the people. Content with just filling their bellies—for the majority of them even this exercise had become problematic as a result of their grinding poverty—they refused to learn new techniques and technology that alone could make them capable of standing on their own.³⁶

Acutely conscious, moreover, of the ominous process of cultural erosion under British rule, Harishchandra tried to check the growing loss of identity without spurning the advantages of English education and contact with the western world. Pride in being Indian even while recognizing the existence of evils in contemporary Indian society and working for their removal was his idea of a national revival. There were, no doubt, weaknesses in his conception of such a revival.³⁷ But at least he had the vision to realize that the challenge posed by the British was more than political, and that no meaningful response to it could be simply political.

In the final analysis, however, the dominant note of Harishchandra's patriotic writings was one of pessimism. In the *Bharat Durdasha*, perhaps his most direct political play, he offered nothing but despair. Similarly, in the *Bharat Janani*, which was an adaptation of a Bengali play and dealt with the state of the country, he deviated from the original text to cut out the role of unity and enthusiasm. However valid these might be in the case of Bengal, he noted in the manuscript of his play, at least for the North Western Provinces neither unity nor enthusiasm could realistically be assigned any role.³⁸

Both in its tone and substance Harishchandra's response to British rule presaged and set the pattern for the attitudes of his fellow Hindi *litterateurs*. This was perhaps as much due to the force of his personality and work as to the conditions of the times that evoked similar attitudes in the North Western Provinces as also in other parts of the country. What distinguished them from one another was the proportion in which loyalty to and indictment of British rule coexisted in each one of them.

The man who came closest to Harishchandra, in the form of

not in the spirit of his response to British rule, was Chaudhari Pandit Badari Narayan Upadhyaya. 'Premghan' (1855-1921).³⁹ Belonging to a rich Brahman family of Mirzapur that owned zamindaries besides lucrative commercial interests, Premghan came to literature through his fondness for a life of luxury and culture. What began, in conformity with the conventional image of a cultivated *raja*, as dilettante dabbling in erotic poetry, flowered into a socially committed and politically alive sensibility soon after Premghan came into contact with Harishchandra. Though not possessing the latter's intensity and missionary zeal, Premghan wrote at length and with feeling and discernment about his society. The thrust of *Ananda Kadam-bini*, the journal he brought out in 1881, was perhaps less sharp than that of *Hindi Pradip* or *Brahman* to which we shall come later. But the adoption of a relatively controlled tone did not preclude the frank discussion of sensitive political issues. For a rich and comfortable zamindar to have been so concerned is not without significance. But perhaps more significant is the fact that his reactions were similar to those of his contemporaries who belonged to different and less privileged social strata. It is possible that this similarity of attitudes was in some ways facilitated by the crystallization of a nationalist critique of British rule following the birth of the Indian National Congress towards the end of 1885.

Premghan's *Bharat Saubhagya* illustrates the inextricable fusion of faith in and condemnation of British rule better than any other work of the period. Dedicated to the president of the fourth session of the Indian National Congress at Allahabad (1889), this play was specifically written to be staged for the Congress delegates. It could not eventually be performed. But not because the local organizers of the Congress session found anything objectionable in it. In fact, Raja Rampal Singh, the leading organizer of the session, was perfectly satisfied with the script. He was particularly happy with a song in it which wished Queen Victoria a life of 'a hundred thousand years'.⁴⁰

Bharat Saubhagya shows 'British Nation', one of the leading characters of the play, busy restoring order and peace in the country. He is assisted by three chief agents—'British Policy', 'Education' and 'Freedom'. The restoration of order, which had

provided relief from centuries of oppression and turmoil, is unfortunately interrupted for a while by the outbreak of 1857. The leaders of the outbreak, Bahadur Shah and Nana Saheb, are chastized. Nana Saheb, a Hindu, is called a blot on the fair name of the noble Aryan family.⁴¹ Implicit in this was the assumption of the incapability of Indians for self-rule. It seems ironical, in retrospect, that a play intended for the recreation of the Congress delegates and written by a Congress enthusiast should have explicated this assumption. Even more ironical that Premghar should have offered this explication through 'Freedom' who says: 'What vain thinking that those who can't hold together their loose *dhotti* would govern the country.'⁴² It epitomizes the belief in the bestowal of freedom and the recognition of the need for its negation, even though partial and temporary, that characterized the contemporary Indian reaction to British rule.

The description of British rule, as given in *Bharat Saubhagya*, tallies with the popular image of *Ramrajya*.⁴³ In a poem written nine years later, Premghar would explicitly compare British rule to *Ramrajya*.⁴⁴ *Bharat Saubhagya* provides an inventory of the boons granted by the British to India. It singles out Ripon for special praise and, in a song set in the conventional mould, commemorates the generosity of the Liberals. But while mentioning the House of Commons, it shows unanimity among all the parties regarding dispensing justice to India. So moved is Bharat, the leading character of the play, with this display of kindness that with folded hands he tells the *Rajpratinidhi* (Viceroy): 'By giving us surfeit of joy, you have caused us dyspepsia.'⁴⁵

But interspersed with this eulogy, arbitrarily isolated for the convenience of discussion, *Bharat Saubhagya* provides a commentary on the disastrous consequences of British rule. Saraswati and Rajshri—symbolizing learning and political power—had left India long back. But following the restoration of peace and order by the British, even Lakshmi—the goddess of wealth—is now resigned to being taken away to the West; technology, railways and ships leave her with no other option.⁴⁶

This was Premghar's way of popularizing the idea of 'drain' by describing it in picturesque mythological terms. But on

other occasions he wrote about it more directly, in fact, uncharacteristically bluntly. In 1889 he wrote in a poem: 'Very cruel, indeed, are those who carry off wealth and grains from here.'⁴⁷ Britain flourished by manipulating her economic transactions with India and this he called 'loot'.⁴⁸

As an inevitable consequence of 'drain', *Bharat Saubhagya* further shows, Indian industry, commerce and agriculture fall on evil days and people are reduced to starvation by rising prices, famines and taxation. Like lamps they keep bleating in vain. No relief follows. Neither God nor the Queen Empress seems to care for them. Agriculturists are obliged to take loans to pay their dues to the government; the salaried classes have their fixed incomes devalued by unchecked rise in prices. There is commotion all around. Even charity and religion, the traditional anchors of culture in society, are enfeebled by the ensuing material debasement.⁴⁹ This—and much more⁵⁰—happens in a land that is indebted for the dyspepsia it has got from surfeit of joy.

The unresolved tension between the appreciation and condemnation of foreign dispensation did not render the realization of subjection any less acute.⁵¹ In a poem addressed to his progenitors, and written four years before *Bharat Saubhagya*, Premghan implored them not to come to their once glorious land.⁵² For they would not be able to bear the sight of their descendants carrying with bowed heads the burden of slavery. Impotent, ignorant, poor, and slothful, these people do not even recognize their true interests. Averse to acquiring new technology and reluctant to carry on independent trade, they are incapable of making any effort or sacrifice for their regeneration. Leading an animal-like existence, they have been culturally deracinated. God alone can save them.⁵³

Like Premghan, Radhacharan Goswami (1859-1923), too, was inspired by Harishchandra. Belonging to a sacerdotal family of Vrindaban which owned a chain of temples in different north Indian cities, Radhacharan was an orthodox Vaishnava Hindu with pronounced reformist leanings. At times openly and at times surreptitiously disregarding the injunctions of his family and vocation, he managed to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of English and educated himself about the state of his country. He was actively associated with the Indian

National Congress during its early years as well as with the Indian National Social Conference, and acted as secretary of the Mathura circle of these organizations for some years. He was also connected with the Hindi editors' association which was formed at Allahabad in 1884. He took keen interest in local affairs, and successfully fought the municipal election in 1885 and 1894. As a token of the debt he owed Harishchandra, Goswami named his monthly journal *Bharatendu*. During the three and a half years of its existence (1883-86), the journal wrote candidly and fearlessly—though not always intelligently—on a variety of public issues.⁵⁴

In 1880 Goswami wrote a fantasy called *Yamalok ki Yatra*. Serialized in the *Sarsudhanidhi*, a leading Hindi periodical of the time, it described the visit of an 'enlightened' young man to the kingdom of Yama, the god of death. Interestingly, one of the hells described in this fantasy was reserved for people who had the audacity to rise against 'our mighty government',⁵⁵ although there was nothing in the theme of *Yamalok ki Yatra* to necessitate the inclusion of a hell reserved for the enemies of the British. It was intended to tackle a theme that was virtually tearing him from inside like it was tearing contemporary Indian society into hostile camps: the conflict between the old and the new.⁵⁶ A special hell was imagined for the Indian soldiers who had fought against the British in 1857.⁵⁷

Though he consigned its enemies to perdition, Goswami considered it justifiable to criticize the British in the strongest terms, for they had occupied India through deception.⁵⁸ There was not a single issue of *Bharatendu* in which some aspect of British policy and administration in India was not assailed. It is a measure of the bitterness of Goswami's criticism that in spite of his deep-rooted anti-Muslim bias he could at one point say that the oppression of the Muslim rulers—from which the British were supposed to have provided relief as part of a divine design—paled beside the enormities of the British.⁵⁹ In keeping with the contemporary vogue of employing mythological imagery, he wrote a short play in which the rulers were shown as demons (*rakshas*) mercilessly exploiting the subjects.⁶⁰

But Goswami was not always so unbridled in his choice of expression. He could also convey a great deal through mere

suggestion. For example, in one issue of *Bharatendu* he posed 'three new questions' and asked his readers to furnish a common answer to all of them. One of these questions was: 'Why is there not a single independent representative of the twenty-five hundred million Indian subjects in the Parliament?'⁶¹ (The words used are *the* parliament, not *British* parliament.) Whatever the answer, the thrust was unmistakable. It stressed the subject status of Indians.

The awareness of subjection found particularly fierce expression when Goswami joined issue with Raja Shiv Prasad (1823-95) for giving currency to the view that 'patriotism'—that is the word used in the course of the controversy—was a notion unknown to Indians before they came into contact with the British. With a blindness to logical consistency that overtakes when passions run high, Goswami put forward a whole series of arguments to expose the absurdity of Shiv Prasad's contention that patriotism was a word without any synonym in Indian languages. The fierceness of his reaction stemmed from the anguish of subjection and sought relief in an imagined past. The following excerpt is sufficiently revealing.⁶²

If one were to say that political progress is real national progress, then the king was always under the control of the public. Whomsoever the public wanted became the king; the king who opposed the public was dethroned It is well known that people's representatives would go to the royal assembly and present their views with regard to matters of importance. If the king could not abide by the advice tendered by them, he arranged to have the matter sorted out by arbitration. On occasions kings even left the country. All this was political (the English word 'political' is used in the Hindi original) activity. Now the question arises whether there existed at that time the kind of modern political activity which has people going from one city to another and delivering lectures on matters of national welfare. The gist of these lectures is: Free the country! Prevent the flow of wealth (Lakshmi) to Britain! Purify your social conduct! But these things were then irrelevant. The country was independent; there was ample learning; wealth used to flow in from other countries; social conduct was pure. It was futile then to

endeavour to improve our lot here and now; all energies could be diverted to the betterment of the hereafter . . . As for patriotism and devotion to the country, the sacred sentence that your mother and motherland are higher than paradise coursed through every vein of Indians. The attachment to motherland was so intense that they would rather die of hunger than leave the country. To say, then, that passion for national welfare and progress came in the wake of English education is a thoroughly fallacious proposition. That India, in fact, gave birth to the ideas of social and national welfare would be freely admitted by all.

But the same Goswami, writing in the same issue of *Bharatendu*—though in the changed context of a likely Anglo-Russian war over Central Asia—had no hesitation in saying: 'Such are the cleverness, intelligence and learning of the English that the public of whole India is willing to remain their slave.'⁶³ It was this ambivalence towards the British connection that made it possible for Goswami, like his contemporaries, to welcome the Duke of Connaught to India (1883) in the most loyal terms and simultaneously provide a critique of British rule.⁶⁴

If Harishchandra is taken as the norm for the expression of appreciation and criticism of foreign rule, Premghani and Goswami would appear to have been rather generous in their appreciation without ceasing to be severely critical. In Pratapnarayan Misra (1856-94) and Balkrishna Bhatt (1844-1914) the tendency was reversed; their nationalist fervour all but eclipsed their sense of loyalty.

Born in a Kanyakubja Brahman family of modest means, Misra combined in his life and literature an air of devil-may-care with refined sensibility and solicitude for the suffering. In the *Brahman*, a monthly that exemplified fearless journalism, he assiduously nursed an instrument of public service that to him was a perennial source of material, physical and mental strain; more so as he disdained to improve his indifferent health and meagre finances, and simply hated to curb the natural ebullience of his pen. While Harishchandra, his literary mentor, died a despairing patriot at the beginning of the year that witnessed the birth of the Indian National Congress,

Misra had the advantage of being wholeheartedly associated with the Congress during its difficult but hopeful nascency, and this gave him a degree of confidence in the face of heavy odds. However, Misra's consuming concern for his country and assessment of foreign rule were by and large the same as his mentor's.

It was very early, in 1883 when he was only twenty-three, that Misra saw through what he called 'English policy', and anticipated by a year Harishchandra's *expose* of British rule in his '*mukari* for modern times'. The essence of this policy, Misra says, is that Indians should suffer white men's 'kicks' and lose their wealth.⁶⁵ This pithy summing up is even more perspicacious than Harishchandra's. For, besides economic exploitation, it also points to racialism as being integral to British rule. It is possible that this pained summing up was partly inspired by the impotent rage produced at the time by the Ilbert Bill controversy. But whatever the circumstances, his convictions against alien rule became stronger over time. By 1884 he expressed his anger in the form of a universal proposition: 'Has ever a conquering people anywhere done good to a vanquished people? And how can it?'⁶⁶

Like Harishchandra, he, too, saw that the British were very keen to maintain an attractive facade behind which could be carried on the seamy business of empire. In a poem written towards the end of 1884, he says that 'all that the English pray for' is that the flow of Indian wealth to their country should go on uninterrupted, and their 'criminal' machinations should remain hidden.⁶⁷ So he warned against entertaining any hopes from the rulers. 'What good will they do who have grabbed your land and wealth?'⁶⁸ Utterly selfish as they are, he wrote in an article in 1884, 'how can they see us progress as against their own countrymen?'⁶⁹ He defied his readers to cite but a few examples of measures taken by the government for purely welfare purposes; or even one instance where the most trivial gain of the English people was set aside to avert the biggest damage to Indians.⁷⁰ India was held and defended 'only in order to be exploited for the sake of the British'.⁷¹ To expect that a ruthlessly exploitative government, that thought nothing of making its rupee while people died in famines, would accede to Indians' prayers for just rights was utterly futile.⁷²

Misra was particularly troubled by 'drain', poverty and socio-cultural disorder arising out of alien rule. Describing the state of the country to the gods and his dead ancestors, he bemoans to the sea-god: 'Lakshmi has gone across your vast expanse (to England). How can we, then, make arrangements for your worship? Drown this country into your depths is our prayer to you with folded hands.'⁷³ He employed folk forms to spread the idea of increasing impoverishment as a result of 'drain': 'Destitution shrouds the country as its wealth is carted away to England.' 'All the collections made from us in the form of taxes, octroi and donations have gone across the seas. The remainder is also going away.'⁷⁴ He emphasized the irretrievability of 'drain' when he wrote: 'Having once gone away, it never comes back. That, simply, is why poverty, sorrow and evil conditions plague us.'⁷⁵

Considerations of rhyme possibly impelled Misra to mention taxes and octroi specifically while neglecting to include trade among the sources of 'drain'. For he was aware of this critical link. In the same year as the poem quoted above, he wrote elsewhere, with exaggeration for effect: 'Whatever the starving crores of this country earn from agriculture, trade, crafts, and service is sent to England through the instrumentality of taxation, donation and trade.'⁷⁶ Manchester to him was the symbol of this exploitative relationship.⁷⁷

Poverty is the other strain that keeps recurring with unfailing regularity in Misra's writings. He was upset about the destitution to which crores of his countrymen had been reduced. About one-fourth of them virtually starved—he was certain about the speculated proportion—and the rest barely got enough to fill their bellies.⁷⁸ Such was the scale of starvation that this one-fourth population was forced to survive on tree barks and fruit stones, adding these to whatever coarse grains or wheat flour it was able to scrape together.⁷⁹

A situation of pervasive scarcity, Misra proceeds to argue, has made Indians 'slaves of their bellies'. This phrase occurs repeatedly in his works.⁸⁰ Through it he wished to show that the single circumstance of scarcity rendered people incapable of cooperation, unity and exertion for common weal.⁸¹ The peasant was without land, the trader without trade, the professional without jobs, and the beggar without alms. The conse-

quent struggle for bare survival made for mutual suspicion,⁸² and eroded the sense of community that had held the people together during the centuries of 'Muslim oppression'.⁸³

Like Harishchandra again, Misra regretted the loss of what he called 'selfhood' and the suicidal craze for imitating the rulers' culture and ways of living. Both of them used the same words in the context of the cultural erosion that had set in as a result of foreign domination.⁸⁴ In *Bharat-Janani* Harishchandra lamented that Indians had shamelessly forsaken their own identity.⁸⁵ Misra, too, felt anguished that, obsessed with their need for mere survival, Indians had forgotten their true self and were wallowing in slavery.⁸⁶ In his *Suchal-Shiksha* (1891) he made an impassioned plea for recovering pride in being Indian as a prerequisite for national regeneration.⁸⁷

To a sensitive writer like Misra, subjection was a tormenting refrain from which there could be no escape. Whether he wrote devotional songs or folk ditties, nationalist poems or poems addressed to visiting British dignitaries, plays or essays that touched upon a large range of subjects and evoked a variety of moods, the pain of subjection almost always came through. Very often it was accompanied by a nostalgic pride in India's past and a longing expectation about the future. Unable to bear the spectacle of Indians 'grovelling at the feet of the foreigner',⁸⁸ Misra hoped to take out whatever vestiges of pride that might have remained in them by provoking them. This country, he said, has no man. This land of women—a common pejorative term for cowards—has become the laughing stock of the entire world.⁸⁹ If Indians wanted to become men, they had to cultivate patriotism. Otherwise they would be dismissed as 'harmless' animals.⁹⁰

In his writings Misra adopted a variety of tones ranging from entreaty and exhortation to chiding and provocation. Literature for him was a polemical instrument. But an uncharacteristic despair crept into his writing when he tried to pinpoint the causes of the country's decline. It was, he would say, due to 'our folly'; the folly itself was due to 'God's will', or 'the march of time', or 'the policy of the present ruler', or 'whatever you might say'.⁹¹ In his groping for perceptual or programmatic clarity, Misra, a true believer like Harishchandra and others, placed final trust in God.⁹²

Notwithstanding his understanding of the exploitative aspect of foreign rule, Misra, too, was loyally disposed towards the British. It is true that he wrote no pure loyal encomiums. His manifestation of loyalty invariably combined criticism of British rule. Yet he reacted sharply to the official proneness to suspect Indians' loyalty. He argued that these suspicions were ill-founded because Indians treated their rulers at par with God. As proof of their loyalty he recalled the days of 1857 when the British were locked in a life-and-death struggle. What had then tilted the balance in their favour was the determined cooperation of the Indian people who had risked their properties and lives for the sake of their rulers. Insisting that whatever interested people might say to the contrary, the people of India were truly loyal, he compared Ripon to not only Akbar but even Ram.⁹³

Misra believed that the ruler provided the link between the individual self and God, and hoped that the British would strengthen the loyalty of Indians by giving them their due.⁹⁴

The mixed nature of Misra's response to British rule is brought out by six lines that occur in a very long poem that was serialized in the *Brahman* between August 1884 and December 1885. After describing the horrible atrocities perpetrated by the Muslim rulers, he says that it was because of these sins that Muslim rule was destroyed. As the agent of this destruction, the 'English government' had saved the Hindus' religion and made them feel like they were living in *Ramrajya*. In spite of this lavish praise Misra cannot feel that all is well. In an enigmatic line he says that under the English government people 'are experiencing joys and sorrows in accordance with their *karmas*'. It is difficult to believe that he expected this, at best lukewarm, description of life under the English government to be construed as anything but faint criticism of British rule. Why could he not write, in this instance, with his usual candour? Why, in any case, did he have to make the comparative reference to *Ramrajya*? The question is made trickier by the fact that the comparison is virtually negated, in the preceding line, by a rider that except for the loss of wealth and the plague of taxation, English *raj* in all respects resembles *Ramrajya*.⁹⁵ It is possible to argue that this was a sarcastic exposure of British rule. But the fact that the comparison was

made in the context of relief from centuries of Muslim tyranny invests these lines with an ambiguity of tone that does not permit a straightforward reading. But this is a matter that belongs to the next section.

As intrepidly critical of British rule as Misra, though not equally penetrating in his perception and pointed in expression, Balkrishna Bhatt devoted himself to the service of his country. Making his living as a teacher and supplementing his meagre salary through petty trading in stationery and practice of astrology and indigenous medicine, this proud Brahman from Allahabad could never rise above want. Steeped in Sanskrit scholasticism as well as tutored in English, he was as willing to promote change in his society as he was determined to preserve its rich cultural heritage. While most of his contemporaries who have been discussed above took to writing and public affairs more or less precociously, Bhatt did so rather late. He launched the *Hindi Pradip* when he was thirty-three. Maybe the uncertainties of a chequered early career and the vexations of a turbulent joint family—with which he was later obliged to sever his connections—held him back for a while. But once he had decided to embark upon the venture,⁹⁶ no odds could ever deter him. It was no ordinary odds that came his way in the course of a long life of continuous struggle. His outspoken writing in the *Hindi Pradip* produced enemies; he was once bashed up and no action in the matter was taken by the authorities who, it appears, were only too pleased with the incident.⁹⁷ Bhatt was forty at the time of this assault. Age did not mellow him. At sixty-four, he made a stridently critical speech at the time of Tilak's deportation, and rather than apologize or submit to a token disciplinary action by his college authorities, he courted unemployment.⁹⁸

Bhatt knew that the life he was choosing for himself would bring him little more than trouble. The appeal he made to his readers in the inaugural number of the *Pradip* leaves no doubt about the missionary fervour that inspired him. Warning them that the mood of the monthly would not be of a kind calculated to please the government, he wrote that he had been driven by faith in the goodwill of his own countrymen and his capacity for hard and determined work.⁹⁹ Judging by the poor clientele of the *Pradip*, his faith in people's goodwill does not

appear to have been vindicated. His persistence, however, never let him down.

Besides being trenchant in tone, Bhatt was ever willing to displease those in power. He distrusted Englishmen, even those who were known to be India's friends. For example, in his commentary on Bright's views that Indians had no voice in the administration of their own country and that they had been reduced to being mute creatures, Bhatt reacted bitterly: 'If the selfsame Mr Bright were to come here as governor-general, he would lose this kind of understanding and no more see such things.'¹⁰⁰ This distrust arose from his basic conviction that exploitation constituted the sole basis for British presence in India. 'What, apart from loss of honour', he asked, 'has India gained by surrendering everything it possesses and lying at the mercy of England?' It was at India's expense, he firmly believed, that 'England has become a red rose'. In return, deprived of all glory, courage and self-reliance, the people of India had been transformed 'from sword-wielders to pen-pushers . . . to be the patient butt of white men's shoes has become their habit . . . contempt and dishonour have become their badges.'¹⁰¹ From economic exploitation to racial hauteur, the picture of alien presence was clear in Bhatt's mind. Trust, in conditions of this kind of relationship, seemed to him misplaced.

In a short play, consisting of a series of dialogues between 'Englandeshwari' (Queen of England) and Bharat-Janani (Mother India) and making very effective use of asides, Bhatt brought out the stark reality of the colonial connection with a sombre vividness that neither Harishchandra nor Pratapnarayan Misra had achieved. The dialogue begins with Englandeshwari telling Bharat-Janani about a sum of five million rupees that her sons 'had to send' for famine relief in India, and asking her if she felt grateful to them. Though expressing gratitude, Bharat-Janani says that this was mere discharge of duty. Englandeshwari thereupon points out that famines being an annual feature, she could neither prevent them nor possibly contribute money for relief each time. To which, in an aside, Bharat-Janani reacts: 'How can you give? You only know how to take.' But ostensibly she can only ask Englandeshwari: 'What can be done then?' The latter suggests the creation of a

famine insurance fund which could be used to construct public works designed to meet the menace of famine. Worried that in addition to famine there would now be this new financial burden, Bharat-Janani asks where the money for the proposed fund would come from. Englandeshwari replies: 'Why, my sons will give you loan. It does not matter if you have become old. Your pores are still filled with juice, and your flesh has such an aroma that everybody likes you. Let your sons be ready to take loan.' Again in an aside, Bharat-Janani reacts: 'Your sons have taken away every bit. Now only the flesh remains. Let them slice and eat it if they find its aroma so irresistible.' Ostensibly also this time she manages to be more forthright: 'My sons, poor souls . . . you can squash them as much as you like. . . .' Englandeshwari then complains that the educated sons of Bharat-Janani are forever finding fault with her own sons and trying to equal them. As a simple prescription for mutual amity, she suggests that the 'native' sons should ungrudgingly accede to whatever they are told by her sons. The dialogue ends with Bharat-Janani saying: 'What else can my sons do? Speaking out does not help. . . . Let us see how long this tyranny lasts.'¹⁰²

Recalling the maxim of Manu, the law-giver, that there is no pain like the pain of slavery, Bhatt wondered if dying did not hold in store greater relief than there was in being crushed by taxation and in silently suffering police atrocities. He questioned the wisdom of relying on God—which in a believer like him was the limit of despair—since for all their circumspection and reliance on God, Indians had for centuries rotted away in slavery.¹⁰³

But despair with Bhatt was never more than a passing phase. He was aware that the struggle against the alien connection had to be a long drawn out one. This struggle, he knew, would repeatedly end in failure. But each failure would have to be treated as an inevitable step towards ultimate success. 'Whenever a weak nation has fought against a powerful nation to achieve any kind of independence', Bhatt wrote when Indians were still struggling to have a national political association, 'it has very often met with defeat. But the defeat has without doubt proved a means of great benefit later on.'¹⁰⁴

Yet, in spite of his conviction that British rule did not exist

for the good of India, Bhatt believed that the British presence in India was divinely willed.¹⁰⁵ In a novel entitled *Nutan Brahmachari*, he described the state of anarchy that prevailed before the British brought it to an end. The Pindari rampages and the turbulence caused by the Marathas and the Muslims had subjected the countryside and the towns to the law of the jungle. A proverb had gained common currency during this lawlessness: One who does not guard his belonging is a fool; but a greater fool is one who does not grab others' unguarded belongings.¹⁰⁶ That this observation figured in what was intended to be a didactic novel for young boys and girls would suggest that Bhatt was fully persuaded that Indians had been 'saved' from anarchy by the British following God's grace.

Even the article on Bright, in which a situation was hypothesized to highlight the eventual meaninglessness of any solicitude for India that came from public men in Britain, contained a loyal assertion that was totally at variance with its explicit argument and implicit assumptions. For, referring to Bright's suggestion for a division of India into a number of presidencies to be so ruled as to be qualified for self-government in the event of the British leaving the country, Bhatt commented: 'This, our prayer to God is, may never happen because it is impossible to be the subjects of a kind and just government like this.'¹⁰⁷ It was not surprising that he exhorted his countrymen to keep pressing for the redress of their numerous grievances because they had some sincere well-wishers in England and justice could not be denied them indefinitely;¹⁰⁸ or that he reminded the rulers of the steadfast loyalty shown them during 1857.¹⁰⁹

II

Faith in the colonial connection, despite understanding its inequitable and exploitative nature, constituted the tragic essence of colonial consciousness. To the extent that this paradox was realized by the colonized, it only created a dilemma that necessitated the search for viable tactics and programmes that would have to be experimented and persevered with over generations. To know that one's generation was doomed to merely devising possible courses of action with little hope of seeing them

yield tangible results or even being adopted was a despairing prospect. Harishchandra's was a generation that realized this, and lived in despair.

But the paradox was never faced squarely. The reality of the colonial connection was clearly seen. So was the futility of relying on the colonial masters. Yet the masters were appealed to for relief and reform. This dependence was not merely pragmatic; faith in the rulers had somehow been internalized. This influenced not only tactical calculations but also the very perception of the colonial connection itself in such a way that the understanding of its reality was, at one level, neutralized. It was this core of faith, the incompatibility of which with the understanding of the colonial reality was missed, that constituted the tragic essence of colonial consciousness.

Much of the manifestation of loyalty was, in any case, no more than an empty ritual. A matter of form—a necessary preface for addressing the rulers when the aim was to present a grievance—ritualized expression of loyalty seems to have become a habit with these people. A review, in *Harishchandra's Magazine*, of Shiv Prasad's *Itihastimirnashak* where the author favourably compared conditions in British India with the dark times under Muslim rule, offers a typical illustration. Before assailing Shiv Prasad's pro-British bias, the reviewer wrote: 'We will be guilty of the blackest ingratitude if we do not acknowledge the blessings we enjoy under the British Government.' The formality of a loyal preface completed, he went on to add: '... but it has excelled all the former governments of the country in the variety and number of its taxes on the people', and, while maintaining a civilized exterior, has surpassed the worst of Muslim misrule. Most of the harsh taxes continue to exist under British rule, 'not to say of many more imposed which the former half-civilized rulers could not even think of'. Quoting Fawcett to the effect that 'the system of local taxation in India seemed to have been devised to produce among the people the *maximum* of torment and terror', the reviewer concluded: 'Still Babu Shiv Prasad thinks fit to sound the praises of British Government in this respect.'¹⁰

The formal function of the manifestation of loyalty is further evidenced by a similarity of images and analogies used for the purpose. The equation between British rule and *Ramrajya* was

not confined to the small community of Hindi writers who possessed intimate knowledge of one another's writings. It was suggested by writers from different, far-flung parts of the country writing in a variety of languages and with little possibility of mutual interaction and emulation. It reflected a similarity in the response of Indians to British rule; and the similarity was not confined to ritualized expressions of loyalty.

By way of example may be mentioned Dalpatram Dahyabhai (1820-98), one of the architects of modern Gujarati literature. His work reveals the same spectrum of general attitudes covering the two extremes of loyal faith and awareness of the essential dichotomy between Indian and British interests that the work of Harishchandra and his colleagues revealed.¹¹¹ He, too, employed the same imagery, and compared British rule in India to *sat yuga* (interchangeable with *Ramrajya*). Such is the divine grace, he wrote, that in British India lions, goats and sheep play together, rabbits drive lions, and goats leash elephants.¹¹² Even Narmadashankar (1833-86), the other architect of modern Gujarati literature who, unlike Dalpat, is remembered today for his patriotic poems, shared the same attitudes and used similar imagery.¹¹³

In *Bharat Saubhagya* Premghan praised *Pax Britannica* thus: 'Both the lion and the goat now amiably drink water at the same bank.'¹¹⁴ Radhakrishna Das, in his elegy on Queen Victoria's death, wrote: 'Lion and goat drink water together; with folded hands the lightning waits in attendance.'¹¹⁵ Bhatt's *Hindi Pradip* echoed the same words.¹¹⁶ The militant writer, Balmukund Gupta (1865-1907), who had received his literary and political training from Pratapnarayan Misra, also made use of this imagery.¹¹⁷

The imagery obviously rested on exaggeration. It could not have been meant to be taken literally. But it corresponded remarkably with the traditional Indian mode of perception and description. Exaggeration and fantasy constituted two essential ingredients of this mode. Exaggeration, as Radhakrishna Das once noted, came naturally to such a sensibility.¹¹⁸ Analogies from mythology were a recognized way of understanding and explaining social phenomena. Though used to denote what seemed binary categories in the classification, as *sura* (god) and *asura* (demon), of those who acted on the socio-political

stage, at the existential plane the attributes of the two categories blurred their binary relationship. Ram, after all, had his flaws while Ravana, his prime antagonist, had a generous share of virtues. Such a sensibility could draw pictures that were sharp in their characterization. Yet, at the experiential plane, it shrank from drawing inferences that would be in consonance with that binary characterization.

The use of exaggeration in both praising and condemning the foreign rulers allowed a freedom to reject or accept parts of the broad characterization in accordance with the demands of a given situation. It enabled the construction of a stereotype of British rule that would credit it with intrinsic goodness and also invest it with the vilest intentions.

In this stereotype, British rule—*Angrej raj*—was *suraj*. This *suraj* (good rule) was characterized by freedom, rule of law, and peace. 'Even in *Angrej raj*' was a familiar prefatory strain in contemporary writings.¹¹⁹ In the opening scene of *Bharat Durdasha* the inventory of the country's ills was preceded by the remark: '*Angrej raj* is replete with comforts of all kinds.'¹²⁰ In *Bharat-Janani*, similarly, Mother India cajoled her sons: 'This is Queen Victoria's reign. Awake, my children, and shed off your fear.'¹²¹ In a long poem detailing the wretched state of Indians, Pratapnarayan Misra made them say: 'Even in this *suraj* we are living out our days with the name of God on our lips.'¹²² Misra might at times have dismissed freedom under the British as 'the horns of an ass',¹²³ yet he never quite believed his own simile; on behalf of the victims of *begar* (forced labour) he bemoaned: 'Everybody has got freedom in the English *raj*; but lightning has struck our destiny and slavery is our lot.'¹²⁴ Premghani, too, regretted that the poor of the country had known nothing of the happiness of 'this good rule'.¹²⁵

It is possible that frequent expression of loyalty allayed the critics' fear of official displeasure. After all, *litterateurs*, too, were influenced by calculations of the likely response of the administrators to their works. Hemchandra Banerji, whose poems also combine loyalty and patriotism, wrote in his *Birbahu Kavya* (1861-66): 'With fear I write, and so I can write little. But if there were no fear, you could have listened to the angry strains of my lyre sending thrilling sensations to the lacerated heart of India.'¹²⁶ Harishchandra, who was convinced that he

had been arbitrarily dealt with for what was unreasonably interpreted as 'disloyal' writing in the *Kavivachan Sudha*,¹²⁷ wrote in the preface to a 'loyal' poem that humility and verifiability were the essential conditions that needed to be meticulously observed while commenting on British rule.¹²⁸ In a poem addressed to the visiting Prince of Wales—taking the Prince away from the 'guided' tours organized by officials in order to show him the real state of the country—Misra feared that he would be beaten up and not even be permitted to cry if the officials got wind of what he was saying.¹²⁹ In this context the use of asides by Bhatt in the imaginary dialogue between 'Englandeshwari' and 'Bharat-Janani' can be clearly seen as a declaration that comments critical of British rule needed to be 'hush-hush'.

Yet loyalty does seem to have been more than a simple function of pragmatism born out of impotent fear. As a young boy of twelve Harishchandra could hardly have been moved by pragmatic considerations to essay his first poetic composition on the death of the Queen's spouse. Nor is it likely that Goswami felt impelled by a kindred concern to make a show of his loyalty, and that Raja Rampal Singh 'danced with joy' on reading the song in *Bharat Saubhagya* that wished the Queen a long life of a 'hundred thousand years'.¹³⁰

A couple of entries in a personal diary not intended for publication by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1855-1907) merit serious consideration in this regard. A keen but cerebral analyst of Indian affairs and society—Hamlet-like he postponed active participation in organized public activities—this great Gujarati novelist noted on 22 November 1892:¹³¹

India is under foreign control and the foreigner is the kindest of all foreigners available. To get rid of the foreigner by force or fraud is an idea associated with all the incidents that remind us of the rule being foreign. The idea naturally haunts our uneducated instincts; to the educated instincts the idea is both foolish and fallacious. It is foolish because it is not practicable, and because any experiments founded upon it would send the country from the frying pan into the fire. It is a fallacious idea because the distinction between a native and a foreigner is only transient, and the distinction is not a

guarantee of the native being a better ruler than the foreigner in such a mass of heterogeneous people as my country is. The proper problem is not the absolute eviction of the foreigner, but *his accommodation to the native element*.

Tripathi was not unmindful of the clash between foreign and 'native' interests. As he noted:

In India the sovereign is enlightened, and yet has an interest *foreign* to the country. Two things have to be done. This interest has to be made to cease to be foreign; and while it is foreign, we want the natives that shall guard against the civic temptations to which the foreigner is exposed by his position, that shall enable the native interests to grow and develop during their minority without any hindrances from the adverse interests of the rulers, that shall in fact watch over the real interests and develop the future welfare of the country.

'And', added Tripathi significantly, 'it is possible to do this both loyally and patriotically.'¹³²

In our discussion of the *Bharat Saubhagya* we have noted the irony that a play written by a Congress enthusiast for the edification of Congress delegates should have ridiculed the *dhoti*-clad Indians for believing themselves to be capable of self-government. If Tripathi's diary offers any clue to the contemporary educated Indian thinking on the subject, the notion of a necessary tutelage under the British was more than merely a sentiment expressed to please the rulers. For the same entry in his diary proceeds:¹³³

The political sagacity and shrewdness, the moral unity and strength, the practical art and energy and activity, the physical stamina and virtues, etc., make the rulers a giant to the ruled pigmy. Yet, in the comparative conscience of British Institutions and people, there is a real and most pregnant hope for the pigmy. It is also a question of turning the pigmies into beings with higher statures.

I see the European and the Native; and what is great and little in either. The smallest European is a very powerful spark of fire: powerful for good and for evil, and more for

the latter in their present generation in India. Some of the greater Natives that I could see were bloated semblances of live coal without any real fire, except for absorption by Europeans: flatterers, place-seekers, cowards, fools, rogues and spies, were these Natives. Others there are of a really admirable type—but a Dadabhai is rare, and mostly there are those that have virtue and capacity without position, and it is generally a doubt whether the position, when reached, will not spoil both virtue and capacity rather than improve them.

His circumspection about action may have led Tripathi into an excessive pessimism about the potentialities of Indians of his time. But in general his assessment was one that most of his compatriots would have shared, even if most of them might have insisted on progressive devolution of responsibility as a necessary training for its exercise instead of fearing that power, when acquired, would spoil whatever virtue they possessed. In any case, for all his pessimism, Tripathi's assessment had the merit of being a more honest, elegant and serious articulation of a difficult predicament than that of many of his contemporaries.

Premghar was downright clumsy. Narmadashankar was naive enough to believe that if a member of the British royal family was sent out to rule India, the 'foreignness' of the foreigner would disappear: 'Instead of the Mughals, the English would live here and with that the country's morale, wealth and prosperity would flourish.' If Narmad anticipated the possibility of a conflict between Indians and the British, it was in the distant future when the latter, against their grain, might refuse to give the former their due rights. In that event Indians would have to fight, and God would not disapprove of their action. In the meanwhile, however, all would be well with the permanent coming to India of a member of the royal family.¹²⁴

Similarly, despite his conviction that no conquering nation had ever done any good to the conquered, Misra could also believe that one of the chief reasons for Indians' troubles lay in the temporary duration for which the officials came to administer the country. 'Without living together for long', he wrote, 'mutual affection cannot develop; and without affection

one cannot be a well-wisher of the other.' This being so, British Indian officials naturally favoured their own countrymen to whom they were tied by bonds of community. To him, too, a carrier of blue blood, permanently stationed in India, seemed to provide a way out. This royal touch would soon make India a home for the rulers who then would treat its people with solicitude and love.¹³⁵ Radhakrishna Das did one better. He wanted the Queen herself to settle down in India and thereby banish the poverty, ignorance and sorrows of the people.¹³⁶

But both naivety and faith seem simulated. At a deeper psychological level they may well have begun as simulation. The educated and the politically conscious could hardly be content with the common man's age-old reaction of cynical resignation to political power which, in the words of the saint-poet Tulsidas amounted to: 'Whoever be the king, what harm could it be to us.' Instead, they tended to devise more elaborate and complex ideological constructs to come to terms with political subjection. They had to rationalize their acceptance of this reality. Rationalization—in the sense of seeking justification for an accomplished fact—did not permit too much analytical rigour and logical consistency, and it necessitated a degree of simulation.

With a candour and clarity unusual for the times, Narmad wrote that *swaraj* offered the only solution to the problems of Indians, and added that this was a goal for the realization of which the Indians (he was, however, addressing himself to the 'Aryas') in their existing state of mind were not inclined to work. For a long period of time it would not be possible to uproot the British, so systematically they had entrenched themselves in the country. It would, as a matter of fact, be foolish for Indians to make the kind of efforts made by the Italians. The dilemma facing the Indians plainly was: *swaraj* was the only *anukool sthiti* for them, and it was 'madness' to even talk about it. Narmad, consequently, would not so much as discuss the idea of *swaraj*. Rather, he quickly moved on from the ideal condition of *swaraj* to plead for a body of selfless, experienced, independent-minded, honest and discerning leaders who might act as intermediaries between the people and the government.¹³⁷ Pragmatic considerations obviously influenced Narmad's attitude towards British rule. But this pragmatism did

not always operate as a conscious factor. He would hardly have written loyalist poetry otherwise. The realization of what seemed possible in the foreseeable future tended to constrain the very conception of what needed to be done.

So oppressive was the acceptance of subjection that the rationalization it induced as a possible escape from its constant weight created a new myth. Crucial to this myth, its very *raison d'être*, was faith in the British.¹³⁸ It subscribed to a prolonged phase of anarchy from which the British had been divinely willed to rescue India. This was quite consistent with the belief in divine teleology that formed an essential constituent of Hindu cosmology,¹³⁹ as also with the scheme of causation in traditional Indian historiography. The British also thrived on this myth, and it was reinforced by their account of the interregnum between the downfall of the Mughals and their own final triumph.¹⁴⁰ But the habit of explaining critical historical events in terms of divine will made the acceptance of their rule easier.¹⁴¹

Children in schools were fed on such history through prescribed textbooks such as Shiv Prasad's *Itihastimrtnashak*. Written with official blessings and translated into English by M. Kempson, the Director of Public Instruction, it was widely used in the North Western Provinces. The following excerpts on the foundation of the Mughal empire typify the mode of historical explanation used in the book:¹⁴²

Here he (Babar) found Ibrahim Lodi posted to receive him with an army of 1,00,000 horse and foot, and 1,000 elephants. Babar's troops were only 12,000 men in all; but victory and defeat are in the hands of God; and Ibrahim Lodi perished at Panipat. . .

And further about Babar:

At one time he was in such a plight that he determined to go as a faqir to China; but God had willed that his grandson was to become the greatest and best sovereign that ever governed Hindustan, whose dynasty was to last till the coming of the English.

But the Mughals fell on evil days and God willed the English to provide relief to the people of Hindustan. When the British troops reached Delhi they found:¹⁴³

The Emperor was almost starving, and the people were in a miserable condition. . .

Concomitantly with the myth of divine dispensation was fostered the belief in British moral superiority and military invincibility, particularly after 1857. The world had seen many conquering races. But, continued Shiv Prasad's account, they had all lapsed into luxury and eventual doom. The British were a different kind of conquerors. With dramatic exaggeration (a necessary element of any operative myth) Shiv Prasad inspired his young readers with awe for their heaven-sent masters:¹⁴⁴

Thus the nations beyond the Danube conquered the Romans; thus the Arabs conquered the Iranis, and the Tatars the Chinese; and thus at the present day the Farangis have conquered the whole world. Their power is now immense; but such is the currency of knowledge among them and such its increase day by day, that instead of falling into luxurious ease they even add to their military prestige; and if, by reason of their great wealth, they fall into habits of luxury, to the prejudice of their constitutional vigour, yet such is their scientific skill that they make cannon, guns, ships, and all sorts of novel machines, by the aid of which a single man becomes as powerful as hundreds, or thousands, or even ten thousands, of his fellows.

The effect of such ideas on the educated Indians of British India is illustrated by the diary of B.K. Thakore (1869-1952), an eminent Gujarati historian, critic and poet. As a young lad of nineteen studying in Bombay, he happened to read in the *Mahratta* 'an extract from an article in the *Contemporary Review* by one Townsend.' The piece 'so absorbed' him that he 'determined to finish it carefully and so did not go to the Law class'. The article stunned him. Thakore's account of what happened offers an extremely sensitive and rare insight into the agonizing process that the consciousness of men underwent

when they accepted the rulers' superiority:¹⁴⁵

The effect it produced on me was prodigious and wholly unexperienced before. I can't say what it was like even metaphorically. I don't know whether I would feel so if my heart were bored through by a red hot iron bar. Perhaps I felt as I might feel if I heard someone relating with pride a long list of murders in cold blood of those most dear to him and perpetrated by himself.

What was it that Townsend had written? As summarized by Thakore, it was:¹⁴⁶

Townsend says that we Asiatics do not and can never regard with anything but dislike a Government by law. What we most prize and cannot but prize is the independence of our will to all law whatsoever. The power to dispense even life and death merely as the feat of our will, total irresponsibility, is and cannot but be our only ideal of political power. This every individual had a chance to attain to in all the past regimes of India.

We, the English, can never offer them such a chance in the faintest degree, and so they can never be contented in our regime. This discontent was the real cause of the Sepoy mutiny;... The vastly additional security to life and property, the infinitely greater convenience, the strictly impartial justice that the British can offer and must offer will be offered in vain; and so during the next 3 hundred years, though there is no chance of foreign aggression, England will have to leave India on account of one, two or three internal revolutions which at length she would not see the good of crushing. And within 10 years after England has gone the country will be almost in the same state, the state loved by Asiatics, in which it was when she came. Thus the grand experiment Europe tries on Asia will inevitably end in failure; it is in the very nature of things that it should be so.

It is difficult to appreciate the quality of effect on a young educated Indian of what seems today to be so clearly the outburst of a hopelessly Eurocentric mind. But this was the red

hot iron bar that had bored through Thakore's heart, and it illumines those recesses of colonial consciousness that later-day national consciousness has been loath to recognize as real. The escape from the oppressiveness of acceptance of foreign rule was not without its own oppressive weight. And its weight bore witness to the fact that the days of pure simulation—if ever it was just that—had gone. The myth was in full force. Rattled to the core, poor Thakore wondered:¹⁴⁷

Now what torments me most is that looking to our past history this theory cannot be 'exploded' as a too ingenious one. Are we then doomed for ever? Can the past never be annihilated, nullified, revoked, modified—are the present and future mere beating in the void! What has the present done—has it touched anything but big cities—and how lightly has it touched even these! . . . And what a gigantic past it has been! . . . What do I know of the backbone of the Indian people—or can anything be known—has it any backbone? Or can it ever be created?—What a dreadfully long time it would take—and what chances are there for our success in improvement or creation.—At any rate religion and eloquence are the only means and even these where are they—God!

It was imperative to counter the humiliating spillover of this myth. The proneness to national flagellation that it produced had become pervasive. Radhakrishna Das complained that most of the current histories of the country 'planted in young tender hearts the thought that they are worthless and meant to be slaves forever.'¹⁴⁸ In fact, during the tormenting encounter with Townsend, as if intuitively tumbling along a possible relief route, Thakore had himself realized that the study of Indian history had become 'a more imperious necessity'.¹⁴⁹ Such flagellants—and not many educated Indians could then avoid such a sensation—were likely to look for and find psychological succour in a reconstructed, new past.

The search for a counter history was facilitated by the traditional absence of distinction between mythology and history. So both literary and semi-historical classics of the past (the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, for example) came to be seen as more than repositories of the

community's myths which contained a kernel of historical actuality and meaning that could provide the raw materials for reconstructing India's past. They were histories.¹⁵⁰

History exteriorizes the past. Myth interiorizes it. The past, in myth, is part of the community's collective memory. It is felt, and lived, in the present. Distinct phases like a golden age and a dark interregnum notwithstanding, mythic consciousness erases the distinction between the past and the present.¹⁵¹

Such a consciousness produced the myth of a glorious past as a necessary counterpoint to the myth of the white man's civilizing mission. The two myths together created a balance in which the sense of subjection, while continuing to be galling, ceased to be paralysing. The myth of a glorious past was not simply the outcome of a felt need to get away from the humiliation of the present and obliterate the fact of subjection. It was produced also by the need to accept the present as a divine dispensation; but to accept it without being weighed down by a feeling of impotence.

Political greatness was especially remembered in the idealization of the past. Eager to produce an alternative narrative that would be a source of inspiration, Radhakrishna Das took care to highlight the expansionist proclivities of the ancient Hindus. In a biographical series intended to bring out the all-round development achieved by these people, he included a vignette of Vijay Singh, a scion of the Sinhabahu family that had ruled over Bengal more than two thousand and five hundred years ago. This was a striking inclusion because, unlike the other celebrities in the series, Vijay Singh had a reprehensible moral character. But Das was keen to remove the current misconception that Indians in general and Bengalis in particular had never achieved any glory or conquest abroad. The inclusion of Vijay Singh, who had carved out for himself a kingdom in Sri Lanka, was intended to remove the misconception. More significantly, Das hoped that the example of Vijay Singh would inspire his young readers—troubled as he knew they were by a sense of worthlessness and eternal slavery—with something of 'the exultation of foreign conquests', besides imbuing them with pride in the glory and might of their country.¹⁵²

Contrary to a generally accepted assumption of modern Indian

historiography, the myth of a Hindu millennium was not the creation of late nineteenth century revivalistic movements like the Arya Samaj. It constituted the common mental stock of an average educated Hindu. Even an anglicized liberal leader like Kristo Das Pal (1838-84) took pride in it.¹⁵³ Much before Dayananda's emergence as a religious leader, Raja Peary Mohan Mukerjee, an English-educated zamindar and member of the British Indian Association, could hail as 'unparalleled' the ancient Hindus' 'wisdom and excellence' in religion, philosophy, art, science, and polity. Blissfully innocent of any distinction between myth and history, he could argue that the concept of the separation of powers was commonly in vogue in ancient India.¹⁵⁴

Even in these early times people were so keen about political rights that the question whether legislative powers should be united in the same person or body of persons who exercised executive powers was put in issue in some deadly battles in which Poroooram, the son of Jamadagni, was at the head of the liberal party and the king on the opposite side. The result was that the legislative power was withdrawn from the hands of executive and entrusted to Brahmin counsellors.

There was clearly something common in the language and thought processes of Radhacharan Goswami, the Vaishnava priest from Vrindaban, and the affluent zamindar-politician from Calcutta. Their location in a colonial milieu accounted for this similarity. Essential for the functioning of the twin myths was an interregnum of anarchy. The Marathas were occasionally held responsible for this anarchy, but the interregnum was seen mainly in terms of the tyranny let loose by the Muslim rulers. British rule, in this scheme of history, was a nemesis visited upon the Muslims. On no other issue was there greater agreement among Harishchandra and his contemporaries.¹⁵⁵ They cited similar facts, used particularly gory expressions and tended to invoke the same images in the description of the desolation effected by the Muslim rulers. The country, according to them, was reduced to a *masan* (crematorium) by the Muslims.¹⁵⁶

The celebration of this nemesis permitted the illusion of

freedom. This was freedom from Muslim subjection. The illusion seems to have been credulously nurtured through a dual approach to the question of subjection. It consisted of a fine distinction in the treatment of subjection during Muslim rule and under the British. Almost spontaneously, and as if in response to some barely perceived possibility of psychological relief, subjection under the Muslims was detailed in concrete terms. But the one under the British was mentioned as an abstract feeling. The point may be illustrated by referring to Harishchandra. In his *Nil Devi* he condemned in bitterly disparaging terms those Hindus who had fought against their own coreligionists for the sake of the alien Turks. He called for total renunciation of hope for India because of the glee with which these renegade Hindus were prepared to bear on their heads the shoes of the Muslim conquerors.¹⁷ But nowhere in his vast corpus did Harishchandra express anything like such tortured anger against those who had collaborated with the British. Instead, he discussed the problem of subjection under the British either in abstract terms or in relation to the nostalgia for the past millennium. He never connected this subjection with his frequent wails against the numerous evils of the English *suraj*.

The abstraction of subjection in the context of British rule discharged a double function. It made it possible to feel an actual release from a specific past subjection; at the same time it facilitated the rationalization of the present subjection without obliterating the sense of subjection *per se*. This was the general pattern, if not the rule, for the treatment of subjection by Harishchandra's contemporaries. And this may well explain the fact that in spite of its oft acknowledged absurdity (Misra's 'horns of an ass'), the idea of freedom as a gift of British rule could be seriously entertained.

The use of Muslim 'misrule' was also a double-edged weapon. Muslim rule could be shown as the very picture of tyranny from which the British had effected deliverance, and also as one that was nowhere near its successor in its oppressiveness. Not that there was no attitude towards Muslim rule independent of the feelings about British rule. But it seemed malleable to the fluctuating attitude towards British rule. There was one constant note, however. It was generally agreed that the

Muslim rulers had made India their home with the fortunate consequence that the country's wealth remained within the country. As against this, 'drain' was inherent in the British refusal to settle in India.¹⁵⁸ Harishchandra dramatized this basic difference when he likened Muslim rule to cholera and British rule to tuberculosis.¹⁵⁹ That both could be fatal was beside the point.

With regard to its general concern for the well being of the ruled, too, Muslim rule was at times compared favourably *vis-à-vis* its British counterpart. Misra, easily the most liberal of the writers discussed above, wrote rather frequently in favour of the Muslim as compared to British rule;¹⁶⁰ although he, too, subscribed to the theory of divine deliverance from the Muslim oppression. Even Bhatt, who tended to view the Muslims as foreigners, felt that to compare the Muslim with British rule was like comparing a gold coin with a farthing.¹⁶¹ Similarly, while a character in one of his plays thanked the British for rescuing the Hindus from Muslim tyranny,¹⁶² Goswami could say that Muslim rule was preferable to the British.¹⁶³ Premghan thanked God for His mediation in sending the British deliverers;¹⁶⁴ but he also contended in a poem that the miseries the Hindus suffered under the Muslims had increased under the British.¹⁶⁵

The unfavourable comparison of British with Muslim rule belonged to the category of the patriotic indictment of the former. It did not invalidate the loyalty felt for British rule. The critics, in fact, felt obliged to explain—indeed explain away—the evils they were condemning the British rule for. In normal circumstances this function should have been discharged by the rulers. But the need to justify the acceptance of British rule and the simultaneous recognition of its fundamentally baneful character ironically saddled the ruled with this function. The job was done with varying degrees of sophistication. But there was a striking similarity in the arguments and imageries employed for the purpose.

At a fairly widespread level the fault for the failings of the alien administration was found with the ruled themselves. It could hardly be just coincidental that the same analogy was employed by Misra, Bhatt, Premghan, and Dalpat. Explaining

why the British were not able to remove the grievances of Indians, Misra wrote: 'Unless the boy in her lap cries, the mother cannot know that it is hungry.'¹⁶⁶ Bhatt wrote: 'Even a mother does not offer milk to her child until it cries. If you speak out, your just government would certainly listen to you.'¹⁶⁷ Premghan wrote with greater metaphoric embellishment: 'Just as a child gets no milk without crying, a beggar no alms without begging, and the thirsty no water without asking for it, the ruled do not obtain justice from the ruler without petitioning and wailing.'¹⁶⁸ In a long poem celebrating the establishment of British rule as the rise of the sun in a long benighted India, Dalpat remarked: 'A mother does not give food to her child until it cries. Nothing would be achieved if you keep your thoughts and feelings locked within your heart.'¹⁶⁹

This analysis was logically related to the panacea for the ills of India proposed by some; that is, a member of the royal family be sent out permanently to govern the country. The Queen, being so far away, simply could not hear the cries of her Indian subjects. No relief, consequently, was forthcoming. The explanation had about it a devastating innocence which the historian may tend to dismiss rather preemptorily in the light of his knowledge of later developments. But for understanding the complexities of consciousness the explanation is not without relevance.

Retrospectively, equally puerile was the attempt made by Harishchandra to explain away the disastrous consequences of the British connection. He harnessed fatalism to sustain his faith in the British, and thereby thwarted his growing pessimism about the country. In *Bharat-Janani*, he made 'Mother India' say about her somnolent children: 'The time for their awaking is not yet. Whatever efforts are made at present would be fruitless.'¹⁷⁰ In the same play, he put the following words in the mouth of a sympathetic Englishman: 'Brother, what can one do in this matter? Everything depends on the Creator. Appeal to Him for He is the saviour of the whole world and of its suffering humanity. May He free you from the web of your difficulties.'¹⁷¹

The common use of the devotional form of prayer for expressing the plight of the country seems to suggest that Harish-

chandra was articulating a typical tendency to rationalize helplessness by attributing it to the inscrutable design of God. This was the depressing complement of the more cheering aspect of the same mentality that made possible the myth of divine dispensation.

The explanations for the continuing absence of relief from the rulers carried assumptions that underlay also the more sophisticated political attitudes which formed the basis for contemporary Indian politics. Raja Sir T. Madhav Rao (1828-91), for example, discounted the suspicion about the proneness of educated Indians 'to become disloyal' that haunted 'the minds of our rulers', and assured, on the basis of his access to 'the inmost thoughts' of 'many highly educated fellow countrymen', that they viewed British rule as:¹⁷²

The strongest and the most righteous and the best suited to India's diverse populations and diverse interests. . . . It is the most capable of self-maintenance, of self-renovation and self-adjustment, in reference to the progressive advancement of the subject races.

Since 'it must be contrary to human nature itself to expect that the British nation should undertake the heavy duty and responsibility of governing and defending India without any advantage to itself', Madhav Rao was not opposed to some legitimate compensation being taken by the British. But it was incumbent on Indians to make sure that the compensation did not exceed legitimate limits. This needed to be done because 'human nature is so constituted that the most exalted political virtues have an inherent tendency to deteriorate unless public opinion acts as a constant corrective.' Moreover, the British Indian government was prone to decline from its 'high ideals' as a result of the 'temptation to prefer English to Indian interests.'¹⁷³

Madhav Rao, the proud Maharashtrian Brahman who had been diwan of three Indian states and had twice declined membership of the supreme legislative council, was by no means a great radical. But he was able to see the inherently exploitative character of the British connection. Here, as in the diary of Govardhanram Tripathi, was a refined version of

the colloquial warning that even a mother did not feed her child unless the latter cried.

III

It may be that one hears in Madhav Rao's observations statements he did not exactly make and discerns a note he did not exactly strike. But this additive exercise is perhaps not entirely a function of a retrospective reading advantaged by the awareness of what subsequently happened. It can be argued that the 'additional' statements and the 'extra' tone lay in the original text, and, given the constraints of the time, took a form that could not but have been implicit. Tactical and pragmatic considerations necessitated a tailoring of the text. Hemchandra Banerji, Harishchandra and Pratapnarayan Misra referred to this fact in their own ways. But if these considerations influenced the form of expression, they also seem to have moulded the mode of thinking itself. At this level the influence was not altogether conscious. This is the level at which the twin myths operated.

Thakore's ordeal illustrates our point. Townsend's diagnosis of the societal dynamics of Asia and his prognosis of doom left young Thakore with no hope. He was deprived of the very basis of a justification for living. He wished that his past—his collective cultural past—could be 'annihilated, nullified, revoked, modified' so that the theory on which rested the prognosis of doom could be 'exploded'. He felt he could not do it, but knew that this is what had to be done for survival. Hence the 'imperious necessity' of studying Indian history.

The circumstances that necessitated the study of the past also affected the nature of its results. Crucial to these circumstances was the fact that the present could only torment. The way out of the torment lay into the distant future, but through an inevitable detour in the past. The past gave the present ground for hope in the future. At the same time, it was also seen as the instrument that had 'forged' for the present 'the fetters' that bound the present, and these needed to be shaken off as a necessary preparation for the future.¹⁷⁴

To the extent that it was within the syndrome of subjection that the discovery of the past was undertaken, the constant

point of validation was provided by the alien connection, irrespective of whether the syndrome was negotiated with the help of western analogues or of alternatives gleaned from the indigenous past. Largely, however, it was in terms of analogues (as when the division of powers was shown to have been the basis of ancient Indian polity) that an attempt was made to get over the feeling of inferiority. The trick lay in claiming chronological precedence for most of what the rulers prided in. Hence the assertion that India was 'the elder sister of Britain' and 'the mother of the world's ancient civilization, literature and arts'.¹⁷⁵ But even if, at times, indigenous alternatives were sought to counter the rulers' superiority (as in the call for maintaining selfhood) the exercise carried a hint of inverted inferiority.

The myth of divine dispensation limited the scope of this kind of native romanticism. Instead of invariably questioning the rulers' superiority, it enabled the ruled to emulate the rulers, in certain respects at least, without feeling culturally swamped. This gave rise to what may be called 'metropolitan' romanticism. It found expression in celebrating the British as the carriers of the ideas of freedom and equality. The two romanticisms together alleviated the torment of the present with the hope of a better future. They also made possible the coexistence of hostility to and willing acceptance of British rule.

This structural ambivalence of attitudes to the colonial connection was sustained by two major intellectual constituents of the modern educated Hindus' consciousness. These constituents were traditional Sanskrit texts and modern western 'importations'.¹⁷⁶ There was a close correspondence in the choice of works adapted and translated from Sanskrit and English in most Indian languages. A similar study of the Indian Muslims' responses to the colonial connection would yield interesting comparisons and contrasts.

Judging by the works of late nineteenth century Hindi and Gujarati writers, it would seem that the generations of Dabpat and Harishchandra had not lost their traditional moorings although dents had begun to appear in their basic intellectual premises and belief systems. There could be, as indeed there was, a variety of ways in which the traditional and the imported constituents mixed. A Misra, for example, could feel more

confident of the capacity of his traditions to cope with the new situation than did a Premghan, even if both realized the value of traditions and remained organically related to them. Equally, they realized the need for coming to terms with the alien impact which would not permit a total rejection of itself.

This variety in the proportional internalization of the two major constituents continued all along. But, paradoxically, the traditional constituent tended to weaken in course of time even as the demand for political freedom gained in assertiveness and militancy. The fate of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* embodies the irony of this development. Within a decade of writing this critique of modern western civilization, Gandhi became the supreme leader of the Indian national movement. Barring occasional eclipses or withdrawals, he held the position for almost three decades. These were the decades when the conception of a free India took shape. That the conception bore little resemblance to the cultural alternative enunciated in the *Hind Swaraj*, in spite of Gandhi's continued commitment to it, is illustrative of the growing hold of the 'imported' as against the traditional constituent of colonial consciousness.

REFERENCES

1. See O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, New York, 1964; and Philip Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race*, London, 1962. The value of Mannoni's work rests on the specific observations made by him about a particular colonial situation. The veracity of these observations neither derives from nor confirms the theoretical basis of the study. On the strength of his own observations, in fact, can be questioned his basic theoretical formulation about the division of the human species into two types: the 'native' with his 'dependency complex' and the European with his independent personality. For a convincing critique of the distinction between the colonial and the colonized, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, New York, 1968, pp. 93-108. As for the categorization of responses to the colonial authority, conceptually these are conceived of as coexisting in varying proportions. Man is both Ariel and Caliban, like he is both Jekyll and Hyde. This essential indivisiveness is seen clearly when the unit of analysis is the individual. The indivisiveness is lost sight of when Ariel and Caliban are used as models for examining group responses to the colonial connection in actual historical situations.

2. Though the Hindi-speaking regions responded rather late to the new politics of associations and organized agitation along what came to be called constitutional lines, they were not devoid of a different kind of political consciousness as would be clear from the spread of the anti-British outbreak during 1857-58. That almost all the Hindi writers discussed here tended to look upon 1857 as a setback, fortunately temporary, to the good work the British had begun would indicate a degree of alienation from a whole segment of their traditional resources. On closer examination, though, one is likely to find a measure of ambivalence in the response of these writers, and of their contemporaries, to 1857.
3. Besides himself employing these forms, Harishchandra advised his contemporary writers to do likewise in order to be able to reach the masses of their countrymen including women. See *Bharatendu Granthavali*, Kashi, Samvat 2010, vol. II, pp. 396-97, 405-407, 500-503; vol. III, pp. 935-93. For a full length study of this aspect of late 19th century Hindi literature, see Vimallesh Kanti, *Bharatenduyugin Hindi Kavya mein Loktara*, Dilli, 1974.
4. See *Kavivachan Sudha*, *Harishchandra Chandrika* and *Harishchandra's Magazine*. The North Western Provinces government was so displeased with the *Chandrika's* tone that it discontinued its subscription; but did so on the specious plea that indecent literature appeared in the magazine. See, for the government's action, Srinarayan Chaturvedi, *Adhunik Hindi ka Adi Kaal (1857-1908)*, Allahabad, 1973, p. 88.
5. *The First Annual Report of the Indian Association 1876-77*, Calcutta, 1877, pp. vi-vii.
6. Shyamsundar Das, ed., *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, vol. I, Prayag, n.d., pp. 369-71.
7. Braj Ratna Das, *Bharatendu Harishchandra*, Allahabad, 1962 (reprint), pp. 166-73.
8. Ramvilas Sharma, *Bharatendu Harishchandra*, Dilli, 1965 (2nd edition), p. 38.
9. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, pp. 623-24.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 625-29.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 630-31.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 633.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 675-76.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 699.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 707-11.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 721.
17. The use of the term 'Hindu' by Harishchandra and his contemporary writers is of special significance for an analysis of the process of national consciousness and identity formation in modern India. They used the term for denoting both the Hindu community and the Indian people. Implicit in the interchangeability of the meanings of the term were assumptions that reflected, and influenced, the patterns of social cohesion and division in modern India. I have dealt with this problem in my paper on 'Communal Consciousness in late 19th Century Hindi

Literature', in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 170-85.

18. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, pp. 761-65.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 793-96.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 797-809.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 806.
22. Even after making allowance for the possibility that Harishchandra might have been impelled by tactical considerations to introduce an element of ambiguity in his political plays, it is difficult to share Ram Vilas Sharma's view that Bharat Durdasha, a character in *Bharat Durdasha* symbolizing the misfortune of India, represents British rule. The equivocal character of the message of both *Bharat Durdasha* and *Bharat-Janani* reflects the ambivalence of Harishchandra's attitude towards the colonial connection.
23. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, p. 867.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 813-14.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 815-17.
26. See especially the article on 'Levy' which appeared in *Kavivachan Sudiya* and is included in *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. III, pp. 938-40; and *Harishchandra's Magazine*, all the issues of which are available at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Library, Allahabad.
27. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, p. 735. This lecture was serialized in the *Hindi Pradip* at the behest of whose editor it was delivered in June 1877. See the issues for Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. 1877.
28. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, p. 737.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 735.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 133-34, 140.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
32. He formed a society called *Twadiya Samaj*. Its members were bound by a vow to promote indigenous goods.
33. See the advertisement in *Harishchandra's Magazine*, 15 Jan. 1874. I have discussed the interrelation between material interests and a growing nationalist ideology in *Dependence and Disillusionment: The Emergence of National Consciousness in later 19th Century India*, New Delhi, 1975.
34. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. I, pp. 163-84.
35. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 811. See also his *mukariz* on laws and titles; *ibid.*, p. 812.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 731-38.
37. I have dealt with these limitations in 'Literature and Changing Social Consciousness', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. VI, Nos. 1-2, 1979-80, pp. 209-29.
38. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. I, pp. 155-61; Braj Ratna Das, ed., *Bharatendu Natakavali*, Allahabad, Samvat 2013, p. 218.
39. It is interesting how Ramvilas Sharma sees Premghani's *Bharat Sambhagya* as a contrast to Harishchandra's *Bharat Durdasha*. Writing disparagingly about the former, he sees it as a loyalist play intended to please the rulers. Here is an illustration of how the basic unity of the

structure of educated Indian attitudes to British rule has been missed. See *Bharatendu-Yuga aur Hindi Bhasha ki Vikas-Parampara*, Delhi, 1975, p. 55. It is perhaps his keenness to see *Bharat Saubhagya* as a purely loyalist text that leads Sharma into the erroneous belief that the play was occasioned by Queen Victoria's golden jubilee.

40. *Bharat Saubhagya*, Mirzapur, 1889, pp. 8, 51.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-30, 38-9.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
44. Prabhakareswar Prasad Upadhyaya and Dineshnarayan Upadhyaya, eds., *Premghana-Sarvaswa*, Prayag, Shikha 1884, vol. I, p. 286.
45. *Bharat Saubhagya*, p. 68.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
47. *Premghana-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, p. 286.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
49. *Bharat Saubhagya*, pp. 54, 62-4.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-109.
51. Premghan continued to write poems that were cast in the mould of *Bharat Saubhagya*. This trend persisted in spite of the post-1905 transformation in Indian politics. The only pure eulogy he wrote was way back in 1877 on the occasion of the assumption by Queen Victoria of the title of Empress. See *Premghana-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, pp. 123-26, 243-51, 268-92, 335-49, 371-77, 381-87.
52. This relates to the Hindu practice of making offerings to their dead during a particular fortnight every year when these departed souls are supposed to come to this world.
53. *Premghana-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, pp. 153-63; see also pp. 363-67.
54. I am grateful to Shri Advaita Charan Goswami, grandson of Radha-charan Goswami, for kindly making available to me copies of the latter's autobiography and two tracts on widow marriage and foreign travel.
55. *Yamulok ki Yatra*, Mirzapur, 1888, p. 29.
56. For Goswami's tension, see his *Autobiography*, p. 3.
57. *Yamulok ki Yatra*, p. 15.
58. *Bharatendu*, 20 July 1883.
59. *Ibid.*, 18 Feb. 1886.
60. *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1885.
61. *Ibid.*, June 1883.
62. *Ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1885.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1883.
65. Narayan Prasad Arora and Satyabhakta, eds., *Pratap Lahari*, Kanpur, 1949, p. 40. The word used in the couplet is 'Hindu'. But, in its context, it means Indian. See note 17 above.
66. Vijayshankar Mall, ed., *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, Kashi, Samvat 2010, vol. I, p. 65.
67. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 189.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

69. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 69.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
73. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 49.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 141, 145.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
76. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 367, 408.
77. *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 117, 140.
78. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 272, 311, 371; *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 35, 113.
79. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 113.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26, 29, 47, 53, 57, 98.
81. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 270-78.
82. *Ibid.*, pp. 265-67. See also p. 407 for the contention that poverty—and not social customs, as the official view would insist—caused decline in the health of Indians. Reformers like Keshab Chandra Sen, Dr Mahendra Lal Sarkar and B.M. Malahari shared the view that customs like child marriage adversely affected the average health of Indians.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 272-77; *Pratap Lahari*, p. 26.
84. Harishchandra used the terms *apanapan* while Misra used its modern variant *apanapan*. *Bharatendu-Natakavali*, p. 206; *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 673. Misra also employed, in the same context, other terms like *nijata*, *nijatva* and *jatiyata*. See *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 27, 58, 62; *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 671-73.
85. *Bharatendu-Natakavali*, p. 206.
86. *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 27, 58, 62.
87. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 671-78. Writing as early as 1882, Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850-82) dealt with the comprehensive nature of the British hold over India; it threatened the very cultural survival of the ruled and deprived them of their basic traits. *Amachya Deshachi Shikhi*, Nagpur, 1937, pp. 90-93. I am obliged to Rajahri Gokhale Pandey for so lucidly explaining this Marathi text to me.
88. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 97.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
90. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 66-67.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
93. *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 115-16; 246-53.
94. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 244.
95. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 212.
96. Judging by the second issue of the *Hindi Pradip*, the immediate impulse to start the paper in spite of financial and domestic difficulties seems to have been provided by the North Western Provinces government order No. 1494 of 13 July 1877 saying that only those English-knowing Indians would be entitled to government service who also knew either

- Persian or Urdu. See *Hindi Pradip*, Oct. 1877.
97. Pratapnarayan Misra wrote a blistering attack on the government while reacting to this incident. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 76-77.
 98. Madhukar Bhatt, *Pandit Balkrishna Bhatt: Vyaktitva aur Krititva*, Varanasi, 1972, pp. 54-57.
 99. *Hindi Pradip*, Sep. 1877.
 100. *Ibid.*, Feb. 1878.
 101. *Ibid.* Without saying so in such unmistakable terms—perhaps struggling towards the kind of correlation Bhatt had seen between Indian poverty and British prosperity—Premghani made a pointed reference to the fact that during the sixty years of Victoria's reign England had moved up from virtual poverty to be a mighty and prosperous nation; as against this, during the same period, India had wallowed in squalor. *Premghani-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, p. 288.
 102. *Hindi Pradip*, Mar. 1878.
 103. *Ibid.*, Aug. 1878.
 104. *Ibid.*, Sep. 1878.
 105. *Ibid.*, Dec. 1877.
 106. *Nutan Brahmachari Upanyas*, Prayag, Samvat 1968, p. 3.
 107. *Hindi Pradip*, Feb. 1878.
 108. *Ibid.*, Sep. 1878.
 109. *Ibid.*, Dec. 1878.
 110. *Harichandra's Magazine*, 15 Feb. 1874. The review is in English.
 111. See *Dalpat Kavya*, Mumbai, 1878, vol. II.
 112. *Ibid.*, p. 59, col. i.
 113. See *Narmakavita*, Mumbai, 1914 (first edition, 1887), pp. 80-94, 790-93, 815-22, 829, 870-71. Instead of goats and lions, Narmad uses the contrasting pair of goats and wolves. He even wrote a loyal poem in English. *Ibid.*, pp. 815-17.
 114. *Bharat Satbhagya*, p. 72.
 115. *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, p. 10.
 116. *Hindi Pradip*, Feb. 1878.
 117. *Chitthe aur Khat*, Calcutta, Samvat 1981, p. 10. Balmukund Gupta edited the *Bharat Mitra* and made it a fairly trenchant paper.
 118. *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, p. 144.
 119. The fact that even Dadabhai Naoroji, (1825-1917), the Grand Old Man of the Indian national movement who contributed so much to popularize the idea of 'drain', named his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* would suggest the spread of faith in an ideal norm that was associated with the British.
 120. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. I, p. 134.
 121. *Bharatendu-Natakavali*, p. 208.
 122. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 58.
 123. *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 277.
 124. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 123; *Pratapnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 272. For similar use of *suraj*, see also p. 412.
 125. *Premghani-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, p. 287.

126. Quoted in H.M. Das Gupta, *Studies in Western Influence on Nineteenth Century Bengali Poetry 1857-1887*, Calcutta, 1935, p. 45, note 1. But Hemchandra also wrote: 'Know it as a gospel truth that the enlightened policy of the English nation is the *sine qua non* to the emancipation of India.' And: '... for the future of India there is no other course left open to the destiny of her life. With them (the English nation) she must rise or fall.' Ibid., p. 50, note 1.
127. Harishchandra made a direct reference to this in the *Bharat Durdasha* while contending that the local officials were in the habit of disregarding laws and punishing what they capriciously regarded as disloyalty. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. I, p. 153. See also *Bharatendu - Natakavali* for a similar observation in *Bharat-Janani*, p. 215.
128. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. II, p. 721.
129. *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 246-51.
130. Premghan's younger brother, then studying at the Muir Central College, Allahabad, and very keen on staging the play at the time of the Congress session, reported this reaction of Rampal Singh in a letter to the playwright. See the preface to *Bharat Sambhagya*, p. 8.
131. Kantilal C. Pandya et al., eds., *Govardhanram Madhavarum Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894*, Bombay, 1959, pp. 149-50.
132. Ibid., p. 150. Gandhi, in his *Hind Swaraj*, wrote in a similar vein: 'If the English become Indianized, we can accommodate them.' P. 65. But Gandhi was talking an altogether different language.
133. Ibid., pp. 151-52. See also the entry for 29 Mar. 1891, pp. 24-25.
134. See Narmad's long essay entitled 'Aryotkarsha' (1882) in *Dharmavichar*, Mumbai, 1914, pp. 97-105; and Ramesh Shukla, *Narmad: Ek Samalochana*, Mumbai, 1979, pp. 207. I am indebted to Prof. Suresh Joshi who, in spite of indifferent health, explained to me the meaning of this difficult essay by Narmad.
135. *Pratap Lahari*, pp. 250-52.
136. *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, pp. 8-9.
137. Kavi Narmadashankar Lalshankar, *Dharmavichar*, pp. 102-103.
138. The myth was required, for different reasons though, by both the rulers and the ruled. How the rulers saw this is graphically described in the reminiscences of an Anglo-Indian civilian. He wrote: 'Our life in India, our very work more or less, rests on illusion. I had the illusion, wherever I was, that I was infallible and invulnerable in my dealing with Indians. How else could I have dealt with angry mobs, with cholera-stricken masses, and with processions of religious fanatics? It was not conceit, Heaven knows! It was not the prestige of the British Raj, but it was the illusion which is in the very air of India. They expressed something of the idea when they called us the "Heaven born", and the idea is really make believe—mutual make believe. They, the millions, made us believe we had a divine mission. We made them believe that they were right. Unconsciously perhaps, I may have had at the back of my mind that there was a British Battalion and a Battery of Artillery at the Cantonment near Ajmere; but I never thou-

ght of this, and I do not think that many of the primitive and simple Mers had ever heard of or seen English soldiers. But they saw the head of the Queen-Empress on the rupee, and worshipped it. They had a vague conception of the Raj, which they looked on as a power, omnipotent, all-pervading, benevolent for the most part, but capricious, a deity of many shapes and many moods. . . ' Walter Lawrence, *The India We Served*, Boston, 1929, pp. 42-43.

139. How the Muslims related to British rule is not discussed here.
140. The need to inspire the recipients of English education with implicit faith in the superiority of British rule is articulated in the following observation by Alexander Grant (1826-84): 'When it is reflected that the native University students furnish, or will ere long furnish, the school teachers, the pleaders, the practitioners of European medicine, the subordinate revenue and judicial officers, the overseers of public works, and above all, the newspaper writers, who are constantly disseminating, wise or foolish, disaffected or loyal, criticisms of the acts of Government, it cannot but be felt that it is of the utmost importance that the fountainhead of all this stream of influence, namely the professors and principals of colleges, should be as high and as pure as possible. Without solid and special learning in the professors there is no saying what subversive sentiments may become associated with European learning'. Quoted in B.T. McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, New York, 1940, p. 158 n. The care with which Grant himself discharged this historic pedagogic role is reflected in the alacrity with which he discerned and quashed the subversive orientation of Mahadev Govind Ranade's (1842-1901) mind when the latter was a student at the Elphinstone Institute. In an essay Ranade had made a disparaging comparison between British rule and Maratha rule; clearly he was feeling nostalgically patriotic about the rule the alien Britishers had supplanted. Grant took prompt action in the matter. Not only did he temporarily suspend Ranade's scholarship, he also referred in his annual report to the 'foolish and impertinent expressions' the young man had indulged in 'about the Government which is educating him.' Combining minatory action and persuasion, Grant told the erring student: 'Young man, you should not run down a Government which is educating you and doing so much for your people.' The whole tenor of Ranade's life and public work is a measure of the effectiveness not only of Grant as an individual but also of the hegemonic function for which the educational system had been devised. See James Kellock, *Mahadev Govind Ranade Patriot and Social Servant*, Calcutta, 1926, p. 11; Richard P. Tucker, *Ranade and the Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1972, pp. 35-38. It is significant that Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-46), the first Indian to become a teacher at the Elphinstone Institution and the pioneer of many a public activity in the Bombay presidency, wrote in Marathi a history of Hindustan which was read by generations of school students. His history described the organized oppression and loot carried on under the very aegis of the rulers

- themselves until the British came and brought this unchecked rapacity to an end. See *Amachya Deshachi Sthiti*, p. 82 n.
141. The generation of Harishchandra was reacting to British rule at a point when it had been accepted as an accomplished fact and the struggle waged in 1857 had ended decisively in favour of the British. This is the point when a good deal of rationalization must have gone into the making of attitudes towards British rule. It would be a significant exercise if reactions to British rule could be studied at points when, in different parts of India, it was being established.
 142. *History of Hindustan Being an English Translation of Raja Siva Prasad's Itihastimrtnashak*, Part I, Lucknow, 1890 (third edition), pp. 34-35. The translation was issued under orders from the Director of Public Instruction, N.W.P. and Oudh.
 143. *Ibid.*, p. 87. See also *Strictures upon the Strictures of Sayyad Ahmad Khan Bahadur, C.S.I.* by Sivaprasad, Benares, 1870 (for private circulation only), p. 7.
 144. *Itihastimrtnashak*, pp. 70-71.
 145. H.M. Trivedi, ed., *B.K. Thakore: A Diary Part I; Year 1888*, Baroda, 1969, p. 30. The entry is dated 9.47 p.m., 25 July 1888.
 146. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
 147. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.
 148. *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, p. 157.
 149. *B.K. Thakore: A Diary*, p. 31.
 150. Shiv Prasad, it may be noted, began his *Itihastimrtnashak* by retailing as history the Hindu story of genesis and traced it from the genealogy of the legendary Solar and Lunar dynasties to which belonged the heroes of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; pp. 1-2.
 151. This is not to suggest a polarity between mythical and historical consciousness. There is always a twilight zone in which the two get fused. But to the extent that a distinction is consciously made between the past and history, the twilight zone is narrowed. For the distinction between past and history may be seen J.H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, Harmondsworth, 1973. C. Levi-Strauss, when he talks of 'societies with no history' and 'societies which have histories', seems to highlight the distinction between mythical and historical consciousness; though his scheme might not accept the distinction between past and history in the way suggested by Plumb. See *Structural Anthropology*, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp. 1-27; and G. Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Levi-Strauss*, London, 1970, p. 39. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Memories of Class The Pre-History and After-Life of Class*, London, 1982, pp. 1-33.
 152. *Radhakrishna-Granthavali*, p. 272.
 153. Kristo Das Pal described India as the elder sister of Britain and 'the mother of the world's ancient civilization, literature and arts'. R.C. Palit, ed., *Speeches and Minutes of Kristo Das Pal*, Calcutta, 1887, p. 316. Surendranath Banerji (1848-1925), another anglicized leader who had for some years been a covenanted civilian, asked a

- gathering of young men: '...what Hindoo is there, who does not feel himself a nobler being altogether, as he recalls to mind the proud list of his illustrious countrymen, graced by thrice-immortal names of a Valmiki and Jñ Vyasa, a Panini and a Patanjali, a Gautam and a Shankaracharya? For ours was a most glorious past.' *Speeches of Surendranath Banerji*, Madras, n.d., p. 1.
154. This is from a paper read in 1869. *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of Raja Peary Mohan Mukerjee*, n.d., pp. 1-2.
 155. I have discussed this in 'Communal Consciousness in late 19th Century Hindi Literature', cited above.
 156. *Prengan-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, p. 148; *Pratap Lahari*, p. 50; Balmukund Gupta, *Sphuta-Kavita*, Calcutta, 1905, p. 32.
 157. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. I, p. 116.
 158. *Hindi Pradip*, Feb. 1878; *Pratappnarayan-Granthavali*, p. 371.
 159. *Bharatendu Granthavali*, vol. III, p. 316.
 160. *Pratappnarayan-Granthavali*, pp. 272, 311, 371; see also *Amachya Deshachi Sthiti*, p. 91.
 161. *Hindi Pradip*, July 1878.
 162. 'Bharat mein Yavan Raj' (translation of a Bengali play), *Ibid.*, Mar. 1879.
 163. *Bharatendu*, 18 Feb. 1886.
 164. *Prengan-Sarvaswa*, vol. I, p. 125.
 165. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.
 166. *Pratap Lahari*, p. 36.
 167. *Hindi Pradip*, Dec. 1877.
 168. *Bharat Saubhagya*, p. 86.
 169. *Dalpat Kavya*, vol. II, p. 56, col. 1.
 170. *Bharatendu-Natakavali*, p. 208.
 171. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
 172. S.C. Srinivas Chariet, ed., *Political Opinions of Raja Sir T. Madava Rao, K.C.S.I.*, Madras, 1890, pp. 1-2, 10.
 173. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10.
 174. Bholanauth Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo*, London, 1869, vol. I, p. 229. Chunder wrote this in 1860.
 175. *Speeches and Minutes of Kristo Das Pal*, p. 316.
 176. The various items of these constituents have been listed by M.G. Ranade in his essay on the growth of Marathi literature from the mid-1860s to the late 1890s. He writes: '... a very sensible contribution to the stock of our best works has been made, and the fact that Spencer, Max Muller, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Bacon, Sir Bulwer Lytton, Buckle, Defoe, Swift, Bunyan, Smiles, and Lubbock, have furnished the models for these additions, justified the hope that the national mind is showing signs of a great awakening. . . As none of these additions have been school-books, the industry and enterprise represented by these publications have had to depend for their reward solely upon the unaided patronage of the reading public. With proper guidance and encouragement by such a body as the University, the

circle of this reading public will be enlarged, and we may soon expect to have all the departments of prose literature properly represented in their due proportions, and the work of development, now indifferently attempted by stray authors, will be pushed on and completed in a systematic manner, so as to enable the national mind to digest the best thoughts of Western Europe with the same intimate appreciation that it has shown in the assimilation of the old Sanskrit learning.' *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.G. Ranade*, Bombay, 1915, pp. 31-32. The translations from Sanskrit included the *Bhagwat Gita* which, 'with its numerous commentaries, has furnished the chief supply'. Some of the other works were the *Chandogya*, *Narayan*, *Altareya*, *Taittiriya*, and the *Ishavasya Upanishads*, Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutra*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the plays of Kalidas—the *Shakuntalam* alone being translated by four or five authors—*Mudra-Rakshas*, *Uttar Ramcharitra*, *Malati Madhav*, *Prabodh Chandrodaya*, *Kadambari*, and *Brihatkathasar*. The hope expressed by Ranade was more than fulfilled. Educated Indians were soon showing signs of having an acquaintance with western European literature and learning that surpassed their understanding of their own literary and intellectual stock.

Reality and Realism: Indian Women as Protagonists in Four Nineteenth Century Novels

MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE

WHEN THE NEW genre called the novel came into its own in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, urban life was undergoing changes of several kinds simultaneously which created tensions and paradoxes unknown before. In education alone, not only had a new language become available to the Indian elite, but English had also uncovered new values and opened up new modes of thought including the ideal of individualism, an ideal that was not easily reconcilable with the hierarchical and role-oriented structure of traditional Indian society. The novelists who wrote at this time were products of this tension.

Since realism was the dominant mode of the British Victorian novel—the model immediately available to the Indian writer—his primary challenge was the achievement of realism while remaining faithful to the reality of his social order which generally inhibited individual choice. It was not an easy task because the evolution of the literary form called the novel in England had been closely connected with the emergence of the ideal of individualism in life, and perfection of a mode called realism in fiction, which were both reflections of a basic ideological shift. Todorov is right in pointing out the historic inevitability of literary genres: 'It is not chance that the epic is possible during one era, the novel during the other (the indi-

vidual hero of one being opposed to the collective hero of the former); each of these choices depends upon the ideological framework in which it operates.¹

As a narrative art form the novel differs from the epic on the one hand and from the romance on the other, especially in terms of characterization. The writer of romance does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. Creating real people in a recognizable historical setting—people who are not mere archetypes or representatives of a caste or class or a social role (priest, landlord, mother-in-law, etc.)—necessitates an acceptance of subjective individualism and a specific awareness of history. The latter had never been a component of traditional narrative in India, and the former was not easy in a tradition-bound society even though the writers themselves had begun to be restive. Changes in the writer's own value system were perceptible, but these had not made any dent on the larger social structure; and to this extent the major Indian novels of the nineteenth century reflect a central dilemma of the period.

Returning to the Western model once more, we find that the growth of individualism in English fiction from the 18th century onwards can be related, among other factors, to the new social mobility that industrialization had made possible, making man realize his unique potential outside a rigid hierarchy. Imperial expansion was another factor of mobility, as was the breakdown of hereditary professional categories. Nothing comparable had happened to the English-educated urban Indians of the nineteenth century who were the creators as well as consumers of literature. Their mental horizon may have undergone a basic change, but in terms of economic potential the range had not expanded. The aspiration of most educated Indians was to find employment under the British, and thus to the hierarchy of the traditional social and family structure was now added a new colonial hierarchy.

The depiction of love and courtship was a major concern of the English novelists of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Around the time the novel emerged in English, the relationship between the sexes was undergoing a change where the concept of romantic love was displacing that of courtly love and marriage was slowly becoming a matter of individual

choice rather than of social obligation.²

In late nineteenth century India not only were conventions of marriage restrictive, social intercourse between the sexes was not common in the upper classes. Where girls were married off by their parents before puberty, there was very little scope for emotional relationships of the kind depicted in the English novel which the educated Indian enjoyed reading. Romantic love could perhaps be depicted in historical novels whose temporal remoteness helped minimize social rigidity; also, they were not bound by the conventions of realism. In the contemporary Indian setting, however, love could only be illicit, involving either a widow or a courtesan, since only these two categories of women were without legal proprietors and thus seemed to embody a certain amount of unharnessed sexual energy. Moreover, both were outside structured society. Hence love of this kind was doomed from the beginning. In depicting the man-woman relationship, each major Indian writer attempted in his own way to reconcile the demands of the novel, with its emphasis on the self-determination of the individual and the intransigence of contemporary social reality.

Four novels will be discussed in this paper to analyse different aspects of this problem.³ All written in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the novels are:

1. *Indira* (Bengali) by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) 1873; revised edition 1893.
2. *Indulekha* (Malayalam) by O. Chandu Menon (c. 1847-99), 1888.
3. *Pan Lakshyant Kon Gheto* (Marathi) by Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919), 1890.
4. *Umrao Jan Ada* (Urdu) by Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa (1858-1931), 1899.

Widely different in theme and technique, these novels have some common features:

- (a) They were written by major novelists in each language.
- (b) The protagonists are women though the writers are not.
- (c) They deal with contemporary society or with a period within living memory.
- (d) They are realistic in intention.

The last two points become important when it is seen how often Indian prose narratives in the nineteenth century were set in a vague historical past and used the conventions of romance.

The women protagonists are from four different social milieus. Indira is the daughter of wealthy Bengali landlord; Indulekha belongs to a prosperous matrilinear Nair family in Kerala; Yamuna in Apte's novel is a middle class Maharashtrian girl from Pune; and Umrao Jan is a courtesan of Lucknow and Kanpur. Three of these novels are narrated in the first person by the protagonists themselves; only *Indulekha* has an omniscient narrator who intervenes occasionally to share an opinion or two with the reader and to comment on events. Even in the first person narrations the tone varies considerably. *Indira* is written in the mode of comedy where the heroine's playful high spirits are not suppressed for long even during her misfortunes. The shadow of tragedy falls on Hari Narayan Apte's novel *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetto* right from beginning. Yamuna's childhood and even the brief happy interlude in Bombay is darkened by an impending disaster. Umrao Jan in Mirza Ruswa's novel has an urbane cynical attitude towards life, and although she occasionally makes a ritual reference to her 'sin', the tone of her narrative is free from guilt or self-pity.

Of the four novels only one has a traditional happy ending in marriage. *Indulekha*, unusually for its time, depicts romantic love in a contemporary situation between two young persons and ends in a marriage that combines individual fulfilment, social sanction and material benefit. O. Chandu Menon could make this realistically feasible by choosing his heroine from the Nair community where, because of the property laws, women have more independence than in most other communities of India. In *Indira* the heroine is already married when the novel begins and her attempts to reclaim an estranged husband constitute the plot. *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetto* is a *bildungsroman* tracing the protagonist's growth from childhood to maturity, and marriage is not a climactic event. Though married at eleven, the meaning of marriage dawns on Yamuna very gradually and widowhood is part of the experience tackled in this dense close-packed narrative of nearly 700 pages. Umrao Jan, by virtue (or vice) of her profession, is outside the structured society where marriages are made, and the novel ends

with a sad and cynical acceptance of loneliness.

All the four novels are intended to be realistic and each one uses a different device to ensure credibility. In *Indira* and *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetu* the language and style of the first person narrative is meant to ensure authenticity. Indira's irrepressible vivacity is supported by her rich image-making propensity while her limited feminine horizon is defined by her general acceptance of her social role in spite of occasional lively doubts. Yamuna's style in *Pan Lakshyant* has a lack of sophistication and her ineptitude in verbalizing complex states of mind is only to be expected in a woman without formal education. The prolixity of the novel and its unwieldy quality are also part of the characterization of the narrator. The authors of the other two books, Mirza Ruswa and O. Chandu Menon, have written at length about realism (see Appendices II and III) justifying their ways of writing. Although Ruswa did not use the word 'realism' or its Urdu equivalent, he was indeed propagating the need for psychological realism in fiction when he insisted that common events of ordinary lives are full of fictional potential if we have the ability to see them from within. Without mentioning names he thrusts a dig at his contemporaries like Nazir Ahmed who set their novels in a vague past and did not take any trouble over historical authenticity. With mock humility Ruswa wrote: 'Great ability and much labour is required to write a historical novel, and I have neither the ability nor the leisure to do it.' His emphasis is on the present time and ordinary life, the two axes on which formal realism of the western variety rests.

Chandu Menon states his intentions more clearly than the others in the elaborate preface to *Indulekha* where he extols the superiority of the realistic mode over any other fictional mode. There can always be a gap between intention and execution, and we shall return to the question of how the realistic intentions of these writers relate to their apprehension of reality.

I. *Indira* (1873)

The tone of the first chapter (see Appendix I) establishes the lively nature of the nineteen-year-old narrator-heroine, and her romantic yearning to be with her husband. Unlike her proud father, she does not understand the value of money. But money

and class are important elements throughout the novel. The ostentatious palanquin and the impressive entourage that Indira's new-rich husband's family sends for her invites trouble, and she is abducted by highwaymen while she is on her way to her husband's house. Robbed of her social identity (clothes, jewellery, money), she has to begin life again from scratch, entirely on her own. A lawyer's family in Calcutta employs her as a domestic servant, and gradually the young mistress becomes her friend. Indira's employers conspire to bring her husband to the house and thereafter leave the matter to her resources. She manages to seduce him without revealing her identity, because she knows that no husband will accept a wife who has been taken away by robbers. Once he is completely under her power she takes him into confidence and, with his help, gets accepted by his family. That is the outline of the plot.

Since the novel is written in the comic mode (in the revised edition of *Indira*, Bankim quoted Shelley's poem 'Rarely rarely comest thou/Spirit of Delight' to underline the spirit of the work), it touches but very lightly upon the moral and social dilemmas of the young heroine. The emphasis is on her clever handling of the problems rather than on the basic nature of the problems. Yet there are a few uneasy moments when the questioning of values cannot be altogether avoided. For example, having succeeded in snaring her husband, Indira for a fleeting while doubts the worth of a man who is so easily tempted. While Suhasini, her mistress and friend, decks her up for the secret assignation at night, Indira says:

I am happy, but I can't think very highly of him. I know there is nothing wrong in what I am doing because he is my husband, but he does not know that I am his wife. How can I respect a man who agrees so easily to have a secret appointment with another man's wife?

Suhasini tries to justify his behaviour by reminding Indira that he is a man, and he does not have a wife at home to be loyal to. Indira replies, 'I too don't have a husband', and asks a crucial question: 'Is it so difficult for a man to control his desires?' After reaching this uncomfortable point the novel

moves back to the comic level and Suhasini suggests that a woman must please a man by looking after the small details of his comfort. Indira's spirited rejoinder is:⁴

But that is the work of a slave. Am I trying to win him back only to show him how good I can be as a slave?

What are we but slaves?

When there is love between us I will not mind doing a slave's work. I will press his feet, fan him and prepare his pan leaf. Not until then.

After winning back her husband Indira is not expected to question his individual worth. Upendra as a man is not important in the novel. Only as a husband does he matter. What emerges of his character is not very positive, and Indira does notice his naive gullibility in contrast to the ways of the English-educated men she saw in her employer's house in Calcutta. But she does not allow herself to be critical. She knows that she must love her husband irrespective of his personal qualities.

There is a recognizable gap between the romantic yearning of the girl who was eager to meet her unknown husband (chapters 1 and 2) and the woman who settled down to live with the reclaimed husband at the end of the novel. At the surface level the novel ends happily, and the implied sadness in the gap between the beginning and the end is scarcely admitted. The quality of Indira's language and her imagery, however, suggest a sense of loss. At the time of her first journey she is a girl brimming over with the joy of being young, waiting for the man who will make her complete. At the end of the novel, when she makes the same journey with her husband, instead of being fulfilled she seems rather subdued. She herself tries to explain the difference by contrasting imagination with acquisition. Her first journey was like poetry, the other was like wealth. 'Can a rich man's wealth be ever compared to poetry? . . . Can the realization of a dream be as delightful as the dream itself?'⁵ In her characteristically exuberant and metaphor-laden manner Indira goes on to speculate on the

similarity between money and the colour of the sky. The sky is not blue, she says; we only think it is so. 'So with money. Money is not happiness. Poetry is happiness because it generates hope. Money can only be consumed, and not everyone knows how to consume it either. So many rich men spend their lives protecting money like treasury guards.'⁶

The imagery given to Indira at this point reveals more than the overt intent of the plot. The development of the plot can be seen in four phases:

- A. Anticipation of happiness
- B. Frustration and loss
- C. Attempts to gain happiness
- D. Achievement of happiness

In the above list the word happiness can be easily substituted by the word husband because in the conscious norms of Bankim's world there can be no doubt about their equation. Achievement ought to be better than anticipation; and if the narrative can be seen as a graph, the novel should end at a higher point of bliss than where it began. Yet, in the actual structure of the novel, realized through language, imagery and tone, the achieved happiness of the end falls far below the anticipation.

One does not know if Bankim was conscious of this effect; or if it can be explained away merely by saying that adult reality seldom matches adolescent dream. Whatever the author's intentions might have been, the theme of the novel can be seen as the transformation of the romantic longing of an unfettered individual into the complacent purr of a tamed wife who has found her gilded niche.

Yet in the last paragraph of the novel, which by the logic of the surface plot ought to be the happiest, Indira's smugness seems to be undermined by a vague nostalgia: 'I have not forgotten Suhasini. I will never forget her as long as I am alive.' Suhasini was her friend (initially her mistress) during her days of hardship. This was one relationship in Indira's life where the ties were not familial or social. They related to each other merely as two individuals. Suhasini took Indira home without knowing anything about her. At that time

Indira was wearing a coarse *sari* and had none of the social identity markers like jewellery. By the time Suhasini discovered the marks on Indira's skin that indicated habitual wearing of jewellery, revealing her rich parentage, they were already friends. No other relationship in the novel has the same intensity. In describing Suhasini's beauty Indira becomes lyrical with images of the lotus, waves of a river, and the swaying branches of a mango tree.⁷ Today's readers might see traces of lesbianism in this attachment. But they might do well to remember that in a restrictive society where the sexes are segregated friendships between persons of the same sex tend to gain in intensity; and also that even though the narrative voice is a woman's, it merely projects the male authorial view of feminine sensibility. In the description of female beauty the author seems to take over from the narrator.

Like many of Bankim's other novels (*Kapalkundala*, *Visha Vriksha*, *Durgeshnandini*), *Indira* begins with a journey. A journey is a specially significant experience for a woman who normally inhabits an enclosed space. The mobility and the freedom of the road for the time being liberates her from the inhibitive social structure. ('I wish I could be a bird.') There are three journeys in the novel. After being abducted and robbed by the highwaymen, Indira is taken to Calcutta on a boat by a charitable family. During this second journey she is enthralled by the beauty of the Ganga and looks at everything with wonder and delight in spite of her present misery. She is amused by the flirtatious songs of two little girls on the river-bank about how they will shake their ankle bells and strut boldly. Indira's prosaic companion is annoyed at the vulgarity of the song, but the song makes Indira wonder about the definition of decency. The author makes the ankle-bell-shaking song part of the design of the novel, prefiguring Indira's own later action. The third journey is undertaken with her husband when he brings her home at the end. 'Travelling with my husband was a happy occasion no doubt, but my first journey was joyous in a different way.'⁸ Thus a good part of the pattern of the novel is traced through the motifs of journey.

A long-distance journey in the nineteenth century was an adventure fraught with hazards. It may not be a coincidence that not only in *Indira* but in all the four novels under discus-

sion, robbery is used as part of the plot. Except in *Indulekha*, where the event takes place in a railway station, it happens on the highway. This was a common enough danger at the time, and in Bankim's novels this situation is often used as a plot device. In *Kapalkundala* Motibibi meets Nabakumar because of a robbery; in *Debi Chaudhurani* and *Anandamath* the central characters are members of bandit gangs who plunder for altruistic purposes to restore the balance between the rich and the poor. Unlike *Indira*, which is set at a time nearly contemporary to its time of writing, *Kapalkundala*, *Debi Chaudhurani* and *Anandamath* are set in the past; the latter two in a time of nightmarish misrule in Bengal. The British attempted to impose some law and order, but even in the mid-nineteenth century, when Indira's husband left for the 'far away Punjab', we are told, 'the road going west was dangerous and difficult'.⁹ Although *Indira* was published in 1873, the era that is recounted is certainly pre-1857, because in the novel Indira is a mature woman recollecting in tranquillity a couple of eventful years of her youth.

In *Umrao Jan Ada*, which includes the 1857 upheaval as part of the background, the heroine becomes the victim of an armed attack during a journey. Unaware that her escort and lover is himself a renowned robber, Umrao Jan finds herself being carried off as a booty when another group overtakes them. In *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetto*, there is an early episode where the narrator heroine has a frightening encounter with a robber while parked in a bullock cart by the highway, and another when her brother Ganpat is taken away by the thieves for his gold ear-rings. Highway robbery was a common occurrence till late in the nineteenth century, and memories of *thugs* and *bargis* (marauders who travelled across the country) have remained to this day part of the legends and nursery rhymes of Bengal.

Apart from being a realistic reflection of life, robbery also serves as a fictional device by disturbing the *status quo* and, as in *Indira*, setting the action in motion. As in the game of snakes and ladders, from a very high position the heroine falls down to reach the rock bottom whence she has to slowly make her way up depending entirely on her own resources. This, then, was a strategy of divesting the protagonist of the protec-

tive social crust and seeing her as an individual, unsupported by the props of family, class or caste.

II. Indulekha (1888)

If in *Indira* there is a subtle tension between the author's overt social attitudes (upholding of order and orthodoxy) and the romantic and individualistic undercurrents revealed through tone and imagery, in *Indulekha* the conflict is between the conscious aesthetic intentions of the writer derived from his reading of Western literature, and the gravitational pull of the traditional narrative conventions.

Indulekha began as an adaptation of Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple*, a minor Victorian novel forgotten today, though in the completed work not much trace remains of the model. It is a strange irony of the colonial situation that some of our major nineteenth century writers looked up to second or third-rate British writers as their models and often ended up achieving much more. Hari Narayan Apte modelled one of his novels on W.M. Reynold's *The Seamstress*, a trashy Victorian best-seller, and Bankimchandra Chatterjee acknowledged his debt to Bulwer Lytton and Wilkie Collins in the preface to *Rajani*. O. Chandu Menon far surpassed his modest aim of adapting Disraeli and ended up by writing the first major novel in Malayalam.

Indulekha was written with two specific objectives: to introduce a new literary form in Malayalam—a realistic narrative of contemporary life—and to show the necessity and advantages of English education, especially for women. The first objective is explained at length in the introduction (see Appendix II) where Chandu Menon berates the mythic imagination of the Hindus and extols the western mode of realism in painting (*Indulekha*, from this point of view, could be regarded as a literary counterpart of Ravi Varma's paintings), extending the same argument to literature. Modes in literature and painting have quite often echoed each other in the history of human imagination. In the eighteenth century the novelist Fielding and the painter Hogarth referred to each other to justify their satiric intentions and to emphasize their view of reality. Modes

in literature and painting reflect the same ethos and thus impressionism, surrealism and cubism can all be shown to have parallels in literature. Chandu Menon rejects the traditional Indian modes of both painting and story-telling and chooses to adopt what he considers a superior mode. His actual work, however, often veers towards the pre-novel forms of story-telling and away from the realistic technique that he so admires.

Chandu Menon's young lovers—Indulekha and Madhavan—are both paragons of beauty and virtue and their courtship is presented in a stylized manner (her heart is flint, he cannot sleep at night, they express their love through poetry). There is no characterization in the realistic sense, and the delay in their union is caused purely by external circumstances. There is no conflict within the individual, or between the individual and society, the adversaries often being either illusory or comic figures. The action is propelled forward by accidents and coincidences. Once separated, the heroine languishes in illness while the hero goes on his picaresque journey, following predictable fairy or folk tale conventions.

But the ironic gap between the author's intention and his execution is never more clear than at the end. Menon writes:¹⁰

Now my story is ended. . . . All the characters mentioned in this book are still alive. Madhavan has now attained a high rank in the Civil Service and he and Indulekha are blessed with two children, one a daughter and the other a son, both beautiful as the harvest moon. Madhavan, by his industry, uprightness and ability and Indulekha by her devotion to her children and her husband, have reached the summit of human happiness, and may God bless us and all who read this tale.

The last line in this paragraph is very similar to the ending of oral recitals of the *Puranas* done in almost every part of India, where the telling of and listening to a story is a ritual act. The teller and the audience all acquire merit through the performance. Incidentally even *Umrao Jan Ada* ends on a similar note.¹¹

I hope this tale of my life will do some good to some people.

I will finish with this couplet and hope that the reader will pray for me. . . .

Even if the recurrent authorial intrusions in *Indulekha* are not seen as part of the oral narrative tradition ('Now my story grows sad', 'Now to return to our story', 'Now my story ends'—Victorian novels too abound in such interventions), the *katha*-like ending of the novel links it to the tradition of sacred recitals, quite different from the secular realistic tradition of the western novel. In the fairy-tale-like ending, the hero and the heroine achieve the 'summit of happiness' and live happily hereafter. What can be a greater happiness in the late nineteenth century India than getting into government service?

The other intention of the writer is also stated in the Introduction:¹²

. . . as one of my objects in writing this book is to illustrate how a young Malayalee woman, possessing, in addition to her natural personal charms and intellectual culture, a knowledge of the English language, would conduct herself in matters of supreme interest to her, such as choosing of a partner in life, I have thought it necessary that my *Indulekha* should be conversant with the richest language of the world.

Learning of English is not just an acquisition of linguistic skill; it is the imbibing of a new system of values and gaining of self-confidence. Demure and respectful to elders, *Indulekha* can still challenge the code whereby marriage is an economic transaction for the family and not just a matter of individual choice. Here grandmother explains the traditional obligation of a Nair woman:¹³

When a woman is beautiful and clever she must do some good to her family. She ought to make a good match. Money, my dear, money is the great thing. . . . The girls in our family have always been attractive, but none of them has ever yet been so attractive as you my child.

Without obviously disobeying her, Indulekha quietly manages to ward off through ready wit and a sense of humour the rich Nambudiri suitor sent to court her. She is in love with her cousin, but marries him only when this act is sanctioned by the community—a sanction that she manages to get not through rebellion but quiet self-assertion. Even Kesavan Nambudiri, who has been opposed to women learning English, has to grudgingly admit the power of education.¹⁴

I am convinced now that women who have learnt English are beyond our comprehension altogether. There's Panchu Menon, who isn't afraid of any one in the wide world, but he shivers and shakes before this chit of a grand daughter of his. . . . I begin to think now that perhaps I must have been mistaken.

Throughout the novel English education has been given an almost sacred value. Part of the power of the British in India was their technological superiority. This has always been the basis of colonial domination (one recalls the magical power of gunpowder in *Robinson Crusoe*, an early paradigm of colonial experience); and in *Indulekha* we find Kesavan Nambudiri awed by the thread factory in Calicut where the wheels move 'as if they heard the word of command'. He speculates on the power of the smoke that comes out of the factory and the dark sacrifices that must be made to generate this power. Kesavan Nambudiri's confusion is between two systems—the rational and the magical or the natural and the supernatural (factory smoke=sacrificial fire). His wife knows that English education is the only means of demystification. Indulekha is not awed by anything because she can explain even 'the principles on which the railway train is driven'.

Indulekha is not a realistic character. By the author's own admission ' . . . my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no Malayalee lady can fill the role of the heroine of such a story. My Indulekha is not, therefore, an ordinary Malayalee lady.'¹⁵ Being an illustration of what the Nair woman can become, she belongs more to the tradition of an exemplum than a novel where the ideal is more important than the actuality.

The position of women in society seems to have been a sub-

ject of considerable concern to the nineteenth century novelists in India, as it was to the social reformers and pamphleteers of the day. This was part of the new awareness of human rights and of the individual as an autonomous unit. Women's education and amelioration of the plight of widows were two major consequences of this awareness. In Bengal Ishwar-chandra Vidyasagar agitated for the remarriage of child-widows, and even his other treatises (*Shakuntala* and *Seetar Banabas*) were meant to arouse consciousness about women's question. In the Telugu journal *Tatva Bodhini* (1864-70), problems of widow remarriage were discussed. In Maharashtra this was a controversial issue already in the 1850s when Baba Padmanji, a Christian convert, wrote *Yamuna Paryatan* (1857), a narrative solely concerned with the plight of widows. In Urdu Nazir Husain wrote his first book *Mirat Ul Urus* in 1869, propagating the need for women to be educated; though, of course, he does not mention English as one of their necessary skills. Nazir Husain argued the case for women's education thus:¹⁶

Some ignorant women reason after this fashion. They say: However much we read, shall we become *maulavis* like men? Well then what is the use of bothering ourselves? But even if a woman has learnt more than she requires, there is not the least doubt she will reap a proportionate advantage. I do not deny that too much learning is unnecessary for women, but how many women are there who acquire even so much as is absolutely necessary? It is of the greatest importance to them, at the very least, to be able to read and write the vernacular.

Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetu examines the plight of women from different angles—beginning from Yamuna's mother, who was not treated well by Yamuna's father, to Durgi, whose husband was such a brute that she wished him dead. Yamuna herself, after all her education and interest in reform, was forced to shave her head when her husband died.

In *Indulekha* the milieu is a matrilinear society and consequently women here are relatively less subjugated. Yet one finds prospective husbands like Suri Nambudiri coming to buy a bride, and when Indulekha seems inaccessible, his roving

eyes fall upon her mother. Finally a little girl is given to him as a bride "just as she had been a kitten about the house". Menon exhorts at this point:

My beloved country-women, are you not ashamed of this? Some of you have studied Sanskrit, and some music, but these attainments are not enough. If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are of the same creation as men, that you are free agents as men, that women are not the slaves of men. (p. 369.)

The professed realistic intentions of the introduction are left far behind. As in the familiar indigenous narrative tradition, with its didactic orientation, Chandu Menon ends up by using his novel for conveying a moral.

III. *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetu* (1890)

There is a similarity in the narrative frameworks of *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetu* and *Umrao Jan Ada*, although they are quite different from each other in subject matter and tone. In the preface to *Pan Lakshyant*, Apte tells the reader how he came across the manuscript written by an unfortunate girl called Yamuna and edited it for publication. Similarly Ruswa, in the preface to his Urdu novel, tells the reader how he met Umrao when she was leading a quiet retired life and how he persuaded the courtesan to tell him her life story which he subsequently wrote down. In the early stages of the English novel Defoe had used a similar strategy in *Moll Flanders*, informing the reader in the preface that he was merely editing the memoirs of a woman criminal whom he had met at the Newgate prison.

The autobiographical technique in each case is intended to create an effect of verisimilitude, establishing both the authenticity of the narrator's character and the solidity of her social milieu. In Apte's novel the narrator is a middle-class Pune Brahman girl and the style of narration has the absence of

sophistication, which is what can be expected in a woman without formal education. Her lack of adequate verbal resources is indicated through the repetition of certain phrases—'I don't know how to say this', 'my words fail me', 'I cannot describe'. Although she tries to maintain a chronological order, she often mixes up the sequences unwittingly and then she admonishes herself for her ineptitude. There are two kinds of "now" in her story—the time of writing, and the time when the events were actually taking place. But this amateurishness is part of the author's conscious design and we find Yamuna fairly successful in modulating her point of view from that of a child to that of a girl and later to that of a woman whose consciousness is expanding to discover new horizons. The child Yamuna's point of view is limited—she does not understand the problems that beset her mother and is mystified at the sudden moves of the family; but an adult Yamuna can confidently comment on social injustice or discuss with the reader her narrative problems. While describing the two years of happiness in her life—the time that she spent with her husband in Bombay—she admits that conveying the experience of happiness is far more difficult than that of adversity because there is not much action on the surface.

Yamuna grows up in an enclosed space in a joint family in Pune. After her marriage she goes into an even more claustrophobic world where nothing is private, where conversations are overheard, where there is constant intrigue and politicking within the family and a new bride is an object of everybody's exploitation. She does not realize how narrow this life is, until much later when her vision widens through books and through contact with the outside world. As a contrast to the enclosed worlds of Sadashivpeth or Tulshibag in Pune, there is freedom in Bombay. Even before Yamuna actually reached Bombay the city had been part of her day dreams for some years. She knew that her husband would take her there after his studies were over and she would emerge out of the octopus-like clutches of the joint family to breathe and to set up her own household. When she finally arrived in Bombay she was overwhelmed by its size and grandeur.¹⁷

I used to think our Poona was a big city. But this was not a

city—it was like a different country. . . I sat down foolishly at the Victoria Terminus and looked around with awe and wonder.

This is comparable to Indira's arriving at Calcutta and being similarly overwhelmed. In both cases the big city gave the two women opportunities to be their own selves. While Yamuna learnt to read, write and think, to discuss things with others and talk about the condition of society, Indira, some twenty years earlier, used her individual initiative to reclaim her social position.

The movements are in opposite directions: Yamuna moved out of a closed world towards an open one; Indira chose to return to the security of the closed world. Although Bombay is the world of awakening and individualism, for Yamuna orthodox Pune is never far away. Every time she returns to Pune for a vacation she is sucked back into the turgid pool of narrow views, double standards, and tyranny of public opinion. The tragedy of Yamuna's life is that having once breathed in pure air she has to return to the stagnant society; after her liberal husband's death she becomes a sacrificial victim of the old oppressive ways.

If the word 'feminism' had been current in the last decade of the nineteenth century, *Pan Lakshyant* might have been called a feminist novel. At first docile and limited like all other women of her social class, Yamuna gradually grows into a new awareness, and begins to ask the kind of radical questions that none of Bankim's heroines would be permitted to ask. In all of Bankim's thirteen novels (except in *Kapalkundala* where the heroine asks: 'Is marriage a prison?'), women accept society's valuation of them. The mature Yamuna, on the other hand, cannot suppress her indignation as she recalls the bride-showing incidents of her childhood. She remembers how at the age of eleven she was overjoyed when the groom's people came to see her; it was an occasion for dressing up and being part of the adult world. But now she sees the ritual in terms of the purchase of a domestic animal. Once the child-bride is taken to her husband's house, she is like a puppy who is at first fed on milk and rice. 'At least the puppy is loved. We cannot always be sure of that. We learn to survive by fawning on the

master with a show of devotion and flattery'. Such moments of brutal honesty are usually followed by an apology in the novel. The comparison with the puppy concludes with this remark:¹⁸

Every intelligent reader can see that the comparison can be stretched quite far. But those who will not see the point will be annoyed with me. Hence I must let go of this simile and proceed with my story.

Though written in a densely textured realistic manner, the ancestry of *Pan Lakshyant* can be traced back to the rudimentary first novel in Marathi written thirty-three years ago. More like a tract than a novel, *Yamuna Paryatan* also dealt with the exploitation of women, particularly that of widows, in Hindu society. But *Pan Lakshyant* is much more than a thesis novel. It captures in a vast canvas the subtle enmeshing of the individual's life with society, evoking in the process the conflict between two major forces in nineteenth century India: socio-religious orthodoxy and reform movements. In *Pan Lakshyant*, as in *Indulekha*, English education becomes closely associated with the process of achieving a new social and individual identity. After learning Marathi, Yamuna begins her lessons in English and makes some progress; but her studies are cut short by the death of Raghupat Rao, her husband and mentor.

Apte manages to give Yamuna's relationship with her husband a purely individual quality. Yamuna loved and respected Raghupat Rao as a person, unlike Indira who was interested in the abstraction called a husband. Marriage is important in *Pan Lakshyant* as a social institution. The novel begins with a doll's wedding which reproduces in a small scale the bickerings and politics of real weddings. However, except in the case of Yamuna and Raghupat Rao (and a few of their friends in Bombay), emotional fulfilment on a personal level rarely ensues from marriage. Physical relationship between a man and a woman is seldom referred to except as something to be afraid of, as when Durgi's husband tries to assault his child-bride. The middle-aged widower Shankar Thakur marries a young girl and is inordinately eager to have the 'blessing of the womb' ceremony performed soon—an euphemistic name

for the ritual licensing him to cohabit with his wife. The horror of such bestial marriages is built up very gradually. The first shock comes when Yamuna's father, only a few weeks after her mother's death, brings home a wife hardly older than Yamuna.

As Yamuna grows in her experience of life, she begins to see the disparity between the situations of a woman who loses her husband and of a man who loses his wife; and also the naturalness with which this double standard is accepted by all. A widow's life is a long series of privations, and tonsure is a symbolic rite to desexualize her. Whatever be his age, a man, on the other hand, is encouraged to marry even before the wife's obsequies are over.

The ironic force of this is intensified in the climactic action of the novel. Yamuna refuses to have her hair shaved after her husband's death, creating a public scandal. No priest would come to bless Shankar Thakur's bride's womb so long as an unshaven widow lived in the house. Yamuna is locked up in a room and her head forcibly shaved so that a man three times her age can gratify his desires. The manner in which Yamuna's hair is shorn is reminiscent of an animal sacrifice: first she becomes unconscious in terror and her oppressors take advantage of her unconsciousness.

The shaving of the head is never named in the novel. It is always referred to as the 'cruel deed' or the 'horrible act'. In the social milieu in which this Marathi novel was read, the dreadful associations of this event were too well-known to be described. When Yamuna wrote the account of her life in the last days of her ailment, she avoided naming or describing this event directly, taking recourse to suggestions and innuendoes.

Yamuna is persuaded by her brother to write down the story of her life so that others may know of the injustice that is perpetrated in society. She agrees to do this although she is more cynical than her brother about the objectives:¹⁹

Today my brother said that if the women who spend their lives in such misery learn to read and write, or if they ask someone who can read or write to write out their experiences of life, then these accounts can help in ameliorating the condition of woman. My brother is mistaken in this.

Can't people see for themselves how we poor helpless women live? . . . Can't they see how we are exploited by the self-righteous guardians of morality and religion? If one opens his eyes, he can see. If one wants to find out, he can. But who wants to see? Who ever bothers to notice anything?

The last sentence of this passage gives the novel its title. Unlike the author of *Indulekha*, the author of *Pan Lakshyant Kon Ghetto* professes neither realism nor any social purpose. But by choosing the right narrative voice he achieves both.

IV. *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899)

The waves of social reform and women's awakening that were washing the coastal areas of India (Bengal, Maharashtra and Kerala) left the inland region relatively unaffected. Feudal Lucknow, where Ruswa's novel is set, was a different world. Here values of an earlier age continued in a decadent milieu of nawabs and their *tawaiifs* in a glittering but fragile texture of music and poetry. The ripples of the larger historical transformation were, however, not totally invisible. The novel describes a period when the *nawabi* dispensation in Oudh was giving way to British rule. The revolt of 1857 comes about halfway through the novel when Umrao Jan is at the height of her glory. Before 1857 the capital city of Delhi had declined, and Lucknow was so much the centre of prosperity, culture and refinement that even minor poets from small towns pretended to belong to Lucknow. 'Many make their living on the name of Lucknow as I did when I was in Kanpur', says Umrao Jan. She became famous in Kanpur and in Faizabad as the courtesan of Lucknow. By the end of Umrao's career, about the time she narrated her life story to Ruswa, Lucknow also had begun to decline and the seat of prosperity had shifted to the Deccan (p. 147). The lawlessness in the countryside that was common in much of North India in pre-British days is reflected in this novel too, although towards the end Umrao acknowledges the welcome changes brought about by the benign British rulers, making life more orderly (p. 173).

The presence of the British, their language and the values

they brought to India, may be seen as the immediate or a remote backdrop to all these four novels. But other than this, the novels do not reveal any awareness of the socio-cultural multiplicity of the Indian society. Each community or caste seems to live its own autonomous life with seldom any outside contact other than the socially approved ones. For example, reading *Pan Lakshyant* one would think that in the Pune or Bombay of Hari Narain Apte's time no other caste existed but the brahmans. Similarly, Indira belonged to a wealthy kayastha family and she found employment in another kayastha family until she recovered her husband. The only brief reference to someone from another caste is to be found when Indira, left alone in the forest by the robbers, is approached by a man of obviously low caste with intentions of rape. *Umrao Jan Ada* hardly mentions a character that is not Muslim (except Ramdei, another girl who was abducted along with Umrao). Among the Muslims there were the rich and the poor, but the social and ethical codes that they lived by were not very different.

In *Indulekha* alone we find interaction between castes; but marriages between the Nairs and the Nambudiris were sanctioned by society. Though, given the temporal location of the novel, more interesting is the encounter between the Keralan Madhavan with the Bengali family of Calcutta; as also the long, even if extraneous, discussion about the Indian National Congress.

The narrow homogeneity of the fictional world was not very conducive to the development of the novel as a genre, which in the west had in its early stages thrived on the clash between moral and social values of different classes. It is a question worth investigating whether this fictive homogeneity was a realistic representation of Indian society where people lived in compartments, or whether it was a convenient make-belief—a strategy to leave out inconvenient complexities in order to simplify the narrative.

Indian novels in the nineteenth century often invite comparisons with the English novels of the eighteenth century, insofar as in both cases the genre was at its formative stage. It has been shown how in Richardson's *Pamela* the struggle was not only between two individuals (Pamela and her employer Mr B),

but also 'between two opposed conceptions of sex and marriage held by two different social classes, and between two conceptions of the masculine and feminine roles.'²⁰ Defoe's first two novels, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, were a triumphant assertion of economic individualism. They were especially important because the individual happened to belong in one case to the middle class, which had only recently achieved greater political and economic power, and in the other to the criminal class, outside structured society, for whom economic survival was a higher value than morality. The novels thus reflected the social transformation that was to accompany the Industrial Revolution.

It is the novelist's special prerogative to be able to see the individual and the social process as parts of a dynamic continuum. Hari Narayan Apte achieves some of this through the character of Yamuna, the product as well as the victim of concrete social circumstances, who becomes a recognizable individual through her authentic narrative voice and the delineation of the minutely recorded specific environment which shaped her. Umrao Jan, too, becomes a believable character through her unique narrative voice. The whole story is recollected in tranquility (or cynical resignation) in her middle years when she is reflective and mature, though she manages to give each part of the story an appropriate point of view. Before she was kidnapped she was only a child; and all her memories of those days refer to the external surface of life, to food and clothes, to the shape, colour and texture of material objects:²¹

... I wore tight-fitting red silk pyjamas with a waist band of twill. My blouse was made of nainsook and my *dupatta* of fine muslin. I wore three silver bangles on each arm, a gold necklace around my neck, and a gold ring in the nose (other girls wore silver nose rings). My ears had just been pierced and had blue threads strung through the lobes. An order for gold ear-rings had been placed with the goldsmith.

She was betrothed to her cousin at the time of her abduction. Her girlish excitement about marriage is similar to little Yamuna's enthusiasm in Apte's novel. For both of them it

was an occasion for dressing up and being made much of. The girl-bride's point of view is further brought out in her sense of childish triumph that her fiancé was fair while her playmate Kareeman's fiancé was dark.

Umrao Jan is never shown to be repulsed by the kind of life she was forced to lead. The philosophic reflections about sin and God are afterthoughts and belong to her middle age. In her youth she got into the spirit of the courtesan's world with eagerness and gusto. Until she was old enough to entertain 'guests' of her own, she smarted with envy and desire looking at the older girls dallying with their clients in resplendent clothes.²²

I am ashamed to admit it, but the truth is that I wanted all these girls' lovers to love and be willing to lay down their lives for me only. . . . But alas no one bothered about me.

Ruswa's version of Umrao's life is narrated in fourteen chapters; the fifteenth is reserved for Umrao's own comment on Ruswa's account and her general observations on life. The earlier chapters are occasionally punctuated by Umrao's witty repartee with Mirza Ruswa which never shows any maudlin self-pity. She insists again and again that she was driven to this profession by circumstances, that she was neither born to it nor did she take it up out of her own choice. She also seems to suggest, at the same time, that like people in other walks of life a courtesan, too, lives by a code of conduct, and that she has been true to her professional code of ethics. When she calls herself a sinner she merely bows to conventional rhetoric. Her matter of fact and objective tone of narration seldom betrays any serious feeling of guilt.

Ruswa in no way questions the social system that allows the buying and selling of girls, although he is full of sympathy for the plight of individual victims. Umrao Jan also takes it for granted that there would always be respectable women and courtesans, and there would always be an uneasy rivalry between them. Ruswa could not have intended to present his own character ironically. To the modern reader of the novel, however, there is an ironic gap between his pious lecture on the superiority of the mothers and wives in *purdah* and his

familiarity with all the courtesans of Lucknow. Describing an incident when she was insulted by the ladies of Akbar Ali Khan's house, Umrao reflects on the way women of her profession are treated: 'Mirza Sahib, . . . it is inhuman to look down upon another human being with such contempt.'²¹

Mirza Sahib apparently did not think so and held forth self-righteously on the virtue of the good women who patiently endured their husbands' squandering of their youth and wealth on the courtesans. Umrao's gentle probing about the responsibility of men is airily dismissed by him when he says that men love variety and need change. Ruswa does not emerge as a likable character in the novel. He constantly prods Umrao to reveal more about the intimate aspects of her relationship with men, but she wards off his queries with urbane suavity, refusing to satisfy his prurient curiosity. They have a bantering relationship which is sometimes mildly flirtatious, but it belongs to that ideal category which Umrao cherishes, where there is no demand on either side except good conversation.

The tension in this novel is between Ruswa's sympathy for the character he has created and the social attitudes he must uphold. The double standard is accepted when he absolves his own guilt about visiting brothels by declaring: 'Attempts to mislead innocent women cause me great sorrow, and if I had my way, I would put all those who try to seduce the virtuous against the wall. . . .'²² This is comparable to Bankim's attitude to Robini, the young widow in *Krishnakanta Will*, where sympathy for her as a person has to contend with the moralist's insistence that the social order must not be disrupted.

The courtesan is not quite outside the social order; she has a role to play so long as she is young. It is the loneliness of the ageing *tawaif* that gives the novel its special poignancy. The mature Umrao struggles with a desire for emotional stability and the knowledge that she must learn to live alone. Unwilling to let any trace of sentimentality cloud her urbane and witty relationship with Ruswa, she deliberately takes a cynical and detached view of the man-woman relationship, offering a biological explanation for emotional states. For women's ability to simulate love she has this explanation: 'Weaker animals are endowed with the ability to deceive in order to

preserve themselves'; and for women's preference for young men, her explanation is: '... being weak themselves, they wish to provide themselves with protectors. Young men, being able-bodied, can be relied on more than old men in times of trouble!'²⁵ One is not sure if there is a touch of cynicism in her talk of the solace of religion and literature when youth is over: 'When they (her admirers) began to drop out of my life one by one, ... I developed a taste for books'.

The narrative proceeds from the time the little girl Ameeran was kidnapped to the time when she led a pious and literary life in the seclusion of her home. Many years have passed in between. Wajid Ali Shah has been forced to abdicate; the 'Mutiny' has rocked the country; prosaic British rule has replaced the eccentricities of the nawabi ethos; the seat of power and influence has moved from Lucknow to Hyderabad; the frightened little girl Ameeran has grown into the famous poet-courtesan Umrao Jan. How is the passage of time indicated? Sometimes it is done through simple statements: 'I grew to adolescence, ... At fourteen I learnt to gaze at myself in the mirror'; or 'I had been in Kanpur for about six months'. Sometimes Ruswa helps her to fix a few dates by referring to public events. A sense of passing years is suggested when Umrao reaches Faizabad where she spent her childhood and measures the distance she has covered in terms of her own change:²⁶

But I had lived through the tragic days of the Mutiny, seen kingdoms collapse before my eyes, witnessed the fall of princes like Birjis Qadr, and my heart has become as hard as stone.

But nowhere is the passage of time more effectively conveyed than when after many years Umrao goes to her old room in Khanum's establishment where she had begun her career. The room had been locked for years. It evoked memories despite the dust and the cobwebs, and the centipede that crawled along her *dupatta*. The five gold sovereigns hidden under the bed—her first private earning—shone amidst the squalor, gathering up, as it were all the intervening years and revealing the bright

shine of a first love that had since been dulled through repetition.

Towards the end, the narrative loses its episodic structure and all the loose threads begin to be tied up. All the forgotten and lost characters turn up like the five gold coins, and even the men who had kidnapped young Ameeran are arrested and sent to jail.

The novel thus has two structures: a neat, cohesive, well-organized one where episodes are linked to each other, where the criminals are punished and Umrao after a successful career goes into a well-deserved and comfortable retirement, where the British come to make life orderly and peaceful; and the other, a drifting aimless story of a solitary woman without moorings, one who faces loneliness at the end of a life artificially filled with laughter, music and protestations of love, whose childhood friend Gauhar deserts her after grabbing a large share of her fortune, one who turns to books and religion for solace because her life lacks the warmth of human relationship. The gap between Ruswa's artistic insight into personal psychology and the awareness of his public function as a writer can be seen in this double structure.



Realism is not a value in literature, but one of the many modes that narrative fiction can adopt. When the novel was emerging as a distinct genre in India, social realism had for some time been the dominant mode in the European novel, and the early Indian novelists joined in 'that effort, that willed tendency of art to approximate reality'.²⁷ This effort consisted, among other things, of the creation of characters in situations of individual choice and their presentation in a mimetic manner without distorting contemporary Indian reality.

The challenge was intensified when these individuals happened to be women. Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man, and generally a woman's identity tends to be defined, by herself as well as by others, in terms of her relationship with men, as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother. Though not to the same extent, this was true of the nineteenth century European women too, and

one of George Eliot's characters in *The Mill on the Floss* (1861) reflected a generally accepted belief when he said, 'We do not ask of a woman who she is. We ask who does she belong to'.²⁸

It is perhaps not entirely an accident that quite a few major European novels of the nineteenth century (*Vanity Fair*, *Middlemarch*, *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *Portrait of a Lady*) have women as their protagonists. Social realism at its best conveys in concrete and specific terms the complex relationship between individuals and their society. This relationship can be studied in sharper focus when the individual's life is hedged in by an enclosed space with fewer choices; when the odds are against the individual, i.e., when she is a woman.

But there is one basic difference between the woman protagonist of a nineteenth century European novel and her counterpart in India. Individualism had been emerging as a human ideal in the West for a couple of centuries, and even though in actuality a woman's life lacked the relative autonomy of a man's, the possibility existed as an idea. In India individualism in external action was not a traditional concept, even though through exposure to the West an alternative ideal was beginning to be available in the nineteenth century. In the four novels discussed above, the choice of women as protagonists might have been a deliberate device to magnify for closer analysis the conflict between the restrictive social norms and the half-articulated yearnings to achieve selfhood. The design was not always clear cut or schematic as the discussion above may have indicated. Each writer had to formulate his own strategy to tackle the problem. The resultant works reveal tensions of different kinds—between form and content, between intention and execution, between imaginative sympathy and social responsibility, between the author's conscious design as reflected in the plot and the unconscious longing as revealed through language and imagery.

It is a critical platitude to say that the Indian novel has a derivative form, imitated from the West. This is only superficially true. A form cannot be superimposed on a culture where there is no appropriate ethos to sustain its content. The realistic novel came into existence when the tension between the individual and the society acquired a certain intensity. If the interaction had not generated any tension, narrative fiction

would have continued to retain qualities associated with the epic or the romance; and if the tension had become so acute as to threaten disruption, the creative expression would have turned inward towards solipsism and away from realism. Perhaps poetry would be a more suitable genre for such a situation. If the social transformation of the nineteenth century had not set in motion certain dialectic forces among the English educated class, the novel in its realistic form would not have taken roots in India. This paper has sought to isolate some of the attempts to reconcile reality and realism that mark the nineteenth century creative imagination.

Appendix I

Indira (1873) by Bankimchandra Chatterjee

CHAPTER I

At last I was going to my husband's home. I was nearly nineteen but I had not yet lived with my husband's family. The reason: my father was wealthy, my father-in-law was not. Shortly after my marriage my father-in-law had sent for me, but my father did not let me go. He sent a message saying, "My son-in-law must first learn to make money, otherwise how will he maintain my daughter?" My husband was then twenty years old. Hurt by these words he took a vow that he would earn enough to support his family. There were no railroads in those days and the journey to the West was a hazardous one. He made this difficult journey on foot without any money and reached Punjab. Someone who can do that can also earn money. He made a lot of money and sent it home but did not return for seven or eight years, nor did he keep in touch with me. I used to be miserable and angry. How much money does one need? I felt annoyed with my parents for having mentioned money at all. Is money greater than my happiness? There was a lot of money in my father's house; I could play with money if I wished. I used to think, one day I would lie down on a bed of money to see how it felt. I told my mother, "Let me spread some money one day and sleep on it." 'Silly girl', she said, but she understood. I do not know what devices she used, but a little before the time when this story begins my husband returned to his village. There was a rumour that he had earned enormous wealth by working at the commissariat (I hope that is the word). My father-in-law wrote to my father, "By your blessing Upendra (my husband's name is Upendra. The older readers would please forgive me for referring to him by name. In the current

fashion of course it is possible to call him 'my Upendra') is now able to support his wife. I am sending a palanquin with bearers. Please send our bride to us. Otherwise, with your permission we will get our son married elsewhere."

My father was amused at the ways of the new rich. The palanquin was upholstered with brocade. There was silver work on the wood and the carrying poles ended in sharks' heads made of silver. The maid who came with it wore a raw silk *sari* and had gold beads around her neck. Four dark and bearded men from Bhojpur accompanied the palanquin.

My Father Haramohan Dutta had been rich for many generations. He smiled at the display and said, "Indira, my daughter, it seems I can't keep you any longer. Go now, I will bring you back soon. Don't laugh at the way these people seem to have swollen up from the size of a finger to that of a banana trunk."

I replied to him silently in my mind saying, "My heart has swollen from the size of a finger to that of a banana trunk. Don't laugh at me."

My younger sister must have understood. She said, "Didi, when will you come again?" I squeezed her cheeks.

Kamini said, "Do you know anything about your husband's house?"

"Yes I know," I said. "It is the garden of paradise where the God of love shoots his flower arrows to fulfil the lives of men. When they reach this place women become apsaras and men turn into sheep. The cuckoo sings there everyday, the south wind blows in winter and the moon shines even on a new moon night." Kamini laughed and said, "Go to hell".

(My translation)

Appendix II

From the preface to *Indulekha* (1888) (O. Chandu Menon on Realism)

'Others . . . asked me, while I was employed on this novel, how I expected to make it a success if I described only the ordinary affairs of the modern life without introducing any element of the supernatural. My answer was this: Before the European style of oil painting began to be known and appreciated in this country, we had painted—in defiance of all possible existence—pictures of Vishnu as half man and half lion . . . pictures of the God Krishna with his legs twisted and turned into postures in which no biped could stand . . . such productions used to be highly thought of, those who produced them were highly remunerated, but now they are looked upon by many with aversion. A taste has set in for pictures, whether in oil or water colours, in which shall be delineated men, beasts, and things according to their true appearance, and the closer that picture is to nature, the greater is the honour paid to the artist. Just in the same way, if stories composed of incidents, true to natural life and attractively and gracefully written, are once introduced, then by degrees the old order of books, filled with the impossible and the supernatural, will change, yielding place to the new.'

Translated from the Malayalam by
W. Dumergue, Calicut, 1965
(re-issue), p. XIV.

Appendix III

Ruswa on Realism

- (a) Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa in the preface to *Zat-i-Sharif*:

'It is the practice of some contemporary writers to frame a plot in order to prove a particular point and then fill in the details accordingly. I make no objection against them, but I shall not be at fault if I simply say that my method is the opposite of theirs. I am simply at a faithful portrayal of actual happenings and am not concerned with recording the conclusions to be drawn from them I have not the inventive power to portray events that happened thousands of years ago, and moreover I consider it a fault to produce a picture which tallies neither with present day conditions nor with those of the past—which, if you study the matter carefully, is what usually happens. Great ability and much labour is usually required to write a historical novel and I have neither the ability nor the leisure to do it.'

Translated from the Urdu and quoted by E. Russel in *The Novel In India; Its Birth and Development*, ed. T.W. Clark, London, 1970, pp. 132-133.

- (b) Mirza Mohammed Hadi Ruswa in the preface to his incomplete novel *Afshai Raj*:

'The most paying and interesting subject of study in this world is what happens to human beings; not only their external behaviour, but also their inner feelings and thoughts. These can be depicted through a novel provided an effort is made to

present the picture truthfully We should not give ourselves unnecessary trouble by trying to base our novels upon the lives of persons about whom we cannot know anything in detail. In our own circle of friends and relations there are bound to be many whose experiences are truly strange and fascinating. The trouble is that we do not pay heed to them because we cannot spare time from pouring over the tomes of the histories of Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Gazni, Henry VII, Queen Arne, Napoleon Bonaparte, etc.'

Translated from the Urdu and quoted by Khushwant Singh and M.A. Husaini in the Introduction to the English translation of *Umrao Jan Ada*, New Delhi, 1982 (re-issue), pp. vii-viii.

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2. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Harmondsworth, 1963 (first pub. 1957), p. 241.
3. Of these four novels two are easily available in English translation: *Indulekha*, translated into English by W. Durgue, C.S., 1890. Reprinted by Mathrubhumi Printing & Publishing Co., Calicut, 1965. *Umrao Jan Ada*, translated into English by Khushwant Singh and M.A. Husaini for the Unesco collection of Representative Works, Indian Series, 1961. Reprint Sangam Books, New Delhi, 1982. Page references are to the above editions. *Indira* was translated into English by J.D. Anderson in 1918, and published by Modern Review Office, Calcutta. I have not been able to trace this edition. The page references to *Indira* in this paper are to the Bengali text reproduced in *Bankim Rachanabali*, Vol. I, Sahitya Samad, Calcutta, 1980. *Pan Lakshmyant Kon Ghetu* has been issued in different Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi. The quotations in this paper are from the Bengali translation entitled *Kintu Keyi Ba Khabar Rakhe* by Sarojini Kamtanurkar, 1971, although I have also referred to the Marathi edition occasionally. *Pan Lakshmyant Kon Ghetu* has been issued in different Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi. The quotations in this paper are from the Bengali translation entitled *Kintu Keyi Ba Khabar Rakhe* by Sarojini Kamtanurkar, 1971, although I have also referred to the Marathi edition occasionally.

The quotations from *Indira* and *Pan Lakshmyant Kon Ghetu* are literal translations done by me.

4. *Indira*, p. 317.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
10. *Indulekha*, pp. 367-68.
11. *Umrao Jan Ada*, p. 232.
12. *Indulekha*, xx.
13. *Indulekha*, pp. 137-38.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
15. *Ibid.*, xx.
16. Nazir Husajn, *Mirat Ul Urus*, 1869; English trans. by G.E. Ward, London: 1908, p. 8.
17. *Pan Lakshyan Kon Gheto*, p. 377.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 662.
20. Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, p. 160.
21. *Umrao Jan Ada*, p. 21.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
27. Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* (New York: 1963), p. 3.
28. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 1861. Reprint: Signet Classic New York: 1965.

The North Indian Intelligentsia and the Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand's Writings

GEETANJALI PANDEY

BY THE TIME Premchand (1880-1936) came to the height of his powers as a writer, the problem of relations between Hindus and Muslims, of sectarian strife or what has come to be known as 'communalism', had become a matter of serious concern for every nationalist. Premchand, 'the story-teller of the independence movement', had inevitably to come to terms with this problem. His writings, fictional and non-fictional alike, are full of indications of the way in which he tried to do so. They mirror the conflicting trends within the nationalist movement. We know that all the important nationalist leaders shared an overriding concern to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. What is less known is that they, in common with the Indian intelligentsia as a whole, comprehended Hindu-Muslim relations in complex ways. These ranged from a dismissal of the Hindu-Muslim rift as 'false consciousness' created by vested political interests, to a belief that historically and culturally the two communities were divided by a gulf that could not be bridged. It is this complexity that is reflected in Premchand's treatment of the Hindu-Muslim issue.

The development of Premchand's thought has usually been analysed in terms of an evolution from an Arya Samajist to a Gandhian to a socialist, and his attitudes to the communal question are correspondingly seen in this sequence. There is, of course, considerable evidence in his writings to support such a reading. But it leaves unnoticed certain nuances and com-

plexities. Premchand did embody in his work and person most of what was progressive and regenerative in his society; he assailed all that he thought was decadent in it. The dichotomy between the regenerative and the decadent by no means paralleled the dichotomy between the new and the old. But while the general espousal of certain values for the creation of a new and free society was sustained in terms of abstract principles, the elaboration of these principles in terms of their programmatic content within the context of a plural colonial society often posed dilemmas that were either ignored or resolved in ways that did not wholly conform to these principles. Hence the fact that just a year before his death Premchand wrote a short story like 'Smriti ka Pujari' with a pronounced bias against Islam.¹ Similarly, it was during this progressive phase that he virtually disavowed widow marriage which he had earlier promoted through a novelette, *Prema*, written in 1905. But later on he so revised the story, in *Pratigya*, as to idealize traditional widowhood. In a letter of 1932 he confessed that in showing the marriage of a widow he had been guilty of making the Hindu woman fall from her ideal. This lapse he ascribed to the exuberance of youth.² (After an unhappy first marriage, Premchand had himself married a widow. One wonders if his wife was aware of his changed views on the subject.)

This paper seeks to illustrate this complex pattern. It shows that though Premchand's was a consistently principled support to communal unity, his reactions to specific situations or issues at times deviated from this stance. It argues that a body of inherited assumptions, deeply rooted in his mind, militated against the secular nationalist values to which he was attached, and produced an ambivalence in his responses to the Hindu-Muslim question.

Conventional interpretations of the nationalist intelligentsia's attitudes to communalism fail to take account of the idiom and the cultural context in which this intelligentsia per force had to think, an idiom and a context that were permeated by religion (in a broad, non-fanatic sense of the term). This did not, however, involve any automatic or inevitable 'slide-back' from secular ideals. More crucial, perhaps, was the manner in which the question was perceived, the very understanding of

what these 'communities' meant.

In its treatment of the Muslims, Premchand's work reveals some inconsistent trends. Where they are dealt with directly, a respectful attitude is generally adopted towards them. At times Premchand even pleads with the Hindus to make some sacrifices in order to reassure and win over the minority community. The prospect of the freedom struggle and the future of the country depend on Hindu-Muslim unity. No effort ought to be spared to ensure its realization. It is incumbent on the Hindus, as the majority community, to allay the fears of the Muslims and let them have preferential treatment. In certain other contexts, however, Premchand betrays a tone that does not exactly square with his commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity. While responding to the western cultural offensive, for example, it swings towards a chauvinistic Hindu position. A glorified Hindu past then becomes 'our' ideal. The Muslims are not seen as the Hindus' co-sharers in offensive. When the regeneration of the Hindus is the issue, the Muslims are bypassed, if not denounced outright. Constituting a different religion and cultural universe, the Hindus seem to stand apart from the Muslims. But so intense was Premchand's advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity and so severe his condemnation of the evils of Hindu society, that the constricting effect on his work of this 'Hindu' orientation often escapes attention.

From the beginning of his writing career Premchand was aware of his social purpose as a writer. All writing, he believed, must be geared to the portrayal of social reality, particularly to the exposure of what was decadent in society. But realism must be turned towards an ideal. This Premchand called his *adarshonmukhi yatharthavad* or 'idealism-realism'.³ Such a conception necessitated propagandist literature. For a writer in a colonial society, particularly, there was no escape from such literature even though this might entail a serious loss in aesthetic terms. Writing to a friend, Premchand observed about his own stories: '... it is possible that you do not care for their didactic nature, but India cannot reach the peaks of artistic glory while it is groaning under foreign rule. . . . Our social and political circumstances force us to educate the people whenever we get the opportunity. And our didacticism grows more intense when our emotion is stronger. . . .'⁴ He wanted

plots to be taken from real life so that literature could be utilized for solving life's problems.⁵ The writer must awaken and teach his readers.⁶ Warning against stark realism,⁷ he wanted literature to be the 'advance guard' that guided the politics of the country.⁸

Premchand brought his general normative conception of the writer's role to bear upon the specific problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. Reviewing a book by Swami Shraddhananda in which the history of Hindu-Muslim conflict had been traced, he stressed that communal and sectarian strife had occurred throughout Indian history. He referred to intra- and inter-religious fights among the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. The need of the hour was to forget this long tradition of conflict, not to rake up the past and aggravate communal antagonism.⁹ He took Chatursen Shastri to task for providing, in his *Islam ka Vish Vriksha*, a detailed and lopsided account of the atrocities perpetrated on their Hindu subjects by the Muslim rulers. To thus incite the communally minded among the Hindus to harbour enmity against the Muslims did not become a responsible and eminent writer like Chatursen. All religions, while they were dominant, had been guilty of oppression. In any case, nursing past memories and using them to spread hatred among people was to drive the nation towards disaster.¹⁰ Reviewing the work of a Muslim writer, Premchand complained that he had addressed himself exclusively to the Muslim community to the elevation of which alone he was committed.¹¹

So conscious and conscientious was Premchand's commitment to communal unity that he did not mind recommending, if necessary, the suppression of history and its manipulation for serving the cause of unity. Without being opposed to efforts directed to the regeneration exclusively of the Hindus or Muslims, he did not favour exclusive appeals that tended to forget the existence of the other community and, consequently, hurt its sentiments.

II

Premchand's earliest writings on the communal question date back to the first decade of his literary efforts which began

around 1905. Some of the biographical vignettes he wrote about this time are of special interest. With a few additions that were intended to make the collection 'communally' more representative, these essays were later compiled in two slender volumes entitled *Kalam Talwar aur Tyag*. This was the period of *Soze Watan* (1908), the first collection of Premchand's short stories, when a patriotic ardour filled the young writer's heart. The biographical essays, too, are inspired by the same passion. So enthusiastic is Premchand in these, and so carried away by the love for motherland, that any thought of facts, their implications and mutual contradictions is swept aside. Only the ideal of patriotism shines consistently. The writer moves lightly from one hero to another, praising a particular quality at one time and condemning the same at another, and remaining blissfully unaware of the resultant inconsistencies.

Thus Raja Mansingh and his family are praised for setting aside 'the religious norms of thousands of years for the sake of contemporary interests of the country' in order to form ties with the Mughals. The fact that to make these ties durable they offered a girl of their family in marriage to Akbar is praised. The victory of 'Akbar's valour' over Rana Pratap is hailed and the latter's attacks are described as 'excesses'.¹² The very next year, 1906, Premchand wrote an essay idealizing Rana Pratap whose saga now became worthy of a place in 'our' religious lore. These brave Rajputs could not bear the thought of 'foreigners coming and settling as our equals'. Yet most of them submitted. The Rana alone preserved his freedom. The marriage of the Rajput princess to Akbar now became a reprehensible fall. It symbolized the complete degeneration of the descendants of Ikshvaku, the legendary founder of the venerable Solar dynasty, and the house of Prithviraj. Premchand concluded the essay with the hope that a lesson in freedom would be taken from Rana Pratap's life.¹³

In the following year Akbar was idealized for his bravery, tolerance and justice. Pratap and his like were now called 'rebellious countrymen'. Premchand got so carried away by the impulse to promote Hindu-Muslim unity that even while praising Akbar for abolishing the *jaziya*, he argued that it was not the kind of vile imposition that European historians had made it to have been. In keeping with the patriotic fervour

that informed these essays, he even tried to turn the tables by arguing that it was really the British in India who had levied taxes that could be likened to the *jaziya*. As instances he cited the 'home' charges and the money taken for maintaining contingents in the British Indian army for the Indian States.¹⁴

The others praised in this biographical series for their tolerance and advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity were Maulana Wahiduddin 'Salim', Badruddin Tyabji, Vivekananda, Ranjit Singh, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, though the last named was also criticized for anti-Congress views.¹⁵

The stress in these essays is on patriotism. A pronounced anti-British streak runs through them. They reveal a contradictory pull which, more or less, continued all along in Premchand's thought. Hindus and Muslims are seen as two different communities. Unity between them is seen as essential for the country's freedom. At the same time, the greatness of the Hindus is upheld as distinct from and opposed to the Muslims. While these trends persisted over the years, a new perspective was added later when Premchand began to highlight the material basis of communal differences. Never could he work his way towards a resolution of these attitudes into an understanding of the relative role of material and cultural-historical factors in the creation of community identities and inter-community relations. His framework gradually widened to accommodate the complexity of Hindu-Muslim relations. Yet, he kept vacillating between two kinds of 'cultural' rhetoric: one that rested on the essential separateness of the two communities, and another that took for granted a common culture shared by them. Accompanying these vacillations was the tendency to wish away the communal problem in material terms. Lack of clarity and an almost desperate recourse, in turns, to 'cultural' and 'materialistic' shibboleths characterized Premchand's life-long effort to tackle the communal tangle.

In December 1922, little realizing that the communal situation would deteriorate abruptly, Premchand felt happy with the amity between the leaders of the two communities. In keeping with the spirit of the erstwhile Non-co-operation-Khilafat combine, he noted that though the Hindus would forever remain Hindu and the Muslims forever Muslim, they had united for the common struggle.¹⁶ In February 1924, when the communal situa-

tion was causing anxiety, he admitted that the two communities 'are not and never will be like milk and sugar'; but he reiterated that unity between them was the cornerstone of *swarajya*.¹⁷

Premchand's perception of social reality was influenced by a framework of values and assumptions derived from the traditional categories of caste, sect and religion. These were commonly used for an analysis of existing problems. Naturally, wherever this was done, Hindus and Muslims emerged as separate and distinct. Basic to his search for solutions seems to have been the assumption that the Muslims would not be able to love the country with the same intensity as the Hindus would. During the Non-co-operation-Khilafat stir, he noted, with sympathy and approval, that the Muslims would love the cause of Khilafat more than the cause of national freedom. He assuaged the disturbed feelings of his Hindu compatriots by arguing that like they loved the country more than Khilafat and did not expect the Muslims to mind this, they should themselves be appreciative of the Muslims' emotional preferences. Besides, he went on, Khilafat was no mere religious issue; it was inspired by the Muslims' desire for worldly power. Was not the Hindus' desire for *swarajya* similarly inspired?¹⁸

However liberal and understanding this attitude might appear, it carried with it the admission that, owing to religious considerations, Indian nationalism could not mean to the Muslims what it meant to the Hindus. Whether articulated or not, the admission granted to the Hindus a higher status in the struggle for independence.

It is significant that such a feeling could hold in its subtle grip even an ardent advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity like Premchand. For even he could take a position that was basically Hindu, a position which rested on assumptions that perpetuated the psychosis of distrust between the two communities. In an article written in 1924—when communal tension tended to bring out the latent bitterness of otherwise sober nationalists—Premchand advised the Hindus to give up their narrow-mindedness and treat the Muslims with tolerance. He suggested that the Hindus accept the Muslim demand for the cessation of music outside their mosques without insisting that the Muslims in turn show respect for the cow. At the same time, he admitted that a chasm of 'distrust and hatred' divided

the two communities and that the division lay far back in history. But in elaborating this, he wrote in a vein that was hardly likely to make any easier the acceptance of his plea for tolerance.

He wrote, in the same article, that the chasm had been created as a result of the infliction upon the Hindus of 'the greatest possible atrocities' by the Muslim rulers. Moving on to the contemporary scene, he conceded that the Muslims were the greater culprits in the matter of communal riots and such irritants as sacrifices. They still hugged the memories of their old supremacy and tried to dominate the Hindus. Though not overlooking *shuddhi* activities, he asserted that the *tablighi* Muslims had been guilty of greater excesses. He saw in these excesses a possible explanation for 'the daily decreasing number' of the Hindus.¹⁹

At the time of the Non-co-operation-Khilafat stir, we have seen, Premchand employed religious-cultural terms to promote communal unity. It could be argued that this was to an extent inevitable in view of the nature of the Khilafat issue. Ten years later, when the Salt *satyagraha* began, the symbolic issue was one that affected the secular interests of the entire population. This time, too, Premchand appealed to the Muslims in religious-cultural terms. Claiming wishfully that the Muslims were with the Congress, he betrayed his own disbelief in the claim through the pains he took to convince them that the Congress was where they belonged. He did talk of the common poverty and exploitation of the Hindus and Muslims under the imperialist dispensation. But he also invoked the Muslims' natural love for liberty by referring to the examples of other Muslim countries. He wrote: 'Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey, these are all Muslim countries. See what they have done for their freedom and are still doing. This *qaum* (people) can never go against freedom.'²⁰ He invoked the ideal of Islamic brotherhood while exhorting the Muslim youth not to 'forsake their national interests for the sake of sectarian rights'.²¹ Since this ideal stood for the equality of all men, how could the Muslims claim special rights and privileges?²²

As in his analysis of the causes of communalism, in his search for practical solutions also Premchand displayed a tendency to be carried away in sheer desperation. Disturbed by the Muslim

refusal to give up separate electorate, he warned them that one day they would regret their obstinacy in this matter. Hindu, he argued, would never be able to so unite as to crush the united Muslim community. Only if they agreed to the joint electorate, they would be able to have the Hindus under their thumb.²³

This assertion offers one of those rare examples of the manifestation of Premchand's distance from the Muslims. It betrays a degree of impotent irritation with the Hindus for not being sufficiently united; and an element of pique against the Muslims for their supposed unity. But for the intrusion of this almost unconscious animosity, Premchand could not have drawn this contrast between a divided Hindu and a united Muslim community. He would have seen, otherwise, that the Muslims, too, were internally divided. And the realization would have been truer to his normally drawn picture of the Muslim community. For, irrespective of whether he was taking a cultural or material view of communalism, he was insistent about a distinction between the communally minded selfish few and the rest of the Muslim community.

This inference is further corroborated by the concluding portion of the above article. It clearly brings out the feeling of Hindu superiority that underlay Premchand's nationalism. He writes with uncharacteristic self-righteousness on behalf of all Hindus: 'It would be unjust to them if it is believed that the Hindus want to do away with separate electorate because of their self-interest. They know that it is altogether against their interests to collaborate with the Muslims. Still they want this collaboration. Why? Simply because they want to make India a united nation, and for that unity they are prepared to efface themselves.'²⁴ Premchand's comments about Muslim behaviour during the census of 1931 confirm this bias. Maintaining that the census figures did not present a correct demographic picture, he observed that while the Hindus, engaged as they were in the Salt *satyagraha*, boycotted the census, the Muslims took full advantage of the situation and ensured for their community large returns in anticipation of the electoral issue.²⁵ Also significant in this context is Premchand's opposition to the creation of a separate province of Sindh with a Muslim majority.²⁶

At the same time that Premchand wrote under the assumption that the Hindus and the Muslims were separate communities, he also argued that it was the British rulers and their 'native' henchmen who, for their vested interests, kept the two communities divided. Veering towards the material explanation of communalism, he wrote that the communal fire was stoked by selfish Hindu and Muslim interests that were out to please the government. He advised the Hindus, in this context, to emulate the Muslims and produce such 'servants of unity' as Maulana Azad and Saifuddin Kitchlew.²⁷

This line of argument rested on the assumption that there was no cause for mutual discord in the circumstances of the two communities. It was the colonial masters that kept them divided. 'The hardest blow', he wrote in 1931, 'that a conquering people inflicted upon the vanquished was to poison their history.' This is what the British had done. They had instilled into Indians the feeling that the Hindus and the Muslims had always been divided into two opposite groups. Through this distortion of history, the hearts of Hindus and Muslims had been filled with confusion and fear. The Muslims complained that they were treated by the Hindus as untouchables. The Hindus grieved that their temples had been destroyed and their pilgrim places ransacked by the Muslims, who had also kept in their places the daughters of Hindu kings. But all this was a travesty of truth. If Islam spread in India, it was not an accomplishment of the sword. Rather, the oppression of the lower by upper castes had brought about the conversion of whole villages. Because Islam had no room for inequality, lower caste people had 'welcomed this new religion with great joy'.²⁸

It was easy from this point to assert that Hindu-Muslim unity could be effected only after the British had left the country. This offered an escape from the frustrating failure of all efforts to bring about communal harmony; for it permitted the reassuring faith that all energies could be harnessed to the cause of national liberation without worrying overly about communal amity.

Having argued that the British were solely responsible for communal division, Premchand contended that there was no basic difference between Muslim and Hindu cultures. This was

in itself, at least, a tenable proposition. But the way Premchand explicated it suggests that it was more a special pleading than a deeply-held conviction. He mixed sober facts with specious pleas. In clothes and food habits, he wrote, Hindus and Muslims of a particular region were similar. Just as Shiva, Rama, Krishna and Vishnu were the gods of the Hindus, Mohammad Ali and Hussain were the 'gods or venerable men' of the Muslims. Moreover, the Hindus were themselves riven with differences based on caste and sect. Nor did the cow constitute a bone of contention. 'Only a few, perhaps, among the Hindu princes and those Hindus who had studied abroad', he asserted in a bid to clinch the argument, 'would be found who had not eaten beef.' The untouchables ate beef as a matter of course. (Not realizing that he was weakening his own case, Premchand could not help adding, with regard to the beef-eating habit of the untouchables, that 'we' were trying to elevate them by persuading them to give up this habit.) That apart, the Hindus could themselves worship the cow; they had no right to force others to do likewise. Also, it was only the poor Muslims who ate beef. And the poor Muslims were the ones who had embraced Islam to escape the oppression of caste Hindus. Even the Hindi-Urdu controversy was not the cause of division between the two communities for this was limited to the educated few. 'In a nutshell', he concluded, 'there appears to be no real reason for Hindu-Muslim enmity.'²⁹ How Premchand's eagerness to show this basic cultural unity could drive him to absurd arguments can be seen from his assertion that the two communities were not different, among other reasons, because both of them possessed good as well as bad qualities. This was in an article of 1933 in which Premchand quoted Nehru admiringly for saying that culture was a national and not religious factor, and that both Hindus and Muslims were soaked in Indian culture. Premchand followed this up with an enunciation of what culture consisted of: an outer world consisting of language, dress and customs; and an inner world comprising religious and spiritual principles. In matters pertaining to the outer world, Hindus and Muslims were not different; and their similarities with regard to the inner world were even greater.³⁰

To the extent that there was no real reason for the Hindus

and the Muslims to be antagonistic, the solution seemed very simple. 'What is required is for us to cleanse our hearts of distorted history and settle our beliefs after careful consideration of the needs of time and place. Then we would realize that those we had believed were our enemies had, in fact, rescued the oppressed. They have loosened the rigours of our caste system and helped in the evolution of our civilization.'³¹ Premchand reminded his readers of the 'not insignificant fact' that the person chosen by both the Hindus and Muslims as their leader in 1857 was the effete emperor of Delhi.³² He also highlighted the fact that religion was not the basis of wars between Hindu and Muslim rulers in pre-British India. Moreover, the armies that fought these wars were mixed; Muslims fought on the side of Hindus and *vice versa*.³³

Having argued that there was nothing in the circumstances of the two communities to cause hostility, Premchand did not find it difficult to assert that 'the real war of tomorrow would be economic'. His enunciation of the case, however, does not suggest that he quite grasped the import of it. He seems to have found in the idea of economic conflict a possible way out of the communal tangle. The source of communal conflict lay, he could now argue, in the differences among the educated with regard to their rights and interests.³⁴ He described it as the fight between two beggars for a single piece of bread.³⁵

But this, he thought, was merely a matter of time. 'The coming age would be the age of economic war. Nobody would then ask as to who is a Hindu and who a Muslim.'³⁶ Obviously inspired by Nehru's pronouncements on communalism,³⁷ in believing that the coming age would automatically remove communal conflict, Premchand argued that for the time being one might even tolerate 'mild' communalism to ward off rabid communalism.³⁸

That there was in this analysis of the causes of communalism a desperate desire to see the end of it is indicated by Premchand's use of analogies that had the merit not of suggesting any parallels but of permitting the illusion of relief. For, in the very article that welcomed the future age of economic struggle, he wrote that if the Hindus and Muslims fought, so did the Socialists and Democrats.³⁹ Its relief-offering function apart, the analogy did not form an essential part of the eco-

conomic analysis of communalism. Though it permitted the inference that since the actual area of strife was confined to but a 'fistful' of the educated, the millions that remained were neither Hindu nor Muslim. They were peasants or workers, and very poor and exploited.⁴⁰ Their material problems were the same, irrespective of which community they belonged to.⁴¹ Culture was of no interest to them.⁴² The tranquillizing effect of this analysis is confirmed by the fact that having talked of the coming economic struggle, he even wished it into the world of here and now, and wrote: 'The world today has but one culture and that is economic culture.' And culture, he added, has nothing to do with religion.⁴³

Such an argument implied that culture, and also history, were mere frauds (*dhakosala*).⁴⁴ He looked forward to the blessed day when 'history is banished from our educational institutions'.⁴⁵ But this was stretching the 'economic' interpretation to a point that he could not sustain for too long. For, in the same breath that he dismissed culture and history as fraud, he called upon people to think in terms of the nation. But the idea of nation subsumed within it a good deal more than the material interests and welfare of the downtrodden majority. Premchand's own fiction shows how well he knew that nationalism could be, and indeed it was, a deceptive mask for hiding the interests of a few in society. And this was made possible by the cultural dimension of the idea of nation.

Unless it is argued that he was aiming at the substitution of one kind of fraud with another, Premchand's insistence on a history undistorted by the colonial mediation would indicate that he appreciated the role of collective memory in history. The pains he took to demonstrate that culturally Hindus and Muslims were not different would similarly suggest that he assigned to culture also a role in the development of social life. But he insisted on disengaging culture from religion.⁴⁶ Without necessarily dismissing religion as inconsequential.

Hence his appreciation of the efforts made by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to provide an authentic commentary on the *Quran*. It was clear from this commentary, Premchand observed happily, that the *Quran* emphasized the unity of all religions and did not direct the faithful to liquidate the unbelievers. What it did was to bid the faithful to carry the message of

God to the unbelievers and leave them to the mercy of God if they did not see the light.⁴⁷ Hence also the fact that Premchand himself wrote in defence of the Prophet who, he averred, respected all religions and found in the core of each the same single truth.⁴⁸

In Premchand's fiction, as in his non-fiction, liberal views predominate when the Hindu-Muslim question is treated directly. Muslim characters abound in his novels and short stories. They often occur in innocuous contexts and are paired with Hindu characters as symbols of unity between the two communities. A similar effect is sought by introducing fleeting glimpses of Muslim characters as participants in the freedom struggle. For example, after the police firing in *Rangbhumi* (1925), there is the description of nine crematory and three funeral processions, indicating the martyrdom of three Muslims along with nine Hindus.⁴⁹ In the same novel, Rani Janhavi delivers an impassioned speech saying that out there in the field of duty they are neither Hindu nor Muslim. They are all one. Sailing in the same boat, they would sink or survive together. Following on this logic, Pandeypur, the locale where these Hindu and Muslim nationalists met their valiant deaths, becomes a *shahidgah* for Muslims and a *tapobhumi* for Hindus.⁵⁰ There are, however, more substantial and integral characters, too, like Kadir in *Premashram* (1922) who sings *bhajans* with the Hindus of his village and shares with them a common culture.

Premchand works out in his fiction the rhetoric he was employing in his articles. In *Kayakalpa* (1926), violence threatens to break out over a sacrifice that the Muslims are determined to perform and the Hindus to prevent. Chakradhar, the hero, saves the situation by driving home the point that human life is more precious than a cow's life. He offers himself to be struck before the cow is sacrificed. In the argument that follows, the Muslims complain that the Hindus have revived, after five hundred years of disuse, the institution of *shuddhi*. Why then, should, they be considerate to the Hindus? Chakradhar replies that Islam has never hurt the sentiments of the followers of other religions. He says that God is one and that he recognizes Hazrat Muhammad as the Prophet. Violence is prevented.⁵¹

Through Chakradhar Premchand manages to introduce in *Kayakalpa* much of his well-meaning rhetoric about Hindu-Muslim unity. Chakradhar speaks with nostalgia of the old days of communal amity and tries to remove the mutual fears of the Muslims and the Hindus. He says: 'People unnecessarily give a bad name to the Muslims. . . . They are as peace-loving as the Hindus. . . . People think that they dream of ruling over us. Similarly, Muslims think that the Hindus are out to avenge old rivalries and destroy them wholesale.'⁵² The novel also shows the outbreak of a communal riot which is described with equal severity towards both the guilty communities; for they are interested less in religion and more in outdoing each other in inhumanity. A woman, whose daughter has been taken away by the Muslims, cries: 'Neither for the Muslims nor for the Hindus is there any other place. Both have to live and die here. Why then this scramble to devour each other?'⁵³

Premchand tries similar devices to stress the futility of communalism and to inspire his readers with nationalist fervour in short stories like 'Muktidhan' (1924), 'Kshama' (1924) 'Mandir aur Masjid' (1925), and 'Himsa Paramo Dharmah' (1926).⁵⁴ It may be noted that all these stories belong to a period when the communal situation was alarming; they bear testimony to his desire for Hindu-Muslim unity. During these years of disturbed communal relations, he also wrote a play, *Karbala* (1925), with the specific purpose of inspiring people with the ideal of unity.

III

The underlying 'Hindu' orientation of Premchand's mental make-up emerges more clearly in contexts where he is not directly concerned with the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity and is dealing with the need to regenerate 'his' society. Without deliberate parochialism, it seems, the Hindu society is what he sees as his society. It is in terms of his self-definition as a Hindu that he seeks the larger identity of nation, and relates himself to other groups.

Premchand had come of age during the last quarter of the 19th century when the basic units of social identities drew their sustenance from religion. Nationalism in this traditionally

structured society represented a new kind of awareness that not only transcended but also drew upon traditional social identities. Quite often Premchand thought or wished—that the ideal of nation would bring about the effacement of caste, sect and religion as units of social identification. 'We want India to be one *qaum*, a nation which means a people who have one education, one culture, one political unity, one language and one literature', he said in 1936.⁵⁵ But in his own conception of the Indian nation he could not always manage to prevent the intrusion of his Hindu orientation. In ways that he could not always have perceived, this orientation vitiated his own professed ideals.

Such an intrusion can be traced back to his *Kalam, Talwar aur Tyag* essays. In the essay on Mansingh, whenever his armies defeat a Muslim rival and consolidate Akbar's empire, they are called Rajput and Mughal armies; the obvious inference being that the brave Hindu Rajputs had defeated the Muslims.⁵⁶ The essay on Gokhale, to offer another example, ends with the peroration, 'Motherland! They do you injustice who allege that the Hindu *jati* has become dead and lifeless. So long as children like Dadabhai, Ranade and Gokhale play in your lap, this *jati* can never be called dead.'⁵⁷

It is significant that while the motherland is addressed, the supposed death of only the Hindus is challenged. Equally significant is the fact that Dadabhai, a Parsi, is the first to be mentioned among the illustrious children of the motherland who keep the Hindu *jati* alive. The significance of this lies in the tendency to equate the Hindus with Indians. This tendency comes out more clearly in an article written in 1907 on painting. Almost imperceptibly, in the course of the description of the effect of a painting of Shakuntala, the term Hindu widens to mean Indian and to embrace Indian nationalism.⁵⁸ In a speech, to which reference has been made towards the end of the previous section of this paper, Chakradhar employs the term 'people' for the Hindus as distinguished from the Muslims. The unself-conscious manner in which the Hindus become the people—the Indian people—suggests the efficacy of this extended identification of the Hindus.⁵⁹

It could be argued that the article on painting was written when Premchand was under the influence of the Arya Samaj,

an influence that ceased to operate from about the period he wrote *Premashram*, if not earlier. And also that the way Chakradhar, a character in his fiction, thinks need not offer a clue to the understanding of Premchand's own thought patterns. A close look at his articles—setting aside his fiction for the time being as belonging to a different class of evidence—seems to necessitate a modification of the view that there were clearly marked stages in the evolution of Premchand's mind. Instead, one could more profitably look for continuing influences that had to contend, in his mind, with newly acquired influences.

In some of the articles written during the 1930s Premchand uses the word *jatiya* to denote institutions that had been established by the Muslims or the Hindus for the upliftment of their own communities, and the word *rashtriya* to mean national. Some of these *jatiya* institutions, he says, are doing real service to the nation. Not once is a Muslim *jatiya* institution described as *rashtriya*. But similar Hindu institutions are. On such occasions Hindu, *jatiya*, *rashtriya* and *Bharatiya* are used synonymously. By way of example may be cited his account of the Gurukul Kangri of which he spoke in stirring terms as a 'national institution preserving our culture.'⁶⁰

The persistence of this subtle tendency to take Hindu as Indian or national is reflected in some of the similes and metaphors also. Writing in 1932, when the problem of the untouchables had acquired a serious political dimension, Premchand stressed that the untouchables were as much an integral part of the nation as the others. To press his point, he likened the Indian nation to the human body which had four parts: the mouth, hands, belly and feet. The removal of any part would render the body paralysed or lifeless. 'What would be the fate of this body', he asked, 'if our Shudra brethren—the feet of this body-like nation—are chopped off?'⁶¹ Premchand was obviously influenced by the *Furush Sukta*. Did he, in employing this metaphor, have the Hindu society in mind as a substitute for the Indian nation? Or did he have one of the four parts of the body-like nation reserved for the non-Hindus of this nation? In any case, this was certainly the kind of language that the Muslims were unlikely to relish; a fact that was not unknown to Premchand.

In other respects also this tendency found expression in ways that could not but have antagonized the Muslims; more so as these expressions left no doubt about the Muslims being seen as 'other'. Many of the writings about the untouchables belong to this class. While referring to the lower castes in contexts that related to the Muslims directly, Premchand invariably harped on the oppression and injustice that had induced lower caste Hindus to seek refuge in Islam; he even found reasons for the Hindus to be grateful to Islam for having obliged them to reform their society. But he wrote in an altogether different vein while dealing with the place of the untouchables within the Hindu fold, especially when it was related to the question of the electorate. Written about in this vein, the Muslims became the 'others' who kept waiting villainously for opportunities to make more inroads into the Hindu society.⁶²

In the writings of Premchand that deal directly with the question of communal unity, we can discern a constant note of exasperation at the hold of religion. But in writings inspired by his 'Hindu' orientation, it is considered a matter of pride that India is still a pre-eminently religious country where dharma constitutes the most important part of life.⁶³ There is nothing in the tone of this exultation to suggest that dharma the hold of which was noted with pride, included Islam also.

Faith in Hindu greatness, moreover, found expression in attempts to trace modern concepts to early Hinduism. This did not necessarily indicate the continuing hold of the Arya Samaj on Premchand's thinking. But it certainly suggests the influence on him, as on most liberal Hindu nationalists of the time, of cultural revivalism. Thus, like many Congress Socialists of the 1930s, he maintained that socialism was contained in the Vedanta. No Hindu, he contended, could be true to his dharma without being a socialist.⁶⁴

This picture is confirmed by Premchand's fiction. But this dimension of his fiction has been neglected as a result of greater scholarly interest in aspects of his work which expose the evils and corruption of the Hindu society. Why this should have been so could well be the starting point for an important enquiry into the sociology of modern Indian literature. What is relevant for the present study, however, is the fact that the recurrent exposure of the sordid side of the Hindu society

could well have been prompted by a desire to revitalize it. This supposition would be corroborated by the fact that most of his heroes combine religion and social service. Some of them may be non-believers in the beginning. But they all come round to see the light of dharma. Even the U.S.-educated Premshankar, an atheist, ends up sounding saintly and religious: 'I am now convinced that God answers the prayers of the poor.'⁶⁵ Again and again, one feels, Premchand creates characters who realize in their lives Vivekananda's ideal that service of man is the worship of God.⁶⁶

The most explicit, almost aggressive, statement of Hindu superiority is offered in *Rangbhumi*. Though ostensibly the statement was made with reference to Christianity and the western cultural onslaught, its tone seems to have upset at least some of his Muslim readers who found the novel anti-Islamic and brazenly Hindu.⁶⁷ Through the character of Sophia—which is supposed to have been modelled after Mrs Annie Besant—superiority of the Hindus is unmistakably established. Born in an Indian Christian family of second generation converts from some high caste, she finds, after an agonising search for truth, peace and light in Hinduism. It is not the abstract principles of Hindu religion and philosophy that offer her enlightenment. The normal pattern of Hindu society offers her a haven of peace. This, for example, is what she says about Hindu *vis-a-vis* Christian families: 'I have seen how persons of different persuasions live together so lovingly in Hindu households. The father is an orthodox Hindu, the son an adherent of the Arya Samaj. The husband belongs to the Brahmo Samaj, and the wife is an idol-worshipper. All of them observe their own religion. . . . The soul is crushed among us.' She also says: 'Our freedom is worldly and therefore false. Yours is mental and therefore real.' Soon enough she is able to say: 'I too am all for the Hindu religion.' And Vinay says of her more than once that though by some accident born in a Christian household, she is not a bit less than 'our ideal women'. She is, indeed, an Arya lady.⁶⁸

Occasionally this pride in Hinduism even acquired an anti-Muslim character in Premchand's fiction. In *Sevasadan* (1918), his first major novel, he dealt with the problem of prostitution.⁶⁹ He did not mind including in it the stereotyped Hindu

explanation for ills that had crept into their society. Vithaldas, a reformer in the novel, says: 'How, I wonder, did this evil practice come into being? I think it must have begun during the times of the pleasure-loving Muslim emperors.'⁷⁰ This was not merely the explanation of an isolated evil. Nor could it be dissociated from Premchand's own ideas about the origins of evil practices within the Hindu society, on the ground that through Vithaldas he was merely portraying—realist that he was—a widespread Hindu belief. The fact that as late as 1932 Premchand wrote an article in which he traced the country's general decline to the coming of the Muslims would confirm the impression that he himself shared the belief he had described through Vithaldas in *Sevasadan*. In this article, Premchand ascribed India's decline to the destruction of the *gurukul* system of education following the coming of the Muslims. With this destruction, the 'boat of the nation was deprived of its anchor'.⁷¹

If *Rangbhumi* was seen by some Muslims as an attack on Islam, their assessment must have followed rather from their uneasiness about the idealization of the Hindus than from direct attacks on Islam or the Muslims, which are but a few in the novel.⁷² But the assessment does not seem to have been totally unjustified. In 'Smriti ka Pujari' (1935), Premchand made short work of the supposed greatness of Islam and idealized Hinduism, going so far as to equate it with *manav dharma*, the religion of man. The story describes the disillusionment of a Hindu who has been enamoured of Islam. In the end he realizes his error. He can no longer believe that Islam is a revealed religion. He feels that, like other religions, even Islam is but narrow groupism. He becomes a convinced Hindu, or rather a follower of *manava dharma*.⁷³

Premchand did take pains to show that Muslims were part of Indian culture. Often in his novels and short stories, especially in the portrayal of rural life, Muslims and Hindus lived in harmony and shared a common culture. Besides Kadir of *Premashram* who sang *bhajans*, Miyan Chaudhary of 'Mandir aur Masjid' worshipped Durga, bathed in the Ganges, and respected Hindu religious customs even while remaining a devout Muslim; Rahman of 'Muktidhan' loved cows; and in 'Vichitra Holi' Hindus and Muslims played *holi* together. But

this was a one-sided amalgamation; the Muslims joined in with the Hindus. The picture of common culture would have been complete if Premchand had also depicted Hindus participating in Muslim festivals and rituals; after all, many *pirs* and *mazars* were then, as now, worshipped by both Muslims and Hindus. In fact, this one-sided portrayal in Premchand's fiction is made even more glaring by the fact that his non-fiction mentions the other side of this interaction.⁷⁴

All this lends credence to the suspicion that at least the Hindus belonging to Premchand's own social situation—the urban middle class—were rather distant from the Muslims. More consistent than many of them in his concern for communal unity, Premchand, like them, was evidently influenced by a 'Hindu' mode of apprehending the contemporary social reality, without quite realizing that in the process the Muslims had been bypassed or treated as the 'other'.

IV

Premchand's commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity was, without doubt, genuine. He was, as we have seen, unclear about what it was that kept the two communities apart. He even denied occasionally that they were apart. But the denial was, perhaps, a reflection of his zeal for unity. Maybe it also stemmed from occasional realization of the intransigence of the communal problem. It was this realization that prompted him, like it prompted Nehru and Gandhi, to say that communal unity would be achieved only after the British had left; although he could see the need for unity as a prerequisite for freedom.

This commitment, however, had its limitations. It operated at the level of political pragmatism. Though in the making of a case for unity cultural dimensions were also introduced and a common legacy was shown, this seemed more an exercise in rationalization. That this was so is shown by Premchand's defence of Indian *vis-à-vis* western culture. The need for such a defence was more than just political. It involved the very question of being in a colonial society. Consequently, the mode of Premchand's reaction to the question of collective survival and being reflects a deeper level of his personality.

Using exaggerated terms, he condemned western culture as

steeped in crass materialism. This culture had 'strangled humanitarianism and become an instrument of selfishness'.⁷⁵ If such a civilization had conquered India, the conquest was yet another proof of the inexorable law of history that superior cultures are overrun by inferior ones.⁷⁶

Though the culture whose superiority he establishes as against western culture is almost invariably described as Indian, in its content it is, almost invariably, Hindu. The salvation of India lies in reviving that culture which her ancestors had perfected thousands of years ago, a culture which (rather than the generosity of the rulers) is responsible for the fact that there is yet life in India. Only then would she be able to get back her true soul.⁷⁷ Incidentally, he felt that the revival of the *gurukul* system was essential for the regeneration of the country.⁷⁸ Among the heroes cited by him as examples of the former greatness of this culture are both historical and mythological figures. They include Ram, Krishna, Janak, Arjun, Bhishma, Ashok and Siddhartha. As proof of the poverty of western culture are cited the names of its great men. They include Cromwell, Clive, Napoleon, Lenin, and Mussolini.⁷⁹

The contrast is provided to emphasize the basic difference between the two cultures. As against western culture, which is based on conflict, Indian culture is based on co-operation. Its two underlying elements are ahimsa and universal brotherhood. Western democracy and political revolutions, on the contrary, illustrate the westerners' proclivity to conflict. Our culture, says Premchand, is *sanatana*; it has come down from times immemorial and is suited to our needs.⁸⁰

Fortunately for India, Premchand argued, the very organizing principles of our culture obviate the need for conflict. No group or class in this arrangement need fear the other. The four-fold *varna* system ensured a harmonious and non-exploitative social existence. The Brahman was the 'recognized leader of society and the nation' not on account of his wealth or physical prowess but because of the strength of his wisdom. The vaishya made money and spent it on public welfare. People's instincts had been so schooled that they cared more for their obligations than for their rights. Once *swarajya* is achieved, India will regain her long-lost soul. Dharma will again become ascendant, and *varna* and *ashram* reign supreme.

Indians will then be respected in the world. Outlined in this article is the concept of Hindu *swarajya* for India.⁸¹

Premchand may have got carried away by the need to resist western cultural aggression when he talked of *swarajya* in unabashedly religious terms. For, he did talk of *swarajya*, on other occasions, in more secular and contemporary terms. He even talked of class war. Obviously he found himself exposed to discrete influences and never succeeded in evolving a consistent world-view. In spite of his liberal outlook, he remained at heart a Hindu to the extent of bypassing the Muslims as a whole in his idealized vision of what India was; and also, to some extent, in his vision of what she would become. In ways that he did not always perceive, this attachment to the Hindu world adversely affected his efforts to propagate the ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity.

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2. Premchand to Raghuvir Singh, 17 May 1932. See Kamal Kishore Goyanka, ed., *Premchand Vishwakosh*, Dilli, 1981, vol. I, pp. 144-45.
3. Amrit Rai, ed., *Vividh Prasang*, Allahabad, 1978, vol. III, p. 35. This is a compilation, in three volumes, of Premchand's journalistic writings on a variety of subjects. It covers the period from 1905 to 1936.
4. Premchand to Keshoram Sabherwal, 3 Sep. 1929, in Amrit Rai, ed., *Chitthi Patri*, Allahabad, 1978, vol. II, p. 207. This and the other passages have been translated from Hindi by the author.
5. Premchand to Vinod Shankar Vyas, Jan. 1930, *ibid.*, p. 184.
6. Premchand to Ramchandra Tandon, Dec. 1934, *ibid.*, p. 166.
7. Premchand to Harihar Nath, Jan. 1930, *ibid.*, p. 286.
8. Premchand, *Kuchh Vichar*, Allahabad, 1973, p. 83; see also p. 20.
9. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. III, p. 323.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 414.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 66.
12. Premchand, *Kalam, Talwar aur Tyag*, Dilli, 1979, vol. I, p. 123.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 29-30.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78, 80.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-45; vol. II (Dilli, 1974), pp. 67-80, 94-122.
16. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. II, p. 30.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 351, 355.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 351-57.

20. Ibid., p. 48.
21. Ibid., p. 46.
22. Ibid., p. 73.
23. Ibid., pp. 383-84.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., pp. 211-12.
26. Ibid., p. 389.
27. Ibid., pp. 351-57.
28. Ibid., p. 375.
29. Ibid., pp. 374-78.
30. Ibid., pp. 425-28.
31. Ibid., pp. 377-78.
32. Ibid., p. 377.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 393.
35. Ibid., p. 111.
36. Ibid., p. 394.
37. Ibid., p. 427.
38. Ibid., p. 402.
39. Ibid., p. 403.
40. Ibid., p. 404.
41. Ibid., p. 425.
42. Ibid., vol. III, pp. 232-35.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., vol. II, p. 425.
45. Ibid., vol. III, p. 235.
46. Ibid., vol. II, p. 427; vol. III, p. 232.
47. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 418-19.
48. Ibid., pp. 411-14.
49. Premchand, *Rangbhumi*, Allahabad, 1971, p. 516.
50. Ibid., pp. 539, 552.
51. Premchand, *Kayakalpa*, Allahabad, 1980, pp. 28-37.
52. Ibid., p. 49.
53. Ibid., pp. 205-08.
54. *Mansarovar*, Allahabad, 1978, vol. III, pp. 173-84, 202-10; Amrit Rai, ed., *Gupta Dhan*, Allahabad, 1978, pp. 159-69; *Mansarovar*, Delhi, 1980, vol. V, pp. 86-95.
55. *Kuchh Vichar*, p. 85.
56. *Kalam, Talwar aur Tyag*, vol. I, pp. 127-30.
57. Ibid., p. 44.
58. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. I, p. 89.
59. *Kayakalpa*, p. 49.
60. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. III, pp. 181-84, 198-203.
61. Ibid., vol. II, p. 438.
62. Ibid., pp. 439, 443, 448.
63. Ibid., p. 445.
64. Ibid., pp. 223-24.

65. Premchand, *Premashram*, Allahabad, 1979, p. 378.
66. Pratap in *Vardan* (1921), Surdas in *Rangbhumi* and Chakradhar in *Kayakalpa* combine religion and social service. So do Vinaya in *Rangbhumi* and Gajadhar in *Sevasadan*. In *Karmabhumi* (1932) Amar turns truly religious after a spell of introspection in jail.
67. See *Chitthi Patri*, vol. II, p. 281.
68. *Rangbhumi*, pp. 36, 44, 311, 355, 415, 518.
69. Prostitutes figure frequently in Premchand's fiction. Usually they are Muslims. But, significantly enough, Suman, the heroine of *Sevasadan*, is shown a Brahman housewife who is forced by an unfortunate combination of circumstances to take to prostitution. The novel is full of lamentations that a high caste Hindu woman should have thus fallen.
70. Premchand, *Sevasadan*, Allahabad, 1978, p. 92.
71. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. III, p. 202.
72. There is, for example, the meeting in *Rangbhumi* of Nayakram with Arya Samajists—a meeting wholly extraneous to the development of the story—whom he praises for their role in saving the country from turning Muslim or Christian, thereby preserving the honour of the Hindus, pp. 315-16. Or the fear expressed by Surdas, in the same novel, that Subhagi, having been forced to leave her home, might fall into the hands of Muslims or Christians, p. 358.
73. See note 1 above.
74. *Vividh Prasang*, vol. III, pp. 232-34.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.
76. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 182.
77. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 26-28. It is noteworthy that in this article (1922) Premchand extols the virtues of Hindu-Muslim unity as essential for the success of the freedom struggle.
78. *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 198-200.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-09.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 33-34.

The Peasant and the Landless Untouchable in the Fiction of the Gandhian Age

RAJAT KANTA RAY

Who is a Peasant?

Many novelists of the Gandhian age saw the popular awakening in India in terms of the aspiration of the peasantry to create a brave new world for themselves. However, the more perceptive among them, such as Prem Chand (1880-1936) and Tarashankar Banerjee (1898-1971) were keenly aware of the divisions within the peasant world, and of the consequent tension of conflicting aspirations that threatened the unity of the peasants' vision. One large section of the cultivating population—untouchables who worked for peasants as landless workers—were perceived by both these novelists as a category apart in rural society, living in conditions that could not be equated in every respect with those in which the majority of the caste peasantry lived. Tarashankar Banerjee was especially sensitive to the sexual tensions inherent in this social division within the cultivating population. His novel *Ganadevata*,¹ which may be pronounced to be the single most important exploration of the peasant world in the Bengali fiction of Gandhian age, enables the historian of the countryside to gain a deep insight into these social tensions in rustic society.

Banerjee, keenly aware of the subtle gradations within the agricultural work force, is visibly careful in drawing the social boundaries at this level of rural society. He has no hesitation in marking out gentry from the rest of rural society. He is

aware how at the highest rungs of the peasant society, individual peasants continually climb into gentry society. Still there is no doubt as to the gulf that separates the gentry from the rest of rural society. But when Banerjee descends into the part of the society which constitutes the agricultural work force, he becomes more careful in the choice of terms to denote different categories. Sometimes he uses the same terms to describe categories which he elsewhere distinguishes clearly. He applies the term *chashi* or cultivator to full members of the peasant community as well as to untouchables; but when he refers to untouchables he qualifies the extension of the term by prefixing adjectives to it.

There is another problem. A large section of the rural work force is the body of artisans, who are closely intermeshed with the peasants. They, too, enjoy the rights of the peasant community, because they have access on the same terms to the *chandimandap*, the sanctum of the village and the symbol of its collective popular identity. They may sit on its floor with other peasants, whereas the untouchables stand at one side of the sanctum. How are we to categorize these artisans? They do not constitute a group apart from the peasantry, because they have no collective organization to mark them out from the peasants. They are compartmentalized into different crafts and each craft is tied to the agricultural work cycle.

Banerjee has no comprehensive scheme incorporating these distinctions in sociological terms. But the terms which he uses and the categories that he delineates can be pieced together into a systematic scheme. The scheme is implicit in the descriptive portions of the novel. It unfolds itself in the dramatic action as well.

Ganadevata portrays a peasant world. It shows in motion a peasant society. The reader slowly absorbs the impression that there is a specifically peasant culture, to be distinguished from gentry culture and the untouchable world. Those who participate in this peasant culture are in a sense members of the peasant society, though they need not be cultivators themselves.

The peasant society is wider than the peasantry proper. It includes the artisans, the serving castes of clean status (for instance, the barbers), and rural literate persons from peasant households who are engaged as village pedagogues, peasant

doctors and ground level clergy. It is held together by a common culture and by the fact that in terms of caste-origin it is constituted by families and lineages belonging to the 'peasant castes'—castes whose traditional avocation is cultivation—and the artisan and service castes of clean or semi-clean status. The term cultivation here is used to denote agriculture as well as pastoral farming.

There is no difficulty in distinguishing the peasant culture from the gentry culture. The distinction is based on the hereditary cultural effect of freedom from physical labour on the one hand and participation in manual work on the other. Many members of the peasant community, having acquired land or learning, may seek to assimilate the gentry style by shunning the more unpleasant aspects of manual work. But they remain tied by kinship and marriage networks to the peasant world around them. Nor can they acquire easily the culture and living style of the gentry, who, for many generations, have not been defiled by physical labour. Peasant characters in *Ganadevata*, who do not hold the plough with their own hands, are shown to be actively engaged in supervising the work of their farm servants. The *babus* of Kankana, who are Brahmans by caste, would not do this even when technically they are tenants holding *ryoti* lands.²

The peasantry proper are those who live by cultivation. But are all cultivating men who hold the plough peasants? The issue is by no means easy to decide. He who holds the plough is to some extent degraded—the gentry would call him by the derogatory term *chasha* (a contemptuous corruption of the word *chashi*). But the *chashi* in his own eyes and in the eyes of those below him has a definite status; he is a full member of the village community, with a right to sit on the floor of the *chandimandap*.³ The plough itself is a symbol of status when a cultivator owns it; he automatically acquires by this ownership the status of a peasant. He who tills the land with the plough of a master is not a full member of the community.

The rural community has specific terms to describe such people. Banerjee frequently mentions among the lowest of his rural characters the *krishan*, the *munish*, and the *mahindar*. These are men who live by cultivation. But they do not own the land they cultivate, nor do they own the means of cultiva-

tion. The *krishan* is the highest among these lowly characters. The master provides him with seed, manure, plough, cattle and other implements. The *krishan* gets one-third of the crop for his labour, but no straw.⁴ The *munish* is an agricultural worker, a field labourer hired on daily wages. The *mahindar* is a farm servant, a serf attached to the household of the master. He is fed and clothed by the master, is paid according to a long term oral agreement, and is employed on the field of his master, typically on a hereditary basis. He is, in other words, a bonded labourer, the lowest of the landless.

The *chashi* or peasant may be landless, but he must own at least some of the means of cultivation. When he ceases to do so, he ceases to be a full peasant. Because he takes his own plough to his or someone else's tenancy, he pays rent instead of being paid a wage. Those who pay a produce rent have a more depressed status than those who pay a money rent. The peasant thus falls into two basic categories: the *bhagjotedar* and the *praja*. The *bhagjotedar*—the share-cropper, as locally known in Birbhum—is more generally known as the *bhagchashi* or the *bargadar*. The *bhagjotedar*, like the *krishan*, divides the produce with his master, but on more favourable terms. The terms vary. Under the strictest terms, he gets one third of the produce, but this happens only on the richest and best land. More usually he gets $2/5$, or $9/20$ or one half of the crop. He supplies all or most of the means of cultivation—seed, manure, cattle and plough—and bears the entire or major portion to the cost, as well as the whole of the risk.⁵ He has no right to the land which he cultivates. He is not a ryot. A ryot or an under-ryot, who has some kind of right to cultivate the land, is known by the term *praja*, or subject. *Praja* can be of all types. He can be a 'distinguished *jotedar*', as Tripura Singh is: 'From a *mahajan* he first became a distinguished *jotedar* and in the end, by purchasing a portion of the property of his *zamindar*, he even became a small *zamindar* himself.'⁶ Note the fluidity of the term *jotedar*. It can mean a substantial tenant holding direct from the landlord. But the lowest of peasants, the share-cropper, is also known as the *bhagjotedar*. The peasant, then, ranges from the richest money-lending tenant to the poorest share-cropper holding from a more substantial tenant.

Who then are the peasantry? It is that body of cultivators,

standing below the gentry and above the agricultural labourers (including *krishans*), who apply their own means of cultivation to land held either by themselves or by others.

Artisan Members of the Peasant Community

Peasant society at large includes the artisans as well. Aniruddha Karmakar is a blacksmith, but he is also a peasant. Agriculture and crafts are the two inseparable aspects of rural economic activity. Village crafts are peasant crafts. Village craftsmen are peasant craftsmen. Not merely because they supply the essential implements of cultivation, but also because they are peasants in their own right.

Aniruddha's grandfather belonged originally to Mahagram. The peasants of Sibkalipur invited him to their own village and settled him there. Terms of exchange were laid down on a ritual basis. Under this well-understood agreement from his grandfather's day, Aniruddha Karmakar is to supply ploughs to each household, and to make other implements of cultivation and do all other iron work for the peasants. He is to repair and sharpen the plough of every peasant household at the beginning of each season. For this last service, which is essential to keep the cycle of cultivation going, the peasant households are to give him five *shalis* of rice per plough in the village. When Aniruddha, along with Girish Sutradhar, the other artisan of the village, refuses to do this iron repair work on a full time basis, and opens a workshop in the junction town across the river, a major crisis is produced in the work cycle of the village. *Ganadevata* starts with this crisis.

Besides the income from this iron repair work, the Karmakar has ryoti land of his own. He holds 13 *bighas* of land in all.⁷ He cultivates himself when necessary, but ordinarily he has a *bhagjotedar* for the ploughing work.⁸ Of his 13 *bighas* of land, 4 or 5 *bighas* constitute a highly productive consolidated farm (*bakuri*). This home farm has been built up by the loving care and industry of three generations. Aniruddha's grandfather had seven strips of land amounting in all to 4 *bighas*. He consolidated these seven strips into three strips. Aniruddha's father pushed on the process of consolidation and reduced the number of strips to two. One was a *bakuri* of $3\frac{1}{2}$ *bighas*, the

other a strip of 10 *kathas*, Aniruddha completed the process by consolidating the strip with the *bakuri*.

Aniruddha becomes more dependent on the land as his income from iron work steadily diminishes on account of wider economic linkages between the village and the outside world. Various implements of cultivation become available in the market at cheaper prices and Aniruddha's business slowly collapses. He begins to work on the land along with his *bhag-jotedar* in a bid to increase the produce of his unconsolidated strips.⁹

But all in vain. Srihari Ghosh is his mortal enemy and has an eye on his land as well as his wife. An opportunity to fulfil these desires comes when Aniruddha takes to liquor, contracts a liaison with the village prostitute, Durga, and drives his childless wife, Padma, to distraction. His growing dependence on the land is accompanied by a process of alienation from it. His land is ultimately auctioned, and Srihari Ghosh gets it. He also gets his wife, though only for one night.¹⁰ Aniruddha flees the village, and becomes a labour in an urban workshop. His wife goes off with another man. When Aniruddha comes back for a brief visit, he encourages the poor of the village to leave their homes for mill work.¹¹ In spite of this process of alienation from the land, Aniruddha retains a status consciousness which is curiously like a peasant's idea of his place in village society. He tells his friend, Debu Ghosh: 'I am the son of Keshab Kumar, the grandson of Hitu Kumar. How can I become a worker in a mill—subordinate to those foremen of unknown caste?'¹² Yet circumstances force him to descend precisely to this level, an uprooted landless villager. Artisans, as part of the peasant community, undergo a process of depeasantization like other poor peasants.

Are Untouchables Peasants?

The broader peasant society comprises untouchable cultivators also. Like the artisans, they too are dependents of the peasantry, but of a lower status. Banerjee's characterization of the untouchables shows certain ambiguities. Sometimes he calls them *chashis*, because they are engaged in cultivation. Thus he writes with reference to the Bhallas: 'Ordinarily they are

now peasants, apparently very peaceable; but from time to time, especially during the hard times of the rains, their quiescent evil instincts awaken.¹³ Banerjee, however, is not happy to describe the untouchables as peasants. Often he qualifies the term by employing various formulas like describing untouchable peasant workers—Bauris, Muchis and Doms—as *shramik chashi* or *chashi majurs* (peasant workers).¹⁴

Banerjee thus perceives two clearly distinct levels among those who cultivate. Down to the level of the *bhagjotedar* are those who take autonomous decisions regarding cultivation, because they own the means of cultivation. Below this level, from the *krishan* to the *mahindar*, are those cultivators who till with the ploughs of their masters and are in no position to take autonomous decisions. The *krishan* is thus not a peasant in the sense the *bhagjotedar* is. If a peasant leases out his land to a *bhagjotedar*, it is no longer his own home farm; but if he employs a *krishan*, then it is 'cultivation at his own home'.¹⁵ The untouchables rarely own the implements by which they cultivate. In the Harijan hamlet of Sibkalipur, there are only 5 ploughs and 10 bullocks. They can seldom rise from *krishan* to *bhagjotedar*. As a community, therefore, they are labourers, not peasants.

The clear distinction of status is reflected in the mutual relationship of peasants and untouchables as patrons and clients. Tinkari Ghosh, the Sadgop peasant leader of the Bhallas, is anxious about how to feed the *munish* and the *mahindar*, and his Bhalla followers, during the rent strike; the patron must protect his clients.¹⁶ But the patron derives substantial benefits from the protection he offers. At night Debu Ghosh sees Satish Bauri, lamp in hand, going to the field. 'Debu sighed, without any apparent reason. These are the most miserable people in the world. The peasant householders are sleeping in their homes, while these poor *krishans* and *bhagidars* are going late at night to protect their fields. Yet the peasant takes an interest of 50 per cent for giving them food loans.'¹⁷ It is the duty of all subjects of the *zamindar* to repair the embankment, but most peasants do not perform this task. As the law has become stricter, the *zamindar* no longer dares to compel them by force to do repair work; but Bauris, Muchis and Doms have to do forced labour for maintenance of the embankment.¹⁸

When the flood breaches the embankment, none of the peasants respond to Debu Ghosh's desperate call to hold the dam. It is Satish Bauri, Patu Muchi and other untouchables who come out at his call.¹⁹ Yet in a way they are perhaps less affected materially, because they do not have much property to protect from the flood. It is true that the flood reaches the untouchable quarter first, because it is at a lower level. But the untouchables simply load all their meagre possessions in sacks and baskets, whereas the peasants and householders, immobilized by their goods and animals, are greatly distressed when the water level reaches the steps of their houses as well.²⁰ In the Muslim village of Kusumpur, the leading villagers take shelter with the wealthy Daulat Shaikh during the flood. The ordinary peasants go with their women to the mosque. The poor of the village, those who hire themselves out for labour, go up to the high burial ground of the village saint.²¹ The same distinctions of status are reproduced in the Muslim rural community.

The Harijan economy, as the flood reveals, is distinct from the peasant economy. Their houses are lower and more flimsy.²² Their utensils, clothes, bedding and other household goods are pitiful.²³ In the hamlet of the untouchables, everyone works under a peasant master. They work either on a wage fixed for the year or for a share of the produce. The boys act as cowherds—they get their clothes from the master. If they are a bit older they also get a wage ranging from eight annas to a rupee. Most of the grown up men work as labourers on a wage of one third of the produce. The master supplies them with food during the cultivating season, and when the crop is harvested he gets an additional share of the crop as interest. Their women work at the houses of the more prosperous peasant householders.²⁴

These economic distinctions are reflected in modes of social intercourse. The untouchables are conscious that their masters are gentlemen (*bhadralok*). They make sitting arrangements accordingly at open air rural functions. Their men sit on one side and their women on another; in between they accommodate their peasant patrons.²⁵ The peasants take some care to appear 'respectable' before these lowly characters. They seek to dress, act and behave differently from the degraded rural poor;

they even aspire—if possible—to drink in a more respectable way.

The gap is but narrow; and there is a fear in the mind of the peasant that he may descend to the lower level. Tarini, a Sadgop villager of Sibkalipur, has been reduced to a landless tiller. He earns his living by hiring himself out for agricultural work like the Bauri and Dom workers. His wife, reduced to the same level, wanders about, like Bauri and Dom women, with a basket, catching fish from the mud pond. His little son rolls on the dust and eats it.²⁶ Finally, the man loses even his homestead to Srihari Ghosh. His wife escapes with a settlement peon; and the boy begs in the junction station.²⁷ Aniruddha Karmakar, when he mortgages his entire *jote* to a money-lender, makes a desperate bid to save his land by taking charge of cultivation himself. He employs a servant, a *krishan*; and the man he selects as his servant is Patu Muchi,²⁸ the same man whom he later takes with him to work in a mill in Calcutta.

Differences exist even among the most degraded rural poor. There are, as we have seen, 5 ploughs and 10 bullocks in the Harijan hamlet. Those who own these implements, naturally, have the leadership of their community. There are crop sharing arrangements, variously known as *bhagato*, *ganto*, etc., by which the rural poor pool together their meagre implements to till the land. One plough and two bullocks constitute the essential unit of implements. Since few untouchables possess a whole unit, sharing arrangements are complex and varied.²⁹

Satish Bauri proposes to his caste man, Atal, that they should pool together their three bullocks in a *bhagato* arrangement. Atal, who has a mind, like Patu, to go to Calcutta with Aniruddha, scratches his head and asks, 'So then what will be the terms of sharing?' 'The terms?' 'Yes'. 'What everyone says fair.' 'No brother, you fix it up in advance.' 'All right, let's go, we shall see the *pandit* on the way. What he says will do.'³⁰ Satish is in an advantageous position. After a cattle disease, the number of bullocks for the 5 ploughs in the hamlet is reduced from 10 to 4. Satish owns two of these. Two other cultivators, including Atal, own one each.³¹ Satish is, therefore, a *matabar*, a leader of 'respect'. Having a complete unit of implements, he is able to take land on share as a *bhagjotedar*,

and does not have to hire himself out as a *krishan*, *munish* or *mahindar*. Not that a share-cropper owns his land; but even small differences count in leadership at lower levels.³² 'In the Bauri and Muchi hamlet, Satish is an elder (*morol manush*), he has a plough in his house, and the means to eat moderately well.'³³ The man has some sort of education; he is a village poet in his own way and composes songs for the rural singing party (*chentu dal*).³⁴ As a cultivator with a plough and a pair of bullocks, he is already a patron of a sort, an employer. Patu Muchi helps him as a worker (*majur*) on the land which he has taken on share (*bhag*) from a ryot.³⁵

Satish Bauri, naturally, resists Aniruddha Karmakar's invitation to the untouchables to go with him to Calcutta. 'To work in a mill! Satish shudders. Be they poor, be they lowly (*chhotolok*), but they are householders. Do householders work in a mill?'³⁶ But his neighbours do not listen to him. One of them says: 'That blighter has got land—a plough, let him give us land, cattle and plough, then we shall see. He will not do that—he will eat well, while we must beg to keep up the pious life of the householder (*gerasta-dharma*).'³⁷

Land, implements of cultivation and household—these are the three crucial criteria in establishing distinctions at the lower levels of village life. Take the land first. Satish Bauri's hostile neighbour thinks that he has got land. The man from whom Satish has taken it on share will certainly not admit this. The right to a piece of land has so many shades that the confusion is natural. A *mahindar* or a *munish* can never mistake the land on which he works as his own; nor even the *krishan* though he gets a third of its produce. The *bhagjotedar*, however, tends to confuse the distinctions and begins to think of the land as his own. Raham Shaikh has always thought of his *bhagjote* as his land. He calls it his *baputi* (parental) land,³⁸ and naturally it does not occur to him to ask the permission of his landlord to cut down the tree standing on his *bhagjote*. The share-croppers know, of course, that legally they have no ground for the claim. The right of occupation belongs to the tenant recorded in the settlement; and the *bhagjotedar* is not recorded.

A rumour during the settlement operations sends a thrill of hope among the landless peasants. Gadar, the share-cropper,

asks at a house meeting: 'Is it true that the *korfa* (under-tenant) will get a right? Even *thike bhag* (contract share-cropper)?' Gagan Ghosh, the tenant leader, interrupts him: 'Come on. If the *korfa* and the *bhag* become recognized as rights, what will remain to men? Go dream about it. All share-cropping land will become yours!'³⁹ The brief dialogue reveals contradictory aspirations among the peasants. Those who have a right to the land as ryots and those who are landless have necessarily different things to hope from the settlement.

Share-croppers, though landless, can still be peasants. The *bhagjotedar* owns his implement of cultivation, his plough. Unlike the *krishan*, the *munish* and the *mahindar*, he decides what to cultivate with his plough. If he is not an untouchable, he has in all likelihood a ryot's right to a strip of land, which is insufficient to maintain his family. He, therefore, takes extra land on share to make full use of his plough and cattle. If, however, he is an untouchable, it is highly unlikely that he will have such a strip of land as a ryot. He is then purely a share-cropper and is identified by Banerjee as a *shramik chashi* rather than a *chashi*. Caste is obviously a factor here in depriving him of full peasant status.

As for 'household', until the settlement operations in Birbhum confer the right in the late 1920s, the untouchables do not legally possess 'households'. Before the settlement, the householders (*grihasthas*) used to assign living space on their own land to Bauri, Dom and Muchi families. The untouchables were no less grateful for this—and they were content to be practically serving members of the household of the master. The settlement gave them written documents conferring on them a right to the homestead. Before this—comments Banerjee—'these men generation after generation simply could not conceive that they could own a piece of land on earth.'⁴⁰ Such a psychology prevents the untouchables from thinking of themselves as peasants and householders in the full sense of these terms.

The peasantry are habituated to think of the untouchables as *chhotolok*. They depend on the cheap labour which the latter supply. Aniruddha Karmakar's proposal that the Bauris and the Muchis should accompany him to Calcutta causes consternation in the Sadgop village of Sibkalipur. The elders think

Debu Ghosh is behind the move. Though he is outcasted, the village elder, Harish Mandal, visits him to say: 'Don't do this, son. No *mumish*, no *mahindar* will be available in the village. People will suffer greatly. We shall have to go, basketfuls of cowdung on our heads, to the field ourselves. Prevent them from going.' Debu replies: 'Listen, uncle Harish. I did not tell them anything. Aniruddha asked them. I had heard vague rumours, last night I got definite news. I have thought it over all night. I got a pen and paper and made calculations—the population of their hamlet is five times the number of households (*gerasta bari*) in this village. Nowadays the condition of the householders in the village has so deteriorated that you can count on your fingers the householders who can afford to employ men. Most of the men work in the households of other villagers. After the flood many of them have dismissed *mumishes* and *mahindars*. Now what will these men eat? Tell me, who will feed them?' Harish Mandal falls silent.⁴¹ The conversation reveals economic differences among the peasantry and the untouchables; but it also reveals how marginal the differences are. One natural calamity, and the peasant's edge over the untouchable is gone. The peasant economy is perpetually on the edge of disaster.

Types of Peasants

Banerjee's peasant characters, often drawn from real persons, show how varied are the categories of people in the peasant world. They cannot even be called categories in the full sense, because differences are individual rather than anything else. An exploration of these individual types reveals the diversity of the peasant world.

Banerjee makes a brief survey of this world while describing the characters assembled at the *chandimandap*:

Aniruddha and Girish could not refuse to obey the summons. They both came at the appointed hour. *Matabars*⁴² from two villages (Sibpur and Kalipur = Sibkalipur) had assembled at the *majlis*.⁴³ Harish Mandal, Bhavesh Pal, Mukunda Ghosh, Kirtibas Mandal, Natabar Pal—these are weighty people, *matabar* Sadgop *chashis*⁴⁴ of the village. Dwaraka

Chaudhuri from the next village is also present. Chaudhuri is a distinguished old man, much respected in this locality. People still say—you must consider his lineage. The forefathers of this man were at onetime the *zamindars* of the two villages. But now he is regarded as a *sampanna chashi*.⁴⁵ Brindaban Datta—the shopkeeper—he, too, is a *matar*. Young peasants of middling means (*madhyabitta abastha chashi*), Gopen Pal, Rakhal Mandal, Ramnarayan Ghosh, etc., are present too. The only Brahman inhabitant of this village, Harendra Ghoshal, along with Nishi Mukherjee and Peary Banerjee from the next village, has also sat down at one corner.

Almost at the centre of the assembly, Chhiru Pal (the future Srihari Ghosh) has taken up his position impressively. Chhiru or Srihari Pal is the new rich man of this village. People surmise that he is no less rich than any of the distinguished rich men of this locality. The man is huge. He is mean by nature and violent by disposition. Because of this he has not got the kind of prestige which society confers on a man on account of wealth. People feel contempt for this *abhadra*,⁴⁶ ill-tempered, wilful and dissolute rich man. They show their fear of him. But they do not give him the respect due to wealth. Chhiru feels hurt, and he is annoyed with people because they do not respect him. He is determined to win status by force. So he sits down at the centre of any public gathering!

Another tall, well-built, dark young man is standing at one side, reclining against a pillar with an indifferent expression. He is Debnath Ghosh, the son of a Sadgop peasant of this village. Not that he tills the land himself. He is the *pandit* of the free primary school of the local union board. He is indifferent because he has no confidence in a gathering in which a man like Chhiru Pal is positioned at the centre. In silent contempt he reclines against a pillar on one side. The only man who has not come is Helaram Chatterjee, the adopted son of the miserly *mahajan*⁴⁷ of the next village, the late Rakhahari Chakravarti. The village watchman, Bhupal Lohar, is also present. Around the place, the boys are playing about noisily. Right at one end of the gathering, the *harijan chashis*⁴⁸ of the village are standing. These are the *shramik chashis*⁴⁹ of

the village—it is they who suffer most from the *inconvenience*.⁵⁰

With a few deft touches, the novelist here fills up a whole scene with all kinds of people who inhabit the peasant world he is going to depict. The reader gets subtle indications of status consciousness from the way people position themselves in the public assembly at the village shrine. Let us take another description, this time of a scene of peasants and untouchables going to the field:

The *krishnas* are going to the field—bands of Bauri, Dom, Muchi and such other *shramik chashis*. They have only one cloth wrapped around their body. They are smoking *hookka* and are carrying their scythes on the other hand. This is the season of harvesting. Most of the *chashi grihasthas*⁵¹ of the village also cultivate with their own hands alongside the *krishans*. They, too, are proceeding scythe in hand in obedience to the saying—'*Khate khatay duno pay*' ('He works, makes others work, gets double')—that is to mean, those who work in the field themselves and work their *chashi majurs*⁵² get twice the ordinary crop in their cultivation. Only three or four people do not take physical part in the cultivation. Harendra Ghoshal is a Brahman. Jagan Ghosh is not only a Kayastha but also a doctor. Debu Ghosh is the *pandit* of the *pathshala*. Srihari Ghosh has recently become a *Kulin* Sadgop⁵³ and is the owner of many properties. Only these men do not work with their own hands in the process of cultivation.⁵⁴

The peasant householders, a group apart from the untouchables while proceeding to the field of cultivation, are themselves divided into two categories by their role at the field. A few among them do not participate in the cultivation. They have either a substantial amount of land, or an income from some kind of village profession, or an ancestral status to maintain. The rest, including the village *matabars*, work with their own hands. The distinction is felt by the peasants to be rather important in terms of status within the village. Take, for instance, Srihari. His family surname is Pal. But he wants to alter it. He has long signed himself Ghosh. But this is not accepted in the court. He hopes to use the survey and settle-

ment operations to have himself entered as Ghosh in the record of rights. 'The title Pal is not respectable; those who cultivate with their own hands—the *chashas*—have the title.'⁵⁵

Even though the respectable peasants would vehemently protest against being termed *chasha*, their status is still not that of gentry. True, they refrain from agricultural work. But unlike the gentry, they closely supervise it. Even Dwaraka Chaudhuri, a *zamindar* turned *chashi*, goes to the field himself to direct operations. So does the village Brahman, Haren Ghoshal. This fact distinguishes them from the Kankana *babus*. They are not gentry, for they are too close to the soil. When someone gets that close—e.g., Dwaraka Chaudhuri—he loses gentry status. Even Brahmans and Kayasthas are then regarded as cultivators.

This, however, is not the only possible kind of degradation. The example of the Sadgop, Tarini Ghosh, whose homestead and land are appropriated by Srihari Ghosh, is a reminder of a second possibility: that of being reduced from *chashi* to *chashi majur*. But the typical peasant, who represents the most numerous category among the peasantry, is the cultivating employer who works himself on the field with the help of hired or tied labourers—'he works, makes others work, and gets double'.

Let us take two examples: Raham Shaikh of Kusumpur and Tinkari Ghosh of Dekhuria. Both are in the forefront of the rent strike which emanates from Sibkalipur to engulf the whole of the Panchagram rural locality. Peasants they may be, but respect and independence—the need to hold their heads high—are essential notions governing their behaviour in rural society. Raham calls it *iman* (honour); Tinkari calls it *rej* (manly independence). Tough, independent, disposed to violence, these two leading peasants naturally spring to the leadership of the tenant agitation in Kusumpur and Dekhuria, respectively. Both begin as substantial peasants. Both are broken at the end—Raham Shaikh by Daulat Shaikh and Tinkari Ghosh by Srihari Ghosh. Both, it may be noted, are 'working' peasants who employ labour but do not hesitate to work on the field. Central to Banerjee's vision of rural change in his life-time is the notion that these independent, substantial peasants are broken in the end by their richer, money-lending neighbours

of the same background. While they naturally spring to the leadership of a united tenant movement, it is these two who come to face each other in a communal confrontation. It is the Daulat Shaikhs and the Srihari Ghoshes—and of course the Kankana *babus*—who benefit from this; and the fate of each antagonist is sealed by the breakdown of their frail alliance against the real enemy.⁵⁶

Raham Shaikh is a share-cropper of the Mukherjee *babus* of Kankana. But he is a ryot in his own right on other lands. This enables him to hold his head high as a *matabar*—‘one among five and respected amongst them.’⁵⁷ Client he might be of the Mukherjee *babus*, but in his own way he is a patron, too, for he is the employer of several *munish* labourers. It is his obligation to maintain them by giving them rice; otherwise cultivation would grind to a halt.⁵⁸ This is not his only obligation. He has—an indication of high status for a Muslim peasant—two wives;⁵⁹ and also, of course, a load of debt. ‘Look’, he tells his compatriot Tinkari during the rent strike, ‘whatever debt I have, half of it is due to religious festivals. I have my honour to maintain. Unless I spend at least ten rupees in the Idul Fitr and the Mohurram, why would people respect me?’⁶⁰ Because of all these claims he is hard pressed financially. But still he would not bend before the *zamindar*, and pay the increased rate of rent for his ryoti lands. ‘He has given his *bat* (word) and sworn on his *fat* (race); where would his *iman* be if the word is broken?’⁶¹ He, therefore, borrows still more from the millowners of the junction station to carry on the strike.

His employer, the Mukherjee *bara-babu*, wishes to teach him a lesson. He is physically dragged to the cutcherry for having cut down a *tal* tree without authorization. Mukherjee is smoking in his drawing room, reclining against a pillow. The whole room is filled by a crowd of employees, footmen and clerks. Raham Shaikh salutes him. He does not acknowledge it. Then comes an incident showing the Muslim peasant’s notion of his own status—a notion which it is dangerous to violate: ‘Raham looked around in an injured manner for a seat, but there were no seats, except a few chairs. He was not mentally prepared to sit down on the ground. His pride was injured. All Muslim peasants of West Bengal, who have land, have this pride. How

long can a man go on standing?'⁶² The indication of desired status is subtly conveyed by the novelist: not a chair (which is for the gentry), but not the ground either—a seat fit for a landed peasant is what he requires.

Tinkari Ghosh, the Sadgop leader of the Bhallas, is another example of the sturdy independent yeoman who is overwhelmed by changing conditions. He is not the type who would be tolerated by the police and the rich interests of the locality. From the millionaire of Kankana to the newly rich Srihari, and from the high administrative officers to the local *daroga*, there is nobody he bows to. He pays for his independence dearly.⁶³ As he is the patron of the Bhallas, a recorded criminal tribe, the police is ever on the look-out for an opportunity to incriminate him. He protects the Bhallas and fights criminal cases for them. But he does not take a penny of the looted money, and he does his best to restrain them from criminal activity. The police, however, have a weapon to incriminate him: the 'Bad Livelihood' charge. So long they have been foiled in the 'B.L. case' by the ample land occupied by him as a tenant. Moreover, everyone in the locality concedes that he is a good cultivator. In any B.L. case he submits certificates, medals and prizes won for his agricultural enterprise. He has won prizes for his vegetables at district agricultural exhibitions, as well as a certificate for his cows and bullocks at the district cattle show.

But the police finally get him. He inherited from his father 25 *bighas* of good land. Because of the law suits which he fought, his land is reduced to 5 *bighas*.⁶⁴ In a typical case, he hits the local *daroga* on the nose when the latter turns his household upside down to implicate him in a robbery. Tinkari Ghosh loses 3 *bighas* in the case that the police brings against him for assault and obstruction in the performance of duty. He also brings a law suit against the *zamindar* over a disputed land, and loses more land.⁶⁵ As his land diminishes, the B.L. case against him is strengthened. Even then he tries his best to maintain his role as patron of his 'men' (*munish* and *mahindar*) and protector of the Bhallas. But the material basis for sustaining his role is no longer adequate. Ram Bhalla tells him: 'There is no rice in any house in the entire Bhalla village. You have always given us rice—this time there is no rice in your

house either.⁶⁶ Tinkari sighs and curses himself. But he remains indomitable. Other peasants drop out of the rent strike and accept loans from Srihari Ghosh after the flood. They tell him when he curses them: 'What shall we do, Modol,⁶⁷ the stomach is the culprit.' Tinkari's retort is dignified: 'Have I not got a stomach? Haven't I got a wife and son and daughter?'⁶⁸

Raham Shaikh and Tinkari Ghosh are cultivating peasants. The other leaders of the tenant movement described by Banerjee are 'genteel' peasants who do not plough. Irshad Maulvi is Debu Ghosh's counterpart in Kusumpur. Respected as the teacher of the *maktub* in his village, he, too, hails from a peasant family, but is distinguished from the rest of the peasants by his smattering of Arabic learning.⁶⁹ Dwaraka Chaudhuri, a man of the older generation, keeps aloof from the rent strike, but is still one of the allies of Debu Ghosh in his confrontation with Srihari Ghosh. Dwaraka Chaudhuri, too, is a man of genteel status within the peasant society. He retains a big *jote* (direct ryoti tenancy) in the area over which his forefathers ruled as *zamindars*. The pomp and display of the Chaudhuri family have disappeared one generation before him. He no longer affects nobility of blood. He mixes among the peasants, sits in the same gathering and talks with them while smoking *hookka*.

The founding leaders of the Praja Samiti in Sibkalipur are Haren Ghoshal, a Brahman, and Jagan Ghosh, a Kayastha. They, too, are tenants. But, like Dwaraka Chaudhuri, they are socially part of the peasant community, although keeping slightly aloof from it. Ghoshal is a matriculate and has a smattering of English which he displays on every possible occasion. Though he keeps himself in the forefront, he is a bit of a coward in any confrontation. Nor is he above indulging in scandalous gossip about his own comrade, Debu Ghosh, in spite of his own involvement in a sordid intrigue with the wife of Patu Muchi.⁷⁰

Jagan Ghosh is the village doctor. He possesses no medical degree. Indeed, he has not read beyond the fourth class. Medicine is a hereditary calling in his family. His grandfather was a *kabiraj* (Ayurvedic physician); his father both a *kabiraj* and a doctor; Jagan is a quack. The family was at one time much

honoured in the locality. Having, however, contracted a debt of one thousand rupees to the Mukherjees of Kankana, which in due course multiplied with interest to four thousand rupees, they lost their property, and their honour as well. Jagan wishes to re-establish his honour in the role of a popular leader and representative. He is a snob and is driven by social jealousy to claim superiority over his equals and betters. But he does not spare himself in his medical or public activities and treats the poor villagers free of cost. Such genteel characters are the natural leaders of the peasantry.

The Rich Peasant

These are minor characters. The main action of *Ganadevata* turns on the confrontation between the rich peasant and *mahajan*, Srihari Ghosh, and the village *pandit*, Debnath Ghosh. Srihari Ghosh is strong, sensual and scheming. He would today be identified as a *jotedar*, the Bengali synonym for *kulak* in the contemptuous sense. But in the Rarh area in the lifetime of Banerjee, the term had a more technical and varied usage. A *jotedar* could be either a direct ryot or a share-cropper. Not that Banerjee was unaware of the use of the term in the sense of *kulak*. For Tripura Singh, on whom Srihari Ghosh models himself, Banerjee uses the description; but not for Srihari Ghosh, whom he introduces simply as the new rich man in the village. At the beginning of the novel, he is just a rich peasant, one among several *matbars* competing for leadership; by the end he has emerged as a minor landlord, holder of *patni* tenure, who dominates the village economy as creditor and grain monopolist. Tarini Ghosh, his own neighbour and casteman, has by then lost his land and homestead to him and is working in the junction town. The boundaries of peasant society are fluid; and mobility, whether upward or downward, goes a long way.

Srihari's rise to power is strongly opposed in his village. In Debu Ghosh, and his allies, Jagan Ghosh and Haren Ghoshal, he finds a difficult obstacle to the exercise of unfettered power. Are these characters to be identified as middle peasants leading poor ones against a rich peasant? That will be a naive simplification and will not fit the situation and categories

delineated by Banerjee. There are too many gradations, shading off into each other in constant motion, to justify a triple classification of peasants as rich, middle and poor. The characters portrayed by Banerjee have somewhat different configurations. There is Srihari Ghosh, a dominant peasant and money-lender who comes to control much of the production, storage, lending and marketing of grain in the village. There are substantial peasant *matabars*, like Harish Mandal, who submit to this younger man in the end; there are sturdy independent yeomen who lose land to him steadily because they would not submit; there are genteel tenants, who do not hold the plough and have some education in a largely illiterate society, who spring naturally to leadership of tenants of all sorts in a movement against enhancement of rents; there are poor villagers, landless peasants, share-croppers, and tied agricultural workers as well.

Srihari Ghosh is not a recognized leader at the start when the village assembles to judge the actions of the disobedient blacksmith and carpenter. The recognized leaders are old men of some substance, such as Harish Mandal and Dwaraka Chaudhury. But the beginnings of the economic process by which Srihari would acquire social dominance are evident at the assembly: he rudely reminds Aniruddha, the blacksmith, that he has taken from him 10 rupees on a hand note and that with compound interest the sum now stands at 25 rupees.⁷¹

Srihari Ghosh was originally Srihari Pal or Srihari Mandal. The villagers contemptuously called him Chhiru Pal or Chhire Modol. He was then just an ordinary peasant. Though rich, he worked on his own land. His crude aggression towards neighbours was unchecked by any notion of prestige and dignity. He would not hesitate to steal the bamboo from a neighbour's backyard or get all the fish from his pond overnight. Each year he would surreptitiously stretch his homestead at the expense of his neighbour; and almost every night he would silently move into the Harijan hamlet in search of women—especially the beautiful Durga.⁷² His father—'a successful peasant'⁷³—had wanted his son to be educated up to high school. But he could not manage to keep him at school beyond the fifth class, which he left at the age of 24.⁷⁴

From boyhood Srihari had looked on Tripura Singh—the

employer of his maternal grandfather in a nearby village—as his ideal. A violent man, Tripura Singh had risen from *mahajan* to *jotedar* and had then secured a portion of the *zamindari* of his master. In the process, he had lent money, burnt his neighbours' houses, and taken their lands and wives forcibly. This was the man Srihari emulated when he succeeded to the property which his father had left him—a farm which the latter had created by the sweat of his brow from wasteland. The son had no aversion to hard physical labour either. But, unlike his father, Srihari did not tie up the grain at home. He began to lend it out at high interest. The rate of interest on these grain loans varied from 25 to 50 per cent. He would lend one maund of rice and get back at the end of the year one maund ten seers to one and a half maunds. This was not excessive. It was—Banerjee adds carefully—the accepted rate of interest in the country.⁷⁵

Srihari's ascent is steady from the time the action of the novel begins in 1922. He establishes an alliance with Das, the *gomosta* of the *zamindar*, and with his help he becomes the *gomosta* of his own village by the time Debu Ghosh comes back from jail (1927). 'On top of being a *mahajan*, he is also the *gomosta*—he has ruined the village', Debu is told on his return.⁷⁶ But he rises still higher to become a member of the union board and a *patnidar*. Like Tripura Singh, he buys a piece of the property of his *zamindar*, and sets up as a landlord in his own right. Even Das, his former patron, becomes his employee when he becomes a landlord.⁷⁷

But wealth and other people's lands are not his only objective. What he wants is respect, the recognition of his leadership by his neighbours, his power over them as a ruler.⁷⁸ He appoints Kalu Shaikh, a terrible Muslim clubman, as his employee; and employs economic coercion as well, in the form of grain loans, to establish his rule. As his power grows, his conception of it undergoes a certain refinement. He shows a sense of responsibility. The genuine gratitude which he gets from the untouchables for assistance after the fire (set by his own hands) evokes in him something like a social conscience. The desire to win respect by charitable works grows on him.⁷⁹ The rebuilding of the *chandimandap*—the heart of the village—is central to the new role that he now begins to assume. He inscribes his

name on the floor of the rebuilt village sanctum, changing his title on the tablet to Ghosh, and establishing his new status beyond doubt.⁸⁰

His rule is accompanied by an intensification of economic exploitation. But the process is rooted in the economic system of the village and is not to be regarded as personal wickedness. 'One cannot blame Srihari. It is not sin, nor unlawful, to have money. If it is lent in someone's crisis, the debtor is benefited. When the ugly aspect of the transaction is revealed upon its collection with interest, what can Srihari do? Moreover he has to pay income tax on the interest. He has to spend on court fee to collect lawful debts. He has to pay tax to the union board. How can he *forgo* interest?'⁸¹

Nor is his new charity altogether devoid of sincerity. He takes care to record Debu's lands correctly in the record of rights under the settlement operations while his antagonist is in jail.⁸² The vision which immediately springs to his mind when Das suggests that he should buy a piece of his *zamindar's* property is that he would open a market in the village, clean up the bathing tank, build a new sanctum, found a 'Srihari M.E. School', and win the election to the local board from the union board.⁸³ Altruistic motives are mixed with considerations of personal status and power. He actually carries out most of the good works envisioned by him.⁸⁴ He is hurt when people, who use these facilities, say that he has done all this for his own benefit. Though he could easily interdict their use, he does not do so. 'There is after all a next life. He would be reborn with the merit of these good deeds—he would be a Raja.'⁸⁵ In spite of their ingratitude, he gives his neighbours all possible assistance and shelter during the flood. His mother seeks to dissuade him from giving help to those who had participated in the rent strike against him, but he refuses to be swayed by this advice. 'You are my kinsmen and castemen', he tells them, 'my own people. It is all yours.'⁸⁶

In appearance, in speech, in behaviour, Srihari Ghosh—as the novelist traces his development—becomes a different man. A restrained, dignified behaviour masks the natural violence of his disposition.⁸⁷ He even gives up his liaison with Durga: 'Such low association is not good, Dasji. Society holds it in low esteem. The riff-raff laugh. You lose honour and dignity.'

Das laughs: 'Very good, but the blacksmith's wife is not low association. Since you want to get him, why don't you defile his home?' Srihari Ghosh, though silent, ponders the beauty of Aniruddha's wife and determines to get her. An upgrading of status brings a higher objective in the sphere of carnal desire.⁸⁸

A new self-image guides the dominant peasant's role in village society. He impounds the cows of the Bauris, ostensibly on the charge of unauthorized grazing on his wasteland, but really because the Bauris have defied him on the issue of *Tal* leaves. This act, undoubtedly an unusual punishment—grazing has always been allowed on the *zamindar's* wasteland—is justified in his own eyes. He regards himself as responsible, by divine as well as earthly warrant, for keeping the peace in the village. 'His role is to help the villagers in their misfortunes and calamities, and to punish them if they breach the peace. He would suppress rebellion with a firm hand. It is his right. He admits that he did not have this right when he was an oppressor. But now he no longer commits oppression—his meritorious deeds are evident everywhere in the village. He has spent his own money to build the *chandimandap*, the *sasthitala* (sanctum below a divine tree), the well and the school building. The drain along the road, which has long been an obstacle, will shortly be attended to by him. He is going to make good arrangements for everything in Sibkalipur. It is not his right, it is his duty, to suppress a revolt directed against these good arrangements.'⁸⁹

Such a point of view makes him the natural enemy of popular resistance to the government. During the settlement operations he successfully deflects the people of his village from going in a body to see the district magistrate.⁹⁰ His charitable deeds win him a following and he consolidates his party by using his powers of economic coercion. One by one the village elders—Harish Mandal, Bhabesh Pal and other *matabars*—join his party as they become dependent in various ways on his patronage. Inevitably there is a faction within the village which opposes him and his party. It is this faction—led by Jagan Ghosh and Haren Ghoshal while Debu Ghosh is in jail—which provides the focal point of the Praja Samiti and the local Congress Committee. Popular aspirations begin to coalesce

around this factional opposition.⁹¹

Though he becomes a *patnidar*, Srihari Ghosh remains close to the soil, a part of the peasant community. As his wealth increases, he adopts a higher living style; but it is not a style that would identify him with the Kankana *babus*. True, he gets two outcasted girls as his mistresses, but they are employed in his own household as cooks; there is no question of keeping them in a garden house as dancing girls.⁹² Though his house undergoes many improvements, it is still not a *pucca* building. He spends his new wealth on peasant festivals like the *Gajan*, which identify him closely with the inner life of the peasant community. The fair which he organizes in connection with the *Gajan* is far removed in spirit from the theatre of the Kankana gentry.⁹³ The rich peasant may acquire wealth, but to become a member of the gentry requires something else—a different type of education, culture and living style. Patterns of consumption are as important in establishing distinctions in village society as levels of wealth.

The Peasant Hero

Debnath Ghosh, Srihari Ghosh's opponent, undergoes a complex evolution as a person. Banerjee achieves with him a depth of characterization which is unusual for his heroes. But certain precautions are needed before we look at this profile of a peasant leader. In the first place, Debu Ghosh is not drawn from any real model. Banerjee had a model for Srihari Ghosh in Srikrishna Pal of Mastali village, where he used to go to supervise the cultivation of his own farm. The Mukherjees of Kankana are also real people.⁹⁴ But Debu Ghosh is not in that sense a real character; not even an autobiographical character like Sibnath Banerjee of *Dhatridevata*. Not having modelled him on an actual peasant he knew, Banerjee ascribes to him feelings, dreams and aspirations which may be unusual in a peasant and perhaps more characteristic of the gentry. But then Debu Ghosh is not a cultivating peasant. He is a peasant's son turned village *pandit* and so his emotional and mental world is rather more complex. We are dealing here with a marginal character, a man dwelling on the frontier of the peasant society, a common enough type in the countryside,

but more individualistic than the average villager.

Debu, be it noted at the outset, is involved in a minor way in the system of patronage and inequality against which he leads the forces of popular opposition. So complex are the gradations in rural society that almost everyone above the lowest of the low—from Satish Bauri to the elder Mukherjee—exploits someone else to a greater or lesser degree. In such a system, leadership of popular aspirations would naturally devolve upon those who have some education, some amount of freedom from physical labour and some capacity for coherent thinking. Debu Ghosh works as a *pandit* in the local primary school at a salary of twelve rupees a month, a useful addition to his income from cultivation but not essential to his livelihood. When he comes back from jail, he is no longer the *pandit*. Though this causes some financial difficulty, he is still able to lead a leisured life.⁹⁵ One has to be a patron to acquire leadership in such a profoundly exploited society. Debu is able to get the impounded cattle of the Bauris released because he has the money to pay the detention charges. He is himself the employer of two *krishans* and a boy who tends his cattle.⁹⁶ His farm is cultivated on *bhag* (share-cropping) and *thika* (contract with a servant).⁹⁷

There is thus a certain similarity between Debu's career and Srihari's earlier career. He, too, is the son of a 'pure' peasant (*Khanti chashi*). His father used to plough the land himself, and to carry the harvested crop on his head. Debu used to tend the cattle in his childhood and to dig the soil when necessary. Then he stood first in the whole district and got a scholarship in the high school. When he joined the high school at Kankana, he changed his surname from Mandal to Ghosh. Srihari Pal thus merely follows his opponent when he changes his surname to Ghosh. Debu himself cultivated with plough and bullocks for a short time after his father's death, but discontinued it when he acquired a higher station in life. His style of living is genteel and his life comfortable by rural standards: corn in the barn, oil seeds in jars, cows in the shed, fish in the pond, fruit trees in the backyard.⁹⁸ He has the independence and economic means to stand up to authority, to lead others against injustice.

These material conditions are a necessary background to his

early psychological evolution: his drive for honour and leadership. In this he is the same as his antagonist; only in his case the drive acquires by a gradual process a nobler form. His moral, intellectual and emotional development is a complex process in the course of which his ideas undergo a great deal of change and his personality, through a gradual transformation, acquires moral authority. At the start he is shown to be subject to the same social jealousy and social ambition which drive his fellow tenant leader, Jagan Ghosh. But, in his case, the drive to transform these impulses into a form more consistent with a higher notion of his own personality is also evident from the beginning.⁹⁹

In many ways, Debu is the typical ambitious and jealous villager at the beginning of the story. Srihari Ghosh, as a newly elected union member, asks him, from time to time, how his primary school is running. There is nothing unfriendly in his manner, and he is within his jurisdiction. But 'a fire burns in Debu's head' when confronted with this enquiry from a powerful man, whom he considers morally and intellectually his inferior. 'Excited by jealousy and urged on by a will to achieve, he stands up abruptly, paces up and down, and clenches his fist, the muscles tensing in his arm. He feels a sensation of power flow through his entire frame.' His young wife, Bilu, is astonished: 'What are you doing there, all by yourself?' Debu replies: 'I am thinking how it would be if I were a king.' 'A king?' 'Yes. You would be a queen then.' 'Yes?' 'But you would have no ornaments even as a queen.' Bilu stands still in uncomprehending and astonished silence as Debu smilingly explains: 'This kind of king has a kingdom but he gets no tribute. President of the union board—you understand?'¹⁰⁰ Earlier at school, he had entertained the ambition of being an officer of the government, a ruler of men (*hakim*).¹⁰¹

Frustrated ambition breeds in him a keen self-esteem. He is sensitive on this point, ready to react violently to any offence to his pride. A *daroga* calls him '*tui*' (a contemptuous mode of address) and he immediately makes a complaint. Nothing comes of the inquiry by the inspector, who tells him to patch up the matter.¹⁰² Debu would not learn the lesson, and ultimately goes to jail for defying a settlement clerk who does the same thing, address him as '*tui*'. The authorities identify him

as a potential trouble-maker, a 'disciple' of J.L. Banerji, trying to obstruct the settlement operations from political motives. Debu has no such intention. He is merely seeking to prove a point of honour, of self-esteem. But by arresting and imprisoning him, the government invests his personal defiance with a wider public significance. Here is the making of a leader.

Unintentionally Debu is drawn to a course of action he might not have taken if government had ignored this isolated case of injured self-esteem in a remote village. His role is cut out for him; and when he comes back from jail, the young detainee, Jatin, imposes it on him in spite of his reluctance. The emerging tenant movement in the village selects him as its leader, though he would rather stay away after his experience of jail. But he still has a long way to go to establish his moral authority. Leadership comes to him, but at an immense cost. He fights the cholera epidemic in the Harijan hamlet, and loses his wife and child by carrying the infection home.¹⁰³ Debu has, indeed, moved a long way. The initial impulses of ambition and jealousy are transformed into something else by self sacrifice and personal tragedy. Charity replaces jealousy, a sense of fairness takes the place of ambition. A hero is born.

As a *pandit*, Debu has a social philosophy from the beginning. But as material and moral conditions change in the rural society around him, his social and moral notions undergo important changes. At the start, he is strongly attached to an idealized version of the traditional village community. He seeks to restore it to its supposed pristine form. Such a philosophy, hinging on traditional social values, is instinctively conservative for all its preoccupation with justice. But by gradual stages Debu emerges as an iconoclast, a rebel.

A strong supporter of the village *panchayat* at the start of *chandimandap*, he develops into an avowed opponent of the *panchayat* by the middle of *Panchagram*. But in the meantime the social system has changed, and the *panchayat* has been distorted beyond recognition. The rebellious traits of Debu's new personality are responses to these changed conditions. As the organic village community, which he wanted to revive, cracks beyond redemption, he gropes his way to the vision of a new society designed to abolish the economic concentration and exploitation which has destroyed the earlier vision.

The rural leader, who is close to the peasant community and responsive to its sentiments and aspirations, is a conservative and a rebel at the same time. Biswanath, the son of the Nyayaratna, breaks with the values of the village society and his leadership is rejected by the people. But Debu does not break away from his society. He leads the rebellion from within and is more successful than Biswanath.¹⁰⁴

Initially Debu's anger is directed as much against the blacksmith who defies the village community as against the peasant moneylender who exploits its members. Debu fights on two fronts with Aniruddha Karmakar and with Srihari Ghosh. He urges the members of his community not to depend on the *zamindar* to ensure the services of the disobedient artisans, but to assemble the *majlis* and to mete out strict justice as the *panchayat* was supposed to do at one time. He even seeks to excommunicate the disobedient blacksmith. His notion of strict justice meted out by the community, however, requires that Srihari Ghosh also be punished for his misdemeanours. But the community lacks the power to punish the rich man. As this becomes clear, the basis of his notion of the even-handed justice of the traditional village community is eroded. As Debu recognizes this, he moves from the initial preference for collective justice through the *panchayat* to organizing popular resistance against economic oppression. He comes round to admitting to Aniruddha's woman his error of judgement in excommunicating the blacksmith.¹⁰⁵

In *Panchagram* Debu emerges finally as a rebel. Earlier he had broken rules in spontaneous fellow-feeling, as when he had carried the dead body of an untouchable during the cholera epidemic. But now he violates rules in order to hit at the sources of power and oppression. From this it is but a short step to defy the bonds of tradition. The new tendency is evident in the transformation of his sexual morality. The death of his wife exposes him to unfamiliar encounters with women and forces him to think about an area of life in which he had accepted the conventional morality instinctively and without thought. Padma, the deserted wife of the blacksmith, visits him at night: 'I have come, friend (*mite*).' Debu, who has hitherto called her *miteni* (friend) as well, abruptly changes his mode of address and tells her: 'Rain is coming. Go home,

Kamar-bou (blacksmith's wife).⁹ This unexpected encounter forces him to think about the problem of women who have lost their husbands. His initial thought is to teach her a new *mantra*, which would enable her to control her impulses and concentrate on the eternal *dharma* in a world where everything is transitory.¹⁰⁶ This is the expected reaction of a traditional village *pandit*. But by then the rejected woman has already gone to Srihari Ghosh and fled from his house as well.

Debu's male pride is hurt by her desertion. He may not be able to accept her as a mistress. But he expects her to obey him as a protector. By going to his enemy's house, she has damaged his self-image. He reacts to the sexual humiliation, and is further infuriated by Srihari's attempt through the captive *panchayat* to excommunicate him on the false allegation of sexual involvement with Padma and Durga. The reaction induces him to take a step strikingly unconventional. He has not hitherto allowed Durga, the untouchable woman who loves him, to enter his house. To defy the *panchayat* he now asks her to look after his household: 'The *panchayat* will assemble day after tomorrow. Stay with me for these two days, Durga.' In his defiant mood he announces that he would take water from her hands. 'I don't believe in caste any more. I shall tell this to the *panchayat*.' Durga does not allow him to proceed on a course of fruitless defiance doomed to frustration. But slowly he achieves a more mature solution to the new problems confronting him. The initial pique at being 'deserted' by Padma hardens into a steely determination to strike at the root of a conventional morality which provides no solution of these problems. Debu does not obey the summons of the *panchayat* to explain his conduct. He sends a message: he has accepted Durga in his household as his dead wife's 'sister', and he would not drive her away.¹⁰⁷ The *panchayat* excommunicates him, but is impotent to enforce its verdict. The same Debu who had sought to shore up its authority now successfully defies it.

Material conditions in the meanwhile have so deteriorated as to crack the casing of the *dharma* which had hitherto bound the village community together. Debu's faith in the *dharma*—the *mantra* which he had intended to teach Padma—is destroyed when old Chaudhuri sells the family idol in order to pay his

mounting debts. A hard determination to set at naught all oppressive authority provides a new foundation to his changing philosophy. 'He fears no authority. His mind blazes at any attempt by authority to intimidate.' When he comes back from jail at the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement, he decides to marry Swarna, the widowed daughter of Tinkari Ghosh.¹⁰⁸ The new relationship that he seeks to evolve with Swarna is substantially different from his relationship with his first wife. Social revolution begins to upset inter-personal relationships.

New and Old Notions of Manhood

The moral transformation of a peasant leader is no unfamiliar theme in the Gandhian era. The notions of manhood underwent a redefinition in rural India in this age. *Satyagraha* transformed the lives of many peasants. The historical interest of Debu Ghosh's character lies in the insight it offers into this inner transformation.

How authentic is Debu Ghosh as an illustration of this theme? As a member of the gentry Banerjee was strongly influenced by Gandhian notions. Does he not project his gentry conceptions of moral change into the character of a peasant hero? The question is intricate, and difficult to decide. Debu's moral transformation follows in some respects the earlier transformation of Sibnath in *Dhatridevata*. But not in all respects. Though the character is romanticized to a certain extent in order to emphasize the features of the hero—a typically gentry concept of course—the muted tone of this romanticism is evident in comparison with the gentry hero of *Dhatridevata*.

Debu belongs, of necessity, to the rural literate. But the literate is a diverse and miscellaneous group spanning the gentry and the peasantry. There are many levels of education in rural society. The mass of the peasantry may be illiterate but many of them do go through elementary primary education. Among the cleaner and more prosperous peasant castes such as the Sadgops, secondary education is no unusual feature either. There is thus some contact between gentry and peasantry through school. It is a channel through which ideas are exchanged between different levels of rural society. Without

it society would have been compartmentalized into groups unable to comprehend each other. A crucial intermediary role is played by the literate elements on the margin of peasant society—the village priests, the village doctors, the village pedagogues. They are in a position to communicate with the gentry, to comprehend their changing notions, and to convey these notions in a diluted form to the mass of the rural people.

Debu Ghosh is such a character. His role as an intermediary in the exchange of ideas between gentry and peasantry is emphasized by his friendship with Jatin and Biswanath, sons of gentry, and his special relationship with the Nyayaratna. The last relationship is rather significant. The Nyayaratna is a preceptor of the gentry, the well-recognized and honoured head of a Sanskrit *tal*, whereas Debu Ghosh is the unknown pedagogue of a village *pathshala*. But both belong to the teaching profession. They sustain between them a traditional system of education which accounts for whatever enlightenment is to be found in a largely illiterate society. As a communicator between gentry and peasants, Debu Ghosh belongs to both worlds and his character bears the stamp of his particular position in rural society. It is, after all, precisely this literate element on the fringe of peasant society which became the agent of the transformation wrought in rural India during the 1920s and the 1930s. The literate agriculturists were receptive to the ideas and aspirations of the English-educated intelligentsia, but were at the same time closely tied to the vast mass of the ignorant and illiterate peasantry. But for this element the Gandhian Congress would have found it more difficult to ruralize itself.

Debu Ghosh may, therefore, be safely taken as an example of the moral transformation wrought in sections of peasant society by the importation of new notions of manhood. Traditional rural society had, of course, well understood notions of manhood. These were still vital notions. Often new notions would be put in the traditional idiom understood by the villagers. The interpretation of the old and new notions is indicated by a novelist's device: the Nyayaratna tells the story of a traditional Brahman hero from the *Bhagavata Purana* which deeply impresses Debu Ghosh, and his own life shows some striking parallels with that of the legendary Brahman of

yore. But Debu is a Sudra hero of the modern democratic age, and Banerjee takes some care to show where a break occurs.

To get the cattle of the Bauris released from the pound, Debu, whose financial condition is not so sound after the loss of his teaching job, pawns the bracelet of his little son. The Nyayaratna, hearing of this, recovers the bracelet and comes to give it back. He then tells Debu the key story of a true Brahman who would not abandon the *dharma* at any cost. The Brahman considers it his duty (*dharma*) to give shelter to anyone who asks for it; and he does not hesitate when an evil female spirit who brings poverty with her asks for shelter. He loses his wealth, and then his honour. People begin to gossip about his relationship with the woman. The Brahman is unmoved. He clings to the *dharma*, and ultimately the evil spirit goes away because it cannot bear the company of *dharma*. Later on, the Brahman, who has got back his wealth and has a happy family full of his progeny, purchases a stone idol found in a fishwife's impure container. The stone idol, the god Vishnu, appears to him as a young boy in a dream and threatens him with the loss of everything unless he restores the idol to the impure container. One by one he loses all his offspring and finally his wife. He then abandons home with the stone round his neck and sits down to the contemplation of Vishnu by the holy lake of Manas. The god appears to him with his four arms, but it is the young boy seen in a dream that he wants. Finally the young boy appears and takes him to a divine abode where he finds all his offspring and his wife.¹⁰⁹ As the Nyayaratna interprets it, the impure container is represented in Debu's life by the untouchable's dead body. It is the cholera infection from the body which he had cremated that strikes down his wife and child. Later on, Debu refuses to abandon Padma, whom he has given shelter, when the *panchayat* threatens him with excommunication.

Values of great antiquity, embodied in the legendary Brahman, take a new form in the modern Sudra hero. There is nothing alien in the heroism of the *pandit*. For all that, his heroism is not the same as that of the ancient Brahman. The Nyayaratna expects him to follow the path of the Brahman; he expects him to devote himself to *dharma*, to a life given to

prayer and worship. But in this he is disappointed. The tenant agitation in which Debu becomes more and more deeply involved worries the Nyayaratna; to him the feverish excitement of political activity is without that calm influence of the *dharma* which lasts for ever.¹¹⁰ For some time after the loss of his wife and child, Debu seeks to concentrate on religious observance, to the exclusion of any public activity. But he finds it difficult to devote himself to a life of prayer alone.¹¹¹ The Nyayaratna himself is forced in the end to tell him that it is not his true path.¹¹²

From the very beginning, Debu has a question which nags him about the Nyayaratna's story: what did he mean by *dharma*? How is it to be made suitable to a modern age, and reconciled with the new truths discovered by the advance of knowledge?¹¹³ In the end, after old Chaudhuri sells his idol to pay back his debts, Debu ceases to believe in the ideal of the Brahman who wandered around with a stone round his neck. Not that he disbelieves the God described by the Nyayaratna; but in his eyes the God is transformed into *Ganadevata*—no longer a stone idol but embodied in the people as a whole. Debu settles for *karma* (action) rather than *dharma* (religion); he envisages a new life with Swarna based on equal partnership between man and wife—in this case a widower and a widow, something not envisaged in the *Bhagavata* story.¹¹⁴

Peasant Sexual Morality

The Sadgop peasant community, in its rise to rural respectability, adopts many of the sexual restrictions which characterize the life of the gentry. Fidelity and its institutional corollary, enforced widowhood, figure in these restrictions. Thus Padma, in committing bigamy, and Swarna, in rejecting widowhood, are revolting against customs but recently and imperfectly adopted by the respectable Nabasakha castes. In some respects the clean Sudra peasantry still have behaviour patterns which are not all that far removed from the more relaxed sexual mores of the untouchables.

Peasant society, however, tries to maintain a certain distance from the degraded untouchables by following more restrictive

sexual practices. The Nabasakha have a *panchayat* which judges sexual offences and passes sentences of excommunication on those found guilty, though excommunication is never enforced as strictly as in gentry society. Certainly the sense of defilement is not as strongly developed among peasants as among the gentry. Aniruddha, when he comes back to his village, is prepared to take back the wife he has deserted, even though he half expects her to be living with Debu. Not that he can claim fidelity on the basis of his own record. His only grievance is that Padma went to the house of his enemy, Srihari.¹¹⁵

The system governing relations between men and women at Sibkalipur is perceptibly different from that obtaining at Kankana on the one hand and the Harijan hamlet on the other. These geographical units are related to each other by a set of unequal relationships between men and women implying sexual exploitation and sexual degradation in varying degrees. The women of the hamlet are meat for the men of the village.

The peasant family is structured in such a way as to preclude the type of personality represented by the widowed gentlewomen. It is a smaller unit, more nuclear than the gentry family. The typical peasant families drawn by Banerjee consist of the husband, the wife, and their children, and in some cases the parents of the man. Widowed sisters and aunts, so often met with in gentry families, do not appear prominently in the peasant family. An aunt, like Shailaja Devi in *Dhatrivedata*, who leads a deprived life in the family and poisons the relationship between husband and wife, will simply not be tolerated in a peasant family. The typical peasant widow in *Ganadevata* is Ranga-didi, an old Sadgop woman who lives on her own and is not a burden on any family. She is a money-lender in her own small way. Owner of several cows and goats, she makes a living by selling milk and cowdung and by growing vegetables in her backyard.¹¹⁶ By allowing physical work for its widows, peasant society avoids social burdens it cannot afford to bear. Peasant life is geared to the cycle of cultivation, a cycle which requires so many ancillary occupations that widowed peasant women can acquire economic independence.

The Blacksmith's Wife

Lax as the morality of peasant women might seem to the gentry, there is a world of difference between them and the untouchable women. These differences, when properly explored, reveal a system of rules governing permitted sexual intercourse which holds peasant society together. A comparison of Padma Kamarni with Durga Muchini will give an insight into these differences.

Padma is childless. Not having dealt with the mess made by babies, she has exaggerated notions of pollution—a mental aberration for which the typical Bengali expression is *shuchibayu* (touch complex). A woman afflicted by it is compulsively preoccupied with how to remain ritually clean. Things and persons pollute at touch and the desire to avoid touch is compulsive. Now such notions of ritual cleanliness have no chance to develop among the untouchables, because they are by definition unclean from birth. Widows in gentry households are especially vulnerable to this affliction because they are under a cruel necessity to crush bodily desires which cannot be fulfilled. To a lesser extent, peasant women who belong to the ritually clean agricultural castes are also vulnerable to *shuchibayu*. Padma, as a Kamar woman, belongs to the Nabasakha, whose water is acceptable to the higher castes. This makes it possible for her to develop a pervasive touch complex.¹¹⁷ In fact, any woman belonging to a caste of the *jal chal* rank (the rank in which water is 'passable' to higher castes) is vulnerable to *shuchibayu*.

Implicit in this is a stricter mode of sexual conduct. At the root of the rift between the blacksmith and his wife, and his liaison with Durga Muchini, is the physically less satisfying relationship with his wife, caused by Padma's touch complex. The novelist is explicit on this point. In a passage which is not easy to translate, he sets out the nuances which distinguish Padma's sexual behaviour from that of her rival, Durga. The rough sense of the passage is as follows:¹¹⁸

Padma, even with her healthy young body, could not give him the satisfaction which Durga gave him. She had a load of metal amulets (*maduli*) on her bosom. It always caused

him pain. In her absorption with ritual observances, she kept him off like an untouchable. The excess of maternal care in her love for him caused him frustration. She never sprang to his breast with the wild abandon of Durga. Having worked before the fire all day, he would drink a bit on coming home in the evening. But the pleasant intoxication would evaporate as soon as he stood before his wife in that state of body and mind.

The touch complex thus affects Padma's entire sexual behaviour and makes her less attractive to her husband than Durga who, being an untouchable, has no such complex. But it enhances her attractions for other men. The touch complex implies less easy access; and this stimulates the appetite of other women's husbands. Srihari Ghosh, who had a liaison with Durga before she drew close to Aniruddha Karmakar, is driven by a compulsive need to have Padma.

The mental image which Srihari has of Padma is significant in this respect. She keeps a *dao*—a sharp axe—to keep him away when her husband is not at home, and exhibits it with a smile when he happens to pass by. The blacksmith's wife is not to be had so easily as the tanner's daughter. She fears to be reduced to that state—the unmentionable 'fate of the Hari and misfortune of the Dom'—and strives to retain her independence and chastity even after her husband leaves her. It is true that she is driven by her subconscious desire to Debu's house late one night. But her love for Debu is nursed in secret, whereas Durga never hesitates to proclaim it by open action.¹¹⁹

When Srihari Ghosh proposes to assemble the *panchayat* to excommunicate Debu for improper relations with Padma and Durga, the reactions of the two women are characteristically different. 'What will happen to you?', Padma asks Durga. 'Me?', Durga bursts out laughing, 'I shall beat a drum and dance at the centre of the assembly. I shall recount all my affairs with men, I shall have a song composed by brother Satish. I shall not spare the name of Brahman or Kayastha, zamindar or mahajan. Chhiru Pal's activities will be the refrain of the song.' Hearing Durga talk, Padma wishes she could be as wildly abandoned in the midst of the assembly. But for a

peasant woman such conduct is out of the question, and she therefore imagines herself going to the *panchayat*, removing the veil from her face and saying: 'The *pandit* is a good man, not like you. His eyes are not so full of the dark smudge of desire as yours. Don't go into a huddle about me. I shall go away—no, I am leaving the village right now. I shall not live on anyone's charity.'¹²⁰

The last statement is an indirect reference to her material dependence on Debu after her husband leaves. She hates being dependent on Debu and would rather that he take her. When Debu rejects her, an element of pique creeps into her attitude. It is the outcome of the natural pride which the peasant woman has in her body. The same pride which makes her body less accessible to other men makes rejection so intolerable that she immediately goes to Srihari to spite Debu. Durga Muchini is not allowed by Debu to come any closer, but her hurt at rejection, which she expresses with candour, has no element of pique. She has given her body to too many men to be piqued like Padma.¹²¹

Such differences in reaction are not fortuitous. They are structured by the differing expectations that men entertain of their women at different levels of society. What, after all, is Debu's conception of what Padma should be like? A figure given to prayer and continence. If only his wife had been alive, Debu thinks, she would teach Padma the hundred names of Krishna. She would tell her stories of chaste wives, of Sita and Savitri. Such stories would quench all her hunger, all her frustrations and desires.¹²² In a thousand indirect ways, these conceptions are unconsciously imposed on women, who have respectability to maintain, to make them acutely conscious of the inviolability of their bodies.

Another marked difference between Padma and Durga relates to the desire for child and family. Both are childless. Durga at no point exhibits a desire for a child, whereas Padma is obsessed with it. The structure of living conditions and social possibilities may differ so much as to alter from one person to another even supposedly fundamental instincts. Durga has no desire for a family because at her level in society conditions are so fluid as to check the emotional need for a household. But a peasant woman knows, and desires, more stable condi-

tions. The maternal instinct develops under these conditions. The childless Padma tends to pick up any child that she meets in the street. Durga, who also is childless, rebukes her: 'Why do you invite the trouble when you are happily unburdened by a child of your own?' A child is a burden to a woman who cannot conceive of a stable family life. But for one who knows and experiences family life, the lack of a child disturbs the mental balance. Padma's desire for a child makes her wish that the *pandit's* wife should die so that she can look after his son. The young detainee, Jatin, who is interned in her house, attracts her. But she is able to convert this attraction into a maternal affection because of her compulsive need for motherhood.¹²³

Padma's austerities are fundamentally an attempt to repress the unfulfilled desires of her barren life. She desires things which mark out a peasant woman: a husband, a child, a household. She wants to appropriate these as her own and to establish her own supremacy over a household. It is these desires which drive her at night to Debu's house. They take shape in a dream which an untouchable woman would be hardly able to entertain. Padma wants not merely food and sexual satisfaction—she wants to be an *Annapurna*—a bounteous goddess who fills the plate with rice. She wants to serve it plentifully on the plate of a man, and her child by him.¹²⁴ These dreams are denied to the untouchable women degraded to the lowest level of rural life. Women at all levels of society are deprived; but there are different levels of deprivation for women in different levels of life.

The Untouchable Heroine

If there is a heroine in *Ganadevata*, it is Durga Muchini. She lives at a level in which stable family life is unusual and there is no question of dreaming about being a bounteous goddess filling the plates of her husband and children. Untouchability is not a dominating fact when we look at the inner life of the unclean community. But by governing their relationship with the clean community, it moulds the personal relationships between men and women belonging to the two separated societies. In a close rural community, such contact is a daily fact

of existence. Untouchability is the dominating factor which governs Durga's life and personality; it shapes her relationship with the man she loves—Debu Ghosh of the Sadgop community.

Durga has the kind of physical appeal which is not unusual among women of her community. But in addition, she is fair and well formed; an unusual thing in her community, testifying to her origin. She was born of her mother's liaison with a man of high caste. Durga follows the path trodden by her mother. The older woman actually encourages and guides the daughter. Durga proceeds along this path to a point unusual even for the women of her community. It is no unusual thing in this community for women to have affairs—and husbands learn to look the other way in such cases, especially if the man happens to be a prosperous man of high caste. Durga, however, crosses the limits recognized within her community. She visits at night the president of the union board, the local *daroga*, and even the vice-chairman of the district board. Durga is proud of her connections and thinks herself better than the rest of her community. Not that she had never known family life. She married a man of her own community in Kankana. But she left him and came back to Sibkalipur, living independently by the oldest profession in the world. The Kankana *babu*, at whose house she acted as a sweepress, took her forcibly and gave her five rupees. The money she got—and the favour of so high a man—turned her head.¹²⁵

She lives as a single woman, sharing a part of her father's household with her brother Patu. The kind of life she leads is so different from the family life of the peasant woman, centred on family and household, that she cannot even achieve full mental involvement in religious ceremonies common to agricultural households. Padma and Debu's wife, Bilu, perform the ceremony of *Itu Lakshmi*, which is supposed to give women a happy married life, comfortable living and plenty of children and grandchildren. Durga, who attends the ceremony, laughs at the end of it, and says: 'Sister Bilu, sister Kamarni, please lend me your husbands at my death.'¹²⁶ The woman who performs the ceremony is supposed to die happily on her husband's lap, and this is what Durga refers to, and to the fact that she has no husband.

She labours under no shame and is quite uninhibited. And she is large-hearted. 'When this beautiful abandoned girl comes out with an arch smile on the village path, every wife in the neighbourhood becomes tense. She has neither fear, nor shame, and cracking a joke with any man she meets on the street, she goes away swinging her hips.' When she gets involved with Aniruddha Karmakar, she does not hesitate to ask his wife: 'Am I not your relation, sister? Say, am I not?' 'You my relation?', Padma in her anger uses the contemptuous 'tui'. 'Yes, of course. If I say I am your *satin* (rival wife)? Your husband loves me.' Padma picks up the broom-stick to drive her away, but Durga only draws back and says laughingly: 'You will have to bathe if you touch me at this untimely hour.' Then she asks her to shut the door for the sake of privacy. 'Why should I shut the door?', asks Padma, 'I haven't got scores of paramours.' Durga only laughs at this and says: 'But I have, scores of them. If they are drawn by the smell?' 'If they come, I will teach them a lesson with the broom-stick!' 'You can do that with other men, can you do that to your husband? He, too, is my—what you said.' She puts down the basket which she has brought for Padma, knowing that she does not have the means to perform the religious ceremony in honour of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Padma is about to kick it away with her foot when Ranga-didi happens to come up to the house. Durga seizes the moment to tell her: 'The Kamar wife gave me money to bring these things from the junction, so I brought these.' The lie, intended to cover Padma's shame of poverty, mollifies her. It also shows the delicacy of feeling which lies behind Durga's apparently shameless behaviour. She is naturally generous and has a spontaneous kindness for the sick and the helpless. When Aniruddha Karmakar becomes a thorough-going drunkard, it is she who helps his wife financially through an intermediary, not letting her know where the money comes from.¹²⁷ It is she who looks after Ranga-didi in her death-bed, and who helps Debu look after those stricken by cholera.

The girl is not afraid to take physical risks. She moves quickly and silently through the snake-infested bamboo grove at night to give Debu and Jatin prior warning that the police are coming to catch them at their secret meeting to instigate

the tenants. She pretends to have been bitten by a snake in order to hold the police off. Not that she gets the rewards she wants for this. Debu is held up by the Nyayaratna and comes to visit her only when half the night is over. 'If I had died, brother *pandit*?', asks the deeply hurt Durga.¹²⁸ The claims of the Nyayaratna, the leading learned man of the area, take natural precedence in the village teacher's mind over the claims of an untouchable girl, even though she is prepared to give her life for him. Not that he is insensitive, or ungenerous. The priorities are structured like that in his world. It is Durga, again, who wades dangerously through the flood with Raham Shaikh in search of Debu when the news arrives that he has been swept away.¹²⁹

Untouchable in her own eyes though she is, she has a keen sense of justice and self-respect which manifests itself in strange ways. A spirited girl, she does not hesitate to upbraid Debu when she knows he is wrong. 'Such a judgment does not become you, *pandit*', says Durga when he seeks to excommunicate Aniruddha for defying the *panchayat*. 'Is the fault the Karma-kar's alone? What do you say?' Debu has to admit that his judgment is at fault. She refuses to sign Doctor Jagan's collective appeal for official help after the burning of the Harijan houses. 'Why should I beg when I have a body to work with? I would rather put the noose round my neck.' Padma, who is forced to depend on Debu materially, after being deserted by her husband, broods on Durga's words: 'I will not serve as a maid-servant, nor shall I beg for food and cloth.'¹³⁰ She says this laughingly, with no hesitation at referring to her profession.

Such is the inverted snobbery she has to adopt in order to retain self-respect in her degraded state. This pride is central to her personality. Debu asks her to move into his household when Srihari threatens to excommunicate him for his alleged involvement with her. He would pay her a wage if she would sweep the house and do other duties of the household. Durga reacts: 'But I don't work as a maid-servant, brother *pandit*. I even give a seer of rice to my brother's wife for sweeping my own house.' Debu, who has thoughtlessly and unfeelingly hurt her pride, explains the reasons: the *panchayat* would sit in judgment on him in a couple of days. Durga laughs out then,

takes the key and sweeps the floor.¹³¹

Nor is her sexual conduct devoid altogether of a sense of honour. She sells her body for a living, but would not accept any material reward from one she loves. Far from accepting any money from Aniruddha, she helps his wife when he stops earning anything. Durga's love for the blacksmith is a healthy physical love. She likes his independence of bearing, his tall, well-built form, the skill with which he beats the iron with a heavy hammer.¹³²

The central fact of her emotional life is the pain she feels at the degradation to which she has been born. It is a pain which the blacksmith's love cannot remove. No physical relationship with a high caste man can ever erase the oppressive sense of the untouchability of her body. She takes a mordant pleasure in her physical relationships with clean men. 'I am the daughter of a tanner. They don't allow my people to touch their feet, they don't allow us inside their houses. Yet it is these very people who fall at my feet. They sit me down by their side and caress me with such tenderness as if I am in heaven!'¹³³

The inverted revenge is, however, no real satisfaction; nor is physical love with the 'clean' blacksmith. What she needs is an upliftment from her degraded status. The love which she conceives for Debu is fundamentally the response to this need. Consequently, she avoids carefully any regret at the fact that she has no physical relationship with him. She has had too many 'clean' men to have any such regret. She wants something else from Debu: a release from the pain of her untouchability, an emotional need to sublimate her degraded existence by her love for him.

It is a pain that clutches perpetually at her heart. The detinue, Jatin, tells her for the first time that she is not untouchable. He asks her to cook for him.¹³⁴ Later, she encounters the same strange conduct from Biswanath, the son of the Nyayaratna. She bows from a distance, and he asks her why she is afraid to touch his feet. Ultimately, even Debu asks her to fill his jug with water, in a bid to defy the *panchayat*. She refuses: 'I can't do that, brother *pandit*. The Brahman and Kayastha *babus* of Kankana drink water from my hand secretly. I mix it with drink and lift it to their lips—they drink it well. I give

it to them—but I can't give it to you.' She turns her face to hide her tears.¹³⁵

How consistently logical is this inconsistent behaviour! She needs to be clean. How would serving him with water make her clean? Only by self-denial and selfless love can she lift herself above her degraded status. A natural attraction is hence turned into a platonic relationship so uncharacteristic of a woman living on her body. Debu is contemptuous of her at the beginning. How can she rise above his contempt but by conduct which would win his respect? Instinctively she feels that she can uplift herself by remoulding her personality on the lines approved by him.

By the end of the novel she is transformed. The joyful girl has turned into a weak, anaemic woman who denies herself everything and lives in famishing austerity. Such is the fate of the untouchable heroine who seeks to rise above her degradation. She is deprived from the beginning to the end.

In the end it is the Sadgop girl, Swarna, whom Debu proposes to take for wife. Durga sits in the corner and hears him propose. That is the fitting end to a story in which at every step he sets the girl aside with unconscious contempt. At the very beginning we see him reacting adversely to her attempt to establish a relationship with Bilu, his first wife.¹³⁶ After Bilu's death she gets a chance to come closer to Debu, but her low status is driven home all the more by the higher privileges Padma gets in serving him. It is Padma who waits for him late at night with food, while Durga sits at one end of the veranda so as not to pollute the household. In between the jesting and laughing while she sees him eat, she says suddenly: 'You would not eat from my hands, brother, else you would have seen how much better I could have fed you.'¹³⁷ But that cannot be in a rural society of ritualized distinctions. Padma is his *miteni* (friend), Durga is nobody. Starved of woman's touch, he sees hallucinations; mistaking Durga for his dead wife he seizes her and weeps silently when he realizes his mistake. Durga, who hides her own pain much better, is nonetheless driven to say: 'Brother *pandit*, you are crying because you touched me?' But it is she who firmly maintains her untouchability, although Debu, in defying the *panchayat*, has come to accept her touch.¹³⁸

By this time her transformation is well on the way. She draws

further and further away from men and in the end gives up her degraded calling altogether. In the process she becomes more and more pensive, no longer her old sparkling self. She is altered when Debu comes back from jail at the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement. It is not an alteration for the better in terms of physical well-being, for she now has a remitting fever, probably malaria. Debu cannot believe his eyes. 'Is this Durga? Yes, it is! Wearing a white cloth, with no ornaments, a thin body, the fresh look gone from her face, the hair no longer dressed—what has she become?'¹³⁹

She has finally realized in herself Debu's image of the chaste woman. But at what cost? Swarna, the widowed Sadgop girl, is glowing with health, and listens with a bright face as Debu tells her his new aspirations: 'We shall have the same right in our new household. The man will no longer be master, the wife no longer a maid-servant. We shall work together and go hand in hand. You will teach the girls here, I shall teach the boys and young men. Our joint income will sustain our home.' Durga, who sits at one side, does not understand all that he says about his vision of a new world. She feels an unnamed pain in her heart. Tears of hopeful sorrow run down her cheeks while Swarna's face glows with a touch of crimson.¹⁴⁰

The vision of the peasant leader is slightly askew. It makes provision for equality and comradeship between man and woman. But it requires that the untouchable girl redeem herself by self-denial and chastity—a redemption that must be achieved at the cost of health, a redemption which, when achieved, does not give her the same right to be the equal wife of an equal husband.

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
39. *Ganadevata*, p. 287.
40. *Panchagram*, p. 289.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
42. Leading men.
43. Assembly.
44. Leading Sadgop peasants.
45. Propertied or prosperous peasant.
46. Not genteel.
47. Money-lender.
48. Untouchable cultivators.
49. Cultivating workers.
50. *Ganadevata*, pp. 2-4.

51. Peasant householders.
52. Cultivating labourers.
53. High ranking section distinguished from the rest of the caste.
54. *Ganadevata*, p. 138.
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The Ramcharitmanas as a Radical Text: Baba Ram Chandra in Oudh, 1920-1950

KAPIL KUMAR

THE PEASANTRY¹ HAS been one of the most deprived social classes in Indian society. Yet, it has played a vital role in the struggle against imperialism and its allies and still continues its struggle against oppressive social forces. In certain cases, and particularly in Oudh, the radical rural intelligentsia represented by *babas*, *fakirs*, *sadhus* and *sanyasis*² attempted an 'innovative transformation' of the peasants to create a stage of 'cleavage'³ or class consciousness. Belonging to peasant families, they played the role, in Gramscian terms, of 'organic intellectuals'⁴ in the countryside. They were not revolutionaries of any accepted description belonging to any defined social class; nor did they conform to the behaviour pattern or articulation style of the recognized leadership. Unlike the urban leaders, they did not indulge in sophisticated oratory or political propaganda for the purpose of mobilization. Their exercise rested on a deep understanding of the situation and a critical diagnosis of contemporary social reality. Aware of social contradictions, they directed the ideas and aspirations of the peasants by identifying themselves with the class interests of the latter, and by working out and making coherent 'the principles and problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social block.'⁵ These leaders employed in pithy and telling ways the religious, cultural and traditional symbols of their society, in order to expose

its existing exploitative structure and to foster anti-imperialist and anti-feudal sentiments among the peasants.

The transformation which the radical rural intelligentsia aspired for during the colonial era did not occur in an organized manner at an all India level. The peasants' initiatives to overthrow the hegemony of the colonial state and of the dominant social groups in colonial India remained sporadic in temporal as well as geographical terms. These fragmentary initiatives were not only crushed by the more effective actions of the dominant social groups, but they were also successfully utilized by the latter to overthrow the colonial hegemony, as Gramsci puts it, 'in order to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them.'⁶

According to Gramsci, 'over a certain period of history in certain specific historical conditions religion has been and continues to be a "necessity", a necessary form taken by the will of the popular masses and a specific way of rationalizing the world and real life, which provided the general framework for real practical activity'.⁷ Religion had and has its *reactionary* as well as *rational* aspects in the social life of the peasantry and religious literature is used as an instrument to uphold and sustain these two *contradictory aspects*. It has always been used by the ruling classes and oppressive social forces as a device to maintain their hegemony over the oppressed masses; to teach the toiling poor to resign themselves to their fate and be tolerant; to have faith in God and leave themselves at his mercy; to make the poor and exploited masses believe that their present state of affairs is the upshot of deeds committed in a previous birth; and to sustain the existing social structure which serves their vested class interests. There are many for whom religious literature is a means to preserve their communal and caste interests. On the other hand, social reformers have drawn inspiration from religious texts to fight such social evils as untouchability, child marriage or *sati* etc. Some political leaders have used religious texts to mobilize the people against imperialism by conceptualizing British rule as satanic or *Ravanraj* (rule of the demons) and *swaraj* as *Ramraj*—rule of God. Thus, it is of great importance to assess the use of religious literature by a peasant leader, Baba Ram Chandra, who used the *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas, popularly known as the

Ramayan,⁸ in the Oudh countryside, not only to expose and oppose the British, but also to highlight the inner contradictions of the Indian society. He used it to characterize the British, princes, landlords and the leaders of the national movement; to describe the condition of the peasants; to make the peasants aware of their exploitation and of the necessity to organize and assert their rights; to tell the peasants their duties during the national movement; and finally, what the achievement of independence meant to the peasants as against the upper strata of society.

Baba Ram Chandra, whose real name was Shridhar Balwant Jodhpurkar, had no formal schooling or education. He had, however, acquired previous experience of a working class movement as an indentured labourer in Fiji.⁹ After his flight from Fiji to avoid arrest, during 1918-19 he moved about in the Jaunpur and Pratapgarh countryside and gave religious discourses. The shift from *social* to religious work, on his own testimony, was due to some divine visions he had in his sleep.¹⁰ In the course of this religious work he became familiar with the miserable condition of the peasants.¹¹ He was moved to see the tyranny of the landlords' managers and armed retainers, who forced the tenants to perform *begar* (forced labour) and cultivate indigo. His initial reaction was to work for harmony between the landlords and the tenants. Not sure whether he understood the situation well enough,¹² he was weighed down with a sense of his incapability to mediate effectively on the side of the tenants. He quoted Tulsidas to the following effect:¹³

I have no education, no strength, nor money to spend. O God, only you can preserve the honour of a degraded person like me.

He realized that the 'tradition of *Rambhakti* was extremely deep-rooted and popular' in the Oudh countryside, and decided to utilize it to do something for the upliftment of the peasants.¹⁴ He started visiting various villages. He would carry on his back the religious literature related to *Ramayan* and *Gita* and would not part with it while he was moving, sleeping or eating.¹⁵ As soon as he entered a village he would 'blow

the whistle of *Sita Ram* to collect the peasants and recite passages from the *Ramayan*.¹⁶

The slogan of *Sita Ram* later on developed into a war cry during the peasant movement in 1920-21. Anybody in distress would raise the cry which would be repeated by whoever heard it. The cry would thus be relayed to the village and hundreds of peasants would soon converge at the point where the cry originated. The slogan not only created a bond of unity among different villages but it also deterred the taluqdari agents from practising tyranny and forcing evictions. Jawaharlal Nehru has noted the significance of this slogan:¹⁷

Sita Ram was an old common cry but he [Ram Chandra] gave it an almost war like significance and made it a signal for emergencies as well as a bond between different villages.

Ram Chandra was successful in gaining the peasants' confidence by listening to their grievances. But the main task was to organize them for asserting their rights. The opportunity to do this came when Jhinguri Singh and Sahdev Singh, who had already formed a *kisan sabha* at the village of Rure in 1917, approached him to lead their organization.¹⁸ After reaching Rure, Ram Chandra linked the name of the village with a verse from the *Ramayan*:¹⁹

The two brothers reside in the assembly of kings as though beauty herself was dwelling in their persons.

(Balkand, *chaupai*, 240.)

and added on his own:

Now Ram Chandra, Sahdev and Jhinguri are like them [Ram and Laxaman] in Rure.

Soon Rure became a centre of *kisan sabha* activity, and Ram Chandra, as the Deputy Commissioner of Pratapgadh put it (not without some concern), became 'a magnet of attraction' who supplied 'some mental *pabulum* to a people intellectually starved in these out of the way places.'²⁰ Ram Chandra devised indigenous methods to propagate his programme²¹ and to

organize the peasants. He would suspend a cot horizontally with ropes tied to the trees and use it as a pulpit to address gatherings of thousands without the help of loudspeakers.²² He would, with his neat hand, write hundreds of pamphlets on various peasant problems. The words *Sita Ram* would be inscribed at the top of the pamphlet and appropriate verses from the *Ramayan* would be cited.²³

Ram Chandra wanted to broaden the movement by drawing the attention of Gandhi towards it. With this aim he organized a march of about 500 peasants on foot from Patti to Allahabad, on the occasion of the *Saptami* bathing day, in early June 1920.²⁴ He started the march by quoting what Vibhishan had to say to Hanuman:²⁵

Hanuman, I feel more confidence, for without Hari's favour
there is no meeting with the good. (Sundarkand, ch. 7.)

A fact worth mentioning here is that there were Muslim peasants also in this march.²⁶

It is difficult to chronologically identify his writings. In this paper I am not dealing with the ideological contradictions of Baba Ram Chandra but only taking up the thematic use of *Ramayan* by him which may be classified under the following headings:

I. Characterization of the British, Oppressive Social Forces, Landlords and the Peasants' Condition

In a piece written in the late thirties, Ram Chandra mentions that 'the highest *gaddi* (seat of power) of Indians is at Delhi or Pune, but today they are vacant and masterless. The foreigners have through treachery, made a *gaddi* at New Delhi. They are ruling according to their wish and forcing their laws and language on the Indians.'²⁷ Referring to the help rendered by certain sections of the Indian society to the British, he wrote:²⁸

They have bribed the Indian rulers to their side and through them only are they avenging the *gadar* (revolt) of 1857 by torturing thirty three crores of Indians.

To expose the selfishness of the British and of their landlord allies and their callous exploitation of poor peasantry, he likened them to Indra, the king of gods, and quoted the following verse:²⁹

Though the king of gods, there is no limit to his guile and rascality; he loves another's loss and his own gain. The ways of Indra are like those of a crow-crafty, scoundrelly with no faith in anyone. Having in the first instance formed an evil plot and accumulating all the forces of deceit, he piled up trouble on the head of everybody. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 301.)

It is striking that while citing this verse, Ram Chandra excluded the next verse, which is:

Everyone was infatuated by the Gods' delusive power; their love for Ram was so violent that they would not be separated from him.

To a certain extent he held the British responsible for diverting the taluqdars' attention from their subjects and differentiated them from their pre-colonial forebears.³⁰ Through *Ramayan* he described the peasants' condition and attributed it to the administration and policies of the British and the taluqdars. The verses cited by him relate to Ram's condition in the forest; Bharat's views about his mother, etc:³¹

The people in their distress had the current of their ideas as disturbed as the water at the confluence of a river with the sea. Thus wavering in their mind they found no comfort anywhere; nor did any disclose to another the secrets of his heart. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 301.)

They wear deerskins, eat fruits, sleep on the ground strewn with grass and leaves, they live beneath the trees enduring cold and heat and rain and wind. (Ayodhyakand, *doha*. 211.)

By 'people' and 'they', Ram Chandra means the peasants and equates them with Ram, Sita and Lakshman. Further he quoted:

My mother's evil design, the source of all this mischief, was the carpenter who fashioned an evil adze out of our interests, and with the evil of wood jealously wrought an evil instrument and fixed it with the cruel, evil spell of the period of Ram's banishment. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 212.)

'My mother's evil design' are the intentions of the British who acted as a carpenter to create the 'evil instrument' of the taluqdari system; 'our interests' are the peasants' interests; and 'Ram's banishment' is the peasants' condition. Next:

For my sake she fashioned this evil contrivance and ruined and confounded the whole world. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 212.)

'My' here means the taluqdars and 'She' the British government; the message being that the British created the taluqdari system and ruined the peasants. Here he excluded the next line of the verse:

These evil times will come to an end when Ram returns to Oudh. . . . There is no other way.

This deletion suggests that he was not entertaining the idea of *Ramrajya*. No where did he mention or support this concept.

Ram Chandra was so much concerned about peasants' exploitation that he quoted the verses related to Bharat's worry about Ram:³²

It is this burning pain that ceaselessly consumes my chest so that I can neither eat by day nor sleep at night. There is no medicine for this fell sickness; I have searched the whole world in my thoughts. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 212.)

After citing these verses Ram Chandra warned that 'only once will he ask the taluqdars. . . who are exploiting the peasants through illegal acts, to work for the benefit of the people . . . and if they fail we shall act on our Congress's advice.' The advice which he offered in the name of the Congress was: not to pay rent to taluqdari agents; not to obey any taluqdari

dictates; not to pay a single pie as rent in the case of natural calamity and to pay only that much rent which has been advised by the Congress; and to have no relations with taluqdars, but only with the government, for only then peace shall prevail in the world.³¹ This showed his hostility to the middlemen. Thus, without explicitly suggesting it, he asked for the abolition of taluqdari. He also warned the government officials, who looted the peasants and terrorized them with guns and rifles, to behave decently with the peasants. He suggested the formation of a committee to administer the country and to appoint everybody, from Viceroy to watchman. Indians should have the right to elect this committee and formulate laws which will solve all their problems.³⁴

As part of his attack on the landlords and their connections with the British, Ram Chandra invoked a millenarian past that accorded beautifully with the popular remembrance of mythical antiquity. The ancient kings, he wrote, confronted many hurdles for the benefit of their subjects.³⁵ Moving on to more recent past he found the existing landlords wanting woefully in comparison with their forefathers who had fought against alien rulers in 1857:³⁶

After foregoing their pride and with the help of the people of another country, these taluqdars, whose ancestors had fought the British in 1857, are now bent upon destroying their own subjects. . . . They should feel ashamed of their acts for there is no king of India. . . the king of another country is ruling here and everybody is a subject.

With the help of his favourite comparison with Indra, he described the unchecked oppression of the peasantry by quoting the following verses:³⁷

You are absolutely independent and there is no one to restrain you, so you do whatever you please. You make good evil and evil good, with a heart that feels neither grief nor joy. You have tested everyone by perpetually deceiving them; you fear nobody and you think it all good fun. You are not hindered by regard for good or evil deeds, and so far none has put you right. But now you have made fun of someone

like me and you shall receive a due return for your act.
(Balkand, chs. 136-37.)

Imperialism was thus defined in the idiom of common folk. Like Indra, the British were the supreme sovereign who pursued their selfish interests without any restraint.

While reposing faith in Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, Ram Chandra could see the duplicity of those who, although participating in the national movement, were motivated more by their narrow selfish interests. Such people had no qualms about exploiting the masses, including the peasantry, in the name of nationalism. He characterized these leaders thus:³⁸

At the moment the very persons whose shelter peasants had taken, are considering themselves the defenders of India, though in reality they are destroying the people with the help of *taluqdars*, *kings* and big *mahajans*.

He quoted from the *Ramcharitmanas* to caution the peasants about the dual character of those who talked of serving the masses while remaining aloof from them. The verses he cited related to what Manthara had said to Kaikeyi about the prospective enthronement of:³⁹

Your rival queen desires to pluck you up by the root, so fence your garden round about with the stout hedge of a scheme.
(Ayodhyakand, ch. 16.)

But now those days are past and gone, as soon as they get the opportunity, friends become enemies.
(Ayodhyakand, ch. 17.)

II. The Congress Leaders before Independence

In this context Ram Chandra was alarmed by the relationship between the Congress and the landlords. The latter, he knew, joined the national body 'not to serve the people but in order to control the people through various legal provisions.'⁴⁰ In the pursuit of their narrow group interests, the landlords often

got support from the Congress leaders. He compared such leaders to the gods who, for their selfish ends, had requested Saraswati to prepare the ground for Ram's banishment. Using Saraswati's reaction to their request, Ram Chandra described his feelings about these leaders:⁴¹

High is their dwelling but low are their deeds; they cannot bear to look on another's prosperity. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 12.)

Or they were like Lakshman as Parashuram had seen him:

Though fair to see, his heart is evil, like a golden jar full of poison. (Balkand, ch. 278.)

In these verses the urban Congress leaders are like Lakshman, and the taluqdars like villains and gods. Here, Ram Chandra clearly distinguishes between the landlords and the Congress leaders; but the latter's dual character is not hidden from him. The following verse, which is related to Ram's preaching to Sugriva, is cited to urge the peasants on to a total rejection of these persons:

If a man hypocritically speaks fair words to one's face and slanders one behind one's back, a man whose soul is crooked and whose mind moves tortuously like a snake, then brother, it is better to have no dealings with such a disloyal friend. (Kishkindhakand, ch. 7.)

Ram Chandra mounted a similar criticism against social workers who, without the slightest concern for the poor villager, used village upliftment programme as a cover for making money:⁴²

The written programme of *gram sudhar* (village upliftment) is beautiful, but time servers have penetrated it. I have doubts how the Government will be able to get the work accomplished through these people. . . . Unless all the petty and high officials related to *gram sudhar* are not kept in village huts, it all will be a big waste of money.

He further added:

All those whom you see as reformers today are the ones who were idlers. They were worried about their stomachs (*unka apne pet ki hai hai pari thi*). By placing that *hai hai* (worry) on your head they have found a way out of their unemployment. They do not know your language, nor do they like your appearance, and they are not country dwellers.

These persons come to villages well dressed and seated in cars, and, according to him, they were interested in their own selves, (*gram sudhar wale jivan sudhar kai pujari. . . ban baithai hain*).⁴³ Congressmen are 'flowing in the stream of office acceptance' and capitalists and police are bothered about their own interests. In spite of the fact that 'the theory or principle of the great Congress leaders is that there can be no great reform for *kisans* and *mazdurs* without achieving complete independence,'⁴⁴ according to him some concessions could actually be implemented at the moment.

III. The Congress Leadership after Independence

The realization that even Congress leaders could not be trusted to look after the interests of the poor assailed him with greater acuteness on the eve of Independence. The prospect of political power passing into the hands of these leaders inspired in him the kind of apprehension Lakshman had entertained about Bharat when the latter, accompanied by Shatrughan, was coming to see him in the forest.⁴⁵

A wordly man, who has got power becomes infatuated and so foolishly betrays himself. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 228.)

Gathering together an army with evil intent, he has come to make his sovereignty secure. Countless crooked schemes have the two brothers devised, and have assembled their army and come. If there was no treachery and wicked intent in his heart, why should he want to bring all these chariots and horses and elephants. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 228.)

The two brothers here appear to be capitalists and landlords. Ram Chandra admonished the Congress leaders turned rulers:

Now that you have become king, you exceed in your actions
all the bounds of duty. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 228.)

He also gave expression to his sense of betrayal when he addressed the Congress leaders like Kaikeyi had rebuked Dasharatha:⁴⁶

If you were going to act like this in the end, on what strength
had you pressed me to ask for the boon.
(Ayodhyakand, ch. 35.)

Ram Chandra hoped that the threat of being ruled by such people would oblige the peasants and workers to realize:⁴⁷

For one bound by fate to live in the service of an enemy,
death were far better than life. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 190.)

He felt uncomfortable that in spite of seeing what was happening, he was being advised to do nothing to alter the course of events:

How long must I endure and control myself, though my lord
is with me and my bow in my hand. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 229.)

He cited another verse to renew commitment to his 'lord and 'master', the poor peasantry:

I shall fight for my master on the battle field and illuminate
the *fourteen worlds* with my glory. (Ayodhyakand, ch. 190.)

Swaraj, to Ram Chandra, did not mean just the end of British *raj*. It also meant the end of people's miseries. Otherwise, if previously 'we were under the white government, now we shall be under the Black government.'⁴⁸ He admitted that after acquiring power the Congress had brought some light to the darker life of peasants. But, on the whole, they remained 'entrapped by thugs'. The tragic situation, as he saw it, was that

the Congress 'forgets its real self' and 'we have to face miseries'.⁴⁹ Believing the Congress promise to abolish capitalism and landlordism, he lamented that nothing had been done to set right the old character of capitalists and landlords. The two acted as follows:⁵⁰

Enemy, moreover of the warrior caste and a prince, he was bent upon furthering his own ends by force and fraud.

(Balkand, ch. 160.)

Still maintaining his faith in the Congress, Ram Chandra bemoaned the way capitalists and landlords 'are destroying our pious Congress'. He was not sure that the new constitution, towards which 'all eyes are centred. . .and which we are told will bring good days in future,' would really benefit the 'uneducated society', because only '*brahmins, kshatris, vaishyas*, the zamindar party, the taluqdar party, the ruling party, the *vakil* party or school masters will find a place in it'. These persons will 'get an opportunity to settle old scores'. They will 'raise their walls on *solah annah* (cent percent) lies which they have been doing till now'. He cited the following verse:

Even if by associating with good people they do some good, the wicked never wholly lose their innate wickedness.

(Balkand, ch. 7.)

And in utter despondency added:

There is no medicine for this fell sickness.⁵¹

He described the leaders of the day as 'hypocrites' who, being in league with the officials and the police, treated the *tahsil* as their property. In public they 'abuse officials and when they visit the latter they bribe them with sweets' (*janta mein afsar ko gali aur afsar ke yahan dali*). They 'want laddus (sweets) in both of their hands and mouth'.⁵²

IV. Peasant Mobilization

The *Ramayan* was utilized by Ram Chandra not only to expose

and criticize the British, the internal oppressive social forces and the Congress leaders, but also to make use of it to mobilize peasants and acquaint them with the methods to be adopted for asserting their rights. The verses he cited related to the ocean's character as described by Ram:⁵³

To make petition to an adamant person, to treat a scoundrel with affection, to deal liberally with a born miser, to discourse of wisdom with a man absorbed in thought of self, to advise continence to a very avaricious man or to tell of Hari to a lecher, it is the same as to sow seed in a barren land.

(Sundarkand, ch. 58.)

He asked the peasants to remember:

Only by pruning will a plantain bear fruit, though endless effort may be spent on watering; even so a mean man heeds not a prayer, only by threats will he learn humility.

(Sundarkand, *doha*, 58.)

Obviously Ram Chandra had no faith in petitioning. He believed in direct action. This loss of faith in petitioning was an outcome of his practical experience. Ram Chandra cited the words of Ravan, when the latter saw his warriors flee the battle-field:

If I hear of anyone turning to flee from the battle-field, I will slay him with my dread sword. You have eaten of my bounty and feasted as you please, and now in the battle-field your lives have become dear to you.

(Lankakand, ch. 42.)

Here he himself is Ravan and the peasants are his warriors. The next verse cited relates to what Angad had to say to Ravan. Here Angad symbolizes Ram Chandra himself, Ravan the taluqdars, and monkeys and bears the peasants:

Cut your throat and die you shameless destroyer of your race; are you not terrified at the sight of our power.

You will reap your reward for this later on when the monkeys and bears cuff you.

(Lankakand, ch. 33.)

This citation was a direct challenge to landlords. Through the next verse he urged the peasants to rise in revolt against the taluqdars:

The monkeys cuffed and kicked them and bit them with their teeth, and then belaboured them and threatened them with shouts of triumph: kill them, seize them, *seize and kill them*, smash their heads, clutch and tear out their arms.

(Lankakand, ch. 33).

Suggesting an all out war against the taluqdars, he justified such means by citing Ram's advice to his teachers, *brahmins* and to all citizens:

Whoever crosses not the ocean of birth and death though he finds such means as these, is an ungrateful insenate and suicidal wretch.

(Uttarakand, *doha*, 44.)

It is significant that Ram Chandra justifies his call to the peasants to rise against the taluqdars in the name of Ram. For, the kind of struggle he justifies is in marked contrast with the means recommended by Ram; these means being 'ocean of morality, wind of God's grace and good teachers'.⁵⁴ Ram Chandra exhorted the peasants to stake everything they possessed or held dear:⁵⁵

Perish that wealth and home and pleasure and those friends and parents and brothers that lend not cheerful aid to our quest for Ram's feet.

(Ayodhyakand, *doha*, 185.)

Here 'Ram's feet' symbolized the cause of peasants. He wanted them to sacrifice everything in order to obtain their rights.

The struggle against the landlords had to be part of the struggle for freedom. In a pamphlet written during the Congress ministry period, he stressed the need for a psychological liberation from the hold of the alien masters. He wrote:⁵⁶

It is only after destruction in every work that freedom comes. My guess is that the most important role in this is that of the cars.

⁴ He quoted the following verse to strengthen his argument:

Whoever hears and understands with joyful heart bathes with
utmost devotion. (Balkand, *doha*, 2.)

This, according to him, proved that the 'ears are the root' of everything. But when 'everyone's ears are attentive to *videshi* (foreign) orders, how can they listen to the message of freedom?' Their 'feet are marching on *videshi* orders'. Not a single foot is marching 'towards independent India'. How is 'one going to realize the distance of the destination (*manzil*) of freedom?' Even 'hands are receiving food and clothing at the *videshi* orders'. India, he felt, could not move towards freedom so long as the following message of the *Gita* was not propagated among the masses.⁵⁷

Killed you will obtain heaven; victorious, you will enjoy the
earth. (Chapter 2, *shloka*, 37.)

V. Civil Disobedience Movement and Gandhi

Ram Chandra considered it imperative to remove fear from people's minds. Likening the freedom struggle, at the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement, to a game of chess where the pawns had to make the first move, he wrote that of the 33 crore 'pawns' of India, one weak pawn (Gandhi), without any army or crown, has moved forward.⁵⁸ It was the duty of the peasants to march behind Gandhi. As for the heavy odds against them in this apparently unequal struggle, Ram Chandra alluded to the fears expressed by Vibhishan as Ram confronted the mighty forces of Ravana in the field of battle. Seeing Ram on foot and Ravana mounting a chariot, Vibhishan asked Ram in apprehension:⁵⁹

Lord, you have no chariot, nor anything to protect your
body nor shoes on your feet. How will you overcome this
enemy? (Lankakand, ch. 80.)

⁶ He proceeded to cite Ram's reply:

Heroism and courage are the wheels of my chariot, truth and virtuous conduct its firm set flags and pennants.

The worship of God is its skilful charioteer, detachment his shield and contentment his scimitar.

Alms giving is his axe and understanding his keen lance, and the highest wisdom his unyielding bow. His quiver is a soul stainless and unmoved, filled with the arrows of restraint, control and pious observance. Worship of *Brahmans* is his impenetrable buckler. There is no other way to win victory than this. My friend, one who rides upon this chariot of righteousness, for him there is no foe to conquer.

(Lankakand, ch. 80.)

When Gandhi went on fast against the Communal Award Ram Chandra wrote: 'If Mahatmaji dies there will be fire in the country. . . . I will also commit suicide.'⁶⁰ Then he cited the following verses to warn against the result of not obeying Gandhi:⁶¹

(When Hanuman has burnt Lanka the citizens say) Such is the penalty for scorning the good; our city is burning as though it had no lord.

(Sundarkand, ch. 26.)

He was assured of Gandhi's eventual success because:

Those, in whose hearts dwell desire for the good of others, find nothing in the world too hard to win.

(Aranyakand, ch. 25.)

Gold is proved on the touchstone and a gem by the jeweller; so also are the men proved at the testing time by their character.

(Ayodhyakand, ch. 283.)

The British could not but come to grief in their confrontation with Gandhi for the simple reason that:

For those monarchs, by whom hermits and ascetics are vexed, burn even though there is no fire.

(Ayodhyakand, ch. 126.)

Power of faith apart, even in more mundane and practical terms he argued that 'we had protected the British from the Germans, then how come we cannot take our kingdom back from these handful of white people?'⁶²

As important as the fact of Ram Chandra's zealous support to Gandhi is his understanding of what Gandhi stood for. Imagining himself as the king in Gandhi's *raj*, Ram Chandra spelt out the following agenda:⁶³

1. I would have given the land of my kingdom to the people.
2. Would not have kept my people under anybody's subjugation.
3. Would not have taken my people to courts on false charges.
4. Would not have maintained jails or courts in my kingdom.
5. Would have offered the same food and the same clothes to everyone.
6. The *baniyas* have looted our forefathers for ages through 'interest'. I would have invested this looted money for opening industries in the countryside.
7. Would have kept the people in good houses and myself stayed at the threshold, acting as their watchman.
8. I would not have imported anything and would have opened good industries in my kingdom.
9. Hindus and Muslims would have had equal place in my kingdom.
10. Would not have killed my people with bullets. Had they killed me I would have attained *baikunt* (heaven).

Ram Chandra requested Gandhi not to be annoyed with such a programme and cited a *drishtant* (illustration or a tale conveying a moral). A big frog used to trouble the smaller frogs in a pond. Some boys saw this and decided to liberate the smaller frogs from the tyranny of the big frog by either killing the latter or by throwing him out of the pond. The youngest among the boys started pelting stones without bothering about the warning of the other boys that in this process some small frogs, too, might be killed. Seeing his determination, the others also joined in and killed the big frog. But some small frogs, too, were killed in the process. The young boy, Ram Chandra believed, did not incur the sin of killing some small frogs as he had acted in good faith for the welfare of others and had

liberated the smaller frogs for ever.⁶⁴

VI. Conclusion

The characters of *Ramayan* were living characters for Ram Chandra, very much alive in the present world. Ravan, Supnakha, Manthara, Kaikeyi, and Narad are regarded as evil characters by those who look upon *Ramayan* as a religious text. Ram Chandra did not hesitate to cite these characters approvingly if what they had to say was relevant to explain the present situation. In the same leaflet he would cite the verses which criticize Ravan and also the verses related to what Ravan has to say for mobilizing his army. Ram Chandra did not use *Ramayan* for the sake of devotion. Rather, he used it to expose the exploitative character of the given social organization and for its transformation.

Ram Chandra had the utmost regard for Gandhi. But he did not entertain the idea of *Ramraj*; nor did he make vague promises to the peasants in the name of *Ramraj*. For Gandhi *Ramayan* was the 'greatest book in all devotional literature', and *Ramraj* a rule of *dharma* or people's rule.⁶⁵ According to him:⁶⁶

All the sacred books, the *Gita*, *Ramayan* and the *Bible*, taught that there could be no cooperation between devils and good, no friendliness between saints and satans, no mutual help and cooperation.

But the devil and satan for Gandhi were embodied by British rule which he so often described as *Ravanraj*. He did not look upon the oppressive social forces within the Indian society as devils or satans.

For Ram Chandra the landlords, capitalists, money-lenders and all those forces that exploited the people were devils. He used *Ramayan* to mobilize the peasants for a struggle not only against the British but also against these internal oppressors. To Ram Chandra the British and their landlord allies were like Indra, the king of gods. He found in them all the wickedness, treachery and rascality of Indra, as depicted in Tulsi's *Ramayan*. According to Gandhi, 'the weapons that Rama used

were purely spiritual'.⁶⁷ But Ram Chandra recommended the weapons used by monkeys and bears, the practical weapons of war, and justified their use by quoting Ram. Gandhi believed in trusteeship and change of heart whereas Ram Chandra cited Tulsidas to argue that the wicked may do some good by coming into association with good but their innate wickedness is never destroyed. He also used *Ramayan* to expose the double faced nationalist leaders.

A fact worth mentioning here is that though Ram Chandra often cited the example of Russia along with verses from the *Ramayan*, he never wrote a word about Marxism or Communism. He did refer to Lenin as 'the dear leader of the *kisans*', and wrote that the peasants 'are still slaves except in Russia'.⁶⁸ But there is no evidence to suggest any links that he might have had with the Communist Party of India, though he had contact with Manilal⁶⁹ while he was in Fiji and again during 1925-27 when he brought Manilal to Fyzabad to highlight peasant grievances.⁷⁰

It is not only that Ram Chandra used religious literature to mobilize peasants, but also he was aware of the progressive role of literature and writers in building up a society. According to him, 'in all societies it becomes the duty of the leading persons to collect the literature of their society, resolve the deep meanings of every language and through their wisdom pick up the real text to use it for building up a *barisamaj* (big society) for the benefit of the world.' He added that 'through this only will they be able to generate the strength for removing vast contradictions' which 'will help in overcoming extremely difficult paths'.⁷¹

The *Tulsi Ramayan* is regarded as the peasants' text. But it has been and is still being used by the dominant social groups and castes to sustain their vested interests. For many it is just a sacred text of devotional literature, the reading and recitation of which leads one to heaven. It was Baba Ram Chandra who made a radical use of this devotional text, and used the peasants' tradition and culture to highlight the inner contradictions of the Indian society, and to fight oppressive social forces.

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NOTE

The *Kisan Sabha* still exists in Rure and its membership was about 27,000 in 1977 when I toured these areas. Baba Ram Chandra is a legend for the peasants of Pratapgarh and Rai Bareilly Districts. In the course of interviews, the peasants would often recite a verse from the *Ramayan*. Whenever I asked them the meaning, their reply was: *aap yeh nahin samjhenge* (you won't understand this). They were right. For, being a representative of the 'elite society', I did fail to understand their citations. It was only while writing this paper that I realized what the *Ramayan* is for the peasants of Oudh. Irrespective of their caste or religious identities, it has for generations provided the infrastructure, as it were, for their psycho-intellectual make-up.

Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods: The Ramlila at Ramnagar

ANURADHA KAPUR

WHILE THE WORD transformation is often used in the social sciences, the imaginative counterpart of it is seldom seen in its own terms; it is treated as an input for social change. This may be a valid viewpoint; I should, however, like to treat the two at par for the length of this paper.

My subject is theatre; specifically it is the *lilā* at Ramnagar. I want to emphasize, one, that if we choose to use the word transformation, let us pay attention to forms and not regard it all as a matter simply of content; two, I want to describe how, in this particular theatric performance, the spiritual initiative, virtually irrepressible when it is multiplied to thousands of spectators, may demonstrate something analogous to human volition—though I hesitate to translate that too quickly to the vocabulary of social change.

Great Happenings

If one is to ask, even at the cost of oversimplification, what theatre at its best hopes to do, it may be possible to answer, in the same spirit, that it hopes to make the *possible present*. It hopes to create a world in which the limits of time and space are sometimes acknowledged, sometimes ignored, and at other times simply transcended; where the field of perceived reality expands and converges in a way that does not need to be

reconciled with every day existence. There is then the hope of great happenings.

What I mean by expansion of perceived reality in theatric presentation is that no part of the universe, from heaven to hell, from gods to men, ought to be alien to theatre and therefore no *theme* need be out of bounds. By convergence I mean focusing, gathering attention, a way of pointing, achieved in theatre by a variety of means: by language of course, by make-up and costume, by colour and gesture, and by light. The measured gait of the Noh actor delineates his gesture the more precisely. A soliloquy, an expression, a gesture, may be illumined by a torch brought close to the actor's face in traditional drama or a spotlight in modern theatre—an equivalent to the cinematic close up. In Kathakali, the actor, with his enlarged eyes set in a green (or red and black) face, will express even the passage of *thought*; he widens his eyes at what seems to be the close of his thought and by doing so he somehow gives it a physical presence, as if thought alights on the brain and the eyes widen because of its weight and tangibility. This is theatric revelation.

The Transaction

The audience enters into a transaction when it not only receives what the actors give but also gives something in return to the actors—laughter, tears, booing, applause—and this, one way the other, alters the texture of the performance. In the *nautanki*, for example, a song may be repeated several times over if the audience asks for it, even if it happens to be the dying declaration of the character. But there is another kind of transaction which is less apparent. This is the sense that it is possible, theoretically at least, to redo the cues, the prompts, the hints in a performance. And this sense is perhaps only possible when the performance is not entirely contained in spatial or architectural frames but is instead infinitely changeful and varying; when there is a wedge between the cause and effect of theatric images (when, for instance, the dimming of light does not necessarily mean dawn or dusk); when, in other words, the viewer is allowed to construct his own images.

Taking the suggestion, adding meaning, and completing the

picture represented on stage: this is what I mean by constructing images. While scenery, costume, lights, all contribute to this construction, they may not be absolutely necessary for it. Shakespeare, for instance, created most of his scenery with words, it is acoustic scenery we have with him; the mime artist may construct a door with a gesture and add a squeak to its hinges with his voice. A chair in traditional Indian drama may be a chair, a mountain, a chariot, a throne, as a pond may be a sea, and a boy an icon. There are no fixed representational limits then; things can stand for each other and the same thing can denote several things depending on the context within which it is placed. Now this is not obviously possible in naturalistic theatre. When a table is to be shown, a man on all fours will not do, only an object in some way recognizable as a table, even if it is made of cardboard, must be brought on to the stage. And, of course, supernatural events have literally no space on a stage that is a replication of ordinary lived space. Thus the spectator from his permanent lookout post simply observes what is presented to him as a picture framed by the proscenium. He is not supposed to construct those supplementary images, the abundance of which allows for the possibility of a *play*—which is after all manifest freedom. It is not for nothing that the *lilā* is my model. For here the accommodation between the *shown*, the *seen* and indeed the *unseen* proceeds with extraordinary swiftness and is quite unproblematical.

Seeing Creatively

Sight then is not conceived of as being passive or inert but as energy giving; it can alchemize given objects and endow them with new meanings; it can transform interminably.

We know of human volition as an abstract concept, especially in art; what theatre does is to demonstrate it. It is human volition, the intervention of the imaginative will, that makes theatrical objects volatile. From object to sign to metaphor, from rope to whip to snake, from stick to flute to horse—a transformation that requires creativity of sight.

The Ramlila at Ramnagar

What I have called the creativity of sight, or the ability to construct is exemplified in Ramnagar's Rāmlīlā in an extraordinary manner. What is further remarkable in Ramnagar is how this creativity is sustained over a period of thirty-one days and is sustained every year with undiminished eagerness and passion.

Ramnagar, near Banaras, is situated on the left bank of the Ganga and is spread over an area of about 4.25 square kilometres. Ramnagar celebrates both Krishnalīlā and Rāmlīlā, but it is the Rāmlīlā that commands both time and space of the town.

When Ramlila came into existence is a matter of conjecture. One date, however, is undisputed. In 1833 James Prinsep published a book called *Banaras Illustrated in a Series of Drawings* in which he described the Ramnagar Rāmlīlā in considerable detail.¹ The description matches in many ways what we see today and proves that the *līlā* was well established by that time. Vibhuti Narayan Singh, the present Maharaja of Banaras, says that the locations of the *līlā* were finalized in 1825 when the Girija temple of the town was constructed. In Ishvari Prasad Narain Singh's time (1835-1889) the *samvādas* were finalized and, according to the present Maharaja, have been handed down since then with little change.

The Rāmlīlā continues four or five days after Dashahara, lasting, therefore, thirty or thirty-one depending on the lunar calendar. Its performance style is an amalgamation of the wordless tableaux, the *jhānki*, and of processional drama, where the actors move from place to place and speak dialogues. There is not much variation in the manner of delivering the lines; most actors speak in a well modulated unvarying singsong manner.

The locations over which the *līlā* moves are spread over an area of about 2.6 square kilometres. Some locations have been constructed for the *līlā*, such as the pavilions at Pravarshana mountain, and at Panchavati; some are part of the town's landmarks, like the Durga *mandir*, the Janakpur *mandir* and the Rāmbagh; and others have been simply found appropriate. The town's main square, its two main temples, its lakes and its

tanks as well as the fields at its outskirts, all come within the *lilā's* great boundary. That is to say, almost all the important landmarks of the town are important landmarks in the *lilā*. Moving from one location to the other is very much a part of the performance, and on occasion may take the better part of the days's *lilā*.

If the performance covers almost the whole town and lasts over a month, then the preparations for it take almost the whole year. Bamboos for the effigies, for example, are gathered by February and the actors are chosen by July. In July forty or fifty Brahman boys are presented to the Maharaja for him to pick the *swarūpas*: boys who will play Rāma, Lakshmana, Bharata, Shatrughna and Jānaki. The Maharaja auditions the boys, they recite a few lines of the *Ramacharitamānasa*, and the most suitable amongst them are chosen. Suitability depends on the boys' physical attributes, their height, their beauty, their age, their voice. A Brahman boy may begin acting at the age of eight or nine; he may first play Shatrughna, then he may graduate to the role of Bharata, Lakshmana or Janaki, and later, if he is exceptionally talented and fortunate, he may play Rama. But he can hold his position for no more than three or four years at a stretch; for according to the inexorable law of the Ramlila stage, his careers as *swarūpa* must come to an end as soon as hair appears on his upper lip or as soon as his voice begins to crack.

Having been selected, the boys are initiated into their roles approximately in the middle of July. At a special *pūjā*, Ganesha is worshipped and present at the ceremony are the five *swarūpas*. Along with them the actors playing Shiva, Brahma, Vasishtha, and Hanumana are also present. After this *pūjā* the boys will only be referred to as Rama or Lakshmana or Janaki as the case may be; their real names will be forgotten for the time being. Moreover, they will be expected to behave with the gravity suitable to their status; and they will be expected to obey as well the strict rules of protocol followed during the *lilā*. For example, only after Rama has been seated will the others be allowed to sit; only after he has eaten, will the others be allowed to eat. By July, then the divine presence is already considered to have graced Ramnagar, for the *swarūpas* are considered to have become, two months before the perfor-

mance, the residence of god.

While the *swarupas* are chosen every year, several other roles have become hereditary. The role of Ravana is an example; according to the present actor, it has been with his family since the time of Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh. The role of Vishvamitra, at the moment played by a man of eighty, will soon pass over to his son. Hanumana, Jatayu, Janaka are roles that belong traditionally to one family, that of the *Vyāsa*, who also helps to direct the Ramlila. Smaller roles like Kaushalya and the queens are played by such lads as are able to give time to the performance. The demon and the monkey army is usually made up of children recruited freshly every year.

When the Maharaja's privileges as the ruler of Banaras were abolished in 1949, the Government of India agreed to pay him Rs.100,000 for the Ramlila and for the maintenance of the temples connected with it. This amount was later increased to Rs.115,000. In 1955 the Ramlila cost Rs.103,763 and in 1975-76, Rs.125,360. A detailed budget of the year 1975-76 shows that the actual expense of mounting the performance was Rs.43,094; feeding the *sadhūs* cost Rs.28,534 (all those who come to Ramnagar for the *līlā* are fed free), and maintaining the temples cost Rs.53,731.

The attendance at the *līlā* is truly spectacular. According to the *District Gazetteer* an average of twenty thousand people watch everyday.² On especially popular days, such as days 1, 2, 5, 13, 22, 26, 29 and 30, there may be forty thousand to a lakh spectators in Ramnagar.

This then is a very general picture of the *līlā*. I should now like to look at some aspects of it in detail. I shall begin with the text.

The Text Enacted

The basis of almost all Ramlila performance in Northern India is the *Ramacharitamānasa*. The move from the text to the performance is a move that entails, in the first place, dividing the text into that which is dramatic and needs to be enacted and sung, and that which is less dramatic and needs only to be sung. The text that is acted is text repeated twice; once as it is sung by the *Ramayānis*, and once as it is spoken by the

actors.

In performance the text is laid open to many possibilities: the possibility of seeing, reading and hearing. The performance makes its own text therefore. The Maharaja atop his elephant reads, hears and sees; he reads the *Ramacharitamanasa* which he carries with him; he hears the *Ramayatis* who sit at the foot of his elephant; and he sees the panorama of the performance from his lofty seat. For the spectators, there is a choice to be made. For them it is the eye or the ear, the *Ramacharitamanasa* or the actors—the pleasures of all are often beyond reach. So, for those who believe that hearing the *Ramacharitamanasa* is in itself a form of worship, the places near the *Ramayatis* are the choicest. Since there may be several thousand people between them and the performers, they will only hear Tulsi and scarcely glimpse the *swarupas*. The text here is hearing. For others the text is seeing, *darshana*. So they will take their places near the acting areas in order to adore the gods the better. Already the text, the pure *Ramacharitamanasa*, is layered; some of it is acoustically composed, and some of it through representation.

There are, it seems to me, three kinds of timing in dramatic performances.³ There is, first of all and most importantly, the plot time, the time of one specific plot. The plot time is the structure of the play itself: what it chooses to show, what it chooses to report, and what it presents in flashback as reflection. The plot time is made up of dramatic devices. Secondly, there is chronological time which is the actual sequence of events, the chronology extracted from the dramatic devices. For instance, a murder may be shown first and only later the reasons provided for it in another enactment. In chronological time the spectator will put the event and its reason together in his mind in order to get a clear picture of what happens. And, thirdly, we have the constant 'now' of the play, where everything that is shown appears to be always in the present. A drama, because we are seeing it, happens before our eyes, and is a series of 'presents' happening *now*.

While chronological time remains unaffected by the *lilā*, the plot time is often very different from the time of the *Ramacharitamanasa*. For example, plot time is time stretched and made meaningful by the act of walking from location to location. Tulsi's description of the journey may be brief, but our journey

might take hours. Plot time is time taken out of the *Ramacharitamānasa*, time held in abeyance at *sandhyā* when the Maharaja goes to pray and the *lilā* stops; for the waiting spectators that is time for *melā*, for entertainment, for business, as also for *darshana* of the *swarupas* who too are waiting, and this time has very little to do with the text. And further, to return to the *Ramacharitamānasa*, plot time is time made tantalizingly slow in order that desire and meaning are teased out of the especially popular moments of god's history. The *Bharata Milāpa* is an example.

While the description of the actual meeting of the brothers is brief in the *Ramacharitamānasa*, its prolonged enactment is well rehearsed in the minds of the spectators who have looked forward to it for days. In Ramnagar a hundred thousand people push and scramble for any place that will provide them with a flash of the scene.

My observations of day 29, October 3, 1979: Bharata has been given the news of Rama's impending arrival at forty minutes past seven. Rama, however, himself will only come into view at eleven in the night. The intervening hours are spent wandering and waiting for the great event. At ten the main *chowk* of Ramnagar where the meeting is to take place is completely filled with people; there is no room to shift or to try for a better view. Wherever they are, there the people must stay and glimpse what they can of the scene. Today, as on many other occasions, *being* here is almost as important as seeing the event.

At eleven exactly the Maharaja's elephant comes into view. The audience begins to stir and shift with excitement. All eyes are fixed at the gate from where the *swarupas* are to enter. Heralded by the lights of the flares they enter, brilliantly costumed specks in the chariot. The chariot is brought to the edge of the dais constructed in the centre of the *chowk*. At one end of the stage stand Bharata, Shatrughna and Vasishtha, and at the other end are Rama, Lakshmana, Janaki and the monkey army. The action stops. The *swarupas* must wait till the *Ramayatis* sing the sequence and arrive at the cue line. At a critically dramatic moment, then, the *lilā* has begun to move in slow motion, tantalizing the spectators and arousing them to almost ecstatic devotion. And as the *lilā* lengthens and

expands in time, each gesture becomes denser in meaning to become a special moment in god's history. The audience waits for what *seems* an interminable length of time, because it anticipates most vividly what is going to come, then all at once Rama, Lakshmana and Janaki swiftly descend from their chariot and Vasishtha goes to meet them. As the people explode into a cheer Bharata has run to Rama and has prostrated himself at his feet. Shatrughna lies beside him. The audience calls out first Bharata's name and then Rama's name and the entire town resounds with the almost frightening roar of the great multitude. Rama embraces his brother and then the five *swarupas* are put in a row, fused shoulder to shoulder, and turned in all directions. Flares light them constantly and from the distance they look no more than miniature icons glittering with each burst of light.

The scene, the actual meeting itself has lasted only minutes: the *swarupas* run across the platform and while Bharata falls at Rama's feet, Shatrughna falls at Lakshmana's feet. That is all. But so well has the action been played over in the minds of those who have come to witness it that the plot time seems to stretch and gather the quality of a dream. This is an event made up of action, devotion, flares, suspense, and it gathers meaning that is quite separate from the text itself.

The Space

In an auditorium the choice is made when the spectator decides what seat he can afford. After his ticket is bought and he has been shown his seat he is bound to sit there till the end of the performance. That is because the auditorium, and especially the picture-frame stage, creates a series of calculable relationships: the enclosed space, the static set, the imprisoned spectator. Short of jumping on to stage there is scarcely any possibility of transgression. And this is precisely what often happens in the Ramlila: people surge on to the acting area to get a better look at the gods. Of course this is only possible when the space allows the exercise of choices and I say *choice* deliberately. Naturalist theatre, under the tyranny of certain architectural features, is unable to make its space anything other than verisimilar.

Now any space, theoretically speaking, can become theatre space, though it is usually set apart by markers: a raised stage, a curtain, a pole, or simply the spectators themselves who demarcate by their very presence the playing area from the sitting area. European mystery plays and a great deal of traditional Indian drama are performed in this unfixed and informal space. Here the actors simply come upon the spectators, and the performance space is defined by a tacit agreement between the two; the boundaries between imagination and factuality, as between illusion and life, are constantly overlapping. However, having been once fixed, such space is, for the length of the performance, theatre space.

At this point consider what happens in Ramnagar: while actually being ordinary town space the whole of Ramnagar is in fact theatre space.

In the Ramnagar Ramlila the acting area changes whenever the *Ramacharitamansa* describes a geographical change; that is to say, the gods, the demons, and the spectators move to a new arena in another part of the town when the story calls for it. Thus among the other places Rama, along with his spectators, goes to Ayodhya, Janakpur, Pampasar, Kishkindhā Panchvati, Suvēla Giri, Rameshvara, and Lanka. And after his return from exile he also visits the Maharaja's palace. But of that I will talk later.

The locations chosen meet the requirements set for them in the *Ramacharitamansa*. When a city is to be shown, for example Janakpur and Ayodhya, locations on the main streets of Ramnagar are used. When water is needed, it is provided in the shape of a pond or a lake; when battle grounds are called for, large fields are chosen; when journeys through forests are required, routes are mapped out along Ramnagar's unmetalled roads on the outskirts of the town. So when Rama is in exile, the spectators following him through the mud and the sludge are in exile too, and as he moves further and further away from Ayodhya, they move further and further away from the town centre. And finally to Lanka which, being metaphorically the farthest location from Ayodhya, is three kilometres from the centre of Ramnagar town.

Attention to detail is necessary if the landscape over which Rama travelled is to be faithfully recreated. The desire to

match the geography described in the *Ramacharitamansa* is a desire to be realistic of course. But since ponds are ponds and are not by that token rivers or seas, we have a synecdoche here, a mere gesture towards realism and we have the locations becoming both realistic and suggestive. That is to say, while the locations create Rama's landscape in miniature, they also become a metaphor for it. Thus the town space is layered over to become theatre space, and theatre space is layered over to become epic space, and epic space, since it is the space of Rama, is also sacred space where the vision finally alights. And the means by which all these transformations take place is the performance.

The Actors

For the thousands who watch the Ramlila, the *swarupas* are gods in flesh. How does this happen? How does an ordinary lad become extraordinary, the residence of god? The belief that the *Kirti* automatically transforms the actor into god does not provide the whole answer. Nor does the act of *performing*; it is not as if the boy by playing god is for the moment of the performance identified with him. Identification, as we have come to understand the word in the Stanislavskian sense, is not quite appropriate here. The boy playing Rama does not create the role modelled by and on himself as an actor in naturalistic drama might do. Rather, the boy must not, in any way, alter by his own contribution the popular image of Rama. He must continue without pause what others have begun before him; his merits as a *swarupa* will be more in that than in any originality he may bring to the role. Parenthetically, I scarcely ever found the spectators at Ramnagar complaining about the *swarupas*; each time they were as beautiful, as competent, as compelling as they had been in the previous years.

The word *pātra*, which means both vessel and actor, it seems to me, provides some clues about how the audience views the actor and how the actor views himself.

If, figuratively speaking, the actor means a vessel, then his function is to contain the qualities of the character (I would like for the moment, to banish the notion of character as a

person and consider it as an almost fluid quality, characteriness as it were), and convey them to the audience in the same way as a vessel conveys wine to the drinker. Further, as the taste of wine does not stay in the vessel, the actor does not acquire the qualities of the character he portrays. Otherwise the surest way of understanding the divine would be to play it.

Exempted from such criticisms as are grounded in the logics of acting, the *swarupas* look on all occasions tranquil and composed; indeed, whether they are in the palace or in exile, they always look the same. They are vessels to contain the characteriness—god's images rather than his portraits—and are therefore not required to register every nuance of tone and expression. The audience does not wish to have any logical confirmation of their naturalness.

To see god in the *swarupa* and yet not to be limited by what he is showing is, in a manner of speaking, *reflexivity* in seeing; it is seeing what is shown, also seeing what is not shown, and simultaneously it is agreeing not to see some shown things as well. If there is no crisis in finding gods every year, and at the same time forgiveness for the fallibility of the boy-actor, it is because sight has acquired transposing powers.

On several occasions, when the *lilā* lasted late into the night, I witnessed extraordinary spectacles. Days 30 and 31, October 4 and 5, 1979, are examples. After the *lilā* for the day is over, that is when Rama has bid goodbye to his animal comrades who have been with him during the days of exile, there is an interval of almost six hours—the goodbyes end at nine at night and the *arati* takes place at dawn the following day. During these hours, the *swarupas* become the objects of almost riotous devotion. People literally leap on to stage from all directions to offer tributes to their gods, and fights break out as they jump queue and attempt to advance on the *swarupas* by begging the police on duty or by applying sheer force. While this fervent worship continued I saw at about eleven at night the fatigue of being worshipped overcome Shatrughna. Ornately dressed, with the crown still on his head, he began to doze off. Then I saw the *Vyasa* rush to him and begin to rub his feet; it was a remarkable sight by all standards: a god was being coaxed into wakefulness.

Illuminating the Face: The Make-Up

The *swarupa* seems to stand between two different but related areas: between image worship and drama. He is at once icon and actor. And to function as icon, the actor, the person, the individual, must recede in order to appear more than human, otherworldly. He must not at any cost be recognized as someone the spectators know in everyday life: he must be literally anonymous, without name. Make-up in the Ramilla idolizes the young boy and at the same time effaces his individual features.

The *swarupas'* faces are ornately decorated with gold, silver and red discs forming half moon patterns on their cheeks and brows. They have, as well, sandalwood dots and lines on their faces and on their limbs. With every movement, then, they shine and sparkle and so ravish their onlookers with their beauty. While Norvin Hein, in *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*,⁴ says that the make-up has no special meaning, Vibhuti Narayan Singh, the Maharaja, thinks otherwise. His explanation about the make-up is worth mentioning. Rama laid his heart open to everything. He was so deeply affected by events that he cried easily and laughed easily. Because he was as delicate of body as of heart, the forest exile was very arduous for him. He must have been exhausted by it and exhaustion must have formed beads of sweat on his cheeks. The Ramnagar *lila* lovingly transforms those beads of sweat into radiant discs. And every evening they are put on his face with infinite care and infinite patience: a true labour of love that is equally a metaphor for his suffering.

Consider then a face made evocative, fabulous, a face in Brechtian terms made strange, in order that while we might see it in all its tenderness, it functions spiritually as a metaphor.

Illuminating the Icons: the Arati

Arati closes every evening's performance. Having journeyed, ambled, eaten, watched, the audience gathers to see the *arati*, a non-dramatic element made part of the performance, and thereby fitted into the plot time of the *Ramacharitamanasa*. It is

a pendant moment, the *swarupas* are frozen, still almost to rigidity as they hold most meticulously postures strikingly reminiscent of temple icons. At *arati*, with which the *lila* culminates a special kind of seeing comes about: a narrowing of vision which focuses acutely and excludes all else but the images of god. The evening of journeys and shifts is brought to standstill.

The fierce blaze of the pink and white *mehtabis* that are lit while the *arati* is being performed is splendidly effective in arresting the moment and enhancing the stillness of the *swarupas*. The *mehtabis* function like giant spotlights and are used almost exclusively for the *swarupas* who appear like effulgent images suspended in the dark. Indeed the *swarupas* are displayed. On *Dhanush Yagya*, for instance, and on *Bharata Milapa*, the *swarupas* are instructed to move, shoulder to shoulder, like clockwork figurines so that they may be properly shown in all directions. These are not actors any more, these are images, icons.

The Showing of God: Carrying the Swarupas on the Shoulders

Apart from the *arati*, god is displayed in another way as well. Figuratively, this, too, is like the *mehtabi*, spotlighting, drawing attention to the deities. This is the tradition of carrying the *swarupas* on the shoulders of a devotee. Having once become the residence of god, the *swarupas* never set foot on the ground to walk with the crowds, they are carried from location to location on the shoulders of willing volunteers who offer themselves for the job. This carrying, its religious significance apart, becomes what I might very loosely call a gesture or gest, a telling posture or body-attitude by which the character is revealed to the audience; he who does not walk on the ground is god, or alternatively, he who is carried on the shoulders is god. On day 30/31, at the moment of the *Bhor Arati*, the *swarupas* riding on their devotees' shoulders are especially evocative.

My observations of *Bhor Arati*, October 4/5, 1979: While waiting for the *arati*, the spectators have slept most of the night on the streets of Ramnagar; at three forty-five, Ayodhya begins

to fill up with people. Ten feet from the dais the *swarupas* occupy, a bamboo railing has been erected to prevent the spectators from spilling on to the actors. I watch astonished as Ayodhya accommodates more and more people. By four-thirty it is packed, all available place taken, including balconies overlooking the courtyard that is Ayodhya. Those who have not found a place try to push their way in, and as the seated people surge forward the bamboo railings snap, the policemen use their batons, and several people are knocked down. At five twenty the Maharaja is seen coming. He is not on his elephant, he is on foot today. He is escorted by two torch bearers, and is surrounded by his attendants. At five twenty-five, the Maharaja is before the *swarupas*, at five thirty Kaushalya begins the *arati* and at five thirty-five it is over. The town reverberates with the sound of the spectators. Then amid this deafening frenzy an astonishing sight comes into view. The *swarupas* are being lifted on the shoulders of their devotees. The young boys perch lightly on their carriers, while the carriers hold them carefully as if they were transporting clay images. The *swarupas* are handed swords in red scabbards that are outsize compared to the small actors, but no matter, the effect is altogether remarkable. Holding high their swords, their faces partly lit by the approaching dawn, the *swarupas* skim the heads of their spectators and ride away through the multitude of their admirers. They are, as always, immaculately composed even as they are being rocked and jolted by the worshipping crowd. Their feet invisible, and riding aloft, the *swarupas'* position becomes a sign with which to construct our image of the tranquil divine.

The Maharaja as King, as God, as Actor

That the Maharaja's identity receives support from the spectacle of the Ramlila is clear, for being king is at no time spotlighted, displayed, pointed towards, as it is done during the month of performances. The king is *demonstrably* king, his Cadillac, his horse-driven carriage, his elephants, and also his bedraggled PAC band are there to see, all part of the spectacle of Rama that thousands have assembled to witness.

But with the king of Banaras it is not possible to talk of king-

ship alone for the king of Kashi is meant to be the *pratika* (symbol, pointer, representative) of Shiva, the patron deity of the city. Therefore, while showing himself as king, he also shows himself as god's representative. During the *lilā* every time he passes on his chosen vehicle, the people call out 'Har Har Mahadeva' for him just as they call out 'Bol Shri Ramachandra kī Jai' for Rama.

As king and as Shiva's symbol the Maharaja has some very special privileges. In the first place, the *lilā* cannot begin if he (or one of his family) is not present at the performance site. Secondly, he has the privilege of a very singular view of the performance; only he and his chosen guests can view it from atop the elephants. But above all, and most importantly, he has the power to *interrupt* the performance; when he goes for his *sandhya*, the *lilā* stops and restarts only when he returns. A similar interruption may occur in other theatrical situations only when an actor has to be, for some reason, absent. In a sense, the Maharaja, too, is as important as the principal players of this performance. I will give examples.

My observations of *Dashhara*, day 20, September 30, 1979: at two thirty in the afternoon the Maharaja performs *shāstra pūjā*. The audience, who will follow the Maharaja after the ceremony to Lanka, is packed into the courtyard of the palace. The Maharaja, attired in splendid finery, is surrounded by priests, family members, and attendants. The elephants stand by, decked up and draped with maroon velvet. The Maharaja has put his weapons and himself on display. The spectators, who otherwise see Rama, see him.

When the *pūjā* finishes at four thirty, the royal family atop their eight elephants sets out in a procession from the palace and, with several thousand spectators following, covers the three kilometers to Lanka. Once the Maharaja has entered the frame of the performance he has several roles. He is king, he is the symbol of Shiva, and now he appears to be a fellow king of Rama for his procession looks as if it is a procession in support of the god. Visually, the Maharaja and Rama, on the day of the battle, have become allies. Here is a rare example of political power being buttressed by theatrical spectacle.

But something quite the reverse of this happens simultaneously. While it is possible to say that the Maharaja by setting

out in procession establishes contemporaneity with Rama and lifts himself out of the ordinary world, it is equally possible to say that in doing that he inducts the *lilā* into the ordinary world: Moving so conspicuously through Ramnagar he moves not only through the *lilā* ground but also through what everybody knows to be his kingdom. This process he seals completely when the *lilā* moves from the streets of Ramnagar into his palace on day 31. I shall come to that in a moment.

Consider what happens now. The Maharaja's procession arrives at the large field that is Lanka at five forty-five. The spectators part and make way for the elephants. To the deafening calls of '*Bol Shri Ramachandra ki Jai*' and '*Har Har Mahadeva*', the royal family advances; the elephants climb on to the narrow mud and brick platform that does for the battleground, people press back in panic, shout, cheer, and applaud, and as the noise reaches a crescendo, the elephants cross the battleground and begin, one by one, to amble down the side of it. The Maharaja has cut *across* the battlefield; he has not moved around it because a *parikrama* would indicate that he has paid his respects to Ravana who is sitting there in his chariot. The Maharaja proceeds back to the fort, he does not stay to witness the *lilā*. He does not wish to see, he explained, the killing of Ravana, as one king should not witness the death of another.

The final, and what I believe to be the culminating, exemplification of the Maharaja as actor comes on day 31.

After the *lilā* finishes in Rambagh and the meeting with Narada and the other sages is over, the performance shifts to Ayodhya from whence it will move to the Maharaja's fort. In Ayodhya, the *swarupas* give *darshana* while a member of the royal family escorted by two torch bearers comes to extend a formal invitation of dinner to the gods.

The spectators in the meantime have already found their way to the fort and have settled down to wait for the *swarupas'* arrival. By ten thirty there are about fifteen thousand people packed into all available space. The crowd begins to stir; the *swarupas* have arrived. Framed under the stone archway that leads into the courtyard are two elephants: on the first one sit Rama and Janaki and on the second one sits Bharata. Let us read the visual. The *swarupas* have exchanged places with the Maharaja on the elephants, and in terms of height, have mas-

tered the space; but this has happened in the Maharaja's *own ground*, and though he has given up his elephants to the *swarupas*, he has moved from the peripheries of the performance right into the very centre of it.

The Maharaja, dressed very simply and barefoot, receives his guests along with his family. They are led to a wooden platform and there the *swarupas* sit crosslegged. The Maharaja is handed a silver basin and a water-jug and he proceeds to wash the feet of the *swarupas*. He then puts *tilak* on them and performs *arati*. The sight is astonishing: so directly has the Maharaja become a player in the *lilā* that he has begun to share the same platform with the *swarupas*. A great feast is laid out in front of the *swarupas* and their plates are constantly replenished; attendants wait on their every command. They eat slowly and with superb self-possession. The feasting takes more than an hour, and while the *swarupas* eat, the *Ramayanas* softly recite, right there in the Maharaja's courtyard, whatever is left of the *Ramacharitamāṣa*: the *lilā* cannot finish till the whole text has been read.

The Maharaja presents his token payments to the main actors and also to the *Ramayans*. The *swarupas*, however, will be paid the following day in private. The Maharaja garlands the *swarupas*, performs another *arati*, and then bends to receive from each *swarupa* the garland he has given him; the rest of the royal family also does the same. As the *swarupas* prepare to leave on the elephants, the Maharaja and his family retire into the palace.

Strictly speaking, the *swarupas'* visit to the Maharaja's courtyard is outside the framework of the *Ramacharitamāṣa*; so is the feast hosted by the Maharaja which is the reason for the visit. And yet within the framework of the *lilā* as it has developed in Ramnagar, it is perfectly in keeping. The Maharaja has a role in the *lilā*, that of royal patron, a king like Rama is king, and that being so the Maharaja can, without disturbing the protocol, as it were, invite the young gods to his palace. Thus we have several sets of meaning here set frame within frame, and they emerge from the *one* set of gestures that we see performed this evening. An actor, king, and god is being received by a king, the symbol of a god, and an actor.⁵ Within one evening, the Maharaja pays tribute to the gods like all the

devotees in Ramnagar would like to do but cannot since they are not royalty; he sanctifies his own home by having the *swarupas* enter it; he achieves contemporaneity with the gods by stepping directly into their *līlā*; and he completes his duties as a patron by rewarding his performers. But over and above all that, he reclaims his ground as the Maharaja. During the previous thirty days Ramnagar town has been Rama's home and space, his playground on the peripheries of which the Maharaja has remained. Today we move from Tulsi's and Rama's territory into that of the Maharaja not only figuratively but actually. The playground of the gods has been drawn into the palace. Enchanted space has become bound in quotidian space and what Victor Turner would call the process of reaggregation is complete.⁶

Pilgrimages: Magic Journeys

When a spectator walks three kilometres to see a *līlā*, there is a transformation that takes place in him as a spectator. He is following an actor, of course; but he is also trailing god, seeing him re-enact his history on a sacred map. Here Rama rested, here he crossed the Ganga, here he battled with Ravana. In visiting places sanctified by god, the spectator does what countless pilgrims do, for his worship, like theirs, consists of visiting holy places. Indeed, perhaps it can be said that by the very act of walking, the spectator ceases to exist merely as a spectator, he takes on the role of a pilgrim. And his journey becomes at once physical, metaphorical and spiritual.

Further, wandering endows the spectator with another role as well, that of participant in Rama's life. On Rama's wedding day he joins his wedding procession, on the day Rama begins his exile, he follows him like a loyal supporter, on day 12 he sets off with Bharata to persuade him to return; in Lanka he appears to 'camp', as Rama himself does, and on days 28 and 29, he joins Rama's procession as he comes home victorious. He becomes an *Ayodhyāwāsi*, a *Janakpurwāsi*, and a visitor to Lanka as the occasion demands of him.

And it seems to me appropriate that journeys provide opportunities of taking on roles, for journeys are a sort of beginning, a setting out, and a leaving behind, whereby the routine of

life and the constraints of everyday obligation are left for something other. Moreover, journeys, in some ways, help to reactualize god's time, make it a new, a present, in which to come in and participate, to gather and give meaning.

Play at Ramnagar

There is play in the *lilā* at Ramnagar—play in constructing supplementary theatric images in order to add and subtract from the shown; there is play in the effortlessness and humour with which the absurdly grotesque and the delicately sublime are brought together and reconciled. I should say that in the way meaning is given to the actors and gathered from them by the spectators, there is playfulness and imagination; the audience gambols its way as it were through the enactment of god's history. If implied in the word *lilā* there is revel, spontaneity, freedom, frivolity, the acceptance of the unimagined and the incredible, then might it not be said that the performance at Ramnagar is a *theatric* insight into the very concept of *lilā*?

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Appendix

A schedule of the performance based on the *suchipatra* distributed in *Ramnagar* in 1979.

Day	Date	Lilā Description
	September	
1	5	Rāvana is born; he subdues the universe; Vishnu is seen reclining on <i>Sesaṅga</i> ; the gods pray to Vishnu; his voice comes from the heavens.
2	6	Shringi Rishi performs a sacrifice; Rāma and his brothers are born; Rāma displays his vastness; the sacred thread ceremony is performed; the princes go hunting.
3	7	The sage Vishvāmītra asks Rāma and Lakshmana to protect a sacrifice; the brothers kill Tāraka, Mārīcha and Subāhu; Rāma liberates Ahalya; the brothers worship the Gangā; they arrive in Janakpur; the meeting with Janaka.
4	8	Rāma and Lakshmana admire Janakpur; the Janakpur ladies talk among themselves; Rāma and Jānakī meet at the <i>Girījā</i> temple; they fall in love.
5	9	The trial of the bow; Rāma's breaking the bow; Parshurāma's arrival in a great wrath; the dialogue between Lakshmana and Parshurāma.
6	10	The wedding procession leaves from Ayodhyā; the wedding is performed in Janakpur.
7	11	The wedding procession heads back to Ayodhyā; the princes are shown sleeping.
8	12	(There was rain on this day and the performance was cancelled; it was resumed the following day.)
9	13	Dashratha prepares to anoint Rama to kingship. Kaikeyī goes to the sulking chamber; Rāma is ordered to the forest.
10	14	Rāma, Jānakī and Lakshmana leave Ayodhyā; they meet Nishāda; Lakshmana preaches to Nishāda.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Lila Description</i>
September		
11	15	The trio crosses the Gangā on the <i>Kewata's</i> boat; they meet <i>Rishi</i> Bharadvāja; the crossing of the Jamunā; the meeting with village folk; arrival at Valmiki's āshrama; the camp at Chitrakōṭa; the description of Dashratha's death is sung by the Ramayanīs.
12	16	Bharata arrives in Ayodhya; he refuses the crown and leaves for Chitrakōṭa; the meeting with Nishada; the crossing of the Gangā; the camp at <i>Rishi</i> Bharadvāja's āshrama.
13	17	Bharata crosses the Jamunā; he meets the village folk; the meeting with Rāma; (events scheduled for the following day were enacted from now on so that the day lost on September 12 was made up); Bharata's conversation with Rāma and Vashishtha; the arrival of Janaka.
14	18	The brothers meet Janaka; Bharata returns to Ayodhya; the exile in Nandigrāma.
15	19	Jayanta goes in the form of a crow and pecks at Jānaki's foot; Rāma pierces his eye; the trio sets off towards Panchavati; the meeting with Atri; the slaying of Virādhu; a glimpse of Indra; the meeting with Sarabhanga, Sutikshana, Agastya and Jātayu; the arrival at Panchavati; Rāma's teaching.
16	20	Sūrpanakha's ribaldry with Rāma; Lakshmana cuts off her ears and nose; the slaying of Khara and Dūshana and their army; Rāma pursues Maricha as the golden deer; the abduction of Sita; the battle of Rāvana and Jātayu.
17	21	Rāma laments the loss of his beloved; Jātayu's cremation; Shavari's hospitality; Rāma's wandering in search of Jānaki; the meeting with Nārada; Sugriva and Hanumāna become Rāma's allies.
18	22	The killing of Bālī; the rainy season; Lakshmana departs for Kishkindhā in a rage; Hanumāna sets out for Lankā; the meeting with Sampātī.
19	23	Hanumāna flies over to Lankā; his meeting with Jānaki; his battle with the demons; the burning of Lankā; his return to Rāma with Jānaki's jewel.
20	24	Rāma departs to the sea-shore with his army;

<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Lila Description</i>
		Vibishana asks for refuge; the building of the bridge; the worship of Shiva.
21	25	Rama crosses over to Lanka with his army; the description of his army; the camp at <i>Suvela Giri</i> ; Angada's immovable foot.
22	26	The battle at the four gates; Lakshmana and Meghanada fight; Lakshmana is wounded by Meghanada's special weapon; Hanumana rips the mountain for Lakshmana's medicine; Rama's lament; Lakshmana's recovery.
23	27	Kumbhakarna enters battle and is killed; Rama is entangled in Meghanada's snake-rope; Meghanada conducts a sacrifice; Lakshmana slays him.
24	28	The battles with Ravana begin.
25	29	More battles with Ravana and his arrival on the battlefield.
26	30	The killing of Ravana and Rama's victory. Ravana's cremation (<i>Dashaharā</i>).
	October	
27	1	Vibhishana's enthronement. Jānaki's fire-ordeal. The re-union with Rama. Several gods praise Rama.
28	2	Rama and his comrades begin the journey to Ayodhya; the meeting with <i>rishis</i> ; Nishada welcomes the trio.
29	3	The meeting with Bharata.
30	4	The coronation of Rama; the farewell to Sugriva and other monkeys; (the dawn <i>bratī</i>).
31	5	The reciting of praises by Narada, and Sanaka and his brothers; Rama's sermon. (The farewell at the fort.)

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