



# Inहाज़

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THE BI-MONTHLY THEORETICAL ORGAN OF  
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# Inहाज़

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## *From the Editors*

Literature is a reflection of society. Conversely, society, too, is a reflection of the literature it produces and indulges in. While creations function as a social mirror, putting forth the contemporary realities to its readers, be it the iron fist of despotic political authority, the rustic heavy chains of existing social evils, or a passionate saga dripping with emotions, it also presents the dream of humanity. It stands for what humanity as a social, political, economic, psychological, and environmental creature aspires to be, about the kind of relations an individual shares with one's environment, the institutions that regulate one's life, and the context in which they are living. It anchors the contemporary to its succeeding times, in which the writer becomes an anchor presenting a world free from the contemporary ills that the human society desires to get rid of, or suggesting methods to be free from it. It becomes a tool to expand human imagination towards novel ideas and possibilities.

Literature, as a social tool, has the ability to shape, influence, and nurture minds. It is capable of presenting a vision for a better future and also deepening the conscience and consciousness of people living in contemporary times. It is capable of redefining thoughts, values, ideals, aesthetics, and morality of humans cutting across chronological distinctions and socio-political-economic boundaries. It has the power to present alternative perceptions on various subjects to humanity in an attractive and poignant way and is a popular medium. Hence, it becomes essential to resort to the serious academic study of literature through an analysis of ideologies, literary theories and structures, the varied forms of literary creations, their historical backgrounds, the context of its creation, the background of the creator of the literary piece and so on. In many ways, both literature and academics have shared goals, albeit expressed differently. A theoretical and serious academic study of literature can provide valuable insight into the minds of both the writers and the consciousness of people living in times across ages.

This theoretical organ seeks to put emphasis upon the same. It seeks to analyse, through the works of its contributors, the understanding of literature. It desires to indulge in a serious dialogue with literature through not only mere reading but research on literary theories, backgrounds, structures, and present articles regarding the same. It is a humble initiation towards engaging and familiarizing young minds with the idea of informed literary criticisms and exploration of the same in order to garner sharper literary and humane intellect, deepening of literary consciousness and bring improvement, hopefully to the richness of the literature produced, keeping in mind the benefit of the human community at large, in its own tiny pace.

Sristi Ray (History, II),  
January 25, 2022



# My Journey Towards Understanding My Identity As Dalit-Dusadh

Rinku Kumari

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ई धरऊनी हए धरने रहब (This is our legacy, keep this with you)

- Lines by National Awardee Godhna Artist

The Hindu religious text talks about *Divija* which means twice-born; according to Hindu texts, a person is born twice, first when they are held physically and secondly when attaining knowledge and born spiritually. Not getting into how the concept of *Divija* is incorporated in the *Varna* system, now if we start talking about the origin and evolution of the *Varna* system, the purpose of this article will be lost, since a lot of things has been written about *varna* I can take advantage to skip this, the point here to highlight about how in a way *Dvijya* emphasise on the importance of knowledge for building personal character. We assume that we are and we all can become *Dvijya*; the question is, is it something that happens suddenly spontaneously in one day, or does it take time, effort, and resistance. The reason why I used the word resistance is that since the association of the term the *Divija* is from the *Varna* system, which is itself a problematic issue due to its strategies of social stratification and exclusion, to attain knowledge in the society where people is associated with stigma, binary of purity and

pollutants become complicated.

One always has to resist the system based on the relationship of domination and suppression.

Here I am not going to talk about the issues with the *Varna* system or how caste has impacted people. Sometimes, constitutional grants seem to be reduced to just pieces of paper instead of being reflected in practical contexts, which is a pressing issue. We claim equality in the eye of the constitution which is very different from reality. What I am going to share is my journey where I realized who I am, which later transformed into why I am. What is identity? Surely I can give many sociological definitions, but I will not; I want to highlight my idea about identity. Identity, for me, is a reflection of how society sees you and how you see community. It is based on historical experience, social status, economic position, political opinion, and everything in this society; in the crux, identity is wholesome of your social, political, and financial status. Consciousness about identity takes time, a situation, and even location. For instance, if I am from Madhubani, Bihar, and living in Delhi, I have an identity related to my state. Still, if I went outside India, my identity will be Indian; identity is thus dynamic; it changes, it evolves.

I call myself Dalit-*Dusadh* Feminist my identity as Dalit-*Dusadh* is barely one year old. Though my identity was known to me, I have never felt consciously connected with this identity. My Baba always told me of the greatness of Madhubani village, the *Dusadh* community, and the legends of *Raja Salhesha*. I always consider it as localised affection and emphasise that we should not have a regional or cultural identity but only national; contrary to me, he always used to say, "*you can't have a Nation without Regions.*" Every region has its own uniqueness owing to its identity, which forms of separate geographic features, social compositions, religion, culture, and individual identities. The individual can be considered to be the structural and functional unit of the society, the region, and the nation at large. At different levels, the individual faces crisis which might be in conflict with social complexities, religious identities or overwhelmed by the forceful imposition of a unilinear national identity.

Last year I got the opportunity to research upon something that I was very familiar with (And realised my own shortcomings and expanded my understanding while learning and unlearning many things in the process) Madhubani paintings since my research work focuses more on the *Godhna* painting, which is a Dalit form of art painted by the *Dusadh* community of Madhubani district of Bihar, I got the opportunity to understand my society and culture thus my identity.

During my research, I met a lot of *Dusadh* women artists, their experiences, and stories. Their stories were a great source of information regarding rural areas, the nature of

patriarchy in rural areas, how caste plays essential roles in their respective lives, how even in the caste, there are classes and hierarchy.

The moment I entered the village of Jitwarpur, known as the village of national awardees and called craft village, I noticed that people of the *Dusadh* community were at the end of the village. I recalled that even my house in Koilakh, also part of Madhubani district, was at the end of the village. I never looked at this factor as a casteist system and symbol in infrastructure. Still, now I can relate to what Gopal Guru quotes in *Dalits from margin to margin*, "*The very location of the Dalit becomes an object of contempt and contamination by the urban base of a caste Elite.*" This location is also stigmatised as they are segregated on the principle of purity and pollution". This was the first time my inner consciousness and connectivity started with my community.

As Moggallan Bharti has rightly pointed out in *Understanding the Dalit Self: Politics and World View* "*Dalit Identity reflects a concern for self-imagining and self-recognition of an individual or community that has been historically socially and culturally excluded by the dominant classes of the society,*" I was able to connect it with my area of research, so if we say art and culture have the power to reflect society, it becomes an expression of acceptance and face of resistance.

The emergence of *Godhna* art was revolutionary as :

1. It gave Dalit their form of art, thus a way to challenge both the patriarchal and Brahmanism. The emergence of local deities in their art challenges the great grand traditions of the upper caste like Rama and Shiva,
2. Their identity as women turned into Artists who are now capable enough to earn, thus giving them economic independence. In sum, this gives them space for Recognition, Representation, and Resistance.

In my childhood, I used to ask my *Maa* (mother) why she has a tattoo on her neck and shoulders. She reluctantly says because "*we are from Bihar beta,*" after some time when I met my other friend's mothers from Bihar, I noticed they didn't have those tattoos, I came again to *maa* and ask "*why they don't have these tattoos,*" now her answer was "*beta they are different, above us, we are Dusadh, this is our identity, symbol that we belong to lowest, this is our destiny.*" On questioning why we do not have siblings who have this tattoo, she just said we were privileged and didn't have to suffer what people are facing in the rural areas. Thus our social identities were embedded into us since childhood, and it came consciously to determine the way we viewed ourselves as individuals and related to society.

Now I can very well assume that by privilege what she meant, should I acknowledge that due to my geographical location as a person belonging to urban areas, I never faced those humiliation, exploitation, and oppression that *Maa* and *Baba* faced. I agree with Ambedkar's thought that "*What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism?*". However, urban areas have their type of caste system and

atrocities. Still, the fact was I was never faced such "*continuous struggle against brahminical hegemony*", my mother's idea that it was their destiny somehow showed how people who are the margin of society internalised and marginalised as they "*find themselves helpless frustrated, having lost faith in their ability to comprehend and then confront the marginalisation*".

I also realised how *Godna* as a tattoo and *Godna* as a painting transformed *Dusadh* women's idea of identity; now, they started seeing *Godna* as a symbol of self-dignity, self-identity, and self-reliance. Maybe not just me, but these women of the sad community of Madhubani found their identities back in the 1970s when Channo Devi became the first *Dusadh* woman who drew *Godna* on paper and created a historical revolution in the lives of *Dusadh* women.

Even the gods are segregated in the social stratification. The *Godna* women artists, while sharing their experiences, talked about how they were respected from painting lord *Rama* and their upper-caste Brahmin women emphasise that they should draw their own *Raja Salhesha*, do it was purely their choice to start drawing *Raja Salhesha* and other local deities the kind of restrictions they faced while drawing *Rama* was something that reflects how there was *Bahmanization of Indian history* and also culture. Since there are inequalities based on the Caste system, which Brahmin dominates, the Hindu culture is transformed into Brahmanism, which is exclusively biased and exploitative.

During the research, I realize how their inability to acknowledge the presence of caste discrimination in the field of art led to more oppression. Thus consciousness is a significant acknowledgment.

But why were they deprived of the knowledge of the caste system and its impact? It is difficult to articulate, but if I can go back into my life and closely look at some point or another, I faced caste discrimination, but if it was indirect discrimination that I didn't even realize that it is one of the forms of discrimination based on caste. For instance, in my 12th standard, our teacher, while defining the *Varna* system, emphasised its importance. While answering my question on why shudra are lowest, he said, *"because they are pollutants, they do dirty jobs, even you are from that community,"* when I scored highest in the history, he credited himself saying, *"Brahmin is giving you knowledge that's why you are scoring good marks,"* and was attempting to *demoralize the Dalit student* In our school circulars I was never selected after 10th as now teachers were well aware of my caste, if there were some parts left it was given to me a *"preference for the leftovers"*. Here, I seek to highlight the psychological turmoil it created in our minds and made us doubt

ourselves for something that we were born with. While facing my hardship made me a head girl in the school; these comments and remarks continued to bear upon my heart and mind.

Even during the research when I was trying to search about the paintings artists associated with this art, very little knowledge was there as

compared to other upper caste people, even in Wikipedia if one's type Mithila painting major part of upper caste style paintings will appear and significantly less representation of *Godna* art. Quoting Gopal Guru when he *"In the field of information technology and computers Dalit find them said absolutely marginalized they appear on the website of other people as an object of hatred and ridicule and they do not have their own websites. Websites required huge investment, and since the Dalit lack resources, they get marginalized."* Since these women's heads lack resources, their history got invisibilized from the mainstream.

Now I realise neglecting your identity is ignorance towards your community, culture, and concerns. My identity reflects my people's historical experiences; failing identity means losing the identities of oppressed people from generations, erasing their historical contribution of resistance towards casteism. My question of whom I am ended up answering how I am and why, from social imposition to the emergence of choice and aspiration, my identity gives me consciousness. I still think that identity is dynamic. It can change. It can evolve what needs consciousness. Since the "construction of their lost identity can only happen after erasing the all-pervasive account of dominant historical discourses that exclude them and their history," I am trying to use my privilege to showcase the history of Us, as Dalit-Dusadh, is this our legacy and we have to keep this with us, you were true *Baba* identity comes with consciousness about the regional values, its culture, and community.

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# Catch 22: War Is Not Glorious

Urmi Maitra

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English literature alone contains endless stories that are set during World War II. This is not surprising when one considers the sheer impact that the Second World War has had on the world, and continues to have even now, more than 75 years after it ended. Millions of lives were lost. The political landscape of the world was altered. Immense societal changes were brought about. All of the above are excellent fodder for literature. Several of the books that deal with World War II became instant bestsellers when they were published, and have come to take their place as ‘classics’ of the genre. Most of these war stories follow the same general threads: one individual, or a group of individuals who survive in authoritarian regimes like Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy, perform small or big acts of resistance against the regime, and the story either climaxes in the apparent triumph of good over evil or ends on a note of despair.

Catch-22 is a war story. It is written from an American viewpoint. Its central character is an American bombardier who is serving during the final months of World War II when the Allied forces had already gained the upper hand, and the Axis powers were in a state of steady decline. Such a setting makes it very easy to produce a story that glorifies the war

effort makes heroes out of every soldier and celebrates the Americans (and by extension, the Allies) as bringers of justice. Catch-22 does no such thing, and in doing so, it subverts the central themes of the genre of literature that is war stories.

Catch-22, for starters, has one of the most interesting protagonists in English literature. Yossarian is an American bombardier. Yossarian’s only concern is to stay alive. And so it goes. Yossarian is supposed to fly a specific number of missions in order to finish serving his draft so that he can go home, which is all he wants to do. However, each time he gets close to completing the previously stipulated number of missions, the mission count is increased by members of the military bureaucracy. They do so because they believe that if their soldiers fly more missions than those who serve under others, it will distinguish their command and fetch them promotions. So, in reality, the bureaucracy is more deadly than the enemy. Catch-22, therefore, follows the immense personal crisis that Yossarian is engulfed in, against the backdrop of the biggest political crisis the world has ever seen.

To say that Yossarian is not a typical hero

at all. He is a man, and he is afraid. There is no idealism in him, and some would even say that he lacks a moral compass. He is willing to do whatever it takes to stay alive, which includes pulling stunts like putting detergent in the whole squadron's food so that they become sick and their mission is cancelled. Yossarian is unprincipled. He does not care about the war effort. He does not care about the Germans. He simply wants to live. In short, he is the antithesis of what the ideal soldier should be. However, in creating such a character, Joseph Heller showcases the unquestionable reality - for all the anecdotal acts of courage bravery, for all the heroism, the simple fact is that at his core, every single soldier is scared. Nobody wants to die.

The overall insanity of *Catch-22* mirrors the insanity of war. This is, perhaps, best reflected in the following excerpt from the book:

“There was only one catch and that was *Catch-22*, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask, and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane, he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to, he was sane and had to.”

Yossarian is accompanied by a diverse cast of characters, and as the story progresses, Yossarian's frenzied desperation to leave the war behind increases as most of his friends die. He is surrounded by idealistic youths who are

motivated by ideals of nationalism and the so-called 'greater good'. Joseph Heller goes out of his way to showcase how trivial these ideals can sometimes be, and how they are not worth the loss of life that they often cause.

This is pointed out in an exchange between Nately, a young, idealistic, red-blooded American soldier, and an old Italian man.

“There is nothing absurd about risking your life for your country,” he (Nately) declared.

“Isn't there?” asked the old man. “What is a country? A country is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by boundaries, usually unnatural. Englishmen are dying for England, Americans are dying for America, Germans are dying for Germany, Russians are dying for Russia. There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can't all be worth dying for.”

“Anything worth living for,” said Nately, “is worth dying for.”

“And anything worth dying for,” answered the sacrilegious old man, “is certainly worth living for.”

Yossarian often comes across as a self-absorbed character who is unconcerned about the fate of anyone but himself, there is a greater emotional depth and moral complexity within him. He is horrified by the war. He is horrified by the loss of life that he witnesses all around him. And most of all, he is angry and horrified because soldiers are losing their lives and he is continually having to risk his life because the authorities keep increasing the

mission count in the hopes of receiving a position that is higher up the chain of command. *Catch-22*, in this way, goes on to show that war is about the politics of power. Not just the politics of power between different nations, but also between those who hold power within the same nation. The lives of millions are caught in a tussle between small minorities of men whose aim is to go higher and higher up the pecking order, no matter the cost.

These are the realities of war that Joseph Heller presents.

During the Second World War, propaganda was used in order to cultivate pro-war sentiment in all the countries which were involved in the war. The same is true of the United States of America. The United States joined the war after Pearl Harbour was bombed by the Japanese, so ideas of revenge and nationalism were used as propaganda tools in order to urge people to contribute to the war effort.

It is estimated that a total of 418,500 Americans died because of World War II.

*Catch-22* was published in 1961, 15 years after the end of the Second World War. At the time of its publication, it was expected that the book would depict the glory achieved by the United States in the war, showcase the greatness of ideals of brotherhood, courage, and sacrifice. Nobody expected it to be so gloriously anti-war.

Popular perceptions of war have changed over the decades, and anti-war sentiment has become increasingly prevalent as the world has witnessed conflict after conflict, mass

destruction after mass destruction. This has been reflected in media and literature. There are several anti-war novels now. However, *Catch-22* perhaps stands alone because it makes no mistake about what it is trying to say.

*Catch-22*, in essence, is a tragedy that is masked by black comedy and satire. The narrative is non-linear, and the story, at times, seems utterly irrational. However, it brings forward a hard-hitting, absolute truth. War is not glorious. When all the stories of heroism, patriotism, bravery, and sacrifice are stripped away, when all is bared, the absolute truth is that war is the most gruesome of enterprises. It is destructive, it is brutal, and it is horrifying. War is a massacre.

In spite of all this despondence, it is a funny thing that *Catch-22* actually ends on a note of hope.

World War II continues to be a source of pride for many peoples around the world. It is viewed as a great, noble endeavour - the triumph of democracy over fascism, the victory of the good over the evil. All this, when the estimated number of people that died due to the Second World War is 70-85 million. The question then becomes, "How did this come to be?"

The answer, perhaps, can be found in a profound quote from *Catch-22*.

"You know, that might be the answer - to act boastfully about something we ought to be ashamed of. That's a trick that never seems to fail."

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Urmi is an avid reader. When she isn't poring over books, you can find her discussing history, politics, literature, music, and movies with anybody who is willing to listen. She enjoys quizzing and sports and occasionally writes for fun. Urmi aspires to be a mom to 4 dogs someday. Currently, she is a first-year History student at Ramjas College, University of Delhi,

# Mansfield Park: Austen's Contrasting Portrayal of Societal Ideologies in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries.

Pratiti Majumder

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Austen's literary representation of femininity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century provides a complex and perhaps one of the most exemplary insights into the conflict surrounding the discourse and performance of womanhood. While *Pride and Prejudice* continue to be the most treasured of her works for me, it was *Mansfield Park* that forced me to pause, ever so often, to ponder over the brilliant portrayal of different (and antagonistic) understandings of femininity. What it also brought into relief, and precisely through this very portrayal embodied both in the narrative-voice and the characters, is the beginning of the crisis of the ideology (and its inherent contradictions) of 'natural' and coherent genders. For an intersectional feminist of the Twenty-first century, there is perhaps much that can be discomfiting in *Mansfield Park*, what with the repetition of the old theme of a prodigal man pursuing a genteel woman. Nevertheless, it is only through reading the text that we can read the times. To this, I shall now turn.

Much like her other works, *Mansfield Park* centers around a young woman (born in much poverty) trying to find her footing in the established social order. Fanny Price, our protagonist, is being raised by her rich relatives

owing to her poor background and is for the better part of the novel treated with much neglect and ignorance. Austen's craft is so wondrous in the fact that she is able to conjure direct contrasts in her characters. While Elizabeth Bennet was loud and forceful (and frankly quite opinionated), Fanny Price is just as docile and meek. By contrasting her characters, Austen manages to both reproduce and dismantle the normative social obligations, simultaneously. *Mansfield Park* is, in many ways, a close inspection of the social order and the ways in which people were influenced by it. It especially shines a beam on the proper etiquettes desirable in women at that time. For a good part of the novel, Edmund the male lead spends his energies (in what could be appropriately described as an example of mansplaining) in discussing Mary Crawford's nature with our protagonist Fanny who, ever the ideal lady, cheers him on.

At a time when women ascended or descended the social ladder solely through marriage (as they were unable to take up any profession), Mary Crawford, with her wish to marry a man of wealth and perhaps with a position in the high society, is an interesting character. She is inclined towards Edward and is displeased with his choice of profession, that being a

clergyman. She considers it beneath her current position and is quite boldly vocal about her opinions. It would not be wrong to say that in her disposition Mary is quite like Lizzie Bennet but while Austen made Lizzie's boldness attractive, here she seems to be on the side of Fanny's docile and morally obliging character over Mary's boldness. Mary is portrayed as rather rash and outspoken though with a kind heart. Edmund considers it to be Mary's 'nurture' rather than 'nature' and our Fanny wholeheartedly agrees. Urban and rural settings are used as backdrops for the aforementioned debate, with the proposition being made that city life promotes vices inhibiting one's moral development (hence to Mary and Henry Crawford) while a home in the country instills all necessary goodness and moral virtue (hence Fanny and Edmund). However, Austen cleverly and subtly subverts this in the form of the Bertram sisters and Tom Bertram indicating that country life is not free from corruption. With *Mansfield Park*, Austen is at her most socially aware, particularly visible in the way she depicts poverty in Fanny's home or the ambiguous character of Sir Thomas, absent for the better part of the novel as he is involved in slave trading (a moral liability). Note also her use of gossip columns, the then-popular form of media, as a means of furthering her plot. This is also, arguably, Austen's most sexually aware novel easily observed, for instance, in the almost Freudian symbolism - an idea that perhaps most objects are sexual symbols (Rycroft, 1974) - when Maria squeezes through the gate at Sotherton. Or, consider, for instance, the undertaking of the play 'Lover's vow' by the young people which showcases indirectly that sexuality can be acted out on stage and that

there are layers to the emotions one portrays in front of society.

Let us now return to the talks of discomfoting moments. The most uncomfortable part, perhaps, of reading *Mansfield Park* was to endure the unwanted courtship of Fanny by Henry Crawford (Mary's brother). I have probably never been more exasperated with a male character as I have been of Henry; in today's society, his behaviour would be considered far from romantic. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to characterise his behaviour as stalking. It might be even more perplexing to witness the other men and women in Fanny's life, her dear ones, so abjectly rejecting any feelings on Fanny's part regarding the whole situation. The idea is, of course, that they were well-minded, intentioned and correct in their thinking. Because Fanny, with her roots in poverty, could not have possibly hoped for a better match. Today, obviously, this does not sit well. However, at that point of time, Henry's behaviour would have been lauded as the best form of perseverance and devotion that a man truly in love could possess. The lady would (and was) be considered most privileged as the recipient of such care and affection (and especially so, if the lady was of Fanny's status). Austen however very subtly rebels against this very ideology by making Henry exactly as desirable as quoted, only to bring him down with the disloyalty and faithlessness inherent in his character. We see, therefore, once again the dialectic of reproduction and subversion so characteristic of Austen.

But even an honest reproduction of complex social relations is in itself a form of subversion.

Mansfield Park is revolutionary precisely in this sense - it manages to capture and debate over the most subtle and thorny aspects of society, whether it is one's social standing, propriety, influences of one's surroundings or sexuality acted out onstage. Indeed, the idea of

'acting' is central to the moral reasoning of the novel. It is revolutionary, then, because of the way it has been so carefully layered by Austen - perfectly posing contrasts and leaving it up to the readers to decide which side they wish to indulge in.

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Nose deep in a book; being a bibliophile is part of her personality. She firmly believes learning should be fun and is quite happy to be the nerd of the group. On a seemingly rainy day, Pratiti would like nothing more than a cup of coffee, a novel, and the beautiful mother nature around her.

# Understanding Crisis in Literature: A Comparative Study Between Sukanta Bhattacharya and Sylvia Plath

Sristi Ray

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Literature, as an expression of the human experience in its totality, equips us with the ability to conceptualise the meanings, perceptions, and ideas of crises. Cutting across differences, spatial as well as temporal, it has played an active role in reflecting and processing the crises, the uncertainties, and the difficulties faced by humanity. Crises, of course, have been of all kinds and degrees - personal, social, psychological, foundational, superficial, systemic - rooted always in their particular historical contexts. Literary, especially poetic, depictions have only widened (and therefore made more profound) the human understanding of the whole range of crises that face it. It has drawn connections and brought into relief the manifold interrelations, among others, of the private and the public, the personal and the social, the psychological and the systemic. All these interrelations, connections, and phenomena are thus revealed to humanity in all their overlapping and cross-cutting complexities. Literature, then, has at once depicted and through this very depiction, has sought to understand the crises that are inalienably attached to the human condition in not only their complexities but also, and following from this, in their specificities and their commonalities.

A brief comparative study of two very different poets', separated from each other by linguistic, spatial, temporal, social, personal, and psychological boundaries, treatments of a diverse range of crises would be ideal to better understand literary depictions of and reflections of the same. Precisely such an attempt has been made in what follows by comparatively scrutinising the works of the prominent Bengali poet Sukanta Bhattacharya and the pre-eminent American poet Sylvia Plath. I have attempted to draw connections and parallels, without ignoring or smoothing over the differences and specificities, in the ways in which these poets grappled with the problem of the many meanings, definitions, and aspects of crises. Perhaps one of the main and most illuminating strands common to the work of both the poets, as is shown below, is the interrelation between the personal and the public and the porous boundaries between the intimate and the social. That is to say, how a social crisis also impacts the personal and how the personal informs the social (in a word, the dialectical relationship between the two), is an important concern of both our poets. Let us now turn to a brief discussion of our poets and their poems.

Sukanta Bhattacharya was born in a middle-class Bengali family in 1926 and succumbed to tuberculosis in 1947 at the age of twenty, three months before India achieved independence. But by then, inspired by the great poet of rebellion Kazi Nazrul Islam and heavily influenced by the communist movement, he had truly earned the title of “Kishor Bidrohi Kobi”. This Bidrohi is remembered best for his unflinching stance, present throughout in his poetry, against the tyranny of the British Raj and the oppressive social elites. Indeed, there were scarcely any oppressors and cataclysms that escaped him. Thus, he wielded his pen, among other things, also against the catastrophic Second World War, the famine of 1943, fascist aggression, and communal riots.

Bhattacharya’s writing style in Bengali can best be understood as consciously simple. He used everyday objects as metaphors for human potential and experience. His poetry dealt with a whole range of subjects, from individualism to historical events. His engagement with these subjects was never uncritical. Indeed, he often employed critique to highlight the whole gamut of socio-economic problems, like hunger and poverty, that plagued society. The haunting imagery of his poems and the use of everyday objects as metaphors aptly brings into relief the human face of the brutal daily struggles that the unfree people of Bengal engaged in - the hardships they faced during the famines and other crises that were a part of the everyday life of the colonial subject. He was a master of showing how these social crises impacted the personal experience of individuals. His poems, written in a colonial context and juxtaposed against his contemporaries, marked a major shift in

Bengali poetry, hitherto focused on crafting panegyrics for nature.

He played a major role in turning the poetic energies towards depictions of human pain and realistic reflections on the socio-political conditions of Bengal. Take his short poem, *Hey Mohajibon*, for instance. Here, he directly and harshly denounces poetry and the ornamental praises that it is rife with, and instead seeks to make it a vessel for the depiction of human crisis. An excerpt from the poem reads:

“Kobita tomare dilam ajke chutti  
Khudar rajje prithivi goddomoye  
Purnimar chaand jeno jholsano roti”

It translates to, “poem, I give you leave  
in the world of hunger, the world has taken to  
prose  
the full moon appears to be like burnt bread.”

These lines indicate three important things. First, they criticise and challenge traditional Bengali poetry in both its style and content. Secondly, they show how precisely this critique can be used as a vessel for expressing social crisis. Finally, they portray the linkages of personal experiences with social problems. A similar attempt at expressing the dialectical relationship between the personal human experience and socio-historical crisis can also be seen in his poem *Sipahi Bidroho* (set in the context of the “Revolt of 1857”), where he criticises the social elites for turning a deaf ear to the plight of the peasantry. In one of the other poems,

Deshlai Kathi (matchsticks), he uses the metaphor of a matchstick(s) for individual human potential and collective subaltern pressure from below, capable of destroying authority figures. So the Kobi weaved Bidroh in his poems.

Let us now turn to our other poet. Sylvia Plath (1932-63), who tragically ended her own life at the age of thirty, is known for popularising what has come to be known as “confessional poetry”. Most of her poems were inspired by her personal hardships and struggles - from the loss of a parent at a young age, dealing with bipolar mental health disorders to the affair, marriage, and later separation from fellow poet Ted Hughes. In her singular verse, she tried to catalogue her despair, violent emotions, and obsession with death. In this sense, her poetry was an exploration of her own crises. Confessional in tone, it transports its readers to the landscape of emotion that Plath herself experienced, thereby bringing personal crisis into the public arena. Thus showcasing how the personal emotions experienced in terms of psychological turmoil can be portrayed through poetry in a novel form, hence carving a space for the personal (which was considered intrinsically private) in the public.

Let us take the example of the poem *Tulips*, published posthumously in an anthology, which describes the mindset of a patient lying on a hospital bed, awaiting her operation. The uncertainty, pain, anguish, fear and memories experienced by the patient are beautifully captured by Plath. All this is set in a physical space where the patient, lying in the grey hospital bed, appears ever so distant and aloof

from the bunch of tulips opposite her (the only burst of colours in an otherwise dark setting) And in this subtle but effective way, the disconnect of the individual from the society in the wake of emotional-personal crisis is portrayed.

Both Sukanta Bhattacharya and Sylvia Plath’s works are informed by their experiences, personal and otherwise. Both of them contribute uniquely and widen our understanding of crises in their writing styles, genres, and treatment of subject matters when brought together comparatively on a global scale. For Sukanta Bhattacharya, personal and social crises overlap with each other. Rather than being divorced from each other, the social crisis is the backcloth that shapes the personal and without which the personal cannot be understood. Sylvia Plath, on the other hand, emphasizes personal distress and the importance of bringing it into the public sphere. Thereby breaking down the boundaries between the private and the public. Both of these poets lived and died in completely different milieus, with linguistic, cultural, geographical, social, political, and gender differences. Yet, the universal emotions of distress and human pain expressed in their poems united the two. Both can be taken together to work towards a more fluid, realistic, and complex understanding of crises, their vicissitudes and portrayals.

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# Call it Tagore Stealing Life's Thunder

Aadrit Banerjee

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The last year has been one of unsettling gloom, marked by various crises at all perceivable fronts: political, environmental, economical, and socio-cultural; and these were spread across all levels: from the basic regional platform to the multidimensional global sphere. There was a general disillusionment; a widespread public inability to understand the direction where humanity was headed to, and as a student, I desperately tried to find meaning. But I couldn't. How could I? The apparent enthusiasm of a civilised nation behind the construction of a temple, which at the first place was inaugurated at the cost of brutal communalism, during a fatal pandemic that had taken a devastating toll on innocent lives was something perverse and sick. I felt nauseous.

Strangely, I found solace in a very unusual place when I took refuge in Tagore and his gamut of literary works. This provided a distinct sense of comfort by mirroring what was happening all around me. It seemed to provide me with not just answers, but also an indomitable urge to ask questions.

*Raktakarobi*, or the *Red Oleanders*, thus became the truest reflection of the ongoing people's protests against various forms of

tyranny and injustice - be it in the uprising of the farmers in India, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the US, or the pro-democratic outcries in Hong Kong that was reignited after protests against an inhumane extradition bill. Every dissenter seemed to embody the valiant spirit of Nandini - the protagonist, who at one point in the play vehemently announces, "I have cast away all fear. You can't drive me away. Happen what may. I'm not going to move till your door is opened." It is also interesting how in the same drama, Tagore attempts to explain mankind's inclination to turn to oppression as he ingeniously states, "... those who say that others must die that they themselves may live, it's only they who are actually alive. You may cry out that this shows a lack of humanity, but you forget, in your indignation, that this is what humanity itself happens to be. The tiger does not feed on the tiger, it's the only man who fattens on his fellow man." This profound observation of human nature, mixed with a distinct poetic romanticism, is not just a feature of *Raktakarobi* but an inseparable component of all of Tagore's creations. This is what distinguishes the poet and makes him all the more accessible.

For someone who renounced the knighthood in

protest of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, this shade of his personality is only natural. Most readers would however argue, and raise brows of doubt as to whether Tagore would prove to be contemporaneous with regards to the struggles of the pandemic - the most threatening crisis looming in front of us at present.

Let me state here on a reassuring note, that as the pandemic unfurled, wave after wave, it was neither *thali bajao* nor *diya jalao* or the blame-game tactics which world leaders engaged in during a humanitarian crisis that provided me comfort. But it was the creations of this Nobel Laureate wherein I found my holistic peace.

Take for example *Chaturanga* or the *Quartet*. Set against the backdrop of a plague-ridden city it echoes the ongoing challenges posed by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Over the course of the novella, the reader often cannot help but feel that had Tagore been alive, this would have been his response to the present virus catastrophe. "Should the sick be treated like criminals?", Jagmohan expresses his sheer vexation in the story, reflecting on the way the plague victims were ostracized. He engages in the efforts for the welfare of the people, setting up hospitals, and refuses to abandon the tanners of the locality, who were not only the most vulnerable to the disease but also hailed from the low social strata. Contrasting with this self-sacrificing individual who ultimately contracts the disease and dies is his orthodox brother Harimohan, who scorns the patients and isolates them in a safer place. When I looked around my city, my country, and the world at large - Jagmohan and Harimohan were no longer fictional characters but had metamorphosed into mortals of flesh and

blood.

In *Puratan Bhritya*, or the *Old Domestic Help*, we find a similar character in the domestic help Keshta[, who despite being treated harshly in the zamindar household, shows an unswerving loyalty to his master by nursing him when he contracts smallpox on a pilgrimage to Vrindaban. While other pilgrims forsake the patient, Keshta takes care of his master and himself succumbs to the disease while the master convalesces to good health. Rabindranath paints a complex picture of the epidemic in these works. He reflects deeply on the state of panic that the onset of a contagion brings forth, the lack of public awareness about the disease and isolation practices, and the discriminatory attitude of the society - scenes which had become a quotidian occurrence in these Covid times.

It was as if Tagore had already lived through the pandemic. He had survived its brutalities, seen both the best and the worst of humanity. Thus, through his words, I could channel my reactions to this unprecedented situation - what I was feeling, he already had felt it; the tears I wanted to shed had already been shed by him. I feel I must make something clear at this point. It was not that I was getting to know Tagore for the first time.

As a Bengali, I have known *Rabi Thakur*, as he is fondly called in Bengal, since the time I had learnt to say the very basic syllables of language. I grew up believing that he was an essential part of day-to-day life. I was thus re-reading Tagore. It was not that I had stumbled upon this man suddenly and was enamoured by the timelessness of his ideas.

I was therefore literally rediscovering this man, his work, his art in a new normal era.

And I remembered one of his songs :

কী রবে আর কী রবে না, কী হবে আর কী হবে না  
ওরে হিসাবি,

এ সংশয়ের মাঝে কি তোর ভাবনা মিশাবি?।

যেমন করে বর্না নামে দুর্গম পর্বতে  
নির্ভাবনায় ঝাঁপ দিয়ে পড় অজাজিতের পথে। (i)

*(Would you mix your thoughts with the  
dilemma of what would remain,  
whatnot, and what would not happen?)*

*You estimator ...*

*Lunge into the path of the unknown, fearlessly,  
just like a waterfall,*

*in the isolated mountains, that dives beneath.*

*The more you face obstruction*

*more is the revelation of strength to overcome  
it ...)* (ii)

— I thus didn't shy away from the madness around. I learnt to cope with it, slowly, gradually.

Even when I was estranged from my immediate family and school friends as an unplanned, rushed lockdown forced us indoors, I felt like a caged bird looking at the distant sky - desiring freedom, wanting that necessary human touch, which I had almost grown oblivious to. All thanks to the safety measures of social distancing — I would close my eyes, and recite every day these few lines:

এমনি দুই পাখি দৌঁহারে ভালোবাসে, তবুও কাছে  
নাহি পায়

খাঁচার ফাঁকে ফাঁকে পরশে মুখে মুখে, নীরবে  
চোখে চোখে চায় (iii)

*(Both love each other, unable to come close*

*Beaks touch through cage gaps, silently eyes  
connect.)* (iv)

—Did he know such a pandemic would come one day? I wondered.

As the pandemic choked the nation and the government announced a lockdown to contain it; the migrant workers' crisis was set loose. The migrant workers who support the country's infrastructure on their fragile shoulders were displaced by the lockdown measures. This forced them to migrate from their urban centers of work to their homes in the villages. The workers mostly belonging to the disadvantaged sections of the population undertook this tiresome journey on foot, often with no money and little food, for all logistic facilities had been stopped and the government almost turned a blind eye to their inhumane sufferings. This staggering exodus of the workers desperately searching for food, identity, and safety from the virus catastrophe reminded many of the partition of 1947 and the ensuing displacement of people. Tagore had not seen the partition. He died in 1941. The partition and this migrant labour problem, decades later, would have greatly pained the sensitive poet. For both these human crises are the manifestation of something that is entirely contrary to the poet's beliefs. He had wanted a world which "has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls." (v) Today, not just this world, but also the poet's very own motherland lies broken into millions of fragmented pieces!

The Bengal Elections, the inauguration of the Ayodhya Temple, the negligence of the state that triggered a massive second wave of the

outbreak among many others led to despair and disillusion. All of this came as a psychological shock as the entrenched inequalities lay naked - the virus, the government, and the socio-economic order all parasitizing on these inequalities! I was anxious. India was anxious. And who wouldn't be? After all, as Tagore said, it does not need “a defeatist to feel deeply anxious about the future of millions who ... are being simultaneously subjected to hunger, disease, exploitations foreign and indigenous, and the seething discontents of communalism.” (vi)

I turn to Tagore and his appreciation of scientific ideas as I hold on to the rays of hope that the vaccines shall ultimately defeat the virus. In fact, speaking of immunization, Tagore once played the physician's part and administered an ayurvedic potion called the *Panchatikta Panchan* to his students in Shantiniketan during the flu of 1918 and in a letter to the scientist and his friend Jagadish Chandra Bose; Tagore mentioned how the potion had worked wonders.

I turn to Tagore and his words of courage:

যদি কেউ কথা না কয়, ওরে ওরে ও অভাগা,  
যদি সবাই থাকে মুখ ফিরায়ে সবাই করে ভয়--  
তবে পরান খুলে  
ও তুই মুখ ফুটে তোর মনের কথা একলা বলো রে  
॥ (vii)

*(If everyone turns away, if everyone fears to speak, then with open heart, without hesitation, speak your mind alone). (viii)*

—When I see organised attacks on journalists, truth being trammelled under authoritarian

regimes and a general fear among the people to raise their voice against all forms of falsehood. I also turn to him when debates in world forums about climate conservation seem misleading. Nature remains an intrinsic component of all his creations and it was so important to the bard that he started the *Vriksharopana Utsav* (Tree Planting Ceremony) in *Shantiniketan* as far back in time as in 1927-28. *Shantiniketan*, literally meaning the Abode of Peace, houses Tagore's *Vishwa - Bharati*, which turned 100 this year and remains the concrete expression of the poet's idea- “highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all its existence”. (ix) Tagore states, “To make the paraphernalia of our Education so expensive that Education itself becomes difficult of attainment would be like squandering all one's money in buying money-bags”, (x) and it remains a matter of speculation as to how he would have reacted to the controversial NEP 2020.

At every dark moment, I have found light in his work. Every time I thought I had failed, I have found in him an eternal promise of strength and power. Tagore even after so many years remains pertinent and he will be for generations to come. For all that is life and its myriad shades- from grief and love to despair, death and rejuvenation, this man has gone through it all. There remains nothing, thus, which he hasn't experienced, which he has not explored and which doesn't find a mention in his mammoth body of art.

During the past year, I have read the following account several times, and each time I did, the words pierced my being – emotions over-

flowed and it struck a different chord in my heart. The poet, after losing his youngest son Shamindranath during the cholera epidemic of 1907, wrote:

"I saw the vision of my son lying in the heart of the Infinite and I was about to cry to my friend, who was nursing the boy in the next room, that the child was safe, that he had found his liberation.

I felt like a father who had sent his son across the sea, relieved to learn of his safe arrival and success in finding his place. I felt at once that the physical nearness of our dear ones to ourselves is not the final meaning of their protection. It is merely a means of satisfaction to our own selves and not necessarily the best that could be wished for them." (xi)

Where else should you find this resilience in the face of disease and death, such faith in front of despair, and such a deep intensity of realisation, but in Tagore? Somewhere the bereaved poet, who had throughout his life experienced tragic personal losses, seems to say, like Harimohini — a character from his novel *Gora*, who loses her son and husband to cholera within a few days - "Ishwar, the Almighty kept me alive just to demonstrate

that human beings can tolerate even the sort of pain that is unimaginable."

Tagore thus becomes the finest epitome of this indomitable human spirit. This is his promise, which held me together and thwarted my nerves from snapping in the most depressing of circumstances. As Khaled Hosseini writes in the foreword of his book *The Kite Runner* "... that scene took some of the edges off my own experience. Call it Art stealing Life's thunder"; it was Literature stealing my life's thunder – or to be more specific, it was Tagore stealing Life's thunder.

In his last essay, entitled *Crisis in Civilization*, published just before his death, he proclaims - "From one end of the world to the other, the poisonous fumes of hatred darken the atmosphere ... As I look around, I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a heap of futility, and yet I will not commit the grievous sin of losing my faith in Man. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage." This is his final message. Of Hope, endless hope. That is what Tagore is all about – and that is what literature is all about. And that is what it will always be...

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Aadrit, born and brought up in Kolkata, loves to dream! He writes, or at least he tries to, and in his leisure hours, he sits staring at his smartphone screen typing out words after words afterwords. He sleeps, eats a lot, and also paints, reads, and writes poetry. He is currently a first-year English lit student at Ramjas College, University of Delhi,

# Lensing Indian Literature in Crises

Hinduja Verma

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Literature is a sort of art that expresses your genuine thoughts and delineates your unvarnished self since what you write can be your life experiences, unique to you because no two people however similar can be the same, and that is what the beauty of literature demonstrates. This is what sets literature apart from other types of art such as dancing, theatre, singing, cooking, video editing, and so on. All these to a large extent can be taught not that it's wrong but there's a possibility of you losing your authenticity in the processes unlike in literature. A time of crisis and how you emerge out of it individually or as society defines you and that definition because you can't bear the brunt of your adulterated self at that point in time will be original. A crisis is a real situation of difficulty, confusion, and uncertainty whether social, political, economic, or existential. Books other than befriending people leading a spree of desultory lifestyle can also help people whose lives are constantly engulfed by a certain kind of crisis and deplorable condition through a big chunk of their life to express and give them a platform to speak and tell their stories whether to reinstate our faith in humanity or to make us aware of the injustices a person faced by humanity and

more.

A good example of this is Manoranjan Byhari, a pioneer of Dalit literature in Bengal who learnt reading and writing while he was in jail and after coming out, he authored multiple short stories and books narrating his story. I don't think we would have gotten to know what led him to jail and why he got influenced by Naxalism, if it wasn't for his books and writings. I think literature makes us see people as humans rather than a person of a particular social group or whatever identity he/she might have. It could be the reason why we bought the book but we forget about it once we get involved in the book. I'll say that it's just about a woman/man who's telling his/her stories, opinions, or ideas. Indian society is bound to face a crisis as long as caste, religion, gender inequality and other stigmas are present and entrenched in us as individuals and as collectives of a society. Hence, literature will be as important in a crisis as it is anytime. Not that it's not true for other countries as well, but I intend to talk about India here. The approach of Indian literature during a social and political crisis will be the focus of this article.

During a social or political crisis, literature tells us of multiple narratives of a crisis. Some narratives might get ignored or sidelined because of their popular influence and the one which people want to hear more about, but literature makes sure that we also hear what we don't want to, which is, often the truth. For example, the work of Saadat Hasan Manto is unembellished, the reason being Manto's courage to write the truth and the necessity of someone voicing the truth at the time of political and social crisis. In his short story "Toba Tek Singh " he compels us to discern who the really insane people are? Whether they are the psychiatric patients who are being transferred from a Pakistani asylum to Indian asylum and vice versa or someone else. In his short story "Thanda Gosht " he again awakens our lost conscience when writes about a man forcing himself on a woman who was dead. He claimed, "if you cannot bear these stories, that means society is unbearable". His stories weren't 'bearable' as they were based on authentic realities of life and the society was unbearable because of his stories being realities of society. It talked about the socio-political crisis faced at the time of partition.

At a time when the popular opinion was to fight for freedom from the British, people merely talked about the social crisis the country was going through, literature stepped forward to not let us forget the cost we were paying for it which became only a narrative - like the nationalist narrative. Indian literature has been self-assessing in nature while the country goes through waves of crises which is really brave, whether it was Kabir in the 15th century negating idol worship and caste and religion or Rabindranath Tagore in the 19th &

20th century. Rabindranath Tagore wrote extensively about the British's exploitation of India by forcing their own civilization and suppressing India's identity. But at the same time, he called out our own social inadequacy and how that is the origin of our present helplessness. He talked about how political emancipation should not be greater than our moral emancipation as that was and still remains, the idea of the West. At the time when the West did not speak about how it was solving its issues of racism and the British did not talk about how it was easy for them to unite because of their racial unity from the beginning, Tagore not only slammed them but also conspicuously wrote about the Indian problem of caste and how Indian elite didn't bother to denounce it. Hence, increasing the scope of literature and thinking in general. This inward-looking nature and depth in our literature during critical times proves that we aren't living in oblivion.

Literature alone, cannot be a refuge in crisis because that is a privilege. The poor cannot turn to literature in their times of crisis, at least if not otherwise also. I don't know how much literature can be of help to people dealing with the plight of survival. I am talking about the educated rural or urban low families. - individuals who are educated and interested in literature but their deprivation doesn't allow them to sit and read in difficult times. For instance, during the covid lockdown, these people couldn't afford to read or just couldn't do it because, for them, reading is a privilege, and there are countless things to worry about, including lives, livelihoods, financial crisis, living conditions, etc. Of course, to an extent, everybody was worried but literature was a

refuge for people who did not succumb to such issues constantly. Don't mistake me for this subaltern tone. I am willing to acknowledge this. I, myself, went through this realization while writing this article and concluded that literature or even access to literature in times of crisis, is a matter of privilege. If you don't acknowledge it then it will be analogous to witnessing injustice but doing nothing about it, not even taking cognizance of it. No one is giving them this responsibility. I don't think anyone should but only hope that they realize it themselves. Nevertheless, Indian literature has fulfilled that hope historically at least in terms of writing, and has been utilised to influence or sensitise people, as well as these writers' views being widely read and praised, but we still have a long way to go. I quote this because Kancha Illaiah Shepherd, an Indian political theorist's *"From a Shepherd Boy to an Intellectual: My Memoirs"*, is the first

autobiography of a shudra (Dalit) written in English and this book got published in as recently as 2019. The times are still difficult for the marginalised communities and their literature needs to be read. People enjoy reading about people who speak to them and novels that they can connect with during difficult times because it makes them feel less alone. Do rural Dalits or Muslims have any characters that they identify with? Do rural Muslim and Dalit women have it? Certainly not, because there haven't been many rural Dalit or Muslim women writers. Literature needs to be diverse and inculcate the differences of lives, ideas, thinking, lifestyle, and in all languages. Their work doesn't only need to reach the community they belong to but others too. The self-assessing nature of our literature also needs to be converted into actions that show inculcation of what has been assessed.



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# Of Home and Homelessness

Anwasha Dey

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The bygone year, in retrospect, evokes a fertile ground for a question that has been troubling my mind for years now. What is the purpose of literature? A social critique, a political mirror, or personal comfort, an aesthetic output of the artist's mind which might not need a purpose as such. Being in the middle of a crisis that the planet has rarely seen, when near and dear ones were dying, as a fresher in a literature course, my mind was raked with a dilemma. If we are continuing a discussion on metaphysical conceit when in the neighboring department someone has died or is financially devastated, how is the entire process logical, or rather can poetry be taught that way? Are we then forced literature like everything else, for end-of-semester exams? Probably yes, for the entire education system offered a little solution to the problem. The question intensifies on the ground whether literature at all retains its purpose in the bigger synchronisation when someone who has lost her father, has to write a paper on one of Keats' love poetry?

Literature, if executed in the right measure, might serve as a common man's archive at times of crisis for the common man who would read a story and look back in time to get a glimpse, who wouldn't mind going through past newspaper reports or historical archives.

But, it is important one remembers that literature may give the cue to the real crisis, but a single book, a poem, or a story can never consume the trauma and the pain adhered with the experiences during the crisis. And so, quoting Khaled Hosseini or writing poems on social media when the Taliban takes over Afghanistan is not a brave choice, particularly when the writer in question gives a second-hand American narrative. The plight of the dislocated, the dead, and the suffering can never be consumed into bestsellers in a capitalist market. Hence, probably when Hosseini writes another of his mind-blowing books on the current crisis within a couple of years, and crowds overflow in Starmark, literature would not fail, but people will. People who have not watched a single news report nor have any idea of the killings and dislocation would yet again romanticise the beauty of the eyes of the Afghan women and cry their hearts out in the safe enclosure of their rooms, far away from the ground. I do not criticise the latter but what is the purpose of the process? One can cry well by reading something of the fantasy genre if it is escapism that they want. Literature needs to take a stand at times such as these and it cannot be a medium to fetishize trauma after the real horror has passed through, at which they turned a

blind eye. And so, how literature must be perceived during times of crisis depends much more on the reader than on the writer.

As part of my syllabus, I had to study three texts on Partition when the Pandemic was raging in full swing sometime last April-May. Studying a crisis in the middle of another crisis might not be a great idea, particularly when death plays with your apartment doors in an invisible cloak every morning with the newspaper and the milk. With a severe oxygen shortage all over the country, distributing leads throughout the day, with exhaustion and ailing mental health, I sat to study the pangs of the 1947 separation only for it to deteriorate further. Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* was one of the texts among other partition texts by Chughtai and Manto. It was through desperate readings of Ghosh's novels that I located a common anchor of the lunacies that ravaged through both the timelines- home. Calling Partition the lunacy that operated on the outsides, and the Pandemic to be one on the inside would be a gross misappropriation because one does not forget the thread of migrant laborer deaths or homelessness. But, the point of home and homelessness sustains even if it is not a well-established dichotomy. Ghosh's stirring narrative takes to the blurring of borders in the post-memory of Partition, where a character is psychologically burdened each time an uprooting occurred. The grandmother in her retirement finds herself connected with the memory of yore- and wants to return to Dhaka to save the only person who might serve as a memento of the existence of her times in Dhaka- Jethamoshai. However, the customs in the airport shows how different the collective memory is from the individual - how

people who have once abandoned all hardly return, or so the governments believe. And so, she does not know which is her home, where she was born or where she lived and worked, and made a living. The harrowing dysphoria is so deeply embodied in the memory of the crisis that the process of its recovery dissolves the boundaries. People all over the world are searching for a home- an anchorage of strength and hope- some like Thamma search for their childhoods, some like Ila search for liberation, some like Tridib search for a person, some like the homeless Afghans tying themselves to the tyres of aeroplanes search for a camp to at least survive, some like the laborers walking past the railway tracks only to be killed with their chapatis spilling over, and some like us in the claustrophobic space of our bedrooms, looking for a life we had and did not deserve to lose, our brains clogged with the everyday images— images that would one day be remembered as the face of the crisis and would fuel in literary proliferations.

Such a work of literature cannot and should not boil down the years of crisis (till it ends) in a single outlet. Just how partition narratives expose us to the lunacies that circumscribed homelessness, where Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* dies, the narratives of the pandemic will navigate through the lunacy in the walk to home and within the home years later. And narratives will be known in retrospect which is othered by the mainstream media. And therefore, even in barbaric times such as these, when buying a vegetable or existing itself can be barbaric, literature must be created, to preserve what collective history cannot—the loss of a loved one, the second-hand computer that revolts to boot up during class, the year at

school missed. What we see today is the grand narrative of washing hands, hospitalization and death count, what we do not see are the little stories that are lost forever—people who survive but can barely live their lives. And so, literature of crisis can have a huge socio-political impact only when perceived vis-a-vis the dominant narrative, when the experience imparted is actually lived and not taken as a boring afternoon read. It is for this very reason of lived experiences why Manto and Chughtai will be authentic sources of the partition more than writers who delve into any question of crisis from post-memory—be it Ghosh or Hosseini. Their experiences are second-hand, so to say.

Dissolution of boundaries is another aspect. Historically, there have been zero to no instances of the entire world facing the same crisis simultaneously. But here are people, living shared memories in the confines of their rooms that come in different dimensions, that withhold different stories but nevertheless concur to the degrading psychic health of everyone. In a sane world, lockdown—the very idea of locking up young university students in their homes for almost two years would go high on the index of insanity and yet this is the reality that we are living through, the trauma that we are sharing sans borders while writing and consuming stories at home where the characters do not wear masks or use hand-sanitizers regularly. Because this is not the world we choose to live in, we are transfixed here. But the question is what I started with—can everyone create or consume literature in times such as these? Lucky are those who can. For the rest whose mental faculties are predominantly occupied by the everyday news,

messages of death, the premonition of running short of savings and exams and competition all in one go, is there much scope for the ordinary person to have boredom, or leisure, or the mental stability which one needs to introspect society and create art? For most, probably not. But, on the other hand, literature might be a comforter too. As much as I stick to my idea of literature being a political mirror, one cannot deny its healing properties. And so, after a draining day, a couple of Mary Oliver's poems can be there to soothe the nerves. The reason behind this is that the current crisis has taught us one important idea—it is important to take a stand during a crisis but not by keeping oneself and one's mental health at stake. Taking care of one's own mind by listening to a song or two even in the face of devastation cannot be perverse, for allowing oneself space enough to survive can never be perverse. The crisis at hand has taught us that survival needs not only be physical. So, literature at times of crisis can even be a love poem, but one probably should not be expected to analyse the epistemology of the words in the poem.

Furthermore, one universal aspect which every literature read or written in the time of crisis hints at is the bigger power dynamics of the state, and of nations which have forever been in contest with the well-being of the ordinary citizen—be it the pandemic, partition, or anything else. The failure of the state in managing a crisis or its intentional perpetration always stands true. So, literature in times of crisis must always express dissent, against the very state of homelessness that the state perpetrates.

Anwasha is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in English literature at Presidency University, Kolkata, and has little to do with life but for a little reading and writing here and there, with a keen interest in Indian writing in both English and translation.

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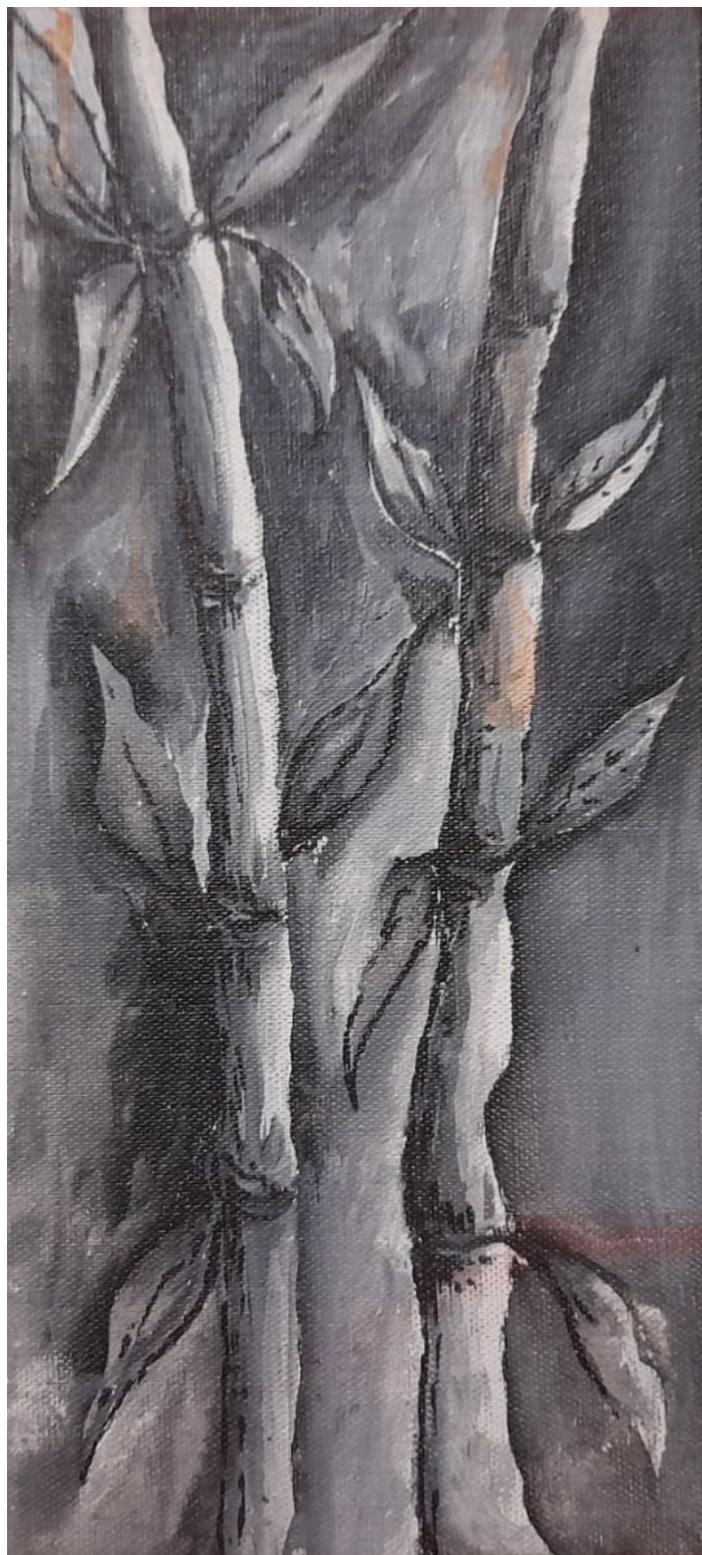
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