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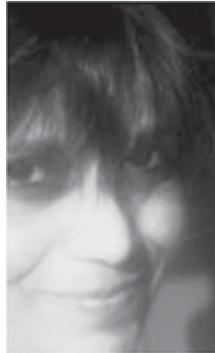
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Tikuli Tiku is a powerful signature in poetry and various other social issues. Her other areas of interests include travel, reading, networking, music, etc. A large part of her writing is executed and available through the internet, a versatile medium. They have received favorable and voluntary responses from diverse range of readers from the Indian Subcontinent to the US to Australia. Some of her work in poetry and fiction has been published online and in print.

One can visit her blog to see her further work and interests : <http://tikulicious.wordpress.com/>

Think Again Mister

Tikuli Tiku

So you think you can tame me
as you did before
chop my life into sick sodden slices
sear my brain
suck marrow out of my bones
pierce and skewer my heart
curve out the soft flesh
from under my breast
and turn me into
some luscious dish
gloat over my misfortune
creep under my skin
and nibble my flesh
like a parasite
reduce me to dust
sweep me under the carpet
or chain me, a performing monkey
and command in your stringent voice
"Perform !"
this manhood that you flaunt
doesn't excite me
it will be your cross
and your whip your noose
and I, whom you call dreg
will rise and blind you
am no marionette
I will end your masquerade
the show will end
and I
will take a bow

No More A Trophy Wife

Sharp as mustard
his words stung and left
a trail of poison in my veins
the marks that you see on my face
are the scarred gashes of my heart
parts of my body hurt
even with friction of the clothes
I'm used to the metallic taste
of the human blood
"Perform" he used to say
his sandpaper lips
corroded my skin
rapacious, savage, fire-breathing monster
with tongue whipping in and out like a snake
his fangs exposed and dripping
large paws groping, trusting, tearing
mauling and ripping my soul
confused, deranged, wet and slimy
I lugged my pain streaked carrion
meticulously concealed
nothing but a battered rag doll
with a wound between the legs
who says "time is a healer"
it torments, prolongs
I mulled memory wine for long
filled glasses, raised toasts
got drunk
and then one day
sprawled on the cold floor
I packed my dreams
gathered my hopes
threw you in the trash
crumpled ball of ink smudged paper
No more a sacrificial lamb
or a tasty morsel
a part of your feast
No more a nauch girl
a marionette
a trophy wife
to flaunt
and
keep encased
behind concrete walls
when not in use
I would rather
live on the streets
under the open sky
but will not be used, abused
humiliated, I won't
become your trophy wife
I won't succumb, I'll fight
I will give up
but won't give in
my soul is hardened
I am a rock.

Punjabi Qissas and the Story of Urdu

Mahmood Farooqui

The Social Space of Language : Vernacular Literature in British Colonial Punjab

by Farina Mir

This book straddles several anomalies that are rather obvious once stated but are rarely formulated as such. How is it that the world of Urdu literature becomes so dominated by people from the Punjab in a span of fifty years, beginning circa 1900s, and in a sense, continues to remain so? Iqbal, Faiz, Meeraji, Rashid, Bedi, Manto, Krishan Chander and down to our times Mushtaq Ahmed and Zafar Iqbal, a top twenty or top fifty list of modern Urdu litterateurs would likely contain eighty percent Punjabis. And how is it that Punjabi, which produced such a brilliant and varied repertoire of stories, epics and poems until the late medieval era by such extraordinary luminaries as Baba Farid, Bulle Shah, Waris Shah, Haridas Haria seems to drop out of our horizon in the modern era, where all we know of is an Amrita Pritam or, less likely, a Surjit Patar. Where such poverty after such riches, where such preponderance from such invisibility? And yet, how is it that Punjabi still continues to enjoy immediate and even aural connotations that transcend nationality, religion and, even as it defines a community, a specific ethnicity. What then is a Punjabi community and where and how has it existed specifically in the colonial era but, in many resilient ways, down to our times?

Add to this another vignette. During his trial in Britain in 1940, the revolutionary nationalist Udham Singh, who assassinated Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab who presided over the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, asked to take oath not on any religious text but on Hir Waris, the Hir-Ranjha poem penned by Waris Shah in the eighteenth century. 'What authority,' asks the writer of the book under review, 'was vested in the romance of Hir and Ranjha for this political revolutionary?'

The book examines the notion of a Punjabi identity by investigating the formation of a Punjab literary community which centred on the composition, narration, performance and

circulation of a set of stories, in verse and often set to music, called *qissas*. Mir's thesis is an attempt to define and narrate the formation of a Punjabi literary community woven around the *qissas*, especially the love stories, that were composed, recited and listened to by people of all faiths and backgrounds.

That this happened at a time when the colonial government in the Punjab was actively propagating Urdu as an official language and consciously downgrading Punjabi shows the resilience of this literary community and its chief practice around which this sociotextual community was formed, *qisse*. As a genre of literary creation, Qissas in North India were first composed in Indo-Persian by Amir Khusraw who retold the love stories of Laila Majnu and Shirin Farhad in the *masnawi* form. These were then translated into several vernacular languages and these and other stories began to be composed in Punjabi which used the Persian *masnawi* form but relied on indigenous metres. From the eighteenth century onwards Punjabi qissa writers began to acknowledge a literary lineage, even a historicist consciousness, of the genre they were operating in. They began to pay homage to past masters of the genre in their compositions.

Beginning in the seventeenth century these love stories of Punjab, especially the story of Hir Ranjha (but also Sassi-Pannu, Sohni-Mahival and Shirin-Farhad) came to define a central element in the definition of a Punjabi identity. These stories were composed by many different kinds of people: Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, noblemen and humbler folk, Sufis and courtiers. They were performed, recited, sung and enacted at shrines, village chowks, weddings, fairs and as stage productions. As such they gathered, in a sticky rather than a fuzzy way, a community around them which defined both an ethnicity as well as a regional identity. This continued in the colonial period even though the colonial state actively denied official patronage to Punjabi and sought to impose Urdu as an official language over Punjab. Qissas continued to thrive when print came to Punjab and provide a rare instance, in the nineteenth century, of a successful printing and publishing culture which did not depend on the colonial state for patronage.

Why was Punjabi marginalized in favor of Urdu? After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the colonial government, in sync with steps in the rest of the country, wanted to develop a vernacular through which to govern Punjab. Punjabi, especially in the Gurumukhi script, was identified, erroneously, exclusively with the Sikh community. Choosing Punjabi, feared some in the colonial administration, might bolster the simmering Sikh nationalist sentiments. Besides, the colonial officials looked down upon Punjabi and found it 'crude', 'barbaric', undeveloped, lacking a literature or worse, defined it as 'merely a patois of Urdu' which lacked a standardized script and usage. Since Punjabi was unfit the task fell upon Urdu. This was also convenient because a majority of the colonial administrators and their Indian collaborators (who were mainly drawn from Hindustan) were more familiar with Urdu than with Punjabi. The native chieftains in Punjab, it was argued, were also more familiar with Urdu. As elsewhere, in matters of linguistic, caste or religious purity the colonial state often adopted, modified to its purposes of course, the prejudices of its chief native informers. Thus Urdu became the official language of Punjab from 1854 and in addition to administrative usage, it also became the chief language of education. A three tier school system, village, tehsil and zilla schools, capped by the famous Government College of Lahore evolved with Urdu as the chief vehicle of instruction. As documented elsewhere Punjab's Department of Public Instruction under William Arnold also attempted a vigorous reform of Urdu literature by organizing theme Mushairas, giving prizes for reformistic essays, commissioning text books and subsidizing newspaper and book publishing. This facilitated a thriving public print culture in Urdu, across the religious divide, dominated by books, newspapers and journals. Thus it was that for a hundred years, until partition, Punjab became a fertile ground for Urdu language and literature. And it was this policy that allowed for a later efflorescence of Urdu literature in Punjab.

However, Punjabi could not be reduced either to a specific ethnic group or a script. Punjabi print data establish that Indo-Persian, Nagri and Gurumukhi scripts were all used to publish texts in Punjabi. Neither could any script be exclusively identified with a particular religion. Mir shows that in the second half of the nineteenth century eighteen different editions of the Adi Granth were published in Punjabi in the Urdu script while five

Punjabi translations of the Ramayana were also published in it. Moreover, while the colonial state misidentified the provenance of Punjabi and helped the spread of Urdu in Punjab it also grievously underrated the literary heritage of Punjab. Not only did Punjab have a thriving body of literature, going back a few centuries, but it was a literary heritage that straddled the entire region and across its religious communities. These chiefly consisted of qissas or love stories but also of other classical genres such as *var*, *dole*, *kafi*, *doha*, *si harfi* and *baran mah*. These had been composed, performed, recited and read by a whole miscellany of people living in Punjab. The writers and the literary community which patronized these compositions successfully harnessed print into the service of these genres and crucially, Punjabi print culture, resting on these indigenous and older genres thrived independent of colonial support. The most popular among these genres were qissas, tales of love, imbued often with the piety of saint veneration and composed sometimes by the leading Sufi-saints of Punjab. The most iconic of those was the qissa of Hir-Ranjha and its most outstanding version was composed by Waris Shah in the eighteenth century.

Mir is successful at teasing out the various strands for the popularity and resilience of this literary formation which in her view shows both the limits of the colonial power as also the resilience of indigenous tastes and practices. Instead of cultural rupture that characterises colonial rule elsewhere in the subcontinent here was a cultural practice and a mode of identity that showed continuities from the pre-colonial period. The world of saint-veneration and shared notions of piety where the qissas were nestled allowed many different connotations to play out at once. Ranjha was a pastoralist, a Jat, a nomad, a Sufi-disciple, a form of Krishna as well as a Punjabi. His identity could be defined by his *zat*, his *watan*, his *des*, his *suba*, his passion, his poetry or his flute. The many different versions of the same story, composed by people of different religions and backgrounds, emphasise similar features, which characterised Punjabi society at large. People who narrated or composed these stories could be professional bards, singers, storytellers, qawwals, noblemen or saint-poets. They were performed at festivals, weddings, ritual celebrations, village chowks, Gurudwaras as well as at Sufi shrines. Their book versions were illustrated and often showed high quality

production. The female heroine Hir appeared to enjoy a greater agency as a woman than we attribute to pre-colonial societies. She could challenge social norms, the Mulla and his Sharia, her mother, social dictates and notions of honor from different vantage points in different stories. Qissas were also simultaneously oral and written literature and this again shows continuities with the past as well as contemporary practices in other parts of India. It was as a kind of autonomous activity, independent of colonial institutions and policies, that the qissas made a successful transition to print. However, even as a printed form, their oral provenance and their aural texture remained alive. Fragments or episodes could be published independently because their readers and listeners were already familiar with the main contours of the story.

Mir ably covers almost the entire gamut of the different facets of colonial production of oriental knowledge. The construction of the colonial archive following administrative imperatives, the understanding that language provided the key to ruling a people and that mastering the language allowed a command over rulership, the ethnographic and taxonomic drive that characterised data collection in the late nineteenth century India, the role played by the socio-religious reformers of the nineteenth century in the construction of nationalities and in sectarian conflicts within and in between communities, the nature and place of women in this discourse, the nature of print production and the book trade in the Punjab in this period, the development and spread of Qawwali, the role of Sufis and religious shrines, there is hardly any strand of her topic that she leaves out. Alongside she shows us how received wisdom about print nationality does not apply to Punjab where this relatively autonomous literary formation continued to thrive and to define itself not against or as an alternative but parallel to the sectarian conflicts between Hindus (the Arya Samaj), Sikhs (the Singh Sabhas) and Muslims (Deobandis, Ahmadiyyas and Barelvis). Even while the political battles raged there were other practices and pastimes which brought people together and this happened along several axes. Notions of piety which emanated from Punjab's Sufi shrines and their ritual, cult practices animated people as strongly as ideas of religious exclusion or a print nationality. The role and conduct of women in these qissas were different from the reformed and subdued gender identities being purveyed by religious reformers, even or

particularly by those who favored education for women. Even while caste or tribe was the main trope for the colonial or official newspaper discoursed in the province, there were other ways of mapping social groupings viz *zaat*, *biradari*, *misl* and *qaum*.

While Mir exhaustively covers all the related themes around her main thesis my slight cavil with it is that she does not do enough with its core. A book which is titled 'the social space of language,' is subtitled 'vernacular language of British Colonial Punjab,' and it then narrows itself to a discussion of the formation of a literary community around qissas and then foreshortens that too specifically to the qissas of Hir Ranjha. But the discussion around Hir Ranjha is also embedded in a deep engagement with the cultural historiography of nineteenth century India so we get as much coverage of the existing literature on caste, gender, census, publishing, book trade, popular religiosity, Sufis and Qawwalis. Mir is fairly persuasive at recounting these strands and also in connecting it to her main thesis. However, often the background details overshadow the kernel which they are supposed to highlight. To resort to a simplified or perhaps even a simplistic formulation, it is written from the outside-in rather than the inside-out. We learn a great deal about the world around which the Qissas were composed and performed but not as much about their consumption or their reception.

Moreover, the popularity of Qissas in the eighteenth century, or its resilience into the nineteenth, was not restricted to Punjab alone. All across Hindustan, that is North India, several such stories were composed and narrated in ways which were very similar to Punjab. *Qissa-e Nal Damyanti*, *Rani Rupmati aur Baz Bahadur*, *Betal Pachisi*, *Singhasan Battisi*, *Barahmasa*, these stories and genres circulated from the vernacular to Persian and back to the vernacular in North India. Legions of Urdu masnawis in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries described similar love stories. Many of them, especially in Awadhi, were deployed by Sufi saint-poets, in what came to be known as *Premakhyanas*, to discuss and propagate Sufism. Often these enjoyed enormous cache in both elite and popular circles. Daud's *Chandayan* for instance was a highly prized book, was often lavishly illustrated and circulated at courtly circles and at one time, according to Badauni, was read aloud in a mosque in Delhi. These Hindustani tales were also meant to be recited aloud and were presumably set to music and performed

too. There is then an elite-subaltern circularity that is similar to the Punjabi situation. Moreover, when print came to North India it was these *qissas* which formed the mainstay of popular consumption. It was for this reason that a majority of the publications brought out by Fort William consisted of these tales, which had already been in oral and written circulation for some centuries. Book advertisements in the early newspapers of North India as well as analyses of the print runs establish beyond doubt that Qissas remained the most popular genre of readership and oral consumption in North India beyond Punjab. They also contain the same mixture of *neeti* or *akhlaq* which is good moral conduct, notions of piety that went beyond any particular religious community and they too recounted stories that were already familiar to people.

Some of these stories were actively patronized by the colonial state. For instance the *Qissa-e-Chahar Darwesh* also known as *Bagh-o-Bahar* that was printed at Fort William by Mir Amman Dehlavi became highly popular thanks in part to the colonial patronage and because it was used to teach Urdu to the colonial recruits. But the colonial administrators had an ambivalent relation with the text and never ceased to harp on the need for a more morally charged literature compared to the obscene and crude fables put out by the Hindustanis. Most of these stories, as production and as consumption, cut across denominational religious lines. Many of them later became a part of the staple repertoire of the commercial universe of Parsi theatre and thence into Hindi cinema, thus giving us a film version of *Laila Majnu* starring Rishi Kapur as late as 1976.

Did the uniqueness of Punjab lie in the lack of official patronage for printing or that the iconic saint-figures constituted a boundary of imagination which was multiplied by a specified set of *qissas*? Did this commonality of a shared interest in Punjabi literary formation exist precisely because Punjabi had not been elevated as an official language, it was too familiar, too everyday, to cause high political contestation? Is that freedom borne of accidental innocuousness, of a sort, the reason why it continues to survive as something of a labour of instantaneous love across the South Asian divides? Urdu poets from Punjab retained and continue to do so, their familiarity with Punjabi literary cultures, exactly in the same vein as Urdu poets from Awadh did with Awadhi or Braj or Bhojpuri, now and before. How deep

this shared literary formation penetrate – writers apart, did the religious-communal warfare and pogroms of partition compel rethinks at the popular level? Farina Mir's book compels one to ask many questions while leaving us with a groundbreaking work on Punjab and its many identities.

I wanted to use this book review to reopen a debate that started some years ago on *Kafila* ([one](#) and [two](#)) where a gentleman called Panini Pothoharvi raised all our hackles by attacking the poet-lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi on several grounds – that he was a lachrymose versifier as a poet and a mediocre film lyricist albeit a significant cultural phenomenon, that Urdu is an elite language and Sahir did not write in Punjabi but in Urdu because he was seduced by the riches that Urdu, as an elite language, brought to people born outside its fold, that Punjabi had the greatest, of North Indian languages, literary output for a thousand years beginning around the second millennium, that Urduwallahs and their pseudo-secular followers had not allowed Punjabi the recognition and the space it deserves and that Urdu had deprived Punjabi of its rightful place in the literary horizon of India and the world at large.

Some of this goes further back than Panini. Amrit Rai in his *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi/Hindavi* had argued that Urdu was an artificial and constructed language dating no older than the eighteenth century. The century which witnessed Nadir Shah's invasion of Delhi and the disintegration of the Mughal Empire created panic in the minds of the Indo-Persian elites. In order to ensure that their distinction and separate identity remained unassailable they, especially the Delhi writers, systematically cast out Sanskrit and Desi, that is Tadbhav and Tatsam, words from a common literary language called Hindavi or Hindi, which had a pan-India currency and replaced it with a Persianate vocabulary, imagery and literary ethos. Thus Urdu was born out of the desire of the Indo-Persian elites to separate themselves from their Indian legacy. And since Maulvi Abdul Haq, hailed for his services to Urdu as the father of modern Urdu, the Baba-e-Urdu, had proclaimed after partition and after he migrated to Pakistan that 'Urdu it was that had created Pakistan,' the retrospective judgment on eighteenth century poetic politics, at first glance, does not seem out of place.

Along with charges of illegitimacy and

elitism and foreign implantations in its literary and linguistic practices Urdu has simultaneously also been celebrated for being a melting pot which came into existence because it assimilated the vocabulary and usage of several languages including Braj, Persian, Turkic, Portuguese, Awadhi and English. It has been lauded for its secular orientation and been seen to have arisen in part out of the needs and practices of the Sufis who needed to speak to the common people to spread their message. This last point though has been strongly challenged by Professor Mujeeb Rizvi, recently, who avers that Sufis were already composing their Premakhyanas to spread their message and philosophy and they were doing this in Awadhi, and in Braj, languages and/or literatures that were more easily understood by the masses including the peasants and which certainly had a longer reach than Urdu. Moreover, argues Professor Rizvi, writers like Mulla Daud and Jayasi were extremely well versed with High Persianate idioms and they consciously reproduced them in Awadhi thereby virtually creating a poetic tradition, a new vocabulary and almost a new language. They created new themes, new words and coinages to speak of Islam and in short integrated Indian poetic traditions to Indo-Persian traditions over centuries of practice. Compared to the deep constructivist work done by the medieval Sufis Urdu of the eighteenth century was a work of mere 'embroidery' without the intensity, ardour and significance of the work done by the Sufi-poets. Urdu's urge for refinement, its ineluctable imbrications in *Sharafat* and the *Sharif* culture perforce cast it in an elitist mode. Thus modern Urdu turned away from its own indigenous past and created a literary vocabulary which was alien to the vast majority of the speakers from which it drew its consumers in a kind of precursor to the construction of modern Hindi in the nineteenth century.

At first sight this seems common-sensical because unlike Punjabi or Awadhi or Braj, peasants do not speak Urdu. Urdu was and is an urban language without a folk. But then again in pre-modern India, as David Lelyveld says, 'there was a diverse collection of languages, different languages for different people on different occasions,' and a case can be made of a linguistic-literary culture where as Mir says, 'there were colloquial, liturgical, sacred, court and literary languages, some of which overlapped and some of which did not.' However, unlike the Punjab there is no single dense tradition that can define

the much larger region of Hindustan. Divided into Braj, Awadhi, Bundeli, Rajasthani dialects superimposed by Khari Boli Urdu, the literary formations of these regions showed similarities with the Punjab but their regionalism was differently contoured. There is no doubt that the colonial patronage of Urdu benefitted the standardized and Persianised variant of eighteenth century Dehlavi Hindi but the patronage was issued because it was already the lingua franca across vast swathes of Hindustan and Deccan.

The taste for Urdu stretched well into the rural arena and the popularity of Parsi theatre songs and also of Nautanki are testimony to that. Moreover, the Urdu folk does not inhere in the canon in part because of the particularities of the internecine warfare between Hindi and Urdu in the late nineteenth century. But as a living tradition before 1857 it would be difficult to find an Urdu poet who did not also show enough command of the dialect of the locality where the poet or the writer hailed from. Awadhi of course formed the main hinterland of the poets from Awadh. Until at least the 1820s most poets also composed Divans in Braj, Shah Alam did, as did Rangin as did Insha. Deep awareness of the vernacular and participation in its cultural heritage went hand in hand with the high poetics of Urdu proper. Wajid Ali Shah's *thumris*, *swangs*, *Rahasaas* and *Indersabhas* emerged from a literary culture where knowing Urdu was not enough. In a culture that prized virtuosity the poets had to show their mastery of several registers of language and also their command of linguistic pyrotechnics which prized performance and therefore knowledge of dialects around the core. Most poets spontaneously composed *kabitts*, the Braj short poetic form which are a commonplace presence in Masnawis and Dastans. What we get in Hindustan then, including the Punjab, is a literary culture where Braj, Awadhi and Punjabi dominated the literary landscape in certain designated regions but on top of which Urdu held sway. No doubt because of its elite moorings and patronage of the ruling elite but also because it could share affinities and features with all of these languages/dialects more strongly than either could do with each other.

Or perhaps that is incorrect?

Courtesy—kafila.org

'Artist's domain is his work'

Balraj Sahni (1 May 1913–13 April 1973) was one of the most respectable film and theatre personalities of India. This is the reproduction of his address delivered at Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi) Convocation in 1972.

About 20 years ago, the Calcutta Film Journalists' Association decided to honour the late Bimal Roy, the maker of *Do Bigha Zameen*, and us, his colleagues. It was a simple but tasteful ceremony. Many good speeches were made, but the listeners were waiting anxiously to hear Bimal Roy. We were all sitting on the floor, and I was next to Bimal Da. I could see that as his turn approached he became increasingly nervous and restless. And when his turn came he got up, folded his hands and said, "Whatever I have to say, I say it in my films. I have nothing more to say," and sat down.

There is a lot in what Bimal Da did, and at this moment my greatest temptation is to follow his example. The fact that I am not doing so is due solely to the profound regard I have for the name which this august institution bears; and the regard I have for yet another person, Shri P.C. Joshi, who is associated with your university. I owe to him some of the greatest moments of my life, a debt which I can never repay. That is why when I received an invitation to speak on this occasion, I found it impossible to refuse. If you had invited me to sweep your doorstep I would have felt equally happy and honoured. Perhaps that service would have been more equal to my merit.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not trying to be modest. Whatever I said was from my heart and whatever I shall say further on will also be from my heart, whether you find it agreeable and in accordance with the tradition and spirit of such occasions or otherwise. As you may know, I have been out of touch with the academic world for more than a quarter of a century. I have never addressed a University Convocation before.

It would not be out of place to mention

that the severance of my contact with your world has not been voluntary. It has been due to the special conditions of film making in our country. Our little film world either offers the actor too little work, forcing him to eat his heart out in idleness; or gives him too much —so much that he gets cut off from all other currents of life. Not only does he sacrifice the pleasures of normal family life, but he also has to ignore his intellectual and spiritual needs. In the last 25 years I have worked in more than 125 films. In the same period a contemporary European or American actor would have done 30 or 35. From this you can imagine what a large part of my life lies buried in strips of celluloid. A vast number of books which I should have read, I have not been able to read. So many events I should have taken part in, have passed me by. Sometimes I feel terribly left behind. And the frustration increases when I ask myself: How many of these 125 films had anything significant in them? How many have any claim to be remembered? Perhaps a few. They could be counted on the fingers of one hand. And even they have either been forgotten already or will be, quite soon.

That is why I said I was not being modest. I was only giving a warning, so that in the event of my disappointing you, you should be able to forgive me. Bimal Roy was right. The artist's domain is his work. So, since I must speak, I must confine myself to my own experience to what I have observed and felt, and wish to communicate. To go outside that would be pompous and foolish.

I'd like to tell you about an incident which took place in my college days and which I have never been able to forget. It has left a permanent impression on my mind.

I was going by bus from Rawalpindi to Kashmir with my family to enjoy the summer vacation. Half-way through, we were halted because a big chunk of the road had been swept away by a landslide caused by rain the previous

night. We joined the long queues of buses and cars on either side of the landside. Impatiently, we waited for the road to clear. It was a difficult job for the PWD and it took some days before they could cut a passage through. During all this time, the passengers and the drivers of vehicles made a difficult situation even more difficult by their impatience and constant demonstration. Even the villagers nearby got fed up with the high-handed behaviour of the city-walas.

One morning, the overseer declared the road open. The green-flag was waved to the drivers. But we saw a strange sight. No driver was willing to be the first to cross. They just stood and stared at each other from either side. No doubt the road was a make-shift one and even dangerous. A mountain on one side, and a deep gorge and the river below. Both were forbidding. The overseer had made a careful inspection and had opened the road with a full sense of responsibility. But nobody was prepared to trust his judgment, although these very people had, till the day before, accused him and his department of laziness and incompetence. Half an hour passed by in dumb silence. Nobody moved. Suddenly, we saw a small green sports car approaching. An Englishman was driving it; sitting all by himself. He was a bit surprised to see so many parked vehicles and the crowd there. I was rather conspicuous, wearing my smart jacket and trousers. "What's happened?" he asked me.

I told him the whole story. He laughed loudly, blew the horn and went straight ahead, crossing the dangerous portion without the least hesitation.

And now the pendulum swung the other way. Every body was so eager to cross that they got into each other's way and created a new confusion for some time. The noise of hundreds of engines and hundreds of horns was unbearable.

That day I saw with my own eyes the difference in attitudes between a man brought up in a free country and a man brought up in an enslaved one. A free man has the power to think, decide, and act for himself. But the slave loses that power. He always borrows his thinking

from others, wavers in his decisions, and more often than not only takes the trodden path.

I learnt a lesson from this incident, which has been valuable to me. I made it a test for my own life. In the course of my life, whenever I have been able to make my own crucial decisions, I have been happy. I have felt the breath of freedom on my face. I have called myself a free man. My spirit has soared high and I have enjoyed life because I have felt there is meaning to life.

But, to be frank, such occasions have been too few. More often than not I had lost courage at the crucial moment, and taken shelter under the wisdom of other people. I had taken the safer path. I made decisions which were expected of me by my family, by the bourgeois class to which I belonged, and the set of values upheld by them. I thought one way but acted in another. For this reason, afterwards I have felt rotten. Some decisions have proved ruinous in terms of human happiness. Whenever I lost courage, my life became a meaningless burden.

I told you about an Englishman. I think that in itself is symptomatic of the sense of inferiority that I felt at that time. I could have given you the example of Sardar Bhagat Singh who went to the gallows the same year. I could have given you the example of Mahatma Gandhi who always had the courage to decide for himself. I remember how my college professors and the wise respectable people of my home town shook their heads over the folly of Mahatma Gandhi, who thought he could defeat the most powerful empire on earth with his utopian principles of truth and non-violence. I think less than one per cent of the people of my city dreamt that they would see India free in their lifetime. But Mahatma Gandhi had faith in himself, in his country, and his people. Some of you may have seen a painting of Gandhiji done by Nandlal Bose. It is the picture of a man who has the courage to think and act for himself.

During my college days I was not influenced by Bhagat Singh or Mahatma Gandhi. I was doing my MA in English literature from the most magnificent educational institution in the Punjab— the Government College in Lahore. Only the very best students were admitted to

that college. After independence my fellow students have achieved the highest positions in India and Pakistan, both in the government and society. But, to gain admission to this college we had to give a written undertaking that we would take no interest in any political movement—which at that time meant the freedom movement.

This year we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of our independence. But can we honestly say that we have got rid of our slavish mentality—our inferiority complex?

Can we claim that at the personal, social, or institutional level, our thinking, our decisions, or even our actions are our own and not borrowed? Are we really free in the spiritual sense? Can we dare to think and act for ourselves, or do we merely pretend to do so—merely make a superficial show of independence?

I should like to draw your attention to the film industry to which I belong. I know a great many of our films are such that the very mention of them would raise a laugh among you. In the eyes of educated intelligent people, Hindi films are nothing but a tamasha. Their stories are childish, unreal, and illogical. But their worst fault, you will agree with me, is that their plots, their technique, their songs and dances, betray blind, unimaginative, and unabashed copying of films from the west. There have been Hindi films which have been copied in every detail from some foreign film. No wonder that you young people laugh at us, even though some of you may dream of becoming stars yourselves.

It is not easy for me to laugh at Hindi films. I earn my bread from them. They have brought me plenty of fame and wealth. To some extent at least, I owe to Hindi films the high honour which you have given me today.

When I was a student like you, our teachers, both English and Non-English, tried to convince us in diverse ways that the fine arts were a prerogative of white people. Great films, great drama, great acting, great painting, etc., were only possible in Europe and America. The Indian people, their language and culture, were as yet too crude and backward for real artistic expression. We used to feel bitter about this and we resented it outwardly: but inwardly we could not help accepting this judgment.

The picture has changed vastly since then. After independence India has made a tremendous recovery in every branch of the arts. In the field of film making, names like Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy stand out as international personalities. Many of our artistes, cameramen and technicians compare with the best anywhere in the world. Before independence we hardly made ten or fifteen films worth the name. Today we are the biggest film producing country in the world. Not only are our films immensely popular with the masses in our own country, but also in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, the Eastern Republics of the Soviet Union; Egypt, and other Arab countries in the Far East and many African countries. We have broken the monopoly of Hollywood in this field.

Even from the aspect of social responsibility, our Indian films have not yet degenerated to the low level to which some of the western countries have descended. The film producer in India has not yet exploited sex and crime for the sake of profit to the extent that his American counterpart has been doing for years and years—thus creating a serious social problem for that country.

But all these assets are negated by our one overwhelming fault—that we are imitators and copyists. This one fault makes us the laughing stock of intelligent people everywhere. We make films according to borrowed, outdated formulas. We do not have the courage to strike out on our own, to get to grips with the reality of our own country, to present it convincingly and according to our own genius.

I say this not only in relation to the usual Hindi or Tamil box office films. I make this complaint against our so-called progressive and experimental films also, whether they be in Bengali, Hindi, or Malayalam. I do not lag behind anyone else in admiring the work of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Sukhdev, Basu Bhattacharjee, or Rajinder Singh Bedi. I know they are highly and deservedly respected; but even then I cannot help saying that the winds of fashion in Italy, France, Sweden, Poland, or Czechoslovakia have an immediate effect on their work. They do break new ground, but only after someone else has broken it.

In the literary world, in which I have

considerable interest, I see the same picture. Our novelists, story writers, and poets are carried away with the greatest of ease by the currents of fashion in Europe, although Europe, with the exception of the Soviet Union perhaps, is not yet even aware of Indian writing. For example, in my own province of the Punjab there is a wave of protest among young poets against the existing social order. Their poetry exhorts the people to rebel against it, to shatter it and build a better world free from corruption, injustice, and exploitation. One cannot but endorse that spirit wholeheartedly, because, without question, the present social order needs changing.

The content of this poetry is most admirable, but the form is not indigenous. It is borrowed from the west. The west has discarded meter and rhyme, so our Punjabi poet must also discard it. He must also use involved and ultra-radical imagery. The result is that the sound and fury remains only on paper, confined to small, mutually admiring literary circles. The people, the workers and the peasants who are being exhorted to revolution, cannot make head or tail of this kind of poetry. It just leaves them cold and perplexed. I don't think I am wrong if I say that other Indian languages too are in the grip of "new wave" poetry.

I know next to nothing about painting. I can't judge a good one from a bad one. But I have noticed that in this sphere also our painters conform to current fashions abroad. Very few have the courage to swim against the tide.

And what about the academic world? I invite you to look into the mirror. If you laugh at Hindi films, maybe you are tempted to laugh at yourselves.

This year my own province honoured me by nominating me to the senate of Guru Nanak university. When the invitation to attend the first meeting came, I happened to be in the Punjab, wandering around in some villages near Preet Nagar—the cultural centre founded by our great writer S. Gurbakhsh Singh. During the evening's gossip I told my villager friends that I was to go to Amritsar to attend this meeting and if anyone wanted a lift in my car he was welcome. At this one of the company said, "Here among us you go about dressed in *tehmat-kurta*, peasant fashion;

but tomorrow you will put on your suit and become Sahib Bahadur again." "Why," I said laughingly, "if you want I will go dressed just like this." "You will never dare," another one said. "Our sarpanch Sahib here removes his *tehmat* and puts on a pyjama whenever he has to go to the city on official work. He has to do it, otherwise, he says, he is not respected. How can you go peasant-fashion to such a big university?" A jawan who had come home on leave for the rice sowing added, "Our sarpanch is a coward. In cities even girls go about wearing *lungis* these days. Why should he not be respected?"

The gossip went on, and, as if to accept their challenge, I did make my appearance in the Senate meeting in *tehmat-kurta*. The sensation I created was beyond my expectation. The officer—perhaps, professor—who was handing out the gowns in the vestibule could not recognize me at first. When he did he could not hide his amusement, "Mr Sahni, with the *tehmat* you should have worn *khosas*—not shoes," he said, while putting the gown over my shoulders. "I shall be careful next time," I said apologetically and moved on. But a moment later I asked myself, was it not bad manners for the professor to notice or comment on my dress? Why did I not point this out to him? I felt peeved over my slow-wittedness.

After the meeting we went over to meet the students. Their amusement was even greater and more eloquent. Many of them could not help laughing at the fact that I was wearing shoes with a *tehmat*. That they were wearing chappals with trousers seemed nothing extraordinary to them.

You must wonder why I am wasting your time narrating such trivial incidents. But look at it from the point of view of the Punjabi peasant. We are all full of admiration for his contribution to the green revolution. He is the backbone of our armed forces. How must he feel when his dress or his way of life is treated as a matter of amusement?

It is well-known in the Punjab that as soon as a village lad receives college education, he becomes indifferent to the village. He begins to consider himself superior and different, as if belonging to a separate world altogether. His

one ambition is to somehow leave the village and run to a city. Is this not a slur on the academic world?

I agree that all places are not alike. I know perfectly well that no complex against the native dress exists in Tamil Nadu or Bengal. Anyone from a peasant to a professor can go about in a dhoti on any occasion. But I submit that the habit of borrowed and idealized thinking is present over there too. It is present everywhere, in some form or degree. Even 25 years after independence we are blissfully carrying on with the same system of education which was designed by Macaulay and Co. to breed clerks and mental slaves. Slaves who would be incapable of thinking independently of their British masters; slaves who would admire everything about the masters, even while hating them; slaves who would consider it an honour to be standing by the side, of the masters, to speak the language of the masters, to dress like the masters, to sing and dance like the masters; slaves, who would hate their own people and would be available to preach the gospel of hatred among their own people. Can we then be surprised if the large majority of students in universities are losing faith in this system of education?

Let me go back to trivialities again. Ten years ago, if you asked a fashionable student in Delhi to wear a kurta with trousers he would have laughed at you. Today, by the grace of the hippies and the Hare Rama Hare Krishna cult, not only has the kurta-trousers combination become legitimate, but even the word kurta has changed to guru-shirt. The sitar became a star instrument with us only after the Americans gave a big welcome to Ravi Shankar, just as 50 years ago Tagore became Gurudev all over India only after he received the Nobel Prize from Sweden.

Can you dare to ask a college student to shave his head, moustache, and beard when the fashion is to put the barbers out of business? But if tomorrow under the influence of Yoga the students of Europe begin to shave their heads arid faces, I can assure you that you will begin to see a crop of shaven skulls all over Connaught Circus the next day. Yoga has to get a certificate from Europe before it can influence the home of its birth.

Let me give another example—a less trivial one.

I work in Hindi films, but it is an open secret that the songs and dialogues of these Hindi films are mostly written in Urdu. Eminent Urdu writers and poets—Krishan Chandar, Rajinder Singh Bedi, K. A. Abbas, Gulshan Nanda, Sahir Ludhianwi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and Kaifi Azmi are associated with this work.

Now, if a film written in Urdu can be called a Hindi film, it is logical to conclude that Hindi and Urdu are one and the same language. But no, our British masters declared them two separate languages in their time. Therefore, even 25 years after independence, our government, our universities, and our intellectuals insist on treating them as two separate and independent languages. Pakistan radio goes on ruining the beauty of this language by thrusting into it as many Persian and Arabic words as possible; and All India Radio knocks it out of all shape by pouring the entire Sanskrit dictionary into it. In this way they carry out the wish of the Master, to separate the inseparable. Can anything be more absurd than that? If the British told us that white was black, would we go on calling white black for ever and ever? My film colleague Johnny Walker remarked the other day, “They should not announce ‘*Ab Hindi mein samachar suniye*’ [Now listen to the news in Hindi] they should say, ‘*Ab Samachar mein Hindi suniye*’ [Now listen to Hindi in the News]

I have discussed this funny situation with many Hindi and Urdu writers—the so-called progressive as well as non-progressive; I have tried to convince them of the urgency to do some fresh thinking on the subject. But so far it has been like striking one’s head against a stone wall. We film people call it the “ignorance of the learned”. Are we wrong?

Lastly, I would like to tell you about a hunch I have, even at the risk of boring you. A hunch is something you can’t help having. It just comes. Ultimately it may prove right or wrong. May be mine is wrong. But there it is. It may even prove right—who knows?

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has admitted in his autobiography that our freedom movement, led by the Indian National Congress, was always

dominated by the propertied classes—the capitalists and landlords. It was logical, therefore, that these very classes should hold the reigns of power even after independence. Today it is obvious to everyone that in the last 25 years the rich have been growing ‘richer’ and the poor have been growing poorer. Pandit Nehru wanted to change this state of affairs, but he couldn’t. I don’t blame him, because he had to face very heavy odds all along. Today our Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, pledges herself to take the country towards the goal of socialism. How far she will be successful, I can’t say. Politics is not my line. For our present purposes it is enough if you agree with me that in today’s India the propertied classes dominate the government as well as society.

I think you will also agree that the British used the English language with remarkable success for strengthening their imperial hold on our country.

Now, which language in your opinion would their successors, the present rulers of India, choose to strengthen their own domination? Rashtrabhasha Hindi? By heavens, no. My hunch is that their interests too are served by English and English alone. But since they have to keep up a show of patriotism they make a lot of noise about Rashtrabhasha Hindi so that the mind of the public remains diverted.

Men of property may believe in a thousand different gods, but they worship only one—the God of profit. From the point of view of profit the advantages of retaining English to the capitalist class in this period of rapid industrialization and technological revolution are obvious. But the social advantages are even greater. From that point of view English is a God-sent gift to our ruling classes.

Why? For the simple reason that the English language is beyond the reach of the toiling millions of our country. In olden times Sanskrit and Persian were beyond the reach of the toiling masses. That is why the rulers of those times had given them the status of state language. Through Sanskrit and Persian the masses were made to feel ignorant, inferior, uncivilized, and unfit to rule themselves. Sanskrit and Persian helped to enslave their minds, and when the

mind is enslaved bondage is eternal.

It suits our present ruling classes to preserve and maintain the social order that they have inherited from the British. They have a privileged position; but they cannot admit it openly. That is why a lot of hoo-haw is made about Hindi as the Rashtrabhasha. They know very well that this Sanskrit-laden, artificial language, deprived of all modern scientific and technical terms, is too weak and insipid to challenge the supremacy of English. It will always remain a show piece, and what is more, a convenient tool to keep the masses fighting among themselves. We film people get a regular flow of fan mail from young people studying in schools and colleges. I get my share of it and these letters reveal quite clearly what a storehouse of torture the English language is to the vast majority of Indian students. How abysmally low the levels of teaching and learning have reached! That is why, I am told preferential treatment is being given to boys and girls who come from public schools i.e. schools to which only the children of privileged classes can go.

This was my hunch and I confided it one day to a friend of mine who is a labour leader. I told him that if we are serious about doing away with capitalism and bringing in socialism, we have to help the working class to consolidate itself on an all-India scale with the same energy as the capitalist class is doing. We have to help the working class achieve a leading role in society. And that can only be done by breaking the domination of English and replacing it with a people’s language.

My friend listened to me carefully and largely agreed with me.

“You have analyzed the situation very well,” he said, “but what is the remedy?”

“The remedy is to retain the English script and kick out the English language,” I replied.

“But how?”

“A rough and ready type of Hindustani is used by the working masses all over India. They make practical use of it by discarding all academic and grammatical flourishes. In this type of Hindustani, “*Larka bhi jata hei*” and “*Larki bhi jata hei*”. There is an atmosphere of rare freedom in this patois and even the intellectuals indulge

in it when they want to relax. And actually this is in the best tradition of Hindustani. This is how it was born, made progress, and acquired currency all over India. In the old days it was contemptuously called Urdu—or the language of the camps or bazaars.

Today in this bazaari Hindustani the word 'university' becomes *univrastī*—a much better word than *vishwa vidyalaya*, 'lantern' becomes *laltain*, the 'chassis' of a car becomes *chesi*, 'spanner' becomes *pana*, i.e. anything and everything is possible. The string with which the soldier cleans his rifle is called 'pullthrough' in English. In Roman Hindustani it becomes *fultroo*—a beautiful word. 'Barn-door' is the term the Hollywood lights man uses for a particular type of two blade cover. The Bombay film worker has changed it to *bandar*, an excellent transformation. This Hindustani has untold and unlimited possibilities. It can absorb the international scientific and technological vocabulary with the greatest of ease. It can take words from every source and enrich itself. One has no need to run only to the Sanskrit dictionary."

"But why the Roman script?" my friend asked.

"Because no one has any prejudice against it," I said. "It is the only script which has already gained all-India currency. In north, south, east and west, you can see shop signs and film poster in this script. We use this script for writing addresses on envelopes and post cards. The army has been using it for the last thirty years at least."

My friend, the labour leader, kept silent for some time. Then he smiled indulgently and said, "Comrade, Europe also experimented with Esperanto. A great intellectual like Bernard Shaw tried his best to popularize the Basic English. But all these schemes failed miserably, for the simple reason that languages cannot be evolved mechanically; they grow spontaneously."

I was deeply shocked. I said, "Comrade, Esperanto is just that Rashtrabhasha which the Hindi Pandits are manufacturing in their studies, from the pages of some Sanskrit dictionary. I am talking of the language which is growing all round you, through the action of the people."

But I couldn't convince him. I gave more

arguments, including the one that Netaji Subhash Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru were both strong advocates of Roman Hindustani, but that too failed to convince him. The question is not whether the comrade or I was right. Perhaps, I was wrong. Perhaps, my thinking was utopian, or "mechanical" —as he called it. As I said before, you can never say whether a hunch is going to be right or wrong. But the fun lies in having it, because to have a hunch is a sign of independent thinking. The comrade should have been able to appreciate that, but he couldn't, because it was difficult for him to get out of the grooves of orthodox thinking.

No country can progress unless it becomes conscious of its being—its mind and body. It has to learn to exercise its own muscles. It has to learn to find out and solve its own problems in its own way. But whichever way I turn I find that even after twenty-five years of independence, we are like a bird which has been let out of its cage after a prolonged imprisonment—unable to know what to do with its freedom. It has wings, but is afraid to fly into the open air. It longs to remain within defined limits, as in the cage.

Individually and collectively, we resemble Walter Mitty. Our inner lives are different from our outer lives. Our thoughts and actions are poles apart. We want to change this state of affairs, but we lack the courage to do anything different from what we have been doing all along, or different from what others expect us to do.

I am sure there must be some police officers in this country who in their hearts want to be regarded as friends rather than enemies of the public. They must be aware that in England the behaviour of the police towards the public is polite and helpful. But the tradition in which they have been trained is not the one which the British set for their own country but the one which they set for their colonies. So, the policeman is helpless. According to this colonial tradition, it is his duty to strike terror into anyone who enters his office, to be as obstructive and unhelpful as possible. This is the tradition which pervades every government office, from the chaparasi to the minister.

One of our young and enterprising producers made an experimental film and approached the government for tax exemption. The minister concerned was being sworn into office the next day. He invited the producer to attend the ceremony, after which he would meet him and discuss the matter. The producer went, impressed by the informality with which the minister had treated him. As the minister was being sworn in, promising to serve the people truly, faithfully, and honestly, his secretary started explaining to the young producer how much he would have to pay in black money to the minister and how much to the others if he wanted the tax exemption.

The producer got so shocked and angry that he wanted to put this scene in his next film. But his financiers had already suffered a loss with the first one. They told him categorically not to make an ass of himself. In any case, if he had insisted in making an ass of himself the censors would never have passed the film, because it is an unwritten law that no policeman or minister is corrupt in our country.

But there is something which strikes me as being even funnier. Those same people who scream against ministers every day cannot themselves hold a single function without some minister inaugurating it, or presiding over it, or being the chief guest. Sometimes the minister is the chief guest and a film star is the president, or else the film star is the chief guest and the minister is the president. Some big personality has to be there, because it is the age old colonial tradition.

During the last war, I spent four years in England as a Hindustani announcer at the BBC. During those four years of extreme crisis I never even once set my eyes on a member of the British cabinet, including Prime Minister Churchill. But since independence I have seen nothing else but ministers in India, all over the place.

When Gandhiji went to the Round Table Conference in 1930, he remarked to British journalists that the Indian people regarded the guns and bullets of their empire in the same way as their children regarded the crackers and *patakhaas* on Diwali day. He could make that

claim because he had driven the fear of the British out of Indian minds. He had taught them to ignore and boycott the British officers instead of kowtowing to them. Similarly, if we want socialism in our country, we have firstly to drive out the fear of money, position, and power from the minds of our people. Are we doing anything in that direction? In our society today, who is respected most — the man with talent or the man with money? Who is admired most—the man with talent or the man with power? Can we ever hope to usher in socialism under such conditions? Before socialism can come, we have to create an atmosphere in which possession of wealth and riches should invite disrespect rather than respect. We have to create an atmosphere in which the highest respect is given to labour whether it be physical or mental; to talent, to skill, to art, and to inventiveness. This requires new thinking, and the courage to discard old ways of thinking. Are we anywhere near this revolution of the mind?

Perhaps, today we need a messiah to give us the courage to abandon our slavishness and to create values befitting the human beings of a free and independent country so that we may have the courage to link our destinies to the ones being ruled, and not the rulers — to the exploited and not to the exploiters.

A great saint of the Punjab, Guru Arjun Dev, said,

jan ki tehl sanbhakhan jan sio uthan
baithan jan kai sanga
*jan char raj mukh mathai laagi aasa puuran
anant tharanga*

[I serve His humble servants, and speak with them, and abide with them.

I apply the dust of the feet of His humble servants to my face and forehead;

my hopes, and the many waves of desire, are fulfilled]

It is my earnest hope and prayer that you, graduates of Jawaharlal Nehru University, may succeed where I and so many others of my generation have failed.

Courtesy—bargad.org

Mega Dams In North-East India : Are They Necessary?

*Interim Report and Press Statement of CDRO
(Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisations)
Fact Finding into Mega Dams in North-East*

Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisation, comprising of 20 civil and democratic rights organisations from across India decided to undertake a fact finding into the impact of big/mega dam projects coming up in the North Eastern states on the life and livelihood of the people. Reportedly more than 168 MoUs/MoAs have been signed by the Arunachal Pradesh government alone. CDRO believes that such projects, be they so called Run of the River or Storage dams, affect not only people whose land will get submerged upstream but also people living in the downstream area. We also believe that affected people comprise those whose life and livelihood is intricately linked with the river beyond, since water flow will impact agriculture, fisheries, river transportation. Construction of concrete dams in a high seismic zone with sedimentary rock is in itself a mark of utter irresponsibility. Besides, natural floods carry sediments while man-made flood through construction of dam brings sand which destroys cultivable land. Also worth noting is that the seven North Eastern states are plagued by multiple problems born of neglect, discrimination and exploitation of resources accompanied by fear of the people about demographic transformation with the influx from outside threatening their way of life and further militarisation of the region.

The team split into two groups; one headed towards upper Assam and another towards Tipaimukh dam site. The first team

visited North Lakhimpur, Dhimaji in Assam and Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh covering Lower Subansiri, Lower Siang and also downstream area of Lohit and Dibang river projects in Tinsukhia district. The second team visited Tipaimukh project which would affect people living in Manipur, Mizoram and Assam.

Given below are highlights of what people felt would be the consequence of the projects on their life and livelihood:

I. FIRST TEAM REPORT:

1. Lower Subansiri is allegedly a Run of the River project with storage capacity which would submerge 70 sq kms upstream. The 2000 MW project is being constructed for NHPC by Larsen and Toubro and Soma when fully constructed will have a height of 115 metres. While officially only 31 families would be displaced according to Walter Fernandes, no less than 700 families would be affected. About 3436 hectare of forest land would also get submerged and wildlife habitat. Lower stream the impact would be even worse since fear of river drying, fluctuation in water flow, likely increase in deposit of sand over presently cultivable land, destruction of aquatic life which destroy livelihood of 39 lakh fisherfolk, not to forget river transportation. The man-made flood created by 405 MW Ranganadi dam on 14th June 2008 was repeatedly referred to by people to remind us of the possible damage that can be caused to life and livelihood by natural or man-made flood. The difference between peak and lean flow, according to people, is such that likelihood of flash flood increases manifold.

The nature of protest currently in form of four month long blockade of vehicular traffic carrying construction or other equipment meant for the dam, is a clear sign of collective resistance.

2. Lower Siang is again allegedly a Run of the River project with storage capacity which would submerge and restrict habitation in upto 106 kms. Apart from this at height upto one km has been declared as no-man's land and reserved for compensatory forestation for the company. The 2700 MW project was awarded to Jaiprakash Industries. Siang's Adi community considers the river as sacred and fears that 35 villages would be affected. Thus their community land which is cultivable and rich in flora and fauna would be wiped out. In 34 villages ninety percent of people have affirmed through signature their opposition to the dam. They fear that their culture and people face annihilation. It is this that drove them to protest the construction of dam recently. And fear mixed with anger remains strong among people here.

Lower stream people, especially Mishing community, reside along the river bank. They along with others who live in the plains downstream apprehend that their livelihood would be wiped out since river flow would both impact cultivation as well as fishery on which most of the people depend.

3. Lower Dibang is a 3000 MW storage dam of NHPC with a height of 288 metres which submerge 45 kms upstream wiping out 30 villages. This will affect nearly 50% of Idu-Mishmi community and their community land. If the argument of development and employment opportunities do get created by this project then considering the skilled and qualified people among the Idu-Mishmi they stand to lose. We are told that this generates the fear that people from other parts of India

would garner the maximum benefit. This will also nullify whatever protection is offered by the Constitution. The agitation since 2006 has ensured that 11 times public hearing has had to be postponed.

The fear in the downstream area is once again that their life and livelihood would be adversely affected. We do wish to point out that the anti-dam movement is still in its infancy in these parts. But the fear is palpable.

4. Demwe Lower Hydro-electric Project has been given to Athena Demwe Power Ltd. and is said to be Run of the River project to generate 1750 MW and will submerge 26 square kms of land to make way for a reservoir. 1416 (One thousand four hundred sixteen) hectare of forest would also be lost in the process. Its height is 163.12 metres. Public hearing was confined to an area of 5 kms below the dam site. One of the fallout of this project would be the damage caused to Dibru Saikhowa bio-diversity area as well as other bio-sphere reserve in Assam.

While people speak in downstream area about the consequence of the Lohit project on their land and livelihood it is yet to take an organised expression.

II. SECOND TEAM REPORT

1. The proposed Tipaimukh project conceived in 1970s and is being currently implemented by NHPC, Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) and Government of Manipur, despite serious opinions of the people to the contrary. It will submerge around 25,822.22 hectares of land ONLY in Manipur apart from Mizoram. The project is going to destroy at least 7.8 mn full grown trees and bamboo bushes. It will be 162 mtrs in height and is supposed to produce 1500 MW of electricity. 12 villages with a population of 557 families /2027 ST people (of the Hmar and Zeliangrong tribes) will be displaced. Most of these figures were

disputed by people and activists of organizations working in the area because effects of the dam on the people, land and environment of the down-stream areas have not been evaluated by the government agencies.

There has been a simmering of resistance to the proposed project. Some people perceive it as not only a dam but also a threat to their material existence and life, culture and history. There has been recently some rallies, as the cycle rally by the Village Women Coordination Committee on the 19 February Sangaithal area, (Imphal), jointly organized demonstrations (as the 14th March 2012 event at Nungba Bazar, Tamenglong) etc. And the resentment is gathering momentum.

The statutory Public Hearings, for the project, has been fraught with problems and there has been a great deal of dissatisfaction over the way these have been manipulated. The public hearings started in the year 2004 (Darlawn, Mizoram) and continued sporadically till the last one at Tipaimukh on the 31st March 2008. People at Tipaimukh, have told us categorically they were not heard and what was the decision of the Public Hearing, they said, had already been taken by the officials who had come. There has been a protest against Public Hearing also (Kaimai, Tamenglong district March 2008).

What we have listed above is only a small sample of the impact of the dam on life and livelihood of the people both upstream and downstream. The fact of the matter is that nearly every river will have several dams each; Lohit basin will have 10 dams, Subansiri basin 12, Dibang basin 12, Siang basin 39, Kaming basin 43....These figures can go up if all data is made public by the Arunachal government. To build so many dams in an area which is earthquake prone carries incalculable risk for all living beings.

Each MoA is accompanied by monetary advance by project developer to the Arunachal Pradesh government at the time of signing the deal. This implies that the project gets sanctioned even before any of the mandatory reports and clearances is given.

This makes the entire scheme of building projects which will destroy the Brahmaputra basin a colonial project meant to benefit rest of India at the expense of North East. It is also of interest to note that maximum numbers of the projects have been awarded to private companies. Most of the projects lack Impact Assessment Studies. Indeed some which claim to have got this study done are confined to between 5 to 10 kms. Siang river project indeed claims that no agricultural land would be submerged whereas nearly every household in 35 villages would lose their cultivable land! The misinformation by the authorities is accompanied by deliberate attempt to hide the truth from the people by manipulating studies.

We demand:

Suspend construction activities until the cumulative impact study of the entire north east, which involves engagement with the people who will get affected by construction of these dams.

The fact finding was conducted by following organisations:

1. Asansol Civil Rights Association (ACRA), West Bengal
2. Coordination for Human Rights (COHR), Manipur
3. Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS)
4. Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR)
5. Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR), Andhra Pradesh
6. Peoples Union For Democratic Rights (PUDR), Delhi.

Courtesy—Countercurrents.org

The Birth of Poetry

Christopher Caudwell

I

POETRY is one of the earliest aesthetic activities of the human mind. When it cannot be found existing as a separate product in the early literary art of a people, it is because it is then coincident with literature as a whole; the common vehicle for history, religion, magic and even law. Where a civilized people's early literature is preserved, it is found to be almost entirely poetical in form—that is to say, rhythmical or metrical. The Greek, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, Romance, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Egyptian peoples are instances of this generalization.

This poetry is not 'pure' poetry in any modern sense. We may describe it as a heightened form of ordinary speech, without committing ourselves to this as an adequate definition of poetry. This heightening is shown by a formal structure—metre, rhyme, alliteration, lines of equal syllabic length, regular stress or quantity, assonance—devices that distinguish it from ordinary speech and give it a mysterious, perhaps magical emphasis. There are repetitions, metaphors and anti-theses which, because of their formality, we regard as essentially poetic.

This generalization is commonly accepted, and there is no need to give more than a few instances. Hesiod thought it natural to use a poetical framework for a theological work and a farmers' guide. Solon cast his political and legislative maxims into metre as a matter of course. The metaphysical speculations of the Aryan race in India were versified. Egyptian astronomy and cosmogony were poetical in form. Religion spoke always in rhythm or metre, and just as the epic grew out of poetic theology glorifying aristocratic history, so the early agricultural ritual, cast in metrical form, became

the Athenian tragedy and comedy, and finally after various vicissitudes, survives as poetical drama today in the opera and the Christmas pantomime.

Ethnological researches have further shown how any words worth preserving—weather saws, farmers' wisdom, magical spells or the more refined subtleties of ritual and religion—tend among all races, in all ages, to a heightened language. This heightened language, as the people becomes self-consciously literary, is eventually set on one side as the specific vehicle of a department of literature known as Poetry, and distinguished to varying extents in different ages from the other uses of writing and speech. The form peculiar to poetry in a civilized age is the primitive form of all literature. A consideration of poetry must therefore be fundamental for a consideration of literary art.

Among primitives we usually meet with a heightening of language on formal occasions which disappears when the phrases are written down. This heightening is effected by accompanying the words with music or rude rhythm—by chanting them. It is tempting to assume, though by no means certain, that rhythmical or metrical language, before the invention of writing, was always accompanied by some rude music. Indeed one could make out a case for the supposition that music itself was generated at the same time as primitive poetry and that an aboriginal physical rhythm, expressed in gestures and leaps, in shouted words and meaningless ejaculations, and in artificial noises made by beating sticks and stones, was the common parent of dance, poetry and music. Much evidence for this theory could be found in Africa. Significant, for instance, are the Ashanti talking drums described by Rattray, which transmit messages—not by code, an abstraction impossible to a

primitive people lacking letters, but by mimicking the rhythm and pitch of speech on drums, so that the drums literally talk.

However, it would be dangerous to build our foundations on a hypothesis of this sort, which, however attractive, is too sweeping to be capable of rigorous proof. All that is assumed, therefore, is the general evolution of a written civilized literature from a special form of heightened language. At first monopolising nearly all traditional literature, this heightened language, as civilization progresses, becomes confined to a niche of its own.

In its early stages this heightened language is usually in association with music and the dance. Even such a self-conscious literature as that of Periclean Athens does not seem to have seen any real distinction between poetry and music. Every forms of Greek poetry had its appropriate musical, and in the case of dramatic poetry, it's choreographic, accompaniment. This liaison persists in a shadowy form today. Music and poetry have long existed in their own right, but the frontiers overlap in the region of song and dance music.

The differentiation and specialization of language with increasing civilization is of course characteristic of all civilized functions. The development of civilization consists of a continually differentiating division of labour, which is not opposed to but is the cause of a continually integrating web of social economy. Just as the human body, because of the specialization of its parts, is more highly integrated by an elaborate nervous system than a jelly-fish, from which parts can be severed which will continue to live, so the productive basis of society grows in elaborateness and differentiation at the same time as it becomes more and more unified. This is seen in any civilization taken as a whole, which, as its economic basis elaborates and interpenetrates, becomes increasingly differentiated in all its cultural superstructure. Poetry, maid-of-all-work in a simple tribal economy, becomes in the rich elaboration of a modern culture an activity which exists side by side with the novel, history

and the drama. This development will give us the clue, not merely to the meaning of poetry, but also, if we follow the successive trails as they open up, to the significance in man's life of all art and science. As man's society develops, we must expect his art to show a corresponding development, and therefore to reveal with increasing clarity the implicit qualities of man, society and culture which made this development possible.

II

How are we to judge whether a given society is more highly developed than another? Is it a question of biological evolution? Fisher has pointed out that there can be only one definition of 'fitness' justified by biological considerations, and that is increase of numbers at the expense of the environment, including other species. In man this increase must depend on the level of economic production-the more advanced this is, the more man will dominate his environment.

But there is only one species of man-*homo sapiens*-and his level of economic production is unequal at different points and develops in self-contained systems of various sizes. This inter-specific difference in mankind is just what separates humanity from other species, and makes biological standards no longer the most important in the very department in which we are interested-that of culture. The non-biological change of man, superimposed, upon his relatively constant biological make-up during historic times, is the subject of literary history. This development is non-biological just because it is economic. It is the story of man's struggle with Nature, in which his increasing mastery of her and himself is due, not to any improvement in his inborn qualities but to improvements in systems of production, including tools, the technique of using them, language, social systems, houses, and other transmissible external structures and relations. This inheritance is the vast concrete accumulation of 'human qualities' which are not transmitted somatically but socially. Mother wit is needed for their use, but it is a plastic force

which inflates these developing and transmitted forms. Looked at in this way, culture cannot be separated from economic production or poetry from social organization. They stand together in sharp opposition to the ordinary biological properties of species.

Poetry is to be regarded then, not as anything racial, national, genetic or specific in its essence, but as something economic. We expect cultural and therefore poetical development to increase with the complexity of the division of labour on which it is based. As yet no aesthetic standards have been introduced. Complexity is not an aesthetic criterion. It is a quality associated only with division and organization of labour.

Among primitives-people with whom economic production has not passed its early stage of food-gathering or hunting and fishing-there is less differentiation in function than among more historically-developed peoples. The only differences of importance are sexes, age-grades and marriage classes or totemic groups. Each member of the tribe can perform the social, magical and economic offices proper to his sex, age or totem, providing of course that he is not ceremonially impure or outcast. Hence it is not surprising that their formal language and their art are equally undifferentiated, and that poetry, or heightened language, is the common medium of collective wisdom.

As to the exact process of differentiation, there is difference of opinion among anthropologists. Even the Australian aborigines possess a culture obviously resulting from a considerable period of historical development. Indeed the diffusionists see in it traces of indirect Egyptian influence. Frazer visualizes the process as one by which the clever primitive appropriates to himself magical offices, and by this means becomes a priest or god-king. This view is confused, for individual cleverness could not create permanent classes, unless they played some part in the mechanism of social production. This in fact the god-king did, being an important class in agricultural organization, but Frazer does not mention this.

Extrapolating into the past, Durkheim sees the primitive tribe as a homogeneous unit with a group consciousness and Levy-Bruhl regards this group consciousness as 'prelogical'. Durkheim imagines such a primitive tribe to be almost entirely undifferentiated, so that one can consider the members as without character, or individuality except the common impress of the tribe's collective representations, which are coercive and overcome the individual's free thoughts.

This is an abstract conception, since no such homogeneous tribe can be found today. Abstractions of this kind are limits to which society never fully attains. If this school had a clearer idea of the connection between economic function and genetic make-up in creating characters or 'types', they would not confuse, as do so many other anthropologists, *differentiation* with *individuation*. Individual differences are genetic, the result of particular pack of genes. Biologically speaking, they are 'variations'. But social differentiation means that an individual plays a particular role in social production. This differentiation may be the very antithesis of individuation, for by it the individual may be pressed into a mould-which is bound to suppress some part of his native individuality. He becomes a *type* instead of an individual. In inherited character is forced into an acquired mould. The greater the differentiation, the more specialized will be the mould and the more painful the adjustment. Psychologically, as Jung has shown, the process takes place by the exaltation of one psychic function-that most marked genetically, and therefore most likely to prove economically remunerative. The hypertrophy of this function and its accommodation to the purposes of the chosen professional type result in the wilting of the other psychic functions, which eventually become largely unconscious, and in the unconscious exercise an opposing force to the conscious personality. Hence the typical 'modern' unease and neuroses. Twentieth-century civilization, the creation of a gospel on unadulterated economic individualism, has thus

finally become anti-individualistic. It opposes the full development of genetic possibilities by forcing the individual to mould a favoured function along the lines of a type whose services possess exchange-value; so that for a refreshing contrast we turn (like T. E. Lawrence) to a nomad civilization such as that of the Bedouins. Here genetic individuality, the character; and yet it is just here that economic differentiation is at a minimum.

Does this mean that biological individuality is opposed to economic differentiation, and that civilization fetters the 'free' instincts-as the followers of Freud, Adler, Jung and D. H. Lawrence by implication claim? No, it is precisely economic differentiation, by the possibility of specialization that it affords, which give opportunity for the most elaborate development of the peculiarities of 'variations' constituting the 'difference' of a biological individual. But this opportunity presupposes a free choice by any individual of the complete range of economic functions. There is no such free choice in modern civilization because of its class structure. Not only is an individual heavily weighted in the direction of following an occupation approximately equivalent in income and cost of training to that of his parents, but also a marked bent for a slightly remunerative occupation (such as poetry) will be sacrificed to a slight bent for a markedly remunerative occupation (such as company promoting), while the career of being unemployed, the involuntary function of so many millions today, muffles all useful variations.

It is not civilization as such which by its differentiation stifles genetic individuality; on the contrary, its complexity gives added scope for its development and increases the sum of 'standard' deviation'. One incident of civilization-the development of classes in society and the increasing restriction of choice of function for the individual-holds back the very development of individuality which the existing productive forces could allow in a more fluid system of social relations. Capitalism, by making all talents and gifts a commodity subject to the

inexorable and iron laws of the 'free' market, now restrains that free development of the individual which its vast productive forces could easily permit, if released. This gives rise to the complaints of the instincts tortured by civilization which are investigated by Freud, Jung and Adler.

It is not surprising that a civilization in which this rigidity has become pathological and individuality has almost vanished-as in the declining Egyptian and Roman Empires-collapses before 'barbarians' at a lower stage of economic production in which, however, individuality has a freer rein. This class rigidity is itself the reflection of a complete disintegration of the economic foundations of a culture, in which the productive forces, like men's imprisoned characters, are wasting themselves in a sterile quarrel with the iron fetters of obsolete social relations.

Durkheim's conception of a tribe whose consciousness is solid crystal and undifferentiated, corresponding to its undifferentiated economy, in its absoluteness misses the significance of genetic individuality as the basis of economics differentiation, just as the conception of the instincts of civilized man fighting the constraints of society ignores the importance of economic differentiation as a fruitful outlet for individuality. Biologists will notice here a significant parallel to the famous dispute on their own science over 'acquired' and 'innate' characters.

Durkheim distinguishes the collective representations of the tribe which constitute its collective mind, from individual representations which constitute mind, from individual representations which constitute the individual mind, because of the coercive character of the former. This error is only the fundamental error of contemporary philosophy which, by its false conception of the nature of freedom, continually generates the same stale antithesis. The consciousness made possible by the development of society is not by its nature coercive; on the contrary this consciousness, expressed in science and art, is the means whereby man attains

freedom. Social consciousness, like social labour, of which it is the product and auxiliary, is the instrument of man's freedom. And it is not the instincts unadapted by society which are of their essence free; on the contrary the unmodified instincts deliver man into the slavery of blind necessity and unconscious compulsion.

Yet social consciousness is sometimes felt by men as coercive—why is this? Because it is a consciousness which no longer represents social truth; because it is no longer generated freely in the whole process of social cooperation. Such a consciousness is the product of a class antagonism; it is the consciousness of a class which by the development of the division of labour and absolute property-right has become isolated from economic production, and is therefore maimed and obsolete. This consciousness now becomes the bulwark of privilege instead of the spontaneous expression of social fact, and must therefore be coercively enforced on the rest of society. Durkheim does not see that this coercive type of group consciousness is least common with a primitive people, and most common with a sophisticated civilization.

We cannot help noticing already the connection of early poetry—poetry which is also tribal wisdom and rude chronology—with a state of society in which economic differentiation due to division of labour hardly exists. In primitive society man's genetic individuality realizes itself simply like a physical trait—a wide forehead or a splay foot. Remembering that there seems in all ages something simple and direct about poetry, that good poetry can be written by the comparatively immature, that it has a more personal and emotional core than other forms of literary art, we may already guess that poetry expresses in a special manner the genetic instinctive part of the individual, as opposed, say, to the novel, which expresses the individual as an adapted type, as a social character, as the man realized in society. Such an art form as the novel could therefore only arise in a society where economic differentiation gives

such scope for the realization of individual differences that it is useful and valuable to tackle man, the individual, from this angle. There is no essential difference; it is a difference of aspect. But it is an important difference, and one to which we will return again and again. In this sense poetry is the child of Nature, just as the developed novel is the child of the sophistication of modern culture.

We must repeat the warning against mechanically separating genetic individuality from social differentiation. One is a means of realizing the other. In tragedy, in dramatic verse, and in the epic they unite, because these flourish at a time of rapidly-changing society, a society in which older class-distinctions are cracking and man's genetic individuality, his passions, his instincts, his blind desires, are the means by which new economic functions, new differentiations, new standard types, are being idealized and realized. Odysseus, Oedipus and Hamlet are such figures of social poetry, and the problems these epics and tragedies resolve are the problems peculiar to such a period of change.

All such problems are problems concerning the nature of freedom, and hence tragedy poses with overwhelming poignancy the question of necessity, although in each culture the necessity wears a different aspect, for in each culture necessity presses on men through different channels. The necessity that drives on Oedipus is wholly different from that which torments Hamlet, and this difference expresses the difference between Athenian and Elizabethan cultures. The same necessity, but posed in a metaphysical way and with its solution postponed to another world, is the constant theme of religion—the problem it has set itself immediately it begins to talk of good and evil. A religion expresses by its definition of 'sin' the stage of development of the society which generated it.

*Courtesy—Illusion and Reality
To be Continued...*

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