

## EDITORIAL

**SCOTOPIA**---- A Multidisciplinary Bi-Annual Journal has started its journey in 2015 by an editorial collective based in different disciplines of Hiralal Mazumdar Memorial College for Women, as well as scholars from other colleges and universities. The Editors are committed both to open-access publishing and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and academic integrity. The journal is peer reviewed with a multidisciplinary Editorial Board and Advisory Panel. The founding editorial collective were Dr. Sujata Mukhopadhyay, Dept. of Journalism and Md. Iqbal Sultan, Dept. of Geography, who under the guidance of the Principal of the college, Dr. Soma Ghosh took an all out initiative to publish the journal. The internal members of the Editorial Board of 'SCOTOPIA', Dr. Rupa Sen, Dept. of Political Science , Sri Dibakanta Jha, Dept. of Sanskrit, Dr. Lipika Mallick, Dept. of Mathematics, Dr. Debasree Ghosh Biswas, Dept. of Bengali, Smt. Madhushri Das, Dept. of Botany, Dr. Mohua Seth, Dept. of Physiology joined their hands exclusively to examine the interaction between academics and society. Dr. Sarbani Chowdhury, Prof. and Head, Dept. of English, Kalyani University, Dr. Ramanuj Ganguly, Dept. of Sociology, West Bengal State University, Dr. Saibal Chattopadhyay, Reader, Dept. of Veterinary Biochemistry, West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Science, Kolkata have kindly consented to enrich the journal by providing their valuable advice as experts and reputed scholars in their respective fields.

Founded in 2015 under the guidance of the principal of the College, this multidisciplinary *Journal* publishes original empirical and theoretical studies and analyses in education that constitute significant contributions to the understanding and/or improvement of educational processes and outcomes. The mission of the *Journal* is to serve as the premier peer-reviewed,

interdisciplinary journal to advance theory and practice related to all forms of outreach and engagement related to higher education and communities. 'SCOTOPIA' intends to explore innovative endeavors.

'SCOTOPIA' consists of articles, essays, and commentaries by scholars, practitioners and academicians highlighting and critically examining emerging issues, trends, challenges, and opportunities; and reporting on studies of impact in the areas of public service, outreach, engagement, extension, engaged research, community-based research and community service.

This introspective journal has sought to take a holistic approach. Empirical studies and contributions to the understanding of varied socio-economic and political causes and outcomes, as well as some scientific explorations have found place in the current issue of 'SCOTOPIA': Volume 1 Issue 1 (JANUARY-JUNE,2016). There has been an attempt to focus on various critical and debatable issues which have been looked upon by the scholars of West Bengal and of the different states of India. The Journal thus intends to be a national journal with a unique perception.

The journal also aims to become a forum for discussion of varied issues affecting higher education. The study of college and university-related topics through peer-reviewed articles, essays, reviews and research findings, and by emphasizing systematic inquiry, both quantitative and qualitative will definitely find place on the journal.

The editorial team, under the patronage and guidance of the principal of the College, president of the College governing Body, esteemed university and government nominees and university nominees to the College governing body, other teaching and non-teaching representatives to the

College governing body, and not the least the Chairperson of the local municipality is expected to play an instrumental role in the field of academics.

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PRINCIPAL

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## **VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC PLACES: A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG WOMEN OF BANASTHALI VIDYAPITH IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

Some women in India have made progress and reached the highest positions in politics, sports, business and education. However the larger society remains patriarchal, feudal, traditional and male dominated and looks down upon women. Especially in north India men view women as commodities to be enjoyed and harassed at home as well as in public spaces. It is believed that almost every middle class and lower class woman in India has faced molestation and harassment at public places. Experiences of abusive and vulgar language and actions and indecent touching of sensitive areas of bodies in crowded buses, trains, markets, picture halls, roads, colleges are very common for young women living in north India. However most of these unpleasant experiences get unreported to the authorities and families as young women realize the bitter truth that if they will complain they will be blamed for wearing attractive dresses and makeup or going out all alone at odd hours etc and as a result their freedom to move around freely will be restricted by the family. However these unpleasant experiences become hurdles in the life of young women and create an atmosphere of fear among them. A study was conducted on 62 women students of M Phil studying at Banasthali Vidyapith, a university for women located in rural area of Rajasthan near Jaipur, to find out the reality in 2008.

**Key Words:** *violence, women, public space, harassment.*

### **Introduction**

Most societies in the world have been and are patriarchal and in such societies women have a secondary position compared to men and face many inequalities. These inequalities were present in most ancient and medieval societies and are present even today in most societies although the degrees of inequalities vary from one place to another. The patriarchal world of today can be divided among three major groups on the basis of its treatment of women. In the first category are western, developed countries of Europe and America where women are given equal rights in law and women enjoy almost equal rights in practice although still major household and care responsibilities are shouldered by women. In the second category are countries like India where women are almost equal to men in law but in practice they are subordinate to men and in the third category are countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran where women are not equal to men in law and in practice. However it is quite true that in last hundred years situation of women has improved all over the world although it still needs to improve a lot further especially in the second and the third groups.(Tomasevski,2002:231) Although spread of liberal ideas and advancement in science and technology has ensured better deal for women however inequalities based on gender still pervade every aspect of social life and affect women's chances of survival and development in fundamental ways in countries like India. Although some individual women may outrank individual men but men as a group invariably wield more power and acquire greater prestige than women do. The power determinants range across societies from near equality to male tyranny.(Sridharan, 2000:92)

It is claimed that the position of women during Vedic period was considerably better than post Vedic, medieval and British period. However women did not enjoy equal status with men in any historical period in India. Patriarchy has ensured excessive subordination of women leading to practices like female infanticide, female illiteracy, child marriage, sati, polygamy, *jauhar*, *purdah*, permanent widowhood. However due to social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar and participation of women in the national movement women were given equal status in the constitution of independent India. And some women made progress and reached the highest positions in politics, sports, business and education. However the larger society remains patriarchal, feudal, traditional and male dominated and looks down upon women. Birth of a male child is celebrated but the birth of a female child is often regarded as a disaster and female feticide is common in parts of India.

Common women also face a number of challenges such as illiteracy, neglect, child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, honour killing, eve teasing, molestation, sexual exploitation, rape etc. The data on sex ratio, literacy rate, work participation, gender related development index etc clearly demonstrates the subordinate position of women in India. To illustrate as per census 2011 sex ratio is 940 females per 1000 males. Literacy rate is 75 percent for men and 53.7 percent for women. Work participation rate is 51.7 percent for men and 25.6 percent for women. Amartya Sen rightly says that women face survival inequality, natality inequality, unequal facilities, ownership inequality, unequal sharing of household benefits and chores and domestic violence and physical victimization in India. (Sen, 2005: 224)

### **Violence Against Women**

Experts define violence against women as behavior that is violent, uses physical force or threat and is intimidating, coercive, damaging to women. It includes physical, visual, verbal or sexual acts that may be termed as threat, invasion or assault. It includes acts which are hurting and degrading to her and takes away her ability to control contact with another individual. (Levy, 2008: 4) Studies have shown that violence against women is widespread and common in every country and society. (Levy, 2008: 1) Bishakha Datta calls violence against women a multi headed hydra because women experience violence in private, public and virtual domain; from strangers, familiars and intimates; on streets, in workplaces, homes, war zones and in media. (Datta, 2010: 3) According to feminist theory the main factors that contribute to violence against women include historically male dominated social structures and socialization practices teaching men and women gender specific roles. It focuses on power, gender and the structure of relationships in a male dominated patriarchal culture. It explains that the institutionalization of violence against women in political, legal and economic systems make it invisible and acceptable. (Levy, 2008: 21) Carole Sheffield writes that the right to control the female body is the cornerstone of patriarchy as patriarchy is a system in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. (Levy, 2008: 27) The conviction rates for major violent crimes against women – dowry deaths, rape, molestation and cruelty by husband and relatives are in the range of 18 percent to 33 percent in India. The reason being that the system is aggressively anti- feminist. (Naqvi, 2010: 29) There are very few feminist in Indian courtrooms to use the laws. (Naqvi, 2010: 44) Hence Mathura, Rameeza Bai, Kanchanbala, Bhanwari do not get justice from the system. (Naqvi, 2010: 31-32)

Violence on women at public spaces in India includes horrific crimes like gang rape, (The Times of India, 2010: 5) acid attack, branding and burning as witch ( Saira, 2010: 9), abduction, murder, black mailing, naked parade(The Times of India,2009: 1), thrashing, sexual exploitation (The Hindu, 2009: 4)etc. However only some women go through these horrific crimes but almost every woman in India has faced molestation and harassment at public places. Experiences of getting unwanted calls on mobiles, abusive and vulgar language and actions and indecent touching of sensitive areas of bodies in crowded bus, train, market, picture hall, road, college are very common for young women living in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar and Rajasthan. However most of these unpleasant experiences get unreported to the authorities and families as young women realize the bitter truth that they will be blamed for wearing attractive dresses and makeup or going out all alone at odd hours etc and as a result their freedom to move around freely will be restricted by the family. However these unpleasant experiences become hurdles in the life of young women and create an atmosphere of fear among them.

### **Case Study**

A study was conducted in 2008 at Banasthali Vidyapith, a university for women located in a rural area in Rajasthan, in which 62 M Phil students were involved to understand how much violence young women face in India and how it affects their lives. Questionnaire, interview and observation methods were used to the study 62 young women who were in between 22 to 28 years of age. 58 percent respondents were from general category, 32 percent from other backward class and ten percent from schedule caste and tribes. 89 percent respondents were Hindu, six percent Sikh, three percent Buddhist and two percent Jain. All women were post graduate.

All respondents knew about human rights and their source of information was newspaper, family and teachers. 39 percent respondents did not read newspaper. 27 percent had never discussed women's issues with anyone. They believed that status of women is affected by family and the woman herself and education and good laws are essential for empowerment of women. All felt empowered and believed that men and women are equal as per the constitution of India.

The respondents believed that the main problems before women in India today are: eve teasing, molestation, discrimination, kidnapping and rape. 42 percent respondents had faced violence at public places and 32 percent had resisted it by retaliating themselves and by taking help from family, friends and police. None of the respondents was aware of any law which can help them in case of violence at public places. 44 percent knew some other woman who had faced violence at public places. 82 percent believed that women are themselves responsible for violence against them along with factors like bad social atmosphere, lack of law and order, bad mentality of men, short dresses of women, vulgar magazines, lack of morality, lack of punishment and women projecting themselves as weak.

All feared violence at public places and felt insecure because of it and agreed that it restricts their lives and violates their human rights. All also believed that women face more violence than men. 61 percent believed that in India women face more violence than women in other countries. Only three percent respondents believed that police has a positive attitude towards victims and only five percent believed that family and society has apposite attitude towards the victim.

Interestingly such highly educated women blamed women and their dresses for violence against women. It shows the effect of societal thinking on women themselves. Moreover all women accepted that they were living in constant fear of violence and it was affecting their lives negatively.

## **Conclusion**

Indian society is patriarchal and many men in north India do not believe that women have human rights and are equal to men. They think it is appropriate behavior to harass women and do not hesitate in taking advantage of women if they are sure that they will not be punished for it. Moreover if women dress and behave in a modern way and men think that they are available and looking for attention. Hence the first step is to make men understand that women are also human beings and must be treated with equality and with respect. Women can wear any type of dress and move about anywhere anytime if they need and wish to. It does not entitle men to harass women. Some men even think that women enjoy this harassment. They must be made aware that



women dislike or hate men who harass them. This can be achieved by including gender and human rights education in the curriculum at all levels as well as through wide publicity in mass media.

The second issue is that men who harass women think that they can get away with it. They think that the victim will be too ashamed or scared to report to the police and even if she will report no action will be taken against the aggressor. Hence the need is to strengthen the law and order situation and ensure punishment to those who commit such crime. For this policing and justice system needs to be strengthened and men in police and justice system must be made aware of concepts of human rights and gender equality. Reserving fifty percent posts in police and judiciary can also make them more sensitive towards women.

The third issue is that women have a tendency to blame the victim for instigating violence by wearing certain type of dress and makeup etc. That needs to be taken care of through intensive sensitization through mass media and proper education.

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## **ADVENT OF THE TRANSNATIONAL MIDDLE CLASS INDIANS**

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*The recent discourse on Indian media and popular culture indicate trends towards the tide of 'transnational identities'. In this context one may argue about the 'end of nation-state' given the rise of the transnational linkages and construction of identities which also confront the existing notions of class boundaries. This paper seeks to address the impact of popular culture in the construction of a transnational middle class identity, in an era of globalization of communication and its subsequent impact on the discourse on culture and consumption.*

India which began its journey as a modern democratic nation, supported Nehruvian discourse of state socialism, that laid emphasize on the state-led development, is yet to come out of the dichotomy of social equality vs growth debate. Recently the Indian middle class which has been at times been portrayed as a conscience keeper and perceived as an antidote to any kind of bloody class revolution, given the existence of an uneven socio-economic order, has generated lot of interest in terms of their representation in the existing popular culture.

It was felt that the early harbingers of communication, holding positions in the government, devoted very little time to the official communication machinery, while Gandhi himself had been a great communicator during the freedom movement. Robin Jeffrey states that, Gandhi and his adherents paid scant attention to tapping the potential of exploring films and radio in conveying the message of the nation to its ordinary populace. He argues that,

“innovation in these spheres came primarily in films and from men and women with backgrounds in commerce and courtly entertainment”<sup>1</sup>

This assumes importance as many states had realized the significance of the radio and television, and use of newspaper and films for promoting the objectives of the state had received great attention. The pre 1991 era which also was reminiscent of the Indian state’s control over information and broadcasting was replaced by an increasing marketization of media which ironically seems to have airbrushed majority of Indians, especially the marginalized sections inhabiting India’s countryside. This is a significant shift in the state discourse as, “for the last 150 years, westernized, middle class Indians have learnt to look at the first approach – the one which orients the needs of the culture to the needs of the state – as the very epitome of political maturity, achievement and development”.<sup>2</sup> Hence in other words popular culture has an inbuilt cultural component which seeks to influence the audience and legitimize state actions, in the long run.

The Indian middle class has made inroads into the popular memory through a series of interventions confronting the state apparatus leading to some events being occupying prime space in popular culture. A classic case could be the token activism as displayed in films, wherein their role in public affairs, are projected as symbolic gestures of civic citizenship. Deshpande argues that we have no position to take in the matter when he states that “It is as simple as the Hindi commercial film happens to be; hence our propensity to use it. Anyway the greater and the smaller gods of the Bollywood heavens, like our mythological gods themselves, descended to our earth to tell us what our dharma kartavyas (moral duties) are.”<sup>3</sup>

The Indian middle class, which is accused of being socially and political dormant has registered sporadic presence protesting against issues that affect them which is attributed to the ‘Rang De Basanti-effect’. The Anna Hazare movement and its impact also stressed upon the fact that the middle class could no longer be ignored. This has been vindicated by the impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey, Robin, *The Mahatma didn’t like the movies and why it matters*, Global Media and communication, Sage publications, Vol.2 (2):206-207, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Nandy, Ashis, *Culture, State and the Rediscovery of Indian Politics*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XIX, No.49, P- 2078, 8 December 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Deshpande, GP, *Thou Shall Not Forget Thy Duty*, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol XLIV No. 20, May 16, 2009.

protests and candle light vigils in protest following a brutal gang rape in December 2012, in New Delhi.<sup>4</sup> These developments are matched by the process of localization, responding to the middle class aspirations and the challenges confronting them, in the age of satellite television and 24/7 mode of media system.

### **Conspicuous Consumption**

The revolutionary zeal as displayed in the film 'Rang De Basanti', brought the rising youth power and the fighting spirit to various multiplexes and TV screens, with the tacit approval of the market forces that determines the present consumption pattern, of the Indian middle class. A film which affirmed the rise of an awakened generation, ensured that the message percolated across the nation with suitable taglines that implored the youth to express themselves and adhere to the mantra of consumerism by urging them to hold their heads high while drinking coco-cola in order to celebrate youth, through various brands like LG handsets, Berger paints and use of an exclusive clothing of Provogue inspired by the 'revolution' on celluloid. It is estimated that such consumerism and appropriation of values to invoke revolutionary zeal, civic citizenship incurred an expense of Rs. 10 crores for the publicity for the film, an enormous amount the Indian film history.<sup>5</sup> While it is debatable, if the film offered a conservative outlook in terms of internalization of violence and respond to the menace of corruption, in an age that is marked by the evolution of cosmopolitanism and transnational middle class youth platforms with MTV-inspired youth discourse.

The film certainly seeks to reverse the timeframe and seeks to amalgamate the middle-class ethos with a bourgeois nationalism with a sense of acceptable notion of social activism. It seeks to recontextualise the notion of a 'quintessential Indian nation' in the popular conscious, and berates the political class for its alleged nexus with corruption and nepotism reminiscent of the overwhelming process of the global capitalistic order. However it conveniently seeks to emphasize on the pivotal position by bringing the urbanized middle class at the epicenter in

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<sup>4</sup>Kundu, Kunal Kumar, *India's middle class comes of political age*, January 29, 2013, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/OA29Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/OA29Df01.html), accessed on December 24, 2013

<sup>5</sup> *The 'Rang De Basanti' marketing revolution*, <http://www.indiantelevision.com/release/y2k6/feb/febrel37.htm> , Accessed - 30 October 2013.

negotiating with the crisis confronting our nation and bestows upon them the historic responsibility to ameliorate the nation of its ills. Ironically it obliterates the possibilities of having a broader canvas akin to a rainbow alliance that could give representation to the working class and the marginalized groups of our countryside, while it was termed as a nationalist film highlighting the relevance of a generation that has awakened and seeks to chart out a new course outside its hitherto comfort zone.

### **Reclaiming the Diaspora**

In Indian popular cultures the 'nation as family' clearly refers to the common perception of about the Indian middle class, the only group that is visible in the post 1991, in popular culture in terms of representation or in terms of highlighting their aspirations through the institutions of marriage, state and the new category that has captured prime space in the social and political discourse, ie, the Indian Diaspora.

In this context one may also find that the representation of the Indian diaspora in Mumbai cinema (Hindi films produced in Bollywood) has undergone interesting shifts over the last two decades. The middle class politics to a great extent has influenced the representation of the Indian diaspora and there is a qualitative shift in addressing the issues concerning one's 'homeland' which also marks a clear departure from its traditional observations. The notion of being a deserter in the films of 1970s, bereft of the symbiotic link with the motherland has transformed into a model Indian since the 1990s. The NRI is reclaimed as an achiever whom the fellow-Indians look up to as an object of emulation and this changing scenario also showcases the nonresident Indian as a morally superior, "a better human being who despite living in the individualist and antithetical environment of the capitalist West, remains firmly rooted in Indian traditions, thus also ostensibly facilitating an 'ideal' synthesis of spiritualism and capitalism".<sup>6</sup> The Mumbai film industry has emphasized on the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) since the last two decades and with their linkages to economic, technological and ideological trends including liberalization.

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<sup>6</sup> Christiane Brosius and Nicolas Yazgi, *'Is there no place like home?': Contesting cinematographic constructions of Indian diasporic experiences*, Contributions to Indian Sociology, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore, 41(3), P-358, 2007.

The Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas of the NDA regime tapped into these sentiments and acknowledged by the Indian state. The Diaspora is now a global citizen, straddling between different continents and at the same time reclaimed by the middle class as a role model. The conception of Indian Diaspora and the perception of the Indian state have undergone significant changes since the last two decades.

The Indian state has negotiated with the claims of the Diaspora with normative definition of nationalism to a construction of broader principles that create conditions for citizenship beyond national boundaries. The recent initiative to grant voting rights to Non resident Indians (NRI) is significant point to the issues involved.

This is a qualitative shift from the earlier portrayal of the India Diaspora whose departure from their native land was contested and were persuaded to return, reminiscent of the return of the prodigal son.<sup>7</sup> This discourse has undergone a change in the last two decades, when the notion of global Indians, were reclaimed by the nation (a middle class manoeuvre) targeting successful personalities, especially in the west as someone organically linked to India. Hence in other words identity used to be a value and now it is sentimentality. Late Yash Chopra's films vindicate these notions of nationalizing the global discourse and products, seeking to claim the migrant, who has been proclaimed as a blood brother, and "has therefore ceased to be a symbol of the 'Other' and has become instead the prototype of the new Indian, globalized and modern, but always a nationalist at heart. The fact that he belongs to the nation is constantly underlined through the use of the possessive pronoun before the words 'country', 'India' or 'Hindustan' and, despite going through all types of ordeals, his 'Indianness' is always reaffirmed at the end of the film"<sup>8</sup>.

The Indian Middle Class while inclined to ascribing to a past epoch, has tried to nationalize the global images and signs in the present order. Some of the events across the globe like the project of political reaction in India in wake of the racial tensions in Australia and

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<sup>7</sup> Manoj Kumar's films, *Purb Pashchim* and others deal with alienation and invocation of return to homeland, that symbolised purity and an antidote to westernization and cultural pollution.

<sup>8</sup> Therwath, Ingrid, 'Shining Indians': *Diaspora and Exemplarity in Bollywood*, South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal, 4 | 2010 P-6, <http://samaj.revues.org/3000>, accessed on November 19, 2014.

similar developments had a cascading effect in the national domain. At the same time the media representation projects an alliance, which the Middle Class seeks to build, transcending national boundaries, with the dominant global culture.

### **Class Interests**

Neelam Srivastava highlights the same concern when she states that, “When the film came out, Indian critics dubbed it a ‘class hit’, and a film for the ‘thinking viewer of the multiplexes’ rather than for a mass audience. The Bombay film industry draws a rather patronizing distinction between distinct viewing publics, the ‘classes’ and the ‘masses’ (middle class versus working class). This socioeconomic classification, based on class, caste, geographical location, education and occupation is modeled on a developmentalist idea of the Indian population”.<sup>9</sup>

This leads us to reexamine the vital role played by the middle class as a distinct social group that has shaped and as well as internalized the model of modernist national development, which it seeks to consolidate through the present discourse generated by the popular culture. The advent of liberalization, privatization and globalization has also witnessed the resilience of the Indian middle class in terms of it emerging as an agent and also as also a targeted audience of nationalist discourses of development as well as of specific state policies.

It was only during the widening gulf which persisted in spite of growing representation of the disposed section in the power structure, when politics transformed from an agenda to serve the masses to a lucrative form in pursuit of private gains and monopoly. This was also the phase when it was opined that the middle class elites drifted away from the domain of the the Nehruvian state, and sought some kind of reinvention of India. It was a decisive moment while the conventional mode of understanding has been confined to the inevitable conflict between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ that are the moving forces in ushering in changes in the present modern societies. The drifting away of the middle class is also attributed to the middle class who were the principal architects and supporters embracing the new liberal order and imbibing the norms

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<sup>9</sup> Srivastava, Neelam, *Bollywood as National(ist) Cinema Violence, Patriotism and the National-Popular in Rang De Basanti*, Third Text, Routledge, Vol. 23, Issue 6, November, p.708,2009.

of economic liberalism at the beginning of the 1990s, when attempts were explored for alternative social and political models that assured them of defending the existing order and check the emasculation of the Indian polity and society, in wake of threats emanating from below.<sup>10</sup>

Given the diversity of the middle class, which is not a monolith entity, and is polymorphous, as described by an eminent sociologist Andre Beteille, who states that the middle class orientation to inequality is competitive and not hierarchical in contrast to the old order which was determined by primordial identity - birth and location in the hierarchy. While at the same time he cautions that, “It must not be forgotten that a competitive system generates inequality even where the competition is fair, and in India it is not particularly fair. People use the advantages of family, kinship and caste to push ahead without much consideration for the cost to others or for the rules of the game. An expanding middle class has an ugly face and its members often appear as callous and self-serving to those who are attached to the traditional order in which individuals remained in the social positions assigned to them at birth”.<sup>11</sup>

An India which is at the cusp of a new order, and perceived by many strategists in think-tanks as an emerging power, that seeks to compete with the other powers has also witnessed a calibrated attempt to present a homogenous image of the nation, resulting in periodic denial of the existence of the various groups in the bollywood masala films. This observation stands vindicated in context of the debate on exporting poverty, wherein a foreign film has been made on the lives of people inhabiting India’s slums. A nation where popular culture has been dominated by the idiosyncrasies of the new rich class, the beneficiaries of the liberalization of the economy and by the number of billionaires in the country, urging its populace to emulate their success stories, was confronted by the success of “*Slumdog Millionaire*” a largely British made film, based on an Indian story with Indian crew. The film generated enough controversy wherein nationalist grammar was invoked as it was seen as another attempt of the western world to fossilize the pre colonial image of India and its inhabitants. While the larger issue was of the

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<sup>10</sup>Harriss, John, *The onward march of the new ‘Great Indian middle class’*, The Hindu, 15 August 2007 <http://www.hindu.com/af/india60/stories/2007081550681800.htm>, accessed on November 12, 2013.

<sup>11</sup>Beteille, Andre, *The Indian middle class*, The Hindu, 05 February 2001, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/2001/02/05/stories/05052523.htm>, accessed on November 12, 2013.



western image of the orient, as a journalist remarks, “So what then explains the critical hosannas and the popular appeal of Slumdog across the Western world? Simply put, it is the success of a story set in a clichéd perception of India. This is not just about poverty — it could have been eastern mysticism, hysterical religiosity, crime, conflict or corruption, or even global security threats emanating from this part of the world — all easily grasped by the West, thanks so selective media coverage of the region”.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time popular culture have increasingly endorsed the attempt to invoke an indifference vis a vis the others in its discourse, which scholars like Ashish Nandy attribute it to the shift from pluralism, a process endorsed by the Indian state’s action, retreating from its origin, which was earlier designed and legitimized by a diverse range of cultures. He states that, in the present context, “The new culture of the state has come to depend more and more on the expanding on the expanding pan-Indian, urban, middle-class culture, serving as an emerging mass culture. This mass culture is not the central tendency of the diverse popular cultures of different regions of India but an identifiable, will-bounded culture like that of an American-style melting pot.”<sup>13</sup>

The argument that popular culture seeks to cater to the tastes of the middle class, ever since they emerged as an important constituency of the market for the booming consumer goods, and that it merely seeks to respond to the socio-economic challenges and the cultural crises confronted by them during the post liberalization era, which has also resulted in the privatization of the air waves. The common refrain is that the era of uncompromising consumerism of today is also juxtaposed to the Indian middle classes holding disproportionate space in public policy and discourse in governance, in contradiction to their political engagement.

Leela Fernandes gives an assessment of the prevailing public discourses, wherein the consumption pattern practiced by the middle class and the depiction of their lifestyle serves as a yardstick differentiating themselves from the traditional middle class, whose social mores were determined by the socialism of Nehruvian state and the Gandhian notion of austerity. She defines

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<sup>12</sup>Rajesh, Y P, *Danny, David, Freddie*, The Indian Express, 20 February 2009, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/danny-david-freddie/425322>, accessed on November 12, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Nandy, Ashis, *The Political Culture of the Indian State*, Hasan, Zoya (ed) Politics and the State in India, P-71, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000.

the present scenario as, “This heightened visibility has transformed the new middle class into an object for the projection of political, cultural, and ideological assumptions from a range of actors.”<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand it is vehemently argued that one has to embrace the grammar of globalism to secure space and legitimacy as, “To globalise itself, Hindi cinema perforce also had to be transformed into ‘Bollywood’. Very brief news items in editions of Indians newspapers in late July this year have conveyed the two-fold news that the veteran actors, Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri, have expressed umbrage at this term, and that Bollywood has now been accepted by Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, following the example of the Oxford English Dictionary, as a word in the English language. Once the West has conferred recognition on a social or cultural phenomenon, it then gives it a name: what is peripheral or transient becomes pucca.”<sup>15</sup>

Commentators have termed this as a ‘Mental Exit’ which tantamount to rejecting the institution of state whilst inhabiting within its territorial confines. This is manifested through various actions ranging from imploring the state and at times seeking to subvert the system to evade responsibilities and duties and attempt to legitimize their imperviousness towards the legal institutions. Hence the nation exists in fragments in popular culture and the city is a manifestation of numerous gated communities with their own management of their own security, access to basic resources and means of entertainment. The home insulates them from the general vagaries of life and their ability to snap the chord with the nation, gets replicated across the nation.<sup>16</sup>

This is evident in the depiction of an insular world as highlighted in some of the popular films, which also proclaim Indian (Hindi) films responding to new realities and catering to the ‘lived experience’ of the middle class. The film *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* which has been projected as a new-age *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, another film, which caught the attention of the middle class, in terms of deriving consent for an opulent consumption and unapologetic

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<sup>14</sup> Fernandes, Leela, *India’s New Middle Class*, University of Minnesota Press, P-30, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Lal, Vinay and Rajan, Gita, *Ethnographies of the Popular and the Public Sphere in India*, South Asian Popular Culture, Routledge, Vol. 5, No. 2, P-88, October 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Deb, Sandipan, *The Exit of the Middle Class*, 11 July 2013, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/vslJbi0RTC3Z2WNlddaLL/The-Exit-of-the-Middle-Class.html>

demeanor towards ostentatious celebration. While the film deals with individual ambitions, alienation from native land and dislocation, what contrasts it from others is the opulent celebrations and indulgence of capital and consumption, portrayed with a modicum of ordinariness. The consumption pattern is seen as an innate in the social settings, while emphasizing on human emotions and celebration of life.<sup>17</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The notion of Indianness is primarily derived from two developments; viz a shared sense of history which includes a belief in broad civilizational unity and the consensus evolved in the Constituent Assembly debates on citizenship and cultural pluralism. The framers of the Constitution drew up the guidelines which paved the way for recognition of individual rights and the recognition of their membership of groups and communities through process of accommodation and integration. M.N.Srinivas observed that, “Consumerism is an important characteristic of the middle classes and it is spreading to other sections of society. The urge to become part of the middle class is now widespread, cutting across religion, language and caste....sections of castes want very much to become part of the middle class and once it happens, education, professions and lifestyle, become indicators of status putting caste in the background”.<sup>18</sup>

So one may argue that the determination to usher in India into the globalised economy from a ‘license Raj’ is also reflected in the Bollywood too, which has embarked on a journey to globalize itself. While the present popular culture is confronted by alternative media system, which seeks to question the middle class discourse in nationalizing the global. The Middle Class representation seeks to target the state through popular culture for appropriate allocation of resources and also negotiate with the global mediascape in seeking a fair share of their representation.

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<sup>17</sup> Pal, Deepanjana, *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani is a new-age Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, 01 June 2013, <http://www.firstpost.com/bollywood/movie-review-yeh-jawaani-hai-deewani-is-a-new-age-hum-aapke-hain-kaun-830767.html>

<sup>18</sup> Srinivas, M.N., “An Obituary on Caste as a system”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 February 2003, [www.epw.org.in](http://www.epw.org.in).

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## **CAN LBA UNTANGLE THE TANGLED?**

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An unfinished agenda of Partition was punctuated with the ratification of land Boundary Agreement (LBA) on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015, signed between Indian Prime minister Shri Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Premier Sheik Hasina on behalf of their respective nations.

The agreement that stood a limbo for years is expected to settle, India's porous border on eastern front, an unresolved issue, lingering for over four decades, now promise to change the political and economic landscape of South Asia. India's foreign policy demands that she strengthens her neighbors on the conviction that until neighborhood develops, the region shall continue lagging, making it vulnerable to inimical forces. Therefore, the hour is ripe to boost up one another, essential to build a cohesive and integrated regional strength to command its interests in the belt.

The agreement is a landmark in the history of political conundrums, for the affected on either sides of the fragile boundary. It initiated a settlement for India's 4,096Km long land border with Bangladesh and conferment of citizenship rights on enclave residents and also settle the maritime boundary with the nation. As a part of 'Act East' policy the Indian prime minister seeks to strengthen SAARC, ASEAN and other regional blocs in the neighborhood through bilateral trade relations, cultural exchanges and extending political friendship. Anchored to false ego, bickering over trifle issues and mindless insinuation peppered with innuendos not only kept good relations between nations at bay but weakened it economically too.

The undefined enclaves located in India and Bangladesh purported series of socio-economic and political problems that inundated normal bilateral relation between the two nations for years.

The Chits or Enclaves, had remained a contentious issue, between India and Bangladesh, for nearly 41 years. These were initially part of former Coochbehar Kingdom which ceded pockets of territory to Mughals and British. Later when Coochbehar (a princely state) was

acceded to India, a part of which was in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) became part of India except for a technicality, of them lying in another country.

Folklore, says that enclaves resulted from chess game played between Maharaja of Coochbehar and Nawab of Rangpur, who used villages as wagers and wrote names of villages on a small piece of paper or Chit and exchanged them when they lost or won the game. That is how these strips of land became Chits or paper palaces, according to locals. The residents are stateless and lack access to public service of any kind.

The India-Bangladesh accord of 1974, determined the length of land border to a whopping 3286Km, upon which no defense structure could be constructed within 150yards of line zero. In 1986 the border fencing began, after the Assam accord signed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1985 and the deadline was pitted to March 2012. This accord aimed at sealing the border to prevent infiltration from Bangladesh to India and smuggling in both directions. Between 1986 and 2010 more than 1,60,000 Bangladeshis were identified in Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram and Bihar who immigrated secretly to India. Five Indian states share border with Bangladesh: Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, naturally the effect spilled and spread in the terrain affecting the lives of many. Around 90,000 Indians were displaced due to fencing on the Indo Bangladesh border. A stretch of 95 Km registers as the length of border, that Karimganj district shares with Bangladesh, with 269(approx) families from karimganj district live beyond the border. The National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007 were not applicable for fencing out Indians, even though Article 300A notified that none shall be deprived of his property, save by law. Actually by fencing 150 yards India disowned around 149 villages with a population of about 100,000. At places the fence has divided the homesteads, fish ponds and village markets rendering a deplorable situation, for many living there.

Documents reveal that the Assam Government made few attempts to address the issue. In 1989 the state Government, initiated to rehabilitate the fencing affected inhabitants and asked officers to submit a survey report, done on this line later.

In 1994 the Guwahati High court ordered the authorities to identify the Indian citizens who had been affected by the creation of no-mans land. But here too the Government did little to

take required measures and the people continued to live a life of non entity. Caught in the quagmire, people made illegal movements to and from their Chits, in search of benefits found elsewhere. Moreover a communal overtone prevailing in the area whips up an ambience of animosity that aggravates challenges, in their lives. During fencing every single Hindu village on the west Bengal border suo moto shifted to this side (India) because they wished to avert problems on the other side(Bangladesh).But Muslim villages demanded compensation for moving away from India to Bangladesh, though average Muslims wished to house themselves in areas densely inhabited by their community. What ever is the price, the moot point is villages should be resettled immediately after fencing to stop reckless movements across the porous border. One can ill afford to forget the recent macabre between indigenous Bodos and Muslim migrants from Bangladesh in 2012.The illegal flow of migrants have changed the demography of north east beyond imagination. But the Assam Government did little to check the constant influx, vying for votes.

Adjacent to Mekhliganj in West Bengal(India) lies one of 51 Bangladesh enclaves. Similarly some areas of our country remain under Bangladesh, because of unresolved disputes. Such enclave areas were inhabited, by unfortunate people caught in the quagmire and forced to remain hostage to unfavorable and inhuman conditions, for no fault of their own. They were in prisons with no basic facilities or administrative assistance. Items like salt, sugar, cumin or baby food powder were expensive in Bangladesh, hence they often risked to trespass, to purchase the said commodities from Indian enclaves. This exercise often landed them to deep trouble. They were chased as thieves, branded as criminals and trespassers. Enclaves were inhabited by people but utter lawlessness that prevailed in the strips made life absolutely difficult. Criminals, mostly Indians used these enclaves for their illegal activities. Rampant atrocities of the strong, often claimed lives of men and women and there was no law to redress the woes of the victims. Complaints to police authorities were rare because that could land them to even greater problems. Criminals abound the land, terrorizing the innocent. They rob the people in the enclaves of cattle, crops and what ever they lay their hands on.

A plot under Mashaldanga enclave was taken on lease for few months by a local quack in lieu of Rupees 15000,which he later used for cultivating poppy. This upset the owner, yet he had no option but to wait for the lease period to be over. The Bakalichara enclave had a similar story

to tell. Rich Indians who have a clout and living in the vicinity often take lands inside enclaves on lease, to suit their purpose, while owners dare not refute the offer lest they lose their shelter and security. Their plight doesn't end here. Many daily wagers in such enclaves were often forced to part with the major share of their income as tax. Any refusal could lead them to unfavorable consequences, they generally prefer to avoid.

Land Boundary Agreement offers a package of good will to be exchanged between the two countries. The residents of these no mans land, wish to smell the whiff of better days, to follow soon. With citizenship rights conferred to them, fresh air is expected to breeze into their nearly non-existent lives. The agreement has promised to ensure free movement of enclave people; the residents would be permitted to exchange enclaves, allowed to return home; the border would be re-demarcated, and measures be undertaken to check violation of border line by Indian civilians and BSF; Bengali speaking Indian nationals would no longer be pushed to Bangladesh. All kinds of illicit trade would cease; A date with better future has been fixed, but what transpires and reaches the trapped people of such enclaves, is yet to be seen.

Amid jubilations and celebrations, a pall of gloom befell Dohogram and Angaripota corridor whose status, remained unchanged. These two areas are actually Bangladeshi enclaves located in India. To connect these with mainland of Bangladesh an accord was signed and Teen Bigha Corridor was evolved. This patch of Indian land over 'Teen Bigha' corridor was established for people from both sides to move; the villagers of Angrapota and Dohogram use the corridor frequently to travel to and from Bangladesh, taking advantage of the lack of administrative maneuver; the reason it gradually transformed into a haven of smugglers. Besides, people of Kuchlibari enclave feels (now in Coochbehar district) alienated and left out, after the agreement and redefinition of the border.

Report, of Zealots, launching protest movements, spark violence sporadically at Dinhat, Moshaldanga etc demanding the ouster of Bangladeshi nationals from Indian soil. In Teen Bigha Corridor 10km away from Mekhliganj, a Muslim resident of Bhaskata an Indian enclave in Bangladesh is also upbeat about gaining Bangladeshi nationality. He claims to own 40 Bighas of land there and refuses to budge an inch, in exchange to any offer made to him. Regarding few Hindu families in his village he said he was unsure of their stance. The transfer of enclaves for Mirgipur residents, however meant freedom from fraudulently obtaining Indian identity proof.



The decision of exchange of enclaves between the two nations, have aroused doubt, of losing territory on both sides. But the point is, even if, we loose enclaves, we shall do so, over which, we neither have access nor govern or enjoy right to use it in any way, without the prior permission of Bangladesh. The Indian enclaves located in Bangladesh, were never in our agenda of development. However, the proposed transfer, requires, efficient administration and consideration for welfare of those residing the no mans land. It is assumed, that both the countries would absorb enclaves, inside its land and confer citizenship right gradually, according to law.

Many residents of such enclaves, possess voter ID cards and NREGA cards but no jobs. It is difficult to admit children to schools or get health aids in Indian enclaves because of Bangladesh nationality; the reason they need to buy lands outside their enclaves and register them in India. At times pregnant mothers fake names of their husband(give names of acquaintances living in Indian land) to get admitted to hospitals in India. The children hold birth certificates with names of fake fathers scribbled. The scenario is same for the children who aspire for education on the other side of their village. Added to it villagers in these enclaves need to travel to the gate bordering the mainland and enclave to receive visitors from other side of the land, which is not always plausible.

The river Icchamati divides India and Bangladesh with an imaginary border in the middle of the water. This necessitates guard on the water basin too. But unfortunately the requisite infrastructure to secure the regions could not be provided adequately, easing the infiltration of migrants.

Moreover, the banks on the Indian border is dotted with brick kilns stretching from Bashirhat to Hingalganj the real hub of illegal immigration from Bangladesh.80% of workers in these kilns are Bangladeshi nationals, who arrive with families on their job destination, only to chance and disappear into the mainland of our country; once able to mingle in the crowd it is arduous to trace and file them back. A host of rickshaw pullers in Kolkata, Malda, Noida in Delhi comprise of these trespassers.

Border Security Forces, have now taken measures to build deep ditches to check rampant smuggling of cattle, livestock other necessities and criminal activities across Indo-Bangladesh

border. The border guarding force, over last five months has plugged some of the most vulnerable patches of this 4,096 Km border by not only increasing troop strength but also providing them with more weapons and fast attack motorboats to patrol river areas. Border security officers say it is difficult to improve relations and situation on the border, as the people refuse to cooperate. Any measures undertaken to check smuggling or immigration is meted out by pelting stones at BSF officers.

Close to Bakalichara enclave, the Government is carrying out a survey on 100 bigha of vested land where residents from Indian enclaves who cross over from Bangladesh is proposed to be settled. A good number of people now seek to cross over to India from enclaves located in Bangladesh finding no future back home. Will the exchange process be smooth as it promises to be? With property Rights still to be settled, wouldn't the hope of a better life remain elusive? Can we call off the possibilities of a communal frenzy while the process of resettlement begins? But primarily the forces on the border post would have to maintain the inviolability and integrity of the zero line boundaries, following the parameters of their respective legal systems to affirm trust and confidence between the two nations.

As a measure of restoring connectivity Sheik Hasina, Narendra Modi and CM of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee flagged off buses from Dhaka to Guwahati and Agartala. It is believed that transit through Bangladesh will help India, improve relation with north east while Bangladesh gains access through India to market in Bhutan and Nepal. India seeks to bus its way linking Dhaka with Meghalaya and Assam, while Bangladesh has approved a five year extension of water transit protocol. The proposed motor vehicle agreement between Bangladesh, Bhutan India and Nepal might be the maiden step for four countries to get onto ASEAN style of cooperation in lieu of the SAARC ones.

Bangladesh has been importing 500MW from India and transmission lines are set up to import additional 600MW by 2017. Indo-Bangla joint collaboration of Rampal power plant is proceeding fast while Adani group plans to install 1600MW coal power plant and Reliance plan to set up an LNG fuelled 3000MW power plants signal growing private sector involvement.

Besides, the Ambanis aim to invest in power plant that shall reduce scarcity in energy in future. In return Bangladesh shall raise two Special Economic Zone for Indian industry. If this

happens it will be the first time a neighboring country will have a designated economic zone just for Indian companies. Signing for India specific SEZ would encourage Indian investment and give countries a way to address the yawning trade deficit. With a host of promising packages on the anvil Bangladesh has possibility of becoming a bridge to South East Asia, while moribund economies of India's eastern and north eastern states can be renewed. Besides Indian cargo ships will now, be able to unload their cargoes at Chittagong and Mongola ports which were so long denied by Bangladesh Government. It is expected that such vistas of opportunities would not only speed up movement of goods and people but also make it cheaper. The construction of Akhura-Agartala rail linkage is underway, while several other rail links are under consideration. Besides new ports of calls have been added in Bangladesh Inland water transport and Transit agreement and some more additional ports along with coastal shipping agreement are under consideration. Also trade between north east and rest of world could get a boost. All that India, now need to do is tow lines of genuine friendship with Bangladesh.

That LBA might boost Indo-Bangla ties but challenges to enhanced transport links are formidable and if not maneuvered diplomatically might, generate problems more than gains. Regarding possibilities and challenges some experts, hold that political insensitiveness, bureaucratic inertia, fossilized mindset and a nonchalant attitude to issues have hobbled improvement of bilateral relationship. It is urgent that inertia of development that took off, continue unabated, no matter who comes to power. History unfolds that in the past, before 2010, Awami League leaders rejected India's intention of help in many projects and when Bhutan wanted to export power to Bangladesh, India refused to play ball. Such bitterness should be buried for good unleashing a fresh start.

Land Boundary Agreement is definitely a positive move to build strong ties with Bangladesh but numerous problems, adhering to it should be addressed to ensure a sustainable development between the nations. It would be folly to refuse to acknowledge burning issues like arresting illegal immigration from Bangladesh and random cattle smuggling through Assam. Prof Anindya jyoti Majumdar (JU) opinioned, that it is essential to build favorable constituencies on both sides. Seamless connectivity would be of no use until subsidiary issues addressed. Just people to people ties would not enhance any change in official policies and attitudes. It would

further be dangerous if State heads of any of the two nations, seek to play their own power game independently, ignoring the bait of the Indian foreign policy.

The most sticky issue between India and Bangladesh is the sharing water of river Teesta on 50:50 basis is yet to be resolved. According to Teesta Barrage irrigation scheme Bangladesh needs at least 4500 cusecs of water for 60,500 hectares of crop land in the northern strip of the country. But not more than 500 cusecs reach them. If this implies that India has shut the gates at Gajoldoba Barrage to check the flow of Teesta water, Bangladesh too have constructed a dam over Atrayee a tributary of Teesta . The export of Hilsa cultivated in River Padma is also arrested by Bangladesh depriving Indians, from the delicacy of the fish. Sharing of Ganga water has always remained a bone of contention between the two nations(India and Bangladesh).Conflict emerged with the construction of the Farraka Barrage to divert water from Ganga to Hoogly in India. This was done to provide steady supply of water to Bhagirathi and Hoogly in India during lean period, but unfortunately Bangladesh suffered due to the decision. Bangladesh was forced to make excessive use of ground water, have already led to depletion of the water table, by about two feet in northern region. In most areas farmers ought to dig at least ten feet before installing pumps. Bangladesh is miffed at the reduced flow of water in their land, responsible for causing damage to their crops ,industry and ecology due to the barrage. Thus it can well be assumed that, until the impasse of water shortage is resolved the operation and safety of the first nuclear power plant built upon Padma River is sure to be jeopardized. Besides, Livelihood of about nine million who depend upon the river water would continue to be at stake, forcing them opt for alternate jobs.

The proposed Tipaimukh hydro electric dam in Manipur on the Barak river, whose water Bangladesh shares, is yet another reason that the country is left bickering, governed by suspicion and ambiguity against India, even if the later assures of her sincerity to promises made.

The Teesta catchment area is more in India than what is in Bangladesh. Above all the total amount of water resources in West Bengal is not plenty enough to show liberalism on the issue. Still if New Delhi concedes, North Bengal would suffer and the Teesta Barrage project would be impaired. No matter how much positivism India displays, is it rational to benefit others at the behest of ones own interest. Water is crucial for Bangladesh and perhaps India should initiate in resolving it on humanitarian ground but national interests and foreign policies never

ride on empathy. The Indian premier Modi, may be temporarily successful in convincing Bangladesh of its benefit in pairing and cooperating with India. His overtures and loads of economic and political packages showered upon Hasina Government might encourage Pakistan to extend their hand of cooperation towards India, in her endeavor to cluster the south Asian nations to ensure an integrated regional development.

Amid a series of issues waiting to be addressed by Bangladesh government, they have recently embarked upon the mission to crack down upon growing militancy in the land. The terrorist outfits like Jamat e Islami still engineer communal frenzy, claiming lives of innocent at their whims proves failure of the Government to check its growing prowess. The fundamentalists are at a prowl against the liberals living in Bangladesh. The recent murder of Bangladeshi nationals for expressing their animus against Islamic fundamentalism has been targeted not only condemned by India and the world but also pitted ignominy.

Problems are complex and too many to handle them with one go riding on LBA. Step to reconfigure the relationship from one of distrust to mutually beneficial cooperation will help foster a better future for both India and Bangladesh. But striking out a political Map with well defined lines of demarcation, backed by required legislation is primordial. Above all genuine intention to forge a relationship of peace and harmony must be evident on both fronts to make matters viable. Decades elapsed, bickering over issues, that found no concrete solution. The LBA certainly, appears to flick hope to those awaiting salvation from the fuzzy zone.

It is high time, we strike a diplomatic and sustainable partnership with Bangladesh, expand the vistas of cooperation by setting itself a viable framework of sub regional cooperation to ensure real growth in the region. Bangladesh is no longer a dependent nation yet she needs financial aids to augment her growth. India has already promised an aid of \$1USmillion for its development projects. They are in urgent need of technology to augment their export capacities too. She is frantically trying to expand her market in the neighborhood, increase her investment credentials and mitigate challenges in cooperation with WTO. It is expected that a slowly expanding growth of symbiotic interdependence will eventually emerge interlocking the growing cooperation between the two nations. A settlement long over due, perhaps sought salvation through the accord signed off recently, with high hopes on the anvil, but what, actually transpires

in future is yet to be seen. Beset with an array of problems, both India and Bangladesh ; must seek respite and untangle the tangled, diligently and diplomatically.

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## রবীন্দ্র কবিতায় পুরাণের প্রয়োগ ও বিনির্মাণ

### ড. দেবগ্রী ঘোষ বিশ্বাস

সহ অধ্যাপিকা, বাংলা বিভাগ হীরালাল মজুমদার মেমোরিয়াল কলেজ ফর উইমেন  
দক্ষিণেশ্বর, কোলকাতা

রবীন্দ্রসাহিত্যে বেদ, উপনিষদ, ও পৌরাণিক সাহিত্যের প্রভাব অপরিমিত। মূলত সংস্কৃত ধারার উপাদান তাঁর ভাবনাকে অনেকাংশে পরিপুষ্ট করেছে। পৌরাণিক অনুসংগকে মননরিদ্ধ ভঙ্গিতে, নিজ সৃষ্টিতে প্রয়োগ করেছেন। চরিত্র ও ঘটনার বিনির্মাণ করেছেন কিছু কিছু ক্ষেত্রে, প্রাচীন সাহিত্য, নাটক, কাব্যনাট্য ও কাব্য-কবিতায় পুরাণ চর্চাকে প্রসারিত করেছেন।

প্রাচীন বা পুরাকাল থেকে লোকমুখে ব্যক্ত হয়ে আসা কাহিনী হল পুরাণ। ইতিহাস ও পুরাণ অঙ্গাঙ্গিক সম্পর্ক যুক্ত। পুরাণের রচনাকাল নির্ণয় করা অত্যন্ত দুর্কর কাজ। প্রচলিত মত, বেদ রচনার আগেই পুরাণ রচিত হয়েছিল। রামায়ণ-মহাভারতের কাহিনীতে পুরাণের উল্লেখ আছে, সমালোচক winternitz এর মতে মহাভারত লেখার অনেক আগেই পুরাণের সংকলন হয়েছিল। কারণ কৌটিল্য তাঁর অর্থশাস্ত্রে পুরাণ থেকে উদ্ধৃতি দিয়েছেন। পুরাণের ইংরেজী হিসাবে মিথ (mith) শব্দটিকে ব্যবহার করা হয়। যদিও মিথ ও পুরাণের মধ্যে কিছু পার্থক্য আছে। রামায়ণ – মহাভারতের পৌরাণিক অভিধাটি সম্প্রসারিত হয়েছে সাহিত্যক্ষেত্রে। রামায়ণের উৎপত্তি হয়েছে ত্রেতা যুগে আর মহাভারতের দ্বাপরে। মহাভারতের কৃষ্ণ ও রামায়ণের শ্রীরাম উভয়েই বিষ্ণুর অবতার রূপে চিত্রিত। মহাভারতের কাহিনীতে, রামায়ণের প্রক্ষেপ লক্ষ্যনীয় কিন্তু রামায়ণে তা নেই। মহাভারতের বাচনভঙ্গিমা, কাহিনীবিন্যাস, উপাদান বিশ্লেষণ করে বলা যায় – মহাভারতে কূটনীতি, ধর্মনীতি, যুদ্ধনীতি, দর্শন, রাজনীতি প্রভৃতি বিভিন্ন জটিল বিষয়ের উপস্থাপনা প্রমাণ করে মহাভারত পরের রচনা। কারণ রামায়ণে সমাজ-জীবন-জীবিকা-স্বার্থ নেই, বরং উল্টো চিএ প্রতিভাত হয়।

রবীন্দ্রনাথ পৌরাণিক সাহিত্যের প্রতি গভীর শ্রদ্ধাশীল ও অনুরাগী ছিলেন। বিশেষত রামায়ণের প্রতি। রবীন্দ্র মতে রামায়ণ রূপক কাহিনী মাত্র। সমাজবিদ্যা, নীতিশাস্ত্র, দর্শন, সবই এতে নিহিত। রাবণ= ঈশ্বর, রাম=রমনীয়তা, লক্ষ্মণ= সৌন্দর্য ও সম্পদ, সীতা=রেখা। অর্থাৎ রাম-লক্ষ্মণ-সীতা কৃষিবিদ্যার সঙ্গে সংযুক্ত। কাজের সঙ্গে শস্যশ্যামলা ভূমির ধারণা। তাই রামচন্দ্র 'নবদূর্বাদলশ্যাম'। রাম ও রাবণের যুদ্ধ আসলে কৃষি সভ্যতার সঙ্গে ধনতান্ত্রিক সভ্যতার বিরোধ। রামায়ণের কাহিনী তিনি 'প্রাচীন সাহিত্য', 'পঞ্চভূত' 'বাল্মিকী প্রতিভা' 'চিগ্রাঙ্গদা' 'কর্ণকুন্তীসংবাদ' এ ব্যবহার করেছেন। কিছু কিছু কবিতা বিশেষত 'ব্রাহ্মণ', 'পতিতা', 'অহল্যা' তেও উপাদান স্বরূপ গ্রহণ করেছেন। আক্ষরিক অর্থে অনুসরণ বা অনুকরণ বলা যাবে না। কারণ রামায়ণের কাহিনী সূত্রে নিয়েছেন মাত্র। তার পর আপন মনের জারক রসে জারিত করে তার বিনির্মাণ করেছেন।

'ব্রাহ্মণ' কবিতার রচনাকাল ১৩০১ বঙ্গাব্দ। সাধনা পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত হয়। উপনিষদের চতুর্থ অধ্যায়ে চতুর্থ খন্ড থেকে সত্যকাম জবালার কাহিনী নবম খন্ড পর্যন্ত বিস্তৃত। কাহিনীটি এই রকম- জবালা মহর্ষি সত্যকামের মাতা। যৌবনে তিনি বহুচারিণী ছিলেন, সেই সময় তাঁর গর্ভে সত্যকামের জন্ম। তিনি বিদ্যার্থীরূপে মহর্ষি গৌতমের নিকট উপস্থিত হলে তাঁর গোত্র জানতে চান। কিন্তু সত্যকাম মাতার কাছে নিজ গোত্র সম্পর্কে জানতে পারেন নি এবং জানতে না পারার কারণ ও মহর্ষিকে জানান। ঋষি গৌতম সত্যকামের এই স্পষ্টবাদিতায় তুষ্ট হয়ে তাঁকে শিষ্য রূপে গ্রহণ করেন। তিনি বলেন 'তুমি সত্যব্রষ্ট হও নি, ব্রাহ্মণ ভিন্ন কারও পক্ষে এইরূপ সত্যভাষণ সম্ভব নয়'।- (পৌরাণিক অভিধান। পৃষ্ঠা-১৭৮)

পুরাণ অনুযায়ী ঋষি গৌতম সত্যকামকে চারশত কৃশ ও দুর্বল গোরু দিয়ে বলেছিলেন, তুমি এদের নিয়ে যাও। সত্যকাম বিদায়কালে বলেন- সহস্রপূর্ণ না হলে তিনি ফিরে আসবেন না। এই কাহিনীর সবটুকু রবীন্দ্রনাথ গ্রহণ করলেন না। সত্যকামের সততায় মুগ্ধ হয়ে গৌতম ব্রাহ্মণজ্ঞানে তাঁকে শিষ্য হিসাবে গ্রহণ করেছেন, এখানেই কবিতার সমাপ্তি। এই পুরাণ কাহিনীর বিনির্মাণ ঘটিয়েছেন কবি। গৌতম ব্রাহ্মণ ছাড়া কাউকে শিষ্যে গ্রহণ করেন না, এ কথা সত্যকাম জানতেন তাই ঋষির কাছে আসার আগে মাতার কাছে নিজের গোত্র জানতে চেয়েছিলেন। অথচ কবিতায় দেখা যায়, গৌতমের কাছে নির্দেশিত হয়েই তাঁর গোত্র জানতে চাইছেন। এই ঘটনায় বালক



সত্যকামের সারল্য, নিষ্পাপ মনের সুকুমারতা প্রকাশ পাচ্ছে। কিন্তু মূল কাহিনীতে এই সরলতা ছিল না। কবি সচেতন ভাবেই সত্যকামকে বিনির্মান করেছেন তা স্পষ্ট। মাতা জবালার কাছে সত্যকামের তিনটি প্রশ্ন ছিল-

'\_\_\_কহো গো জননী, মোর পিতার কি নাম

কী বংশে জনম

মাতা কি গোত্র আমার?'

তিনটি প্রশ্ন পরস্পর সংশ্লিষ্ট---১। পিতার নাম ২। বংশ পরিচয় ৩। কি গোত্র। উত্তরে জবালা দ্বিধান্বিত হয়ে শুধু নত মুখে স্পষ্টভাষায় জানালেন---

" যৌবনে দারিদ্র দুঃখে

বহু পরিচর্যা করি পেয়েছি

তোর,

জন্মেছিস ভর্তৃহীনা জবালার

ক্রেড়ে

গোত্র তব নাহি জানি

তাত"!

জবালা স্বভাব দোষে নয়, দারিদ্রের কারণে বাধ্য হয়েছিলেন বহুজনের পরিচর্যা করতে। এই তথ্য জবালার 'বহু পরিচর্যা'র কলঙ্কের গুরুভার মুহূর্তেই অনেকটা লঘু করে দেয়। নারীত্ব ও মাতৃত্বের পরিচয়ে সে এক দৃঢ়চেতা পৌরাণিক নারী। সত্যকাম চরিত্রাঙ্কনে রবীন্দ্রনাথ পুরানাপ্রিত রসের অনুগমন করেছেন। তাঁর চরিত্রায়নের এক বিশিষ্ট পদ্ধতি ও এখানে রূপায়িত। অধর্ম বা অন্যায় যে রূপেই আসুক না কেন রবীন্দ্র সৃষ্ট চরিত্ররা অসম্ভব দৃঢ় ও প্রতিবাদী, এরা গোত্রহীন পিতৃ পরিচয়হীন। যেমন অভিজিত বা গোরা। লক্ষ্যনীয়, কেউ তাদের প্রকৃত জন্মরহস্য জানার পর আত্মগ্লানিতে বা অত্মযন্ত্রনায় দীর্ন হয় নি বরং অভিষ্ট লক্ষ্যের দিকে নিঃশঙ্ক পদক্ষেপে অগ্রসর হয়েছে।

তাই সত্যকামেরও মনস্কাম পূর্ণতার ইঙ্গিত দিয়ে কবিতাটি শেষ করেছেন। পৌরনিক অনুসঙ্গের বিনির্মান করেছেন ঊনবিংশ শতকের গভীর মনীষায়।

‘পতিতা’ কবিতাটির কাহিনী বস্তু রবীন্দ্রনাথ গ্রহন করেছিলেন মহাভারত মহাকাব্য থেকে। বন পর্বের ১১১সংখ্যক অধ্যায়ে ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ মুনির কাহিনী আছে। আবার রামায়ণেও রাজা দশরথের পুত্র কামনায় যজ্ঞের প্রসঙ্গে ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ মুনির কাহিনী বর্ণিত হয়েছে। কাশ্যব তনয় বিভান্দক মুনির পু ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ। একদা অঙ্গরাজ লোমপাদ রাজ্যকে ভয়ঙ্কর অনাবৃষ্টির হাত থেকে রক্ষা করতে মন্ত্রীর পরামর্শে তপস্যারত ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ মুনিকে রাজ্যে আনতে বারবণিতাদের পাঠান। মুনি বনবাসী ও বেদ পাঠরত। মনুষ্যসমাজ সম্পর্কে অনভিজ্ঞ। তাঁকে প্রলুব্ধ করে নগরে নিয়ে আসেন। দেবরাজ ইন্দ্রের নির্দেশে অঙ্গরাজ্যে বৃষ্টি শুরু হয় এবং রাজা নিজ কন্যা শান্তার সঙ্গে মুনির বিবাহ দেন। তাঁরা এই রাজ্যে বসবাস করতে থাকেন। মহাভারতে যেমন একাধিক বারবণিতার উল্লেখ আছে, রামায়ণে এক বৃদ্ধা বণিতার একাকি কন্যার কথা আছে। মূল কাহিনী থেকে রবীন্দ্রনাথ তাঁর ‘পতিতা’ কবিতায় অনেক বণিতার মধ্যে এক জন কে বেছে নিয়েছেন, যে ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ মুনিকে ছলনা করতে গিয়ে তাঁর পবিত্র, নিষ্পাপ দৃষ্টিতে নবজন্ম লাভ করেছে। মুনি জীবনে কোন নারী দেখেন নি। স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই মুক্ত বিজ্ঞানে তিনি গণিকার মুখে দৃষ্টি নিবদ্ধ করলে, গণিকাও জীবনে প্রথমবার লুক্কতামুক্ত নিষ্কলুষ দৃষ্টির সামনে পড়ে বিহ্বল হয়ে পড়ে—

“কহিলা কুমার চাহি মোর মুখে

কোন দেব আজ আনিলে দিবা—

তোমার পরশ অমৃতরস

তোমার নয়নে দিব্য বিভা”।

এই কবিতারটির বাখ্যা কবি নিজেই করেছেন---“রমনী পুষ্পতুল্য তাহাকে ভোগ বা পূজায় তুল্যভাবে নিয়োগ করা যাইতে পারে, তাহাতে কদম্বতা বা পবিত্রতা প্রকাশ পায়, তাহা ফুল বা রমনীকে স্পর্শ করে না—ফুল বা রমনী চির পবিত্র চির অনাবিল—তাহাতে ফুলের বা রমনীর কোন

ইচ্ছাই মানা হয় না বলিয়া সে ভোগে বা পূজায় নিয়জিত হয় এবং তাহাতে নিয়োগ কর্তার –ই মনের কদর্যতা এবং পবিত্রতা প্রকাশ পায় মাত্র”।

ঋষিকুমার পতিতার কালিমা লিপ্ত জীবনে প্রথম পবিত্র প্রেমের স্পর্শ দিলেন। বহুবল্লবা নারীর হৃদয়েও যে প্রসবন প্রবাহিত হয়। যা ফল্গুধারার মত – তাকেই ঋষি দৃশ্যমান করলেন। যৌবনের শরীরী বিভঙ্গে ,বিলোল কটাঞ্চে ও দৈহিক কামজ সৌন্দর্য নিয়ে গণিকাটি ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গ মুনিকে সাময়িক ভাবে আচ্ছন্ন করে জয়ী হয়েছিল। সিদ্ধ হয়েছিল তার কর্ম। হৃদয়ের দেবতা তার কাছে ঘুমন্ত। তাদের অভিসার রাত্রিকালীন। পতিতা নারীটি তার পাপ কর্ম সম্পর্কে সচেতন। তারা নরকের পথে আলো জ্বালায় কিন্তু সে আলোয় কোন মঙ্গল নেই, শুভ্রতা নেই, তা অন্তরকে সমুজ্বল করে না। তাই সে বলে –

“দেবতা ঘুমলে আমাদের দিন

দেবতা জাগিলে মোদের রাত

ধরার নরক সিংহদুয়ার

জ্বালাই আমরা সন্ধ্যাবাতি”।

ঋষির নিষ্পাপ চোখের দিকে তাকিয়ে সে অনুভব করল শরীর উত্তীর্ণ প্রেম। তার পতিতা পরিচয় মুছে গিয়ে জেগে উঠল চিরন্তন নারী হৃদয়—

“হৃদয়ে আমার নারীর মহিমা

বাজয়ে উঠিল বিজয় ভেরি”।

মেঘ যেমন ব্রজের দাহকে ঢেকে দেয় তেমনি ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গের প্রেম উদামতাকে সংহত করেছে। প্রেমের উজ্জ্বল আলোর মতো ঋষির প্রেম তার অন্তরআত্মাকে আলোকিত করেছে। প্রেম মানুষের জীবনের চকিত উদ্ভাস, তারপর তা সারা জীবন ধরে ধ্রুব তারার মত পথ দেখায়। রামায়ণ ও মহাভারতের কাহিনী অনুসারে অনেক বারবনিতা মিলে রাজ আদেশে মুনির ধ্যান ভঙ্গ করার ছবি আছে। কবি এখানে মাত্র এক জন পতিতা নারীর হৃদয় যন্ত্রনার ছবি একেছেন। এক বারাপানার

মধ্যে প্রকৃত প্রেমের জাগরণ ঘটিয়ে তাকে নারীত্বে উত্তোরণ করেছেন। দৈহিক শুচিতা সত্বীতের লক্ষণ নয়, যে নারী আপন প্রেমের গৌরবে গৌরবান্বিত, প্রকৃত নারী সেই। ‘ল্যাবরেটরি’ গল্পে রবীন্দ্রনাথ সেই কথাই বলতে চেয়েছেন সোহিনির মধ্যে দিয়ে। নারীর অন্তর শুচিতা ও সত্বীতের এক উজ্জ্বল দৃষ্টান্ত ‘পতিতা’ কবিতা। পুরানাপ্রিত একটি ঘটনাকে ব্যবহার করেছেন মাত্র।

‘অহল্যার প্রতি’ রবীন্দ্রনাথের অন্যতম শ্রেষ্ঠ কবিতা। অহল্যা পুরান নির্ভর চরিত্র। মহাভারতে অহল্যার উপাখ্যান আছে। ব্রহ্মার মানস কন্যা অহল্যা শব্দের অর্থ সর্বাঙ্গসুন্দর, নিখুঁত। সত্যযুগে তাঁর জন্ম। বিশেষ কার্য উপলক্ষ্যে ব্রহ্মা তাকে ঋষি গৌতমের কাছে রেখে যান। পরে মুনি নিষ্পাপ অবস্থায় অহল্যাকে পিতার কাছে প্রত্যর্পণ করেন। ব্রহ্মা খুশি হয়ে গৌতম মুনির সঙ্গে অহল্যার বিবাহ দেন। অন্যদিকে দেবরাজ ইন্দ্র এই ঘটনায় ক্ষুব্ধ ও ঈর্ষান্বিত হয়ে ওঠেন। তিনি মনে করতেন, প্রকৃত অর্থে এমন অদ্বিতীয়া সুন্দরী তাঁরই স্ত্রী হবার যোগ্য। একদিন গৌতম মুনির অনুপস্থিতির সুযোগে ইন্দ্র, মুনির রূপ ধরে অহল্যাকে কামনা করে। ইন্দ্রের ছলনা ধরতে পেরেও সে নিজেকে সমর্পণ করে। পরিতুষ্ট অহল্যা মুনি ফিরে আসার আগেই ইন্দ্রকে আশ্রম ত্যাগ করতে বলে, কিন্তু ইন্দ্র সে সুযোগ পান নি। স্বাভাবিক ভাবে দুজনেই ঋষি কর্তৃক অভিশপ্ত হন। ইন্দ্রকে তিনি বলেন—‘তোমার মুষ্কন্ধয় স্বলিত হোক’ এবং অহল্যাকে বলেন-- ‘তোকেও সবার অদৃশ্য হয়ে ভস্মরাশিতে শুয়ে শুধু বায়ু ভক্ষণ করে, দীর্ঘকাল কাটাতে হবে। পরে কোন কালে রামের করুণায় তুমি পাপ মুক্ত হবি’। (গদ্য বাল্মীকি রামায়ন, জ্যোতিভূষণ চাকী, অষ্টাচছারিঃ সর্গ, পৃষ্ঠা ৩৫)

পৌরাণিক অহল্যাকে রবীন্দ্রনাথ ‘অহল্যার প্রতি’ কবিতায় বিনির্মাণ করলেন, তাঁর নিজস্ব প্রকৃতি ভাবনা ও বিশ্বচেতনা বোধের আলোকে। রামের পাদস্পর্শে অহল্যা শরীরী অবয়ব প্রাপ্ত হওয়ায় ক্রমে দিব্য জ্যোতিতে বিশ্বলোক ভরে গেল। যা সমস্ত বাসনা, কামনা, লোভ মুক্ত। নিষ্কলুষ দিব্য জ্যোতি। বাল্মীকি যাকে বলেছেন—‘মায়াবতী দিব্য প্রতিমা’। যার বিকিরণ ‘দীপ্ত সূর্যপ্রভা তুল্য’। আর এখান থেকে রবীন্দ্র কবিতাটি সূচনা। কবির ধারণা পাশান রূপী অহল্যা ধরনীর সঙ্গে একাত্ম থাকলেও তার মধ্যে প্রানের স্পন্দন ছিল, ছিল চেতনা—‘কী স্বপ্নে কাটালে তুমি দীর্ঘ দিবা নিশি/ অহল্যা পাশাণ রূপে ধরাতেল মিশি’। প্রানের সৃষ্টি প্রকৃতি থেকে। প্রকৃতি তাঁর কাছে মাতৃস্বরূপ। অহল্যাতো মাতৃগর্ভেই বিলিন হয়েছিল। সে তার অভিশপ্ত জীবন অতিবাহিত করে নি, বরং তার

সন্তপ্ত জীবনকে আশ্রয় দিয়ে সান্ত্বনা দিচ্ছিলেন জননী। ছিন্নপত্রে তাঁর এই মনোভাব ব্যক্ত করেছেন ৭০ সংখ্যক পত্রে—

“এক সময় যখন আমি এই পৃথিবীর সঙ্গে এক হয়ে ছিলাম, যখন আমার উপর সবুজ ঘাস উঠত, শরতের আলো পড়ত, সূর্যকিরণে আমার সুদূর বিস্তৃত শ্যামল অঙ্গের প্রত্যেক রোমকূপ থেকে যৌবনের উত্তাপ উদ্ভিত হতে থাকত”। বৈশ্বিক ভাবনা কবিকে সংহত করেছে অহল্যার নব নির্মাণে। কবি সৃষ্ট অহল্যা প্রকৃতি সম্বন্ধে, তিনি তিলোত্তমা। Eternal beauty র অলোকে উদ্ভাসিত। অহল্যার মানবী সৌন্দর্যকে তিনি দেশ কালের সমস্ত বন্ধনের উর্দ্ধে স্থাপন করতে চেয়েছেন বলেই ‘কুমারী’ অভিধাটি আরোপ করেছেন।

“দিলে আজি দেখা

ধরিগ্রীর সদ্যোজাত কুমারীর মতো

সুন্দর সরল শুভ্র”—

অহল্যা শুধু সুন্দরীই নন। তিনি সর্বপ্রকার মালিন্য মুক্ত। রবীন্দ্রনাথের রোমান্টিক সৌন্দর্য ভাবনা প্রকাশিত হয়েছে ‘অহল্যারপ্রতি’ কবিতায়। কবি নিজের অভিব্যক্তিকে প্রকাশ করার জন্য পুরান বর্ণিত অহল্যার মিথকে ব্যবহার করেছেন। শাপ মুক্ত অহল্যাকে প্রকৃতির বিস্তৃত পটভূমিকায় রেখে বিশ্বের সৌন্দর্যভাবনা কে তাঁর ভাষায় ‘অধরামাধুরী’ কে পরিস্ফুট করতে চেয়েছেন। এই অনুভবে পুরাণের ধূসর অন্ধকারাচ্ছন্ন Mythology র জগত ছেড়ে রূপ-রস-গন্ধ-বর্ণময় প্রানচঞ্চল বিশ্বের অলোকে উদ্ভাসিত অহল্যা মুক্তি লাভ করেছে।

এই প্রাচীন পৌরাণিক সাহিত্যকে কাহিনী সূত্রে গ্রহন করে রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঊনবিংশ-বিংশ শতকের আধুনিক মননে যে ভাবে বিশ্লেষণ করেছেন এবং সাহিত্যে প্রতিস্থাপন করেছেন, তা তাঁর মতো ‘একমেবাদ্বিতীয়ম’ প্রাপ্ত ঋষির পক্ষেই সম্ভব। প্রায় প্রতিটি ঘটনা ও চরিত্রের বিনির্মাণ ঘটিয়েছেন তিনি।

সহায়ক গ্রন্থঃ

- ১) পৌরাণিক অভিধান: সুধীরচন্দ্র সরকার (এম.সি.সরকার ১৪০৮)
- ২) রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও সংস্কৃত সাহিত্য: কল্যাণী শঙ্কর ঘটক (বর্ধমান বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় ১৯৮০)
- ৩) রবীন্দ্রকাব্য পরিক্রমা: উপেন্দ্রনাথ ভট্টাচার্য (ওরিয়েন্ট বুক কোম্পানী ১৪০৬)
- ৪) পুরাণ প্রসঙ্গে রবীন্দ্রনাথ: ড. দিলীপ রায় (এন.ই.পাব্লিশার্স ২০০৮)

## **RE-READING GANDHIJI'S RAM RAJYA: MEDIA DICHOTOMY IN REPORTING COMMUNAL AFFAIRS**

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This paper is a tacit culmination of two gigantic episodes—one of these episodes can be traced back to a historical juncture and the other is in continuum, making us a part of it--the repercussions of which is affecting us in more ways than one.

We are living in turbulent times—nationally, communally, socially. The implications are wide and far reaching, often at contradiction with the very democratic structure of the polity. The ball of globalization that was set rolling since the 90s have brought with it unprecedented changes—changes in technology, economic liaisons and popular culture. We have witnessed giant leaps in science and communication, the opening up of the public sphere in a virtual world, social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook literally transforming the way information is disseminated. Time and space have been redefined in this information rich multimedia super-highway. New platforms for the exchange of ideas are being formed, e-commerce to cyborgs, digital steroids to micro blogging, we have it all. We can finally say that postmodern media has arrived with a bang.

The Indian media now juggles between religiosity in the name of reporting communal clashes, and populist strategies adopted by politicians to perpetuate the mass hysteria after the coronation of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India. Essentially, media has become an extension for both, assuming newer forms of power in defining the future courses for a more assertive Indian polity. They have a strategic position in reporting, particularly communal affairs, and are the key determinants for fostering amity and peace. What is reported in newspapers, or shown on TV, or circulated on social media, determines the

relation structure between communities, whether they interact with hate, or restraint. Media can be an accelerating factor in fostering secularism, it can also be an agent provoking riots and destruction.

### **Gandhiji's Ram Rajya: Then and Now**

Gandhiji's experimentations on polity, his take on collective protest movement, secularism, non-violence has received renewed attention among media and social scientists in present times. What makes Gandhi so pertinent in today's scheme of things is that he had envisaged a society that would foster on secular lines. He also spelt out the ways in which they could be achieved. Scholars are debating on various issues that Gandhiji depicted from his daily activities. Whether his thoughts would be spurned or accepted by the Y generation remains to be seen, but the undeniable fact remains that Gandhi was the most popular leader of his time, who was able to keep aside caste and religion, and build a true mass following rallying behind him. His vision of building India on secular lines, a country ruled by Divine Wisdom has been coined the Ram Rajya or a country where everyone is equal, where the Harijans sit in line with Brahmins and eat food. Ram Rajya, as later asserted by historians, is a metaphor, an idea, associated with wise and just governance. It is a conceived nation of many cultures, many people and many voices.

In the very words of Gandhiji, "By Ram Rajya I do not mean Hindu raj. I mean by Ram Rajya a divine raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of truth and righteousness". On the eulogy of the word Ram, he goes on to say, " Whether Rama in my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of Ram Rajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizens could be sure of swift justice. Even the dog is said to have received justice under Ram Rajya....How can it happen when we all along have been nursing violence in our hearts under the garb of non-violence?"

Critics to this date are debating on the purposive use of the word Ram by Gandhiji, particularly in his biography "My Experiments with Truth" in 1925, where he spoke about the significance of chanting the Ram Naam 3 times a day.

The name "Ram" in Gandhiji's Ram Rajya has been hijacked by different communal parties with an eye to the vote bank since the last two decades, as liberalization set in. Any



party that has been voted to power has given their own versions of “Ram” and “Rajya”. The nomenclature of Ram Rajya has been given a distinct identity as Ram has been identified with Right wing Hindutva, and Rajya has fostered separatist tendencies.

The very name of Ram has religious and cultural connotations, and both left and right wing parties have left no stones unturned to idolize Ram as a Hindu icon. Ram has been communalized, keeping in mind that it evokes not only respect and awe in Indians, but also creates a deep Hindutva sentiment in the minds of the non-Muslim populations, to the extent that anything remotely connected to this name creates mass hysteria, religious extremities, as well as a rooted antipathy towards all things non-Hindu. It is an interesting fact that Gandhiji is said to have uttered the words “Hey Ram” when he was shot by Nathuram Godse, though many allege that it was a communal strategy of the Congress to idolize Gandhiji as Mahatma.

What is important here is that Ram has not only been cited in Hindu contexts by the Bharatiya Janata Party when it came to power in 1992 or even now that it has been voted at the center. The name Ram has been used by other parties as well, even the Congress way back in 1989, when the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the Congress Party’s election campaign from Ayodhya citing that it was the birthplace of Lord Ram, and spoke about his exemplary character and governance.

Today, mass Media has become a new battleground for venting the ire of communal bickering. The BJP had earlier adopted a novel tactic to spread Hindutva among masses, promoting soaps and serials on television. Right after their ascendancy to power in the mid 80s, there was a surge of religious drama on Sunday morning TV. The serials “Ramayan” and “Mahabharat” surpassed all other serials in terms of sheer viewership. It can be recalled from a press clipping in TOI during this time that the busiest streets and roads of India had only some passer by’s. All places earlier thronged by people used to have a deserted look. The womenfolk in the houses got up an hour earlier to finish their daily chores. Just as the clock struck 10 in the morning, all eyes used to be glued to the television set to watch the serial “Ramayan”. People shed tears seeing the plight of Seeta Maiya, and revealed when Lord Ram fought Raavan with heroic elan.

Print as well as electronic media ran many stories relating to Ramayan. Interestingly Arun Govil, who played Rama in Ramayan was adulated in different states. The way Lord Rama carried himself, his image cut across economic and social barriers. Urban and rural

people feel at Rama's feet, thinking him to be the real Ram, such was the frenzy that caught on to the masses. The Tribal's of Gujarat put their babies at Ram's feet, to get his blessings. The character who played Seeta (Deepika) and brother Laxman (interestingly he was a Muslim whose name was rechristened as a Hindu name to maintain the religiosity of the majority) mostly accompanied Arun Govil and this created a sort of history during those days.

This divine personification of Ramayan characters created a pathway for the projection of Ram to invoke the sentiments of Hindutva in the coming years. In recent times, Ram has found its place in the inflamed speeches of various leaders, especially Narendra Modi before being elected as the PM. Ahead of the polls, he kept on harping about the virtues of Ram Rajya, and its manifestations in the relevance to the welfare state. He ended with a distinct reference that India is the holy land of the Hindus and he politely asked the Muslims to return to Bangladesh, as they had illegally migrated to India as refugees' way back in 1971.

Nitin Gadkari also used to name of Ram to evoke Right wing Hindu fundamentalism when he glorified the Ram Navami and declared it to be a national holiday. According to a scholar, Gandhiji's Ram Rajya had a sense of mystique around it, it was a Utopian concept held closely by Gandhiji, but in course of time, Ram became iconoclast with religiosity, assertion of Hindutva philosophy and a deep rooted hatred towards non-Hindus, inciting feelings of communalism and separatism. In his words, "many Gandhis have been formed in the public realm" with each trying to supersede the other as how much of a Hindu icon Ram could be made out

BJP's ascendancy in the power structure was based on a two-fold agenda, corporatization of the different economic sectors and the manifestation of a symbolic Hindutva. On closer introspection, a very interesting trend in post-global communal culture can be found—the punching of 2 opposites, modernity and tradition. Critics point out that this is a neo capitalist ploy to find a foothold in both the areas that is religion and economy. Once both of these become interconnected, the by-product becomes a hybrid. There has been tremendous growth of economy in some pockets of India, other states are catching up. But somewhere down the line, the illiteracy, poverty, uneven development, gender issues, health and nutrition largely seem to have been neglected. Along with society, a micro society has

also been formed, where religiosity fills in the lacuna. In time, it creates a deep attachment towards religion, where any deterrence is not tolerated. Symbolic Hindutva has found a viable market here, and it has been lapped up by politicians to propagate their own agenda.

The BJP have many other sister agencies who preach different philosophies coated with communal agenda, packaged for particular areas. So there is the VHP or the VishwaHindu Parishad which believes in ethnic cleansing, as India witnessed the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandis in 1990, Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, anti-christian violence in 1999, Godhra riots, and the Akshardham massacre in 2002. The Shiv Sena which is a Hindu fundamentalist organization, and numerous such others have with the help of the media propagated their communal ideology. Therefore, polarization as far as religion is concerned, happened at the backdrop of another slogan—economic development.

### **Mass Media, Re-creations and Overexposure of Communal News**

Journalism has been called by many “a compelling medium for influencing a normative national consciousness of language, image and sound. TV (reproduces) a vision of the world for its audiences. These productions link TV with the communal economy of nation building. The medium can work to socialize people, foment material desires, and normalize consumer relations.” But the question of nation building and the relation of media as the constructor is posed with serious maladies in the present times. It is natural for old values and ethics to be eroded with time and new measures root in its place. But when the very moorings of journalistic conscience becomes embedded in the money raking quickie form of instant journalism, questions are bound to arise.

To attract favorable attention to their clients, communal parties often organize media events, a practice that is known as staging news. These are designed to be irresistible to journalists. Rallies by celebrities and intellectuals on topical communal issues such as Muzaffarnagar riots and Purkhonkighar Wapasi, find their way onto front pages, magazine covers and evening newscasts because their photogenic and curiosity prompting qualities give them an edge over less visual although sometimes more significant events. The ethics question is less important for publicists, who generally are upfront about what they are doing. The ethics question is more serious for journalists who claim that their job is to present an accurate and balanced account of a day's events but who regularly overplay staged events that are designed by publicists to be photogenic and easy to cover.

Then there are re-creations in news. Some TV based news programs feature re-enactments that are not always labeled as such. In recent times newspapers poured out stories about the Nirbhaya Rape case and gave various interpretations, based on their latent communal affiliations and editorial policies. It was not a chance practice that the rapists, of them one was a Muslim as shown as a violently ugly face, with a sinister body language. These create an instant hatred among vulnerable minds, who think that all Muslims are beastly and criminals. Mounting pressure from different communal parties too cannot be ignored, especially during the run-up to elections. We have all witnessed different versions of the Nirbhaya rape re-creations, with each channel claiming their story to be based on original facts.

It was the same in the case of the Rizwanur murder case, which grabbed the headlines of leading dailies for weeks, along with the communal-bureaucratic-businessmen drama played out to the fullest. From subtle persuasive techniques like dialogues, to background shadow playing, all possible techniques were used to drive home the reader a certain line of thought, essentially communal in character. And more recently, the different interpretations of communal personalities Burdwan blast case involving the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh and the subsequent crackdown on Madrasas statewide, to the “bilateral” mudslinging regarding the deaths, are all played out like a sitcom on television news channels.

Philip Weiss, writing for ‘The Columbia Review’, gives a brilliant picture of how news is re-created to extreme measures for public consumption over TV—“....shadows on the wall of a man taking a hammer and hilling a woman of a different community in the backdrop of a Mosque, a faceless actor grabbing a tin of kerosene to blow up Hindu shrine, a corpse in a wheelbarrow with a hand dangling, a detective opening the trunk of a car and reeling from the stench of a decomposing body.”

“Communal News Propaganda” often warps Public opinion. The public may accept as fact one-sided information in the news columns. It cannot form intelligent opinion regarding national issues from a newspaper which fills its news columns exclusively with facts favorable to one party and unfavorable to the other party. The full truth was not told about World War 1 until many years afterward, although on the other hand much of the “debunking” of America’s idealism in that war was wide of the truth. Even in our daily

newspapers, we see such lopsided views of certain news stories that often harp on the illogical. In recent times, before the Bidhan Sabha elections in West Bengal, the mass media launched a vehement campaign of communal leaders maligning the Muslim community, saying they are outsiders in different channels. Slanderous comments were made, finger movements aggravated, character assassinations done, with a dose of humour here and there made by politicians in jest.

## **Evaluation**

This paper is a tacit reflection, an overview about the framing effects of communal news coverage on Print and Television, and to an extent the consumption patterns of audience, their evaluation of communal conflicts as depicted in a packaged format. Several angles about the framing effects of communal news was discussed—hinging on 4 basic concepts: how communal conflicts are perceived in the real world and in the world of television news, what are the differences between subjective and objective representation of communal news in terms of complexity, intensity and solvability. Secondly, whether people can differentially perceive communal conflicts in the realm of TV news within the context of social reality. This question was based on the assumption that all media contents are the results of the complementary processes of selection and composition so that the presentation of communal conflict on TV news cannot be identical with real communal conflicts. Apart from that, peoples' experiences with the mass media have conditioned them to notice the discrepancies between the real and the symbolic world. This is directly opposite to the cultivation analysis theory and more in line with the concept of mainstreaming that was later propounded by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli in 1980.

Therefore, it reintroduces the theory of proximity that influences perceptions of communal conflicts, and how the audience relates differently to communal situations. Lastly, based on the concept of media dependency, it is understood that the more remote conflicts are from a person's experience, the more there is a likelihood of congruity between the individual's perceptions of communal conflicts in reality and the manner in which they are presented in TV news. Conversely, the more the proximity of the conflict touches the mind of the viewers, the less is the linkage between the 2 realms of reality.

According to a noted social scientist, the role of mass media in the past half century suffers from the concept of "embarrassment of riches". This phenomenon has been typified

with a generation of differing, and even contradictory hypotheses concerning the communal effects of mass communication process. Perhaps as a result of this diversity and effluences of perspectives, the intellectual history of framing of communal news in TV channels has often been too compartmentalized. Some speak of the policies of media institutions, whereas others of media contents. These are separate domains in themselves. Comparatively, however, critical approaches that have long aspired and developed a more composite picture of news framing have rejected any empirical tilt in the investigation of their ideas.

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## **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE MODERN EDUCATOR**

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### **Abstract**

Swami Vivekananda was an outstanding spiritual and intellectual luminary of the modern age. He made certain suggestions on education which are constructive, practical, comprehensive and modern in approach. In the present world of commercialization, international understanding and cultural fellowship these guidelines of Swamiji are very helpful and modern in approach. Thus these views of Swami Vivekananda have been adapted and implemented in the present educational setup with some modifications.

**Key words :** *Self-realization, Faith, Man-making education.*

Swami Vivekananda, formerly known as Narendranath Dutta, was born on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1863. He was an outstanding spiritual and intellectual luminary of the modern age. He was hailed as a person of remarkable insight, dynamic power and wide known ledge. From his meaningful, effective and original ideas embodied in his writings it becomes clear that he made certain suggestions regarding education. The peerless and wandering saint preached his views on education for the service of the humanity. To him education is not merely a means for advancement of knowledge and elimination of ignorance but a sound means of inward vision which will bring social progress and liberation. His philosophy of education is primarily based on the theory of self- discipline which will lead to the advancement of the self. This in the long run will create an advanced society and a developed nation. Thus it can be said that the ideas and guidelines given by Swamiji on education are very modern. The suggestions on education were not only helpful in those days when they were uttered but are extremely relevant today. Hence the guidelines are widely adapted by the modern educators and implemented in the present educational system with some

modifications. This article basically investigates the above dimension of Swamiji's educational thoughts.

In the present world of commercialization man has been reduced to a commodity, a money making machine, full of greed and possessive instincts. There is a severe erosion of moral values prompting degeneration of the nation. To retrieve this situation a possible solution can be to impart education following the vibrant educational philosophy propounded by Swamiji. In this regard it may be said that education is recognized as necessary equipment for all round development of the self which in turn will lead to political and social development. Self development can be brought about by following Swamiji's scheme of education. Swamiji's whole scheme of education is based on the absolute values of truth directed towards self-realization. Infact Swamiji actually wanted to revitalised and revolutionize education by bringing certain changes in the educational process for socio-aesthetic development of the masses. Swami Vivekananda's unparalleled thoughts and suggestions on education undoubtedly promise an enlightened society. Thus in the present socio economic scenario this educational objective should be the call of the hour.

To Swamiji education is the manifestation of 'perfection already in man'<sup>1</sup> and religion is the innermost core of education. He believed that the material and spiritual worlds are inseparable. The objective of education is not to throw away the material as non-spiritual but raise the material world to the Divinity<sup>2</sup>. Therefore religion is a realization of oneness with the Supreme, the *Satchidananda*. This realization creates strength, energy and fearlessness among individuals. In the words of Sister Nivedita, "It is strength we want, not calm. Calm is only a result. It can be cultivated by practice. But if we have strength as the root then calm, peace and steadfastness cannot fail to be its flowers"<sup>3</sup>. Therefore it can be said that he never lost faith in the inherent goodness in man. Though there is negativity in human behaviour as reflected in the society, but the spirit of goodness comes out in all its efflorescence in the long run with the realization of the self. The function of education is to inculcate this goodness in man. In this situation all the imperfections of human behaviour will definitely undergo a change by self control and self enquiry. This will make him efficient to face and overcome all the difficulties of life. This necessitates formation of character which can come through proper education. With this objective in view Swamiji propounded an ideal method for imparting education.



According to Swamiji 'Faith' or "*Sraddha*" is an essential feature of education<sup>4</sup>. He said "To preach the doctrine of *Sraddha* or genuine faith is the mission of my life"<sup>5</sup>. Faith emerges when the student cultivates chastity (*Brahmacharya*) in thought, word and deed<sup>6</sup>. For this it is essential to teach a child the dignity of oneself. In addition to it Swamiji emphasized on continuous discovery of truth to be the focus of true education. He said no compromise should be made with anything that stands in the path of truth. Swamiji said 'Speak out the truth, boldly without any fear that it will puzzle the weak'. This true education will strengthen the mind to face any eventuality. This will make an individual optimistic, dynamic and positive approach towards everything. It will again give strength, confidence and energy to face the challenges of the world in a constructive way. To Swamiji strength and fearlessness are two major characteristics of human personality. In his words "Strength is goodness, weakness is sin"<sup>7</sup>. This doctrine is very helpful in the present world of chaos, confusion & corruption.

Vivekananda rightly opined that the personal influence of the teacher is very great on the student and plays a major role in the character building process. So he advocated residential educational institutions where both can live together and exchange their ideas. The teacher should be efficient enough to discover the shortcomings of the students and lovingly eliminate them<sup>8</sup>. The teacher must be pure in thought and action, spiritually rich and must have the power to transmit his own experience effectively to the students. This erudite guidance propounded by Swamiji is of immense help to the teachers as they are primarily responsible for making the future generation of the country. Swamiji said, "...the true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can teach and none else"<sup>9</sup>. Swamiji believed that knowledge is within a child and a teacher like a gardener has to rekindle it or help it to grow by taking away obstacles on its way and only then knowledge comes out of nature. He said "..... you cannot teach a child any more than you grow a plant"<sup>10</sup>. Regarding knowledge he observed "Knowledge is inherent in man, no knowledge comes from outside; what we say a man 'knows' should in strict psychological language be what he 'discovers', or 'unveils'<sup>11</sup>. It must evolve within and not through coercion or compulsion. This approach to education is akin to the heuristic method of modern educational system where the student is looked upon as discoverer and not a passive listener of the lectures delivered by the teacher. Here again we are reminded of Swamiji's guidelines

when he emphasized on the freedom of education from the mechanical dull rote learning. He gave priority to modifications in teaching where the creativity and critical consciousness eliminates all the artificialities in the learning process.<sup>12</sup> Therefore freedom of thought and expression should be encouraged. This approach to education is a very modern concept which has been adopted by the educator of the present day.

Swami Vivekananda always stressed on education for life and not just education for a profession. He said “We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s own feet”<sup>13</sup>. This is a modern concept. He added that education is a training by which will force is strengthened. Such education allows enlightenment and removes darkness and ignorance. Thus it is a life-building, man making, character-building and idea assimilating process<sup>14</sup>. For this education should lay proper emphasis on creativity, originality and excellence which in turn will lead to higher intellect and better personality. So Swamiji boldly suggested that the standard of life should be raised through education of intellect and religion. In this endeavour all the social stigmas and superstitions will be eradicated and will foster social and human development. Moreover real education requires the cultivation of a sense of humility. This sense of humility is the basis of man’s character, the true mark of a balanced personality.<sup>15</sup>

To pursue education for life it must be comprehensive in character. For this Swamiji emphasized on physical culture which would create physical, mental and spiritual strength and overcome any weakness. Swamiji said “...the physically weak are unit for the realization of the self”.<sup>16</sup> We find a unison of thought in the teachings of Plato when he stressed on the role of gymnastic and music in a sound educational system. It is noteworthy to mention that the present educational set up acknowledges the need for physical culture and incorporates physical education as an inseparable part of the curriculum.

Swamiji considered religion as the innermost core of education. Like Swamiji, another educationist Whitehead in this book *The Aims of Education* opined that religion is the essence of education. He suggested that religion is man’s total response to the meaning of existence and education is man’s total preparation for a meaningful effective life. Swamiji further commented that religion is the manifestation of the divinity potential in man and education is the perfection already in man. Thus the two are inseparable and the two are two aspects of the same reality. It should be noted that when Swamiji said religion is the core of

education he did not refer to any particular religion. He actually wanted to mean the essential character of religion which is the realization of the Divinity already in man. Thus he proposed to impart secular knowledge through religion by introducing religious instruction in educational institutes. Now the question arises whether there is scope for giving religious instruction in educational institutes? Here it should be said that India is a secular state and our constitution takes a middle course on the issue of imparting religious instruction. It is stated that while religious instruction is banned in state sponsored educational institutions, it is permitted in other denominational institutions. It may be postulated that since Article 29 guarantees that no Indian citizen shall be denied admission to any state sponsored educational institutes on ground only of religion, race etc, the makers of the Constitution found it impossible to provide religious instruction for pupils following diverse faiths and studying in the same educational institution. However religious instruction is distinguished from research in comparative religion or religious philosophy.

If we delve deep into Vivekananda's conception for religion it can be said that it is not inconsistent with the principle of our Constitution. The Preamble to our Constitution resolves to secure fraternity, dignity of the individual and unity of the nation to the citizens of India. To Swamiji religion teaches dignity of the individual. Dignity arises when man realise himself as a spirit and considers his fellow being as an embodiment of the same spirit. It is not a doctrine performed with rites and rituals or idol worship<sup>17</sup>. Religion that Vivekananda wanted to teach was the religion of *Vedanta* and *Upanishad*. To him *Vedanta* is a religion of strength and hope. Thus it is of great help in strength giving religion and man-making education. If this essence is grasped by the educators then without any harm religious education can be introduced in a state-sponsored educational institution. It is interesting to note that the recommendations of the University Education Commission of India (1948-49) on the subject of religious education are in accordance with Swamiji's scheme.

The Commission mentions "Religion is not identified with a creed to be believed or an emotion to be felt or a ceremony to be performed..... If religion is a matter of realisation, it cannot be reached through mere knowledge of dogmas. It is attained through discipline, training, Sadhana."<sup>18</sup>

Swamiji highlighted that education should be given on national lines. To him unity in diversity is the rule of life. Since religion is dynamic in character, true religion must express

unity in diversity. Swamiji believed that religious education can create national education. This will lead to national integration. In other words if a person is spiritually educated he can expand his heart, give love to others and by doing so eradicate separateness, create unity and bring national integration. With this end in view Vivekananda wanted to build a non-sectarian temple of learning<sup>19</sup> where the pupils will learn the common bond of union among all the religions leaving aside different rituals, customs and traditions. In this context education becomes more dynamic and purposeful and all the pupil feel for a conjoint ambience of social and spiritual advancement. Here it may be added that Swamiji always had great liking for the ‘*gurugrihavaśa* system.’<sup>20</sup> Later vivekananda’s ideas reached a crowning success with the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math at Belur.

Though Swamiji overemphasized on the spiritual basis of education, he never ignored scientific and technological training. He made untiring efforts to harmonise *Vedānta* with Science<sup>21</sup>. He said, “..... we need technical education and all else which may develop industries, so that men instead of seeking for service may earn enough to provide for themselves and save something against a rainy day”<sup>22</sup>. At Belur Math he urged that students to study the latest researches and critical methods in science and letters as well as religion.<sup>23</sup> Thus by cultivating scientific and technical study, Swamiji wanted to remove superstition and ignorance on one hand and poverty and unemployment on the other. This is again very helpful in the present socio-economic fabric of India.

He wanted to supplement technical education with the study of Humanities, especially the Classics. He believed that the study of Indian Classics will help the students to develop a liking for the Indian culture. In addition to it Swamiji believed that the essence of spirituality is stored in the sacred books of India. Thus these books should be incorporated in the curriculum to make abstract *Advaita* and *Vedānta* more living Swami Vivekananda was in favour of teaching through the medium of the mother tongue of the students. However, he laid great emphasis on the study of Sanskrit<sup>24</sup>. He equated Sanskrit with our cultural heritage and opined that, “Sanskrit words give prestige and power and a strength to the race.”<sup>25</sup>

He also incorporated teaching of Fine Arts in the curriculum. According to Swamiji Fine Arts signified the greatness of a nation. He wanted to combine art and utility. This concept is extremely praiseworthy as it will generate employment on one hand and preserve national heritage on the other.

Vivekananda suggested learning through activity. He advised introduction of dance, drama, singing, storytelling etc in schools and colleges. Other activities may include inter-school and inter-collegiate discussions, excursions, camps, first aid squads, various social service activities etc which will enable the students to learn how to sacrifice personal interests for the sake of the larger interests of the society.<sup>26</sup> In the modern educational set up this guideline has been accepted and implemented in schools and colleges.

Swamiji was in favour of women education. He believed that education would make women fearless and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He proposed a math for the women where religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, rudiments of English and some other subjects like sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work and upbringing of children may be included.<sup>27</sup> However, he advocated separate maths for women and men and restricted male teachers from teaching female students.

Modern educators are also in favour of extending equal educational opportunities to women. Swamiji justly identified the special aptitude in women besides academic proficiency. Like Swamiji's thoughts, The University Education Commission of India (1948-49) had recommended subjects like Home Economics and Home Management, nursing and Fine Arts for Women Education.<sup>28</sup>

Swamiji always emphasized on the necessity of literate citizens for the advancement of the nation. So he gave top priority to proper education for the upliftment of the masses. He strongly believed that education must be all-pervading and reach every citizen of our country. This 'education for all' approach found an echo in the educational policy of the government named 'Sarva Shiksha Abhijan'.

There is no denying the fact that throughout the ages several methods have been undertaken for the upliftment of the masses. However, Swamiji's suggestions for uplifting the masses through proper education is the most constructive, practical and comprehensive in approach. In the present world national integration, cultural fellowship, international understanding and similar other values are very important. In such a situation Swamiji's views on education have a deeper significance today. Swamiji rightly suggested that education should not be stuffing some facts into the brain of the students but reforming the human mind. So he emphasized the need for a complete re-orientation of human values. It is

an educational scheme to liberate the mind from the bondage of environment, remove cultural isolation and inculcate spirit of enquiry. Thus in accordance to the need of the hour Swamiji's view on education are very apt and have inspired the modern education greatly. The guidelines of Swamiji's has been adapted and implemented in the present educational set up. Hence, it can be stated that Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on education are very relevant in the modern times and should be followed not only for the progress of the child but for the advancement and regeneration of the mankind.

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## **BIO-RESOURCES: EDUCATION, MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

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### **Abstract**

The term 'biodiversity' is indeed commonly used to describe the number, variety and variability of living organisms. Biodiversity provide a number of services to the mankind mainly in the form of ecological, biological and social benefits. The human wellbeing depend upon biodiversity; bio-resources not only deliver numeral amenities as food, fodder, wood, medicine, raw materials, energy and clean water but also, a source of income generation and jobs through trade, tourism, food production etc. The loss of biodiversity and hence bio-resources and its serious consequence on economic-ecological systems is a critical apprehension. If India is considered, there has been an overall deterioration of floral and faunal species majorly due to human mediated habitat degradation and over exploitation. The problem of preserving bio-resources should be addressed very promptly, and effective ways should be implemented to protect it for the future generation. The monetary values of the services provided by biodiversity and the extent to which it can be refunded should be assessed. It should be recognized that a better understanding of the environment can only come through education, aiming to study the environment and also to mark the use of nature and natural resources in a justifiable way. Students and youths should be involved in activity based learning centred upon reducing consumption and increasing sustainable use of bio-resources.

**Keywords:** *Bio-resources; education; youth; sustainable use.*

### **Introduction**

The word 'biodiversity' is a contraction of biological diversity. The term 'biodiversity' is indeed commonly used to describe the number, variety and variability of living organisms. Biodiversity



provide a number of services to the mankind mainly in the form of ecological, biological and social benefits. The basic needs of humans like food, air, water and shelter are fulfilled by nature. . Large number of species ensures greater variability of crop plants. Moreover, diverse crop species are more adaptable to environmental changes as they are the largest pool of different metabolic traits and pathways. They are effective users of resources over a broad range of environmental conditions (Schlapfer et al 2002). Together with fuel, wood, wild food products are the main source of forest-related income and consumption (Vedeld et al. 2007).

It has been evident that biodiversity provides many free recycling, purification and pest control services. The existence of humans solely depends upon natural processes such as pollination, the absorption of carbon dioxide and renewed oxygen supply by plants and trees. Medicinal plants, non-timber forest products and timbers are the greatest source of income generation for developing countries. Botanic and zoological gardens, ecotourism etc have their greater aesthetic values. Scientists have been looking more and more at nature to reveal how various species work, produce, consume resources and are trying to imitate the whole process that million years of evolution has produced.

Greater biodiversity correlates with a lower disease burden. Presumably, superior biodiversity causes difficulty for human pathogens to survive. For example, if there are more types of birds around, more malaria-carrying mosquitoes will get eaten. The burden of vector-borne and parasitic diseases (VBPDs) rise as biodiversity falls (Bonds et. al.2012).The economic development of a country is also dependent upon biodiversity. At a financial policy stage the remunerations of agro-biodiversity for the poor have been acknowledged in many environment and development literatures (Jackson et al. 2007; Perrings 2001; Perrings et al. 2006; Perrings 2007; Ravi et al. 2006; Smale and Drucker 2008).

International concern about the loss of biodiversity and the serious consequences on economic-ecological systems is a vital concern. As far as India is concerned, there has been an overall deterioration of floral and faunal species majorly due to human mediated habitat degradation and over exploitation. Therefore, the problem of preserving natural resources should be addressed very instantly, and effective ways should be implemented to protect it for the future generation.

The study specifically focuses on the questions: What are the different ways by which biodiversity affect human life? How it act as a service provider? What are the different strategies which could be followed to evaluate this degrading wealth? Where India stands? But before answering the questions, few aspects should be kept in mind like: the requirements of the target groups, making appropriate choice of thought provoking measures, so that the purpose of both conservation and sustainable development is achieved and answering a vital question *viz.* Whether our general education system

satisfactorily designed to combat the challenges? The role of the youth is extensively prominent. They have enormous prospect. The necessity is to kindle and clarify their mind in a more captivating manner.

### **Background of environmental education and sustainability**

Agenda 21 (United Nations 1992), which came out of Rio, has highlighted that environmental education is one of the most imperative approaches for protecting our environment. It emphasized not only on just education through the formal system, but also at all other levels. In addition, environmental education can also play an integrated and pivotal role in conserving biodiversity.

It has been recognized that a better understanding of the environment can only come through environmental education aiming: to study the environment in which species live; interact, grow and survive; to appreciate it; and also to mark use of the nature and natural resources in a justifiable way. Environmental education is learning about the factor, cause and solutions for different environmental crises.

The efforts to include environmental education (EE) in teaching-learning process started way back in the 1960s and environmental concerns formed an integral part of curricula and textbooks. The documents 'Curriculum for the Ten-year School: An Approach Paper (1975)' and 'Curriculum for the Ten-year School: A Framework' (1975) both underlined the need for EE. The National Policy of Education, 1986 identified 'Protection of the environment' as a value. The Policy states: 'There is a paramount need to create a consciousness of the Environment. It must permeate all ages and all sections of society, beginning with the child. Environmental consciousness should inform teaching in schools and colleges. This aspect will be integrated in the entire educational process.' The National Council of Educational Training and Research (NCERT) has, in the last three decades, not only developed textbooks and teacher guides incorporating environmental concerns, but also prepared guidelines for preparation of textbooks. The Honorable Supreme Court in December 2003, made environment education compulsory at all levels of education. The curriculum framework prepared by the NCERT has been accepted by the Court as the guideline for state education departments to develop textbooks for schools from 2004-2005 onward. Though integrating environmental concepts into curricula was not a new idea at that time, but the judicial interest in the issue gave it stimulus.

The objectives provided at the 'The *Belgrade Charter* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976)' and 'Intergovernmental Conference on EE held at Tbilisi (UNESCO, 1978)' have the potential to rescue the world from environmental crises.

The *Belgrade Charter* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976) was adopted by a United Nations conference,

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and provides a widely accepted statement for environmental education:

*'The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.'*

The first Intergovernmental Conference on EE held at Tbilisi (UNESCO, 1978) established the objectives of EE. They are:

- *'Awareness* – to acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems;
- *Knowledge* – to gain a variety of experiences in and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems;
- *Attitudes* – to acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection;
- *Skills* – to acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems; and
- *Participation* – to encourage citizens to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.'

Observation, analysis and innovation are the preliminary principles of any education. It aims ultimately for reaching and manifold behavioral changes in everyday life and at the work place. The guiding principle and pedagogical ideal of environmental education is the environmental responsible consumer, industrial producer, employee, citizen, policy maker, traveler, athlete, tourist and farmers and a human being. Whoever learns ecology develops problem oriented and action oriented capabilities and insights. Environmental education is a lifelong process which begins at preschool level and continues through formal and non-formal educational avenues of life.

## **Methodology**

The research work had been done mostly on the basis of secondary data. The methodology for the review included examination of the peer-reviewed literature, as published in journals and books, and an examination of websites of major organization working on biodiversity conservation (UNEP WCMC; MoEF, GOI; TEEB; CBD; WWF India etc).

## **Result And Discussion**

### **Different strategies to conserve and evaluate the degrading wealth**

The very survival of the human race is dependent on conservation of biodiversity. It is evident that this invaluable heritage is being destroyed at an alarming rate due to several reasons. There are several strategies which are adapted for conservation of biodiversity. Some of these are: Legislation, in-situ conservation, ex-situ conservation, community participation in conservation, recording indigenous knowledge, international conservation strategies and many more. In 2002, The Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a target “to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation [emphasis added] and to the benefit of all life on earth” (SCBD 2002). It was botched as biodiversity is continuously vanishing from earth. Different conservation programmes have also been launched for scientific management and wise use of wetlands, mangroves and coral reef ecosystems.

The annual report on implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the UN General Assembly (UNGA), was submitted by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in July 2013 and released in mid-August, titled 'A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the MDGs and advancing the UN development agenda beyond 2015,' stresses sustainable development as the "global guiding principle and operation standard" for the post-2015 era. On environmental sustainability, it notes ‘achievements on water and sanitation alongside continued biodiversity loss, increased carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and land degradation and desertification, overexploitation of fish stock, which threaten other achievements and undermine future gains’. Out of the many transformative actions that can bring the emerging vision of MDGs to life, addressing climate change; addressing environmental challenges (including managing fisheries, forests, freshwater resources, oceans and soil and building resilience); promoting sustainable growth are of major significance.

Now the question arises where India stands? The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, took both way strategies to conserve and evaluate. Firstly, apart from conventional methods of conservation it set up Green Tribunals to cope up environmental related legal issues and secondly, in collaboration with The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study has initiated a new programme to value the immense wealth of natural resources and biodiversity in India. It has begun the evaluation of its natural capital and ecosystem services in terms of economic value. The following are also considered:

1. ***Greening of formal education and institution and Non formal Environmental Education (EE) a mandate:*** There are 733 universities in India (as per UGC on 03.09.2015). A six months compulsory core module course in environmental studies at the undergraduate level was prepared by expert

committee and compulsorily implemented in all the Universities. Though the course content is proficient and addresses many questions, issues and relevant matters but it lacks real life application.

The content should be comprised of two strategic elements: one is curative and the other preventive and reductive. Moreover student should be involved in activity based learning such as designing projects centered upon biodiversity and the needs of the communities along with the teachers, institutional heads and local community member. Apart from this greening of campus, formulating different strategies to cope up biodiversity challenges as a part of environmental studies should be included and special credits must be awarded to the institute, teacher and students.

Non-formal education, though, is not often prioritized in education systems and many teachers lack the skills and training necessary to provide effective EE experiences. Still non-formal education within the school framework had been an innovative experience. “The National Green Corps programme of the Ministry of Environment and Forests had set up 150 eco-clubs in every district of every state in India, working through a network of NGOs, government departments and schools. The World Wildlife Fund and many other NGOs provide learning opportunities through nature camping. These experiences are catalysts for imparting awareness, knowledge, attitudes and skills among children and youth. The long-standing involvement of NGOs has resulted in the development of large amounts of relevant educational material.”(Joshi, 2005)

The number of children attending school is increasing with the growing population, but low retention proportions during the primary cycle account for a large number of school drop-outs. Efforts should be made to create non-formal centres, street-side classes, and mobile education units for providing opportunities of learning for those children also, many of whom work and live on the streets in very unhygienic conditions.

2. ***Training the trainers:*** Amidst numerous, growing and complex environmental problems, the need for the preparation of world problem solvers is as great as ever. Although there are some good programs to train pre-service and in-service teachers in environmental education, these programs tend to be inconsistently available. CEE in collaboration with the Departments of Education and academic institutions, carry out teacher’s training in EE. In-service and pre-service opportunities for incorporating EE are offered through EE courses and project work. However, rigid and overloaded curricula, time constraints and a conventional approach to teaching still pose a challenge to the integration of EE in formal education. Systemic changes and capacity-building is required to address the issue. Distance education may be considered as an option.

2005-14 was declared by the UN as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

(DESD). It seemed there was a global appreciation of the significance of education to move in the direction of sustainability. Centre for Environment Education (CEE), the ENVIS Centre on Environmental Education leads our country in this programme and to achieve sustainable development CEE recognised new prototype which emphasized on:

- **Learning** rather than *teaching*
- **Lifelong and continuous** education rather than education *confined to a specified period*
- **Multi-sourced and accessed** education rather than *top down, controlled and orchestrated* education
- **Empowering** rather than *socializing (indoctrinating)*
- **Global yet locale specific** education
- **Capacity building** to build abilities for critical thinking and problem solving
- **Multi-disciplinary approach** as opposed to a *single new discipline*
- **Sensitivities to gender, diversity etc.,**
- **Participatory and based on learning with peers.**

These ideologies were well recognised long ago by Mahatma Gandhi in his words: “*Education for life; Education through life; Education throughout life.*” The challenges faced are to reach all the formal and other institutions with the techniques of EE and ESD. The challenge is to build more capacity to full-fill the targets of the decade and indeed those of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. ***Involving young minds for challenge solving:*** Youth have always been a major force in initiating change and must be involved in EE and ESD planning and decision-making processes. ‘Children and youth increasingly participate in sustainable development activities through non-formal education programmes and networks. Social networking sites, websites, newsletters, TV and radio are frequently used by youth organizations to disseminate information on environment, biodiversity threats and sustainable development issues.’(Joshi, 2005)

Government programmes for youth have begun incorporating sustainable development concerns. India's National Youth Policy (2003) places increased emphasis on environment and sustainable development issues and initiatives. Despite this progress, there are still significant opportunities to further incorporation of ESD into youth initiatives. Youth programmes require a clear strategy and institutional support for greater opportunities, constructive learning and involvement in ESD. The South Asia Youth Environment Network (SAYEN), located at CEE, promotes youth participation in sustainable development practices. Higher education institutions, NCC unit, NSS unit etc could also play a greater role in providing opportunities for youth involvement in environment related activities.

4. ***Enabling the increased use of bio-resources:*** To enable the increased use of bio-resources International and national policies regarding land management that permit or limit production practices; safety regulations, especially with regard to specific agrochemicals; subsidies that favour or limit the use of particular production practices; land and water rights, especially for small-scale farmers, rural communities and indigenous peoples should be reformed. Secondly, economic and market perspectives should be considered by developing markets for underutilized or wild species, using a wider range of genetic resources, development of totally new markets, stable supply of planting or breeding stocks, to adapt processing technologies and to set quality standards are also necessary. Community-based approaches should be considered by incorporating traditional knowledge in conservation and sustainable usage of bio-resources; recognizing the importance of bio-resources by local institutions organizing and managing local production and improvement of different ways to strengthen them is a essential. Sustainable diets are the diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and vital for biodiversity and ecosystems, it is culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; at the same time it is optimizing the use of natural and human resources.”

## **Conclusion**

With only 2.4% of the worlds’ land area, India accounts for 7 to 8% of the worlds’ plant and animal species. It is one of the 18 mega-diverse countries and contains four global biodiversity hotspots. India shows a high degree of endemism, which is why conserving biodiversity is essential for the future. As a developing country, its dependence on natural capital is more. Transforming these resources into other forms of wealth is essential for development, but it must be in a sustainable manner to ensure continued growth and the survival of the resources. Biodiversity conservation cannot be brought about only by enforcing law. Moreover assigning values to the priceless entity is an immense and urgent need. A holistic approach should be followed with implementation of regulations that reward conservation of ecosystem services or implicating methods of penalizing their destruction, and encouraging markets, which give economic value to the decision to conserve. Though, environment education is a compulsory subject in schools and colleges. Students are being taught mere facts and figures. We have to make our children realize that they are part of the problem, and therefore they have to be the part of the solution too. Apart from the above mentioned goal, the following should be considered:

1. Education of all the actors involved in production, marketing and consumption of bio-resources should be an important part of the process of changing production practices. Student should be involved in activity based learning such as designing projects centre upon needs of the communities. Interrelation between teachers, students and the curriculum is necessary. New ways of teaching and learning tools should be introduced like- games, classroom displays, performing arts, demonstration, exhibition, creative expressions, creative writing, arts and crafts, using the outdoors etc.
2. Agricultural production practices need to be changed, reducing the negative impact of agriculture on the environment while continuing to increase productivity and improve sustainability. It is essential to conserve species richness and genetic diversity within the species, to support sustainable development by protecting and using biological resources.
3. Knowledge about the needs of the target group is essential- which would help in designing an area- and essential- based project in correlation to everyday life of the individual. Collaboration between NGO's and Government Institutions having appropriate infrastructure and providing incentives to the participants and institutions in the form of ecosystem benefit sharing is also necessary.
4. Citizen action: individual and community initiatives- multi stakeholder involvement in the management of natural resources and evaluation is required. The need for the full participation of youth at all levels of policy making and implementation for biological resource conservation and sustainable use should be recognized.
5. Recognition of traditional practices and technology as an integral part of the strategies is essential. Above all an integrated system that is a blend of formal, non-formal, social, economic and sensitive approaches is needed to illuminate the young minds to solve biodiversity related environmental challenges.

The focus must be on reducing consumption, increasing sustainable use of bio-resources. Humans are the self-preserving self, so let's not think about other species of the planet, let's be the selfish ones, for our own benefits and interests 'let's care, save and share our wealth.

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## **'CAN A MACHINE THINK?'**

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### **Abstract**

The question 'Can machine think?' has been addressed in 1950 by Alan Turing with a proposed test, the Turing Test (TT), where a computer is to answer questions asked by humans. If the answers from the computer are not distinguishable from the answer coming from humans, the computer passes the Turing Test. In 1980 the validity of the TT has been challenged by John Searle in his paper 'Minds, Brains and Programs' published in the 'The Behavioral and Brain Science'. In the paper Searle sets out the Chinese Room Argument (CRA), which is one kind of objection to the Turing Test. It is also an attack on Strong Artificial Intelligence (Strong AI) Theory. In this paper first I would like to discuss about the Turing Test. After that views of Strong AI are to be examined and in the third section I shall focus on The Chinese Room Argument raised by Searle.

**Keywords:** *Machine, Think, The Turing Test, Chinese Room Argument, Artificial Intelligence.*

### **Introduction**

The phrase 'The Turing Test' is most properly used to refer to a proposal made by Alan Turing (1950) as a way of dealing with the question whether machine can think. According to Turing, the question whether machine can think is itself 'too meaningless' to deserve discussion. However, if we consider the more precise question whether a digital computer can do well in

certain kind of game that Turing describes as 'The Imitation Game', at least then in Turing's view we do have a question that admits of precise discussion.

Turing in his paper 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence' sketches the following kind of game. Suppose that we have a person, a machine and an interrogator. The interrogator is locked in a room separated from the person and the machine. The interrogator is like a judge can converse with both the person and the machine by typing into a terminal. Both the person and the machine try to convince the interrogator that they are the human. On the other hand interrogator's task is to find out which of the two contestant candidates will be the machine, and which will be the human, only by their answer to questions. If the interrogator cannot make a decision within a reasonable time, then the machine is considered to intelligent and wins the game.

The basic idea of the game is that the interrogator attempts to determine the sex of one contestant by asking questions and receiving answers in writing. The goal of at least one contestant answering these questions is to cause the interrogator to make the wrong determination. No information is available to an interrogator other than the written answers, and at least one of the contestants answering questions is not obliged to tell the truth.

The Turing test, in its original form, is to replace by a machine one of the contestants of the imitation game who is not required to be truthful. If the results of the game remain unaffected by the presence of this machine, then this machine is said to be capable of thought. In other words, a machine that is indistinguishable from a human being solely on the basis of 'written' interaction is considered to be capable of thought. About this game Turing says, " I believe that in fifty years time it will be possible to program computers, with a storage capacity of about 10 , to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 percent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning . . . I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machine thinking without expecting to be contradicted."

It is important to note here that Turing paper is pretty informal, and, in some ways rather idiosyncratic. In his paper he himself raises many possible objections against his theory and tries

to confute them. He mentions those objections as follows: 1) The Theological Objection, 2) the 'Heads in the Sand' objection, 3) The Mathematical Objection, 4) The Argument from Consciousness, 5) Arguments from Various Disabilities, 6) Lady Lovelace's objection, 7) Argument from continuity in the Nervous System, 8) The Argument from Informality of Behavior and 9) The Argument from Extrasensory Perception.

There are many different objections to the Turing Test which have surfaced in the philosophy of mind during the past sixty years, but all of these we cannot discuss. However, there is one argument—The Chinese Room Argument- that is mentioned so often in connection with the TT. The Chinese Room Argument is being considered as an attempt for refuting the TT.

Turing's article on the Imitation Game provides an elegant operational definition of Intelligence. The essence of the test proposed by Turing was that the ability to perfectly simulate unrestricted human conversation would constitute a sufficient criterion for intelligence. This way of defining intelligence, for better or for worse, was largely adopted as of the mid-1950's implicitly if not explicitly, as an overarching goal of the nascent field of artificial intelligence.

### **The Strong Artificial Intelligence theory**

In 1980, Searle publishes the paper 'Minds, Brains and Programs' in which he tries to refute the views of Strong AI theory along with Turing's conclusion. In his paper he makes a distinction between 'strong' AI and 'weak' AI. According to him strong AI is the view that the appropriately programmed computer really is a mind, in the sense that computers given the right programs can be said to understand and have other cognitive states. That is, computers do understand, have cognitive states and can think. By contrast, 'weak' AI is the view that computers are merely useful in psychology, linguistic and other areas, in part because they can simulate mental abilities, weak AI makes no claim that computers actually understand or are intelligent. In this paper Searle has no objection to the claim of weak AI. But he has a serious grievance against the theory of strong AI who claims that the appropriately programmed computer literally has cognitive states and that the programs thereby explain human cognition.

To discard the observation of strong AI, Searle considers a program SAM (Script Applier Mechanism) made by Roger Schank in 1977. Searle describes the Shank's program as follows—

*“. . . the aim of the program is to stimulate the human ability to understand stories. It is characteristic of human beings' story-understanding capacity that they can answer questions about the story even though the information that they give was never explicitly stated in the story. Thus, for example, suppose you are given the following story: 'A man went into a restaurant and ordered a hamburger. When the hamburger arrived it was burnt to a crisp, and the man stormed out of the restaurant angrily, without paying for the hamburger or leaving a tip.' Now, if you are asked 'Did the man eat the hamburger?' you will presumably answer, 'No, he did not.' Similarly, if you are given the following story: 'A man went into a restaurant and ordered a hamburger; when the hamburger came he was very pleased with it; and as he left the restaurant he gave the waitress a large tip before paying his bill,' and you are asked the question, 'Did the man eat the hamburger?', you will presumably answer, 'Yes, he ate the hamburger'. Now Schank's machines can similarly answer questions about restaurants in this fashion. To do this, they have a 'representation' of the sort of information that human beings have about restaurants, which enables them to answer such questions as those above, given these sorts of stories.' When the machine is given the story and then asked the question, the machine will print out answers of the sort that we would expect human beings to give if told similar stories. Partisans of strong AI claim that in this question and answer sequence the machine is not only stimulating a human ability but also*

- 1. That the machine can literally be said to understand the story and provide the answers to questions, and*
- 2. That what the machine and its program do explain the human ability to understand the story and answer questions about it.”*

These are exactly the claims that Searle likes to refute with his Chinese Room Argument. The same argument would apply to Winograd's SHARLU, Weizenbaum's ELIZA, and indeed any Turing machine stimulation of human mental phenomena.

## **The Chinese Room Argument**

The argument is basically a thought experiment presented by John Searle. Suppose Searle is a monolingual English speaker, cannot understand any Chinese and he is locked in a room which has a input-output window. Now, he is given 'a large batch of Chinese writings' plus 'a second batch of Chinese scripts' and 'a set of rules' in English for correlating the second batch with the first. The rules correlate one set of formal symbols with another set of formal symbols; here 'formal' means he can identify the symbols entirely by shapes. A third batch of Chinese symbols and more instruction in English enable him to correlate elements of this third batch with elements of the first two batches. Actually first batch is 'a script', the second batch is 'story' and the third batch is 'questions' and the rule in English is 'program' but Searle in the room does know nothing of it.

Now, after coming the script, story and questions, following the rule he manipulates the characters and produce a reply in terms of Chinese symbol which he pushes through the output window.

Suppose further, the Chinese answer that Searle produces are very good. In fact, so good, no one can tell that he is not a native Chinese speaker. Producing answers 'by manipulating uninterpreted formal symbols it seems as far as the Chinese is concerned, he simply behaves like a computer, specifically like a computer running Schank and Abelson's(1977) 'Scripts Applier Mechanism' story understanding computer.

But in imagining himself to be the person in the room, Searle thinks it is quite obvious that he does not understand a word of Chinese stories, actually he understands nothing except doing same formal manipulation. So Searle concludes, 'Schank's computer has nothing more that I have in the case, where I understand nothing.'

Searle argues that computers can never understand because computer programs are purely syntactical with no semantic. So what the strong AI is claiming false. Understanding is actually a biological phenomenon and only something with the same causal powers as brains can have.



## **Conclusion**

We have already seen that Searle argues against the strong AI by stating the Chinese Room Argument and concludes that Computationalism is false. To him, strong AI can only be achieved by a computer having the same causal relations as the brain. After Searle, S. Harnad, in his paper ‘What’s wrong and Right About Searle’s Chinese Room Argument?’ summarizes the CRA, agrees with it by refuting Computationalism, and counters a few comments on the CRA and that ‘there are still plenty of degrees of freedom in both hybrid and non-computational approaches’. Another important point is P.M. Churchland and P.S. Churchland in their paper ‘Could a Machine Think?’ argue the Chinese room argument is false and so it is not proven that mentality cannot be achieved by pure symbol manipulation. However due to performance failures of classical AI and specific characteristics of brains, they think that “classical AI is unlikely to yield consciousness machines, but that systems that mimic the brain might.”

In fine, this paper is about the Turing Test, strong AI and the Chinese Room Argument. For each of these terrains, there are lots of problems, loads of papers and articles but no consensus. This paper has only given an overview on some of these. More research, especially in the domain of cognitive science and philosophy of mind will helpfully bring some light on these issues.

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## **GEOGRAPHICAL REALITIES OF HIMALAYAN REGION IN TRAVEL WRITINGS: A REVIEW OF TWO BENGALI TRAVELOGUES**

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### **Abstract**

As far as the etymology of ‘travelogue’—that is, ‘a piece of Writing about travel’—is concerned, the first usage of the word can be noticed as late as in 1903 in the essays of the American traveller Burton Holmes(1870-1958). ‘Travelogue’, as delineated by Holmes, can be divided into different subcategories like ‘travel literature’, ‘travel writing’, ‘travel journal’, ‘travel documentary’, and ‘travelogue- film’. However, most important to decide before the beginning of composition of travelogues is whether the writing is intended to be narrative, descriptive, or instructive.

Swami Ramananda Bharati started his journey to Kailash and Mansorovar as a pilgrim in 1898 and he wrote his travel experiences with sacred view during 1900-1901. As a pilgrim Ramananda accomplished his long journey by foot and riding animal because more than hundred years ago modern transport was unavailable there. If we go through his book it is evident that his outlook or perspective was religious but the geographical facts and realities are present throughout his writings. His writings cover physiography, drainage, flora and fauna, local economy, settlement, society and culture of the time.

Umaprasad Mukhopadhyaya, well-acquainted in Himalayan travel wrote the book ‘Sherpader Deshe’.It is a book on the travel of Nepal-Himalayas. The writer travelled twice (1966 & 1975) in this region. In the first time he started his journey from Kathmandu towards Mt. Everest. After fourteen day’s walk he reached the destination. Mainly, exciting experience of his journey has got a footing in his book. His travelogue

has become a wonderful blending of amazing and multifarious description of nature together with the lives of local people. He has been able to give the vivid description of every halt of his travel route (as its location, altitude etc. ). Thus, his travelogue has reached the status of a geographical record.

**Key words:** *Himalaya, Travelogues, Geographical reality*

## **Introduction**

In ancient and medieval period travelogues were considered as an important source of geographical information of a region. Apparently, Himalaya appears as a 'Natural Wall' of Indian subcontinent but in reality it has a spiritual connection with Indian culture also. So many travelogues on Himalayan region particularly, in Bengali have been written during the last century. Here, two travelogues, 'Himaranya' by Swami Ramananda Bharati and 'Sherpader Deshe' by Umoprasad Mukhopadhyaya are taken into consideration.

Swami Ramananda Bharati started his journey to Kailash and Mansarovar as a pilgrim in 1898 and he wrote his travel experiences with sacred view in 1900-1901. On the other hand Umoprasad Mukhopadhyaya travelled twice (1966 & 1975) in this region.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the paper are---

- a) To study the Bengal Travelogues on Himalayan region as a tool to understand the physical geography (i.e. land forms, geology, climate, drainage, flora, fauna etc.)
- b) To study the habitat, economy and society of the two places according to the travelogues.
- c) To study the myths, beliefs and culture of the aforesaid region described in the travelogues.
- d) Changing scenario of physical landscape to cultural landscapes in temporal variation.
- e) To study man-environment relationship of the locals as well as the travellers according to the travelogues.

## **Methodology**

This is a descriptive or analytical paper. The use of literary tool and its geographical criticism is the major topic of discussion.

## **Existence of “Absolute” and “Relative” space**

The first book was written by a pilgrim and the second one is by a traveller. But both of them have depicted geographical realities of the respective places. Even not always systematically, but pictures of ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ space at time have been drawn.

### ➤ Physical geography in travel writings

Swami Ramananda Bharati described the physiography in the context of mythological background. So the name of the most places are Puranic and not similar at present. In his way to ‘Tratapuri’ the author found a hot spring near Sutlej which was described as ‘Bhasmachal’(p-54). The continuous upward slope in the way to ‘Gaurikuda’ was a permafrost extending five to six miles. For the Hindus a ‘Shva-linga’ shaped mount has almost 22028ft altitude from M.S.L (p-81). In ‘Ravana Hrad’ ( a lake) there was a hilly island with snow peak. Mountains are located in the northern part of ‘Khujrunath’ and in South there was a mountain stream(p-62, 80, 85). The author described ‘Selsel Pass’ which is almost 16390ft in height. In upper part of this pass boulders, pebbles and cobbles are deposited as dome. In Southern part of the river Dhauli, ‘Donagiri’ mountain is situated which is described as ‘Gandhamadan’ in ancient Hindu myth. The peaks are snow covered and the highest peak is 23181ft in altitude(p- 27).

Umadas Mukhopadhyaya has given a detail account of physiography of his journey route from Kathmandu to Thiangochi (Kunda). The author consciously mentioned the geographical terms like ‘Pass’, ‘Col’, ‘Avalanches’ etc to describe physiographic features. The another significance of his writing is to note down of the spot-height of various places and peaks laying his travel route.

In his way to ‘Tretapuri’ the author Ramananda Bharati found a meeting place of seven rivers which are known as ‘Donchu’. Nourished by Sutlej and other two rivers a

lake is created. The River of the 'Lion Mouth' is in the North, the River of the 'Horse Mouth' to the East, the River of the 'Peacock Mouth' to the South and the River of the 'Elephant Mouth' to the West(p- 64).

In Nepali 'Khola' means streams or small rivers. In his way 'Those', the author was surprised to watch the vast sand-bars on a small river. He also found a depressed zone encircled by high mountain peaks. It seems like a dry big pond which is actually the meeting place of several rivers. (p- 56)

➤ **Vegetation:**

As a conscious traveller, Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay's outlook was not merely romantic but scientific also. He mentioned the scientific names of the trees and gave a geographical explanation of the growth and distribution of the vegetation.

➤ **Settlement:**

In his way to 'Niti' Swami Ramananda Bharati<sup>2</sup> found that most of the houses were two-storied and few of them one storied. The ground floor was made of stone and mud and the first floor was structured by wood. He noticed most of the two-storied houses were situated in linear pattern. The ground floor of the two storied houses were generally used to keep the cattle like sheep, goat, cow etc. and the upper part was used as a room (p- 27).

Near 'Khenglung' two and three storied buildings were constructed carving the mountain but the poor local people would have lived in numerous caves in both sides of it (p- 51).The temples were completely made of stone instead of brick. Soil and stone-dust would have been used as the substitute of brick-dust which was so hard than the stone (p- 54).

Ramananda mentioned how did the hilly people adapt to the local environment. Most of the people of Darchin used to live in tents which were made of fur of yak. So, inner part of the tents remains warmer than the outside in winter season. As snowfall

occurs frequently in winter, so there might be the possibility to collapse the roof. For this reason except the rich people no one was able to construct the roof. The people had to clear the ice on roof regularly in winter. (p- 67).

➤ **Economy:**

Traditionally there was a commercial linkage between India and Tibet. In spite of a pilgrim Ramananda Bharati didn't overlook the economic scenario of the region. Major occupations of the people who live near Tibet-India ( at present border of Himachal Pradesh and Utrakhand ) border are agriculture and trade. They gather near 'Niti' Pass during the first of June and wait until to open the pass. Most of the male and female members of the families start to migrate seasonally and come back home before winter. More than hundred years ago, trade with Tibet was carried on by exchange of goods (barter system). The people of many villages near Niti Pass used to export rice, wheat, molasses, sugar candy and coloured pieces clothes and to import salt, borax and wool. Sheep, 'Jhabbu' and goat were the only medium in continuous upward and downward slope of Himalaya. Only cloths and wool were sold and bought in cash. At that time market price of wool of two sheep or goats was rupees one only. Local hilly people were the main buyer of wool who used to make winter garments from it and they would export to Lahore, Kanpur etc in undivided India ( p- 25 ).

➤ **Society and Culture:**

Umamprasad heard the story of life and society of the Sherpa's from his porter Girmi. The author has given a racial distinction between the original Sherpa and 'Tamang' Sherpa. Actually the Tamangs are not aboriginal community of Nepal. Their ancestors were Tibetan. They were Buddhist but married local Nepali woman. Thus a clan named as 'Tamang' was originated. Now they have lost their ancestor's socio-cultural tradition. They worship Lord Buddha and at the same time preserve Hindu's festive occasion (p- 12). So the author has consciously touched upon the anthropogenic and racial backgrounds of the locals.

➤ Sacred geography:

Geography is an interdisciplinary subject and its novel branch Sacred Geography has emerged where interrelationship between 'Religion' and 'space' has been exhibited. Sacred Spaces evoke a feeling of a sacredness of space and time, where Heaven seems to touch Earth and we find ourselves aware of the Holy, and filled with the Spirit. A higher energy resides in a sacred space, a power beyond human control which is a part of the feeling of "awe". To find ourselves in the midst of a great natural beauty is an awakening into moments of heightened spiritual consciousness.

The author Ramananda Bharati in his travelogue describes both 'Sacred' route and 'Travel' route. To visit holy Mansarovar from 'Jugumpha' the following sacred routes must be followed. First 'Jugumpha' to Nangmuna Moth; Nangmuna to Ghigimp; Ghigimp to Sarlang to Bondi; Bondi to Yangu; Yango to Thokor, Thokor to Khuchur. In all the places there was a Moth and a place for taking rest for the travellers. Distance from one Moth to another is atleast ten to twelve miles which indicates that total periphery of Mansarovar is almost eighty to eighty five km (p -86) .

Though his description is scattered yet there are some myth also. While going to Tretapuri from Khenglung he noticed a mountain emission smoke which was mythologically called as 'Bhasmachal'. It is said that 'Bhasmasur' (mythological demon) was burnt into ashes here. Lord Sankar lived here and then in conspiracy of Vishnu when Bhasmasur was burnt into ashes then Lord Sankar departed Kailash. So like Kailash it is also a great and holy pilgrimage. Then he came to Tretapuri where Lord Shiva (Sankar) lived here with Uma (Devi Durga) in Treta Yuga ( a Puranic era). (pp—53 & 54)

He heard a story of discovery of Kailash from some of old Lama. There are the stories of 'Gipchun' and 'Naropa'. They were the prophets of the Lamas. Among them the first one was the worshiper of Lord Shiva and second one was the worshiper of Buddha, i.e. atheist. In his travelogue their myth and stories have occupied a significant place but he didn't express his own feelings. But after having permission from a local



king to travel Kailash-Mansarovar the author as an ordinary pilgrim couldn't suppress his emotion. He believes "except God's blessings nobody without any obstruction can visit Kailash and taking bath in the water of Mansarovar..... I departed the place offering 'pronams' to tutelary God." (pp- 70)

➤ Environmental consciousness:

Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay never perceived Himalaya as a mere traveller. He has consciously pointed out the negative aspect of the growing tourism industry at the hill stations of Nepal. For example, in 1974 total number of tourists in Khumbu region was almost 4000 where at the same time total local people of the concerned area were 3300. This high rate of tourist flow and number of expedition to mountain peaks not only lead to deforestation and environmental pollution but also destroy the eternal calm-quiet spiritual environment of Himalaya. When he second time visited this region he found a heap of garbage like plastic, tear-paper, rags, empty packet etc scattered about here and there.

➤ In concluding statement:

Finally it can be stated that the travelogue on various aspects like pilgrimage, exploration, politics, travel and tourism, etc may be evaluated in the perspective of Geographical realities and ultimately a systematic Methodology can be developed in future.

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