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Memories of Subjective and Objective Violence of Amritsar Massacre in Bali Rai's *City of Ghosts*¹

Indrajit Mukherjee

Abstract

Amritsar is a site of contestation and representation that always cries for a trajectory of resistance and protest against all forms of dehumanization and genocide perpetrated by the regime of terror and enforcement. The ferocious onslaught and assimilationist mentality of the colonizer silenced the colonized into dumb anguish of horror. Applying Žižek's theory of violence and Nora's notion of sites of memory, this paper seeks to explore how Bali Rai's heart-rendering tale *City of Ghosts* (2009) brings back the memory of black horror and unhealed trauma of soul-sapping scheme of random bloodshed engineered by Dyer and his Co. from the points of view of three young men, Gurdial, Jeevan, and Bissen Singh, through constructing the national memory of Amritsar as a patchwork of fact and fiction. I will also represent how this present fiction uses the ghostly figure of Heera who appears in each man's narrative to provide an alternative worldview from the perspectives of the marginalised.

Keywords: Resistance, Violence, Sites of Memory, Trauma, Dyer.

Introduction

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre alias Amritsar massacre is considered to be one of the most phantasmagorical experiences in the history of Indian politics because the warnings of Acting Brigadier Edward Harry Dyer to his fellow troops to hurl bullets from their Enfield Mark IV rifles into a large gathering of unarmed demonstrators butchered and battered the lives of at least four hundred people on the threshold of their undone years in an enclosed park on the auspicious occasion of Baisakhi of 1919. The historian Kim Wagner gives an example of this violence in his recently published book on Amritsar massacre thus: "the troops keep shooting and loading, shooting and loading, the piles of cartridges growing at their feet. The ground is littered with dead bodies, and a small girl is crying next to the bloodied corpse of her mother" (Wagner xv). The nation raised its voice in fierce protest and gave rise to secret centres of violence when open discussions and lawful movements bore no fruit. Even after one hundred years of this mass murder, we did not receive any formal apology from the British Govt., although Churchill, David Cameron and Theresa May expressed regret for this massacre or recently Archbishop of Canterbury felt ashamed

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“The Storm is over”: Negotiating Darwinism and Post-Apocalyptic Milieu in Jack London’s *The Scarlet Plague*

Indrajit Mukherjee

Abstract ■ Presently, the COVID 19 crisis gives birth to a number of questions in our minds about the post-apocalyptic scenario: Will the crisis be a catalyst for a major social change? Will there be anarchy and the politics of extremism, or will there be a rise of dictatorship? Will we, as part of the Post-Corona world, be driven by scientific-rational thinking and ethics, or will we move on to another catastrophe by relying on the destiny of blind faith and religious hypocrisy? Will we emphasize more on our moral grounds, or will we become more courageous in sympathetic mobilization in the face of future disasters? Will we encourage the free flow of information so that our democratic institutions can be more efficient and humane? Will we increase the distance between the state and the people? Should we continue to live a self-centred life as we did before in our personal lives, or should we be careful in our social responsibilities and sympathetic to the needs and problems of ‘others’? The representation of pandemic in literature reflects our fears and despairs about illness and societal crumbling while simultaneously representing us that survival is possible and that rebuilding ourselves into something new is not only necessary but also inevitable. Charged with social Darwinism and racism, Jack London’s *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) is an important illustration of post-apocalyptic fiction because it brings out the novelist’s delineation in his notions of human and social atavism in the text’s inspection on the brink of destruction of the human civilization by “a fast-acting and untreatable plague” (Berkove 135). After discussing how people’s attitudes towards these kinds of pandemic alter from time to time, this paper seeks to address these questions engaging Darwinism and Post-Apocalyptic world in this almost-forgotten short fiction.

Keywords: COVID-19, plague, pandemic, Darwinism, post-apocalyptic world

Introduction

“And once the storm is over, you won’t remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive..... When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in”

— Murakami (4).

The famous Japanese writer Haruki Murakami’s observation in his *magnum opus*, entitled *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), takes us to the ongoing problem of negotiating

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Food and Power in the Food-stories of Mahasweta Devi

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Abstract: Negotiation of the food-ways and eating by the powerful and the powerless emerges as the distinguishing factor between two classes. An examination of the exercise of power over the act of eating reveals how power operates through food and the act of eating in the short stories of Mahasweta Devi.

Keywords: class, food, oppression, power, rice, starvation

Citing literary occurrences as instances, ranging from the *Bible* (the *Genesis*) to Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Mervyn Nicholson, in his article "Food and Power: Homer, Carroll, Atwood and Others" (1987), describes how food is a "power crystal" round which revolves the relationship between the divinity and the mere mortals (or the ruler and the ruled, or the powerful and the powerless) with the former allotting the latter food befitting the position of the mortal in the hierarchy of beings. Obedience to these acts of apportioning marks an acceptance of one's own place in this order, whereas disobedience to these—as in the case of Adam and Eve—becomes an archetypal crime punishable without mercy. Strict adherence to the rule of obedience in terms of food is of paramount importance, because food "is the material means of growth, where growth may be defined as gaining power" (39): a threatening phenomenon for the ruler/ the powerful/ the divinity. In Mahasweta's stories like "Rice" ("Bhaat", First pub. in 1975), "Rice" ("Bhaat", First pub. in 1982), "Salt" ("Noon", First pub. in 1978), "Fish" ("Maachh", First pub. in 1978), "Flood" ("Baan", First pub. in 1968), "Birthday Party" ("Janmatithi", First pub. in 1975) and "The Fairy Tales of Mohanpur" ("Mohanpurer Rupkatha", First pub. in



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“The post-humanist logos”: The Political Dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak*.

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Abstract:

Posthumanism takes a critical stance towards humanism and it urges humans to respect and respond to non-human worlds and to reject the essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature. The aim of my article is to explore how the dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* (2006) take part in the *post-humanist logos* and interrogate the exploitation of animals. The novel opens a new discourse regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text. The essay aims at recognizing the power of animals to interrupt, surprise, and reconstitute human commonality. Its focus is on how the street dogs’ organization and their discourse on Human (its development, rationalism, invention, use and misuse of scientific knowledge) challenge and interrupt anthropocentrism. It will be argued how far the gaze of the animal breaks the hold of reason’s plan by admitting an “alterity” to reason within the temporal continuum.

Keywords: Nabarun Bhattacharya; post-anthropocentric subject; animal gaze; empathy; alterity.

In the “Foreword: The Political Animal” (2008), Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis write: “The political animal is neither the subject who writes each article, nor the subject matter of each contribution. Rather, it is that which enables both the subject of writing and writing itself to belong to the *polis*. As we imagine it, the act of writing begins with the gaze of the political animal.” (5) Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* is a text that engages ‘the gaze of the political animal’. This paper intends to explore how the novel *Lubdhak* addresses and presents the dogs, principally, through the analysis of the animal gaze. Keeping Jacques Derrida, Cary Wolfe, who demonstrates that to adopt a posthumanist approach to animals is to address the unexamined framework of *speciesism*, Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis’s study of animals as a backdrop, I would proceed to evaluate how the dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* (2006) take part in the *post-humanist logos* and interrogate the exploitation of animals. It would be an assessment of how the said novel opens a new discourse

regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text. The human characters in the novel of Bhattacharya will be viewed from Posthumanist stance that urges humans “to respect and respond to non-human worlds” (Ryan 69). Adopting Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis’ “The Political Animal” (2008) that opines that, “the animal also becomes political, in the sense that it conditions the possibility of singularity and of identity” (Danta and Vardoulakis 5), I would aim at recognizing the power of animals to interrupt, surprise, and reconstitute human commonality. This essay’s focus is on how the street dogs’ organization and their discourse on Human (its development, rationalism, invention, use and misuse of scientific knowledge) challenge and “interrupt” anthropocentrism. It will be argued how far the gaze of the animal breaks the hold of reason’s plan by admitting an “alterity” to reason within the temporal continuum.

The oppression of the non-human animals is ensured in the current conceptualization of human. What Derrida does in philosophy, Bhattacharya does in literature. Derrida’s speaks of the capacity of the animals to perceive ‘our’ existence, to acknowledge ‘our’ presence, without which, ‘I’ (the human) would not exist. In his *foreword* about the novel *Lubdhak* (2006), Nabarun Bhattacharya writes: “the right to the sphere of life is not only of man, but of all (living being)” (translation mine) (10). Both Derrida and Bhattacharya want to “move from ‘the ends of man’, that is the confines of man, to ‘the crossing of borders’ between man and animal.” (Derrida 372) In short, while Derrida’s interest is in what the animal gaze says about human consciousness, Bhattacharya, in some different context, continues deconstructing the established meaning of life in a language which is completely human (language): “by the loss of life, what do we mean? Of course, we mean human life” (Translation mine) (Bhattacharya 10). This is how the novel opens a new discourse regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text.

While describing the gradual growth of *Kaan-Gojano*’s (name of dog) ear, Bhattacharya comments that, “...the dormant power of the multidimensional life is a magical realism.” (Translation mine) (17) This opinion of Bhattacharya addresses Posthumanism that takes a critical stance towards humanism and urges humans to respect and respond to non-human worlds and to reject the essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature. Bhattacharya’s text is written in the Posthuman condition that, as in her *The Posthuman* (2013) Rosi Braidotti comments, “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet.” (1-2)

Lubdhak was first published in the festive season edition of Bengali Magazine *Disha*, later being published as a stand-alone book from Abhijan Publishers on January, 2006. Set in a city, Kolkata, the novel thematizes on the organization and revolution of the street dogs. At the turn of the century, the city undergoes beautification for which the street dogs must be driven out. After a long debate on the economic feasibilities and other associated issues, the authority has decided to imprison the dogs within Pinjrapoles (a place for encaging the abandoned animals). These Pinjrapoles resemble the concentration camps. A single Pinjrapole can accommodate more than hundred and seventeen dead dogs the body of which would become food for the