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The Fourth issue of The Notebook is
Dedicated to
Sr. Yvonne Marie
Founding Principal of Jyoti Nivas College (1966-69)
And visionary extraordinaire

Foreword

Within the constructs of a “stable” society, literature has not only lent itself as a medium to the dominant but also inclusively represented the marginal writers. Canonical texts have always found their way into the readership of every layperson, but peripheral writing has struggled to fight through the fissures and cracks to gain much deserved significance and importance. This year’s editorial is dedicated to literature burgeoning from the margins, not just contemporary writers but also those who have been silenced throughout time and space.

Most of the articles represent those voices that have been restrained by the mainstream. And therefore their voices have gained momentum as they advance from a muffle to a roar that fall within the far reaching ears of a standard reader. Moving from the immediate location of India itself, from the Dalit writer and Bhakti movement that caused a revolution in not just the spiritual but literary space, to the Jewish and Black American voices to the subalterns from Iran, this issue of the Notebook sketches the journey of the marginal.

We dedicate this issue of the Notebook to Sr. Yvonne Marie, the founding Principal of Jyoti Nivas College (1966-69) who passed away in January 2009.

*Arnita Ranmali Gunaratne
Mabel Cynthia Mascarenhas
Meghana Shivanand
Soumya Anna George*

For every man who lives without freedom, the rest of us must face the guilt.

Lillian Hellman, *The Watch on the Rhine*

Message Vol.4

Be a blessing *wherever* you go ... and in *whatever* you do and to *whomever* you come into contact with. Be a blessing ... for you are blessed to be a blessing!

The 'Note Book' is the effort to make students develop and utilize their talents and skills in writing.

Let me at the outset congratulate our students on the excellent work done in bringing out the fourth issue of the 'Note Book'. The choice of topics, the quality of articles, the presentation, everything is excellent. I must congratulate the entire editorial team for their hard work, Ms. Arnila Gunaratne, Ms. Sowmya Anna George, Ms. Meghana Shivanand, and Ms. Mable Gynthia Mascarenhas. Also, a special note of thanks to Ms. Roopa Philip, for coordinating the editorial team and bringing out the issue in time. I would like to thank our staff from the department of English for their dedication and support in giving our students a high quality learning environment.

In the journey of life, we meet wonderful people and I have been gifted with you my dear students. Our JNC family is a circle of love and strength. With every new batch of students, the circle grows and through the students the sparkle, the light of JNC is shared around.

At this point in your life you are more experienced and better prepared than ever before. As you step out of these portals of JNC open your self to the enormous opportunity that exists before you now. I hope that these two years have brought more clarity to your dreams and desires and that you are more in line with who you truly are. Your uniqueness is the moment when you can begin to fulfill your greatest possibilities. Love and trust yourself more.

This is the moment you've been working your way toward for a long time; you are here at last. Welcome life's surprises and choose to see the positive value that is in each one of them. Don't be too quick to place judgments on people, situations and events in your life. In everything that comes along, there is an opportunity for you to more fully discover and express your true purpose. Be open to whatever life brings your way. There is real treasure to be found in all that.

I will remember you and pray that you are not afraid to try, for you never know what you can do. You are not some casual and meaningless products of evolution. Each one of you is the result of a thought of God, each of you is loved, each of you is necessary at this moment of history. No matter who you are and what you do, you play a central role in the history of this society. Give back to society as much as you have received from the society.

May God Bless You!

Dr. Sr. Lalitha Thomas
Director, Post Graduate Centre,
Jyoti Nivas College (Autonomous), Bangalore

We will not pay for our freedom with a single promise of silence.

Alexandre Dumas, [*The Three Musketeers*](#)

The Creed of Non-existence: The Concept of Ishq in Sufi Poetry and Legend.

What is the mi'raj¹ of the heavens?

Non-existence.

The religion and creed of the lovers is non-existence.²

William C. Chittick, in his book *Sufism: A Short Introduction* defines Sufism in a broad sense as “the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice” and in addition, that “the Sufis have looked upon themselves as those Muslims who take seriously God’s call to perceive His presence both in the world and in the self.”

It is therefore the adherence to the Quran *inward*, rather than strict adherence to God – contemplation is treasured over action, spiritual development over the law. Rather than be in fear of Allah³, and submit to Him so as to avoid incurring His wrath, the Sufis desire a communion with Him and see in Him all that invokes joy – and it is a *submission*⁴ that demands a shedding of self. By this if we perceive the first half of the Shahadah⁵, the testimony of Allah’s Oneness – *Lā ilaha illa al-Lāh*, – there are two contradictory aspects that complement each other: “no god” and “but God”. The “god” that must be negated here is the *nafs-e-ammara*⁶, the love of which obscures from the sight the presence of the True God⁷.

It is not fear but love of the Divine that drives the enlightened Sufi soul, a love that encompasses the self and renders it into nothingness. The soul in full agreement with Allah, like Hallaj of Rumi’s *Fihi ma Fihi*, reaches such a limit in its love that it is naughted by His presence.

As Rumi himself says:

Like the shadow

I am

And

I am not.

In this paper, we shall be using two important works within Sufi literature: Hakim Nizami’s narration of the legend of Laila and Majnun, with a short interpretation of it by the Sufi mystic Shams-e-Tabrizi, and Ghazal No. 1826. This interpretation is solely based on Sufi notions of *ishq* – a hitherto overused term in Hindi and Urdu popular culture, where the word is used to denote romantic love – as love for the Divine and the need for His presence.

¹ In Islamic tradition, the **Isra and Mi'raj** are the two parts of a journey that Muhammad took in one night, around the year 620. A brief sketch of the story is in verses 1 and 60 of one of the Qur'an chapters (#17: *sura al isra*), and other details were filled in from the supplemental writings, the *hadith*.

² Mathnawi VI Verse 233

³ “O you who believe! Fear Allah as He ought to be feared and do not die except as believers.” [*Sûrah Âl `Imrân* : 102]. The word *taqwa*, which occurs in the Quran at least 17 times, all in its nominal form, which means “God consciousness”, is derived from the root *ittaqa*, which means “to be wary” or “Godfearing”.

⁴ *Islam*, itself, means “submission”

⁵ The Shahadah is the Muslim declaration of the Oneness of Allah, and the acceptance of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as His messenger. It reads: *Lā ilaha illa al-Lāh, Muhammadun rasūlu l-Lāh* (**translation:** This is no god but God (Allah), and Muhammad is his messenger). Sufi practice is deeply rooted in this creed.

⁶ *Nafs* by itself refers to the “self” or the psyche, and there are three stages of the self, of which *nafs-e-ammara* (the uncontrollable spirit prone to evil) is one. In his *Teachings of Islam*, Pg 19, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed speaks of this as a primeval stage of the self, the ego, much before it reaches final communion with Allah in the state of *Nafs-e-mutmainnah* (the soul at rest).

⁷ Rumi, Mathnawi I 772: “The mother of your idols is your own ego.”

Love in Sufism:

*When lovers moan,
they're telling our story.
Like this.⁸*

Shaikh Najm al-Din Razi, author of the book *Intellect and Love*, has this to say about Islamic thought on the two contradicting states:

“Intellect travels in the world of being and has the attributes of water. Everywhere it goes, it flows like water and the two worlds flourish. But Love has the attributes of fire, and travels to the world of Non-Being. Everywhere it goes, it annihilates; everything it touches is annihilated.”

This sums up the effect of what the Persian Sufis called *ishq*, the root of which stems from the word ‘*ashaqah*, which is a type of vine⁹. As the vine leeches nourishment from a tree, thereby robbing it of its lifeblood, *ishq* once rooted in the lover’s heart dries up the lover’s need for the living world, and the tree of the body turns pale and yellow. *Ishq* is not to be confused with the Arabic words *hubb*¹⁰ or *wadud*¹¹, both of which are used extensively in traditional Islamic literature, including the Qur’an. Several scholars, such as Ibn al-Qayyim¹², have in fact labelled *ishq* as forbidden¹³ and it is not mentioned in the Quran.

However *ishq*¹⁴ appears in a number of *hadith* – in some, as love between God and man, originating from *dhikr* (remembrance). From about the thirteenth century, few themes play as important a role in Sufi teachings as *ishq*. William Chittick informs us that “historians have commonly spoken of a gradual development of Sufism that begins in a mysticism of asceticism and fear, slowly changes to an emphasis on love and devotion [...]” Among the many scholars¹⁵ who have written on *ishq* – whether divine or human – Ibn Arabi¹⁶ and Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi, also known as Rumi¹⁷ are considered the two greatest masters of this

⁸ *Kulliyat*, ghazal no. 1826, translation by Coleman Barks.

⁹ When the ‘*ashaqah* vine (known in Scientific terms as *Dolichos lablab* or the Lablab bean vine) coils itself around a tree, the latter dries up and dies, all its nourishment sucked away.

¹⁰ *Hubb*, original verb form of *mahabbah*, has been used 69 times in the Qur’an.

¹¹ Allah is referred to as *Al-Wadud* (the Loving One) in Surah 11:90 and Surah 85:14.

¹² Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya was a famous Sunni Islamic jurist, commentator on the Qur’an, astronomer, chemist, philosopher, psychologist, scientist and theologian. Most of his scholarship centred around the sciences of the *Hadith* and the *Fiqh*.

¹³ He calls it *al-ifrat fi ‘l-hubb* (excess in love) in his *Rawdatt al-muhibbin*, as cited in *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* by Joseph Norman Bell. According to the same book, “the scholar may assert the type of love denoted by *ishq* is ascribed in the Koran on;y to women [Potiphar’s wife and her Eqtyian friends], and to the perverted tribe of Lot.” – Pg. 164.

¹⁴ *Ishq* is usually divided into three forms – *ishq-e-haqiqi* (love of God), *ishq-e-majazi* (metaphorical love, or love between a man and a woman) and *ishq-ar-rasul* (love of Prophet Muhammad [P.B.U.H])

¹⁵ Dhu’l Nun al-Mishri (d. 246/861), Junayd (d. 298/910), Shibli (d. 334/946), Hallaj (d. 309/922) and Nuri who called himself ‘*aashiq Allah*’ (d. 295/907)

¹⁶ **Abū abd-Allah Muhammad ibn-Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-‘Arabi al-Hatimi al-TTaa’I**, (died 1240) was an extremely prolific Arab Sufi philosopher. His name in later centuries became synonymous with the expression *wahdat al-wujud*, “The Unity of Being” and is the author of at least 500 prose works.

¹⁷ “Rumi, who lived in the 12200’s and migrated when relatively young with his family from Persia to western Turkey, became a beloved sage and, for some, a saintly teacher, who enabled the mystical Sufi tradition to evolve and become

tradition. What is fascinating with concerns to this discourse is that even though Ibn Arabi and Rumi belong to two entirely different strands of Sufism, the knowledge-based theologian and the passionate poet agree completely on the nature of love itself:

Ibn Arabi:

Love has no definition through which its essence can be known [...] Those who define love have not known it, those who have not tasted it by drinking it down have not known it, and those who say they have been quenched by it have not known it.

Jalaluddin Mohammad Rumi:

*Someone asked, "What is loverhood?"
I replied, "Don't ask me about these meanings –
"When you become like me, you will know;
when it calls you, you will tell its tale."*

--

*What is it to be a lover? To have perfect thirst.
So let me explain the water of life.*

As is seen in both examples, the diametrically opposite philosophers have one thing in common to say about *ishq*: that it is all-encompassing and undefinable, and that its essence can be felt only through a thorough emptying of the self and absolute need for the Divine.

In the last two sections of this essay, we shall explore this very aspect of *ishq*, *ishq-e-haqiqi* in particular. Keeping this in mind, we shall give a short summary of the legend of Layla and Majnun, as related by Hakim Nizami¹⁸, and its interpretation by Shams-e-Tabrizi¹⁹. Following this, the final section will take a single example of Rumi's poetry – the verse entitled *Like This* – to elaborate on this point.

The Legendary Story of Layla and Majnun:

*"I pass by these walls, the walls of Layla
And I kiss this wall and that wall.
It's not Love of the houses that has taken my heart
But of the one who dwells in these houses"²⁰*

more widely dispersed through his teaching, writing, and charismatic presence." -

<http://faculty.ccp.edu/dept/humanities/humanities/flisser.htm>

¹⁸ Translation in Chapter 5, *Tales from the land of the Sufis* by Mojdeh Bayat and Mohammad Ali Jamnia, South Asia ed 2004.

¹⁹ An Iranian Sufi mystic born in Tabriz (d. 1248) who was famous for his prose discourses and for introducing Rumi to Islamic mysticism.

²⁰ Attributed to Qays ibn al-Mullawah (the Majnun of the legend) in *The Loss of Meaning* by Faraz Rabbani, Islamica Magazine No. 15/2006.

The legend of Layla and Majnun, often called a “classical Arabian love story” has been made popular in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Azeri as part of their religious and folk literature, and seems to be a perfect example of *ishq-e-majazi*, or material love. Based on the real-life story of Qays ibn al-Mullawah from the northern Arabian peninsula during the Umayyad era (7th century), whose passionate love for Layla drives him into a madness which prevents their marriage, in the eyes of their elders, even though both come from prestigious Bedouin tribes²¹.

In Hakim Nizami’s relation of the tale, Qays and Layla, originally classmates, lose themselves in the gaze of the other. As characteristic of the blindness to the self in the concept of *Ishq haqiqi*, Qays and Layla exist only for each others’ company: their school becomes a place for them to meet rather than a house of learning, their lessons are replaced by inscriptions of the beloved’s name. Their knowledge of the world they live in becomes meaningless: *No other friend, no other pleasure existed for them. The world had become only Qays and Layla; they were deaf and blind to all else.*

Interestingly, it is the ill-talk of the very world they reject that prevents their love from culminating into marriage, thus leading Layla and Qays to live – what seems on the surface – incomplete lives: Layla as a loveless though dutiful wife, Qays as a lovelorn madman²².

In his separation from Layla and his subsequent spiraling into madness, Majnun becomes one with Layla in a way that reflects a love of greater depth than their own togetherness. Living apart from her, he begins to treasure everything around him – the water that will carry wildflower petals for Layla, the birds that will send her messages of his love, the stray dog from her village that would be revered and respected as if it were Layla herself. On seeing a widow leading a *dervish* medicant in chains, he implores her to chain him instead, and dances like “a drunken madman”, sobbing Layla’s name all the while.

Facing the Ka’aba²³, though asked to beg for a “cure” for his “madness”, their joint need resonates in his prayers:

"O Dearest of All, King of Kings, You Who bestow love, I beg of You only one thing: to elevate me in love to such a degree that even though I may perish, my love and my beloved will thrive."

Eventually the vision of the lover is present in every inch of the world, annihilating the physical reality of objects around him and replacing them with the essence of Layla. Instead of entreating Allah for his life, or for normalcy, Majnun’s wish is to perish for the sake of his love – in short, his wish is to be naughted – just as the Sufi saint wishes to enmesh the essence of his *nafs* with the Divine. His circumbulation around the Ka’aba, and his whirling around the name of Layla²⁴ resemble the dance of the Mevlevi Turkish *dervishes*²⁵. Majnun in his love becomes the

²¹ When Qays’ father approaches Layla’s for her hand: *"I have nothing against Qays, and I believe you, for you are without doubt an honorable man," Layla's father replied. 'However, you cannot blame me for being cautious about your son. Everyone knows of his abnormal behavior.'*

²² This is how Qays gets the name attributed to him in the legend. On informing a learned man *Hadrat* Hassan that the governership of the province would suit Layla, the latter – in shock – cries *Anta Majnun!* (“You are crazy”). It is said that from that day on, Qays was known as Majnun - http://www.tasawwuf.org/writings/love_allah/love_chapter5.pdf

²³ For mystics like Rumi and Hafiz, the Ka’aba was not just a physical place of worship in Mecca, but a symbol of the Divine Essence, while the Black Stone within it represents the human spiritual essence.

²⁴ This image resembles Mansur Hallaj’s allegory of the moth being drawn to the candle, which he uses to describe the *darvesh* whirling dances.

divine dancer who whirls around the centre, his hands a bridge between the world and the divine, his locus Layla herself. He is the blissful drunkard of Rumi's poems, Hallaj's Moth to the Candle, the reed flute²⁶ through which the seemingly-tragic song of Layla and Majnun is played.

Considering the strength of Majnun's passion for Layla, how does one interpret the silence of the latter, which is punctuated only slightly by revelations of love that seem dry and unresponsive in the face of Majnun's open love? For this, it is imperative to turn to the end of the story, where the deceased Majnun is visualized by a Sufi saint to be sitting by the side of Allah. With a touch of jealousy, the Almighty reveals His role in the story of the two:

"Were you not ashamed to call Me by the name of Layla, after having drunk the wine of my love?"

Layla's silenced, unbending, all-abiding love is therefore taken by the Almighty as his own, thereby extolling her love to a level that surpasses even Majnun's devotion to her, and by extension, to Allah. Her love, and Divine love, therefore become synonymous with each other – the love of Allah is expressed in acts that at once seem inconsequential and all-encompassing: such as the act of creation, and the giving of the life-breath to Adam, which were enforced by God's love for man. In the same way, Layla's wails of pain for Majnun's suffering after her husband's death, pack as much power (if not more) as Majnun's constant moans, sighs and outbursts of poetry. Allah elevates her love for Majnun in the last lines of the story, and her silence becomes a testimony for the True Love of the Divine, which can be reached only through a penance such as Majnun's for Layla:

"Layla's position is exalted above all, for she kept the secrets of Love concealed within."

If the purpose of *ishq* is to shed shame and inhibition, and bask in the glory of divine *ishq*, why then does silence play such a defining role in the magnitude of experiencing *ishq*? A possible answer lies in an interpretation of an excerpt from the legend by Shams-e-Tabriz: where the Caliph Haroun al-Rashid, amazed by Layla's hold over Majnun, uses trickery to see what has fascinated the latter so intensely. Unable to see "anything special" about her, he asks Layla who she is, to which she answers:

*How can you see Layla with eyes with which you see
other than her and which you have not cleansed by tears?*²⁷

Silence is necessary in the world that is being inhabited by human beings, for the vision of knowledge and gnosis, does not match – as Shams-e-Tabriz tells us – the vision of love. The knowledge of human inadequacy – which is the True nature of knowledge – is the knowledge of our nothingness, and the "everything" that the Beloved is.

²⁵ The *Darvesh* members or the *fakirs*, are mendicant ascetics who have taken a vow of poverty, and who beg from door to door (hence the name *darvesh*, as *dar* means *door* in Persian). They are widely known as sources of wisdom, medicine, poetry and enlightenment.

²⁶ The reed flute, while a recurring image in Rumi's poetry, is also played by Majnun to the wild animals in the forest.

²⁷ From the Discourses of Shams-i Tabrizi (*Maqalat-i Shams-i Tabrizi*)

The need of those in possession of knowledge other than that of the *HUU*²⁸ – to seek answers to questions through intellect (*aql*) – is a need that veers away from the path of Truth (*haqq*).²⁹ The eyes of the love cannot be understood or known, for love itself is indescribable and endless, and the material world is seen as one fettered by traditional boundaries that frown upon ecstasy of any form. This love does not come without pain³⁰, for the lover is forced to struggle his way into the Otherworld to experience the *HUU* that is Allah. Layla, therefore, as a symbol of Allah, culminates in human experience the love the Divine offers His devoted servant, and translates into words the very nature of *ishq-e-haqiqi*.

Ghazal 1826: A Poem by Rumi:

More often than not, Sufi writing is found in the form of poetry that is penned down both for private devotional purposes and as music played during *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Many of the themes and motifs used in Sufi poetry are largely a part of both Arabic and Persian literary tradition, such as the use of the reed flute which was common in Persia, the experiences of the prophets Musa, Yusuf, Yakub and Isa (PBUH), the Moth and the Flame, the whirling *darvesh* dances, the concept of *HUU* or the Divine Breath, the symbols of fragrant flower gardens and delicious wine to articulate the ecstasy resulting from the Divine Union.

Rumi's poetry, so far the most well-known and widely-read among the Sufi poets, reflects the richness of Iranian culture and represents the literary environment of Khorasan, the medieval center of the Persian world. Rumi, a devoted follower of the mystic Shams-e-Tabriz, believed in the use of music and dance as a path to reach God, and encouraged the *darvesh* practices of *sama*³¹ and dancing as part of their *dhikr*.

Therefore, when Rumi says, in the ghazal to be studied –

*When someone mentions the gracefulness
of the night sky, climb up on the roof
and dance and say,
Like this?*

- it is apparent that he is talking of the *darvesh* dance, which not only symbolizes the connection between the Divine and human worlds, but also symbolizes the innate poverty of the human soul. For not only do the *darveshes* learn humility from their begging and their names signify

²⁸ Divine breath, a name given to Allah. The H sound itself is a sound of purification.

²⁹ Rabia, a woman Sufi saint, has this to say in her *Rabi'a al-Adawiyya* (translated by Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut):

O Lord,
*If I worship you from fear of Hell,
Burn me in Hell.
O Lord,*
*If I worship you from hope of Paradise,
Bar me from its gates.
But if I worship you for Yourself alone,
The grace me forever the splendor of thy Face!*

³⁰ Rumi, in the following ghazal also illustrates this in his ghazal no. 1138, the *Kulliyat*

*How much the Companion made me suffer until this work
settled into the eye's water and the liver's blood!
A thousand fires and smokes and heartaches all named "Love"!
A thousand pains and regrets and afflictions all named "Companion"!*

³¹ hearing or listening to music, which also involves the Whirling Dance – this is which *darveshes* are also known as *semazens*.

poverty,³² but the dance too, symbolizes an emptying of self – revolving as it does around a centre, as a planet would the sun. Further on, we watch Rumi minimalize the importance of the self even further when he says:

*If someone asks how tall I am, frown
and measure with your fingers the space
between the creases on your forehead.
This tall.*

Throughout the poem, Rumi uses examples from human experience to bring forth the treasures of the Divine – a technique that does not fail to enliven the experience of the selfless Sufi lover to readers, and in fact makes it more vivid.

Wine and drunkenness are used to describe the self-annihilating passion of the poet, who in the presence of the Divine HUU, will “remember God so much that [you are] forgotten.” The delights of shedding the self, in the same manner that one takes leave of one’s senses while drinking wine, emerges when one drinks the “dark wine so potent that/ drinking it, we leave the two worlds”.

The term *Like This*, which is repeated at least twelve times within the ghazal, connects the actions of this world and the Otherworld through actions being performed in front of the address (“like this” indicates that the poet, along with speaking, shows the actions of uncovering the face, dancing on the rooftops, and so on). The personal in the ghazal, therefore, transcends its importance to take on new meanings, while still remaining wholly personal to both reader and writer. The impression of action in the ghazal, through the constant repetition of the phrase, emphasises an ability of the human soul to find the Divine in an actions as liberating as lovemaking, or as small as walking back to a house

God is seen as a Divine lover, in front of whom there is no shame: His fragrance is found in the intense closeness of an embrace; the “old poetic image/about clouds uncovering the moon” in the slow languorous shedding of clothes; the pleasure of receiving the Divine HUU in Jacob’s discovery of his own son Joseph; the joy of a miracle (such as Jesus raising the dead) through a tender kiss. All of the above are personal experiences that have touched human life in the existing world, but acquire a deeper meaning in the process of explaining God’s essence.

Through personal experience, in the same manner as with a number of his other poems, and with the legend of Laila and Majnun, the intensity and transformational power turns what is called *ishq-e-majazi* – the material love – into the eternal and Otherworldly *ishq-e-haqiqi*, where one is engulfed so thoroughly in the essence of God that its nothingness becomes its freedom, madness its *mi’raj*.

*Anu Elizabeth Antony
Attefeh Mohammadi
Azam Attayi
Bahareh Alizadeh,
I M.A*

The authors of this paper would like to give their thanks to Mrs. Maryam Javeed, who provided valuable inputs during the compilation and research stages for this paper.

³² The Arabic word, *fakir* (which they are also called) and the Persian word *darwish* mean “poor man”.

Ghazal No. 1826.

If anyone asks you
how the perfect satisfaction
of all our sexual wanting
will look, lift your face
and say,
Like this.

When someone mentions the gracefulness
of the night sky, climb up on the roof
and dance and say,
Like this?

If anyone wants to know what "spirit" is,
or what "God's fragrance" means,
lean your head toward him or her.
Keep your face there close.
Like this.

When someone quotes the old poetic image
about clouds gradually uncovering the moon,
slowly loosen knot by knot the strings
of your robe.
Like this?

If anyone wonders how Jesus raised the dead,
don't try to explain the miracle.
Kiss me on the lips.
Like this. Like this.

When someone asks what it means
to "die for love," point
here.

If someone asks how tall I am, frown
and measure with your fingers the space
between the creases on your forehead.
This tall.

The soul sometimes leaves the body, then returns.
When someone doesn't believe that,
walk back into my house.
Like this.

When lovers moan,
they're telling our story.
Like this.

I am a sky where spirits live.
Stare into this deepening blue,
while the breeze says a secret.
Like this.

When someone asks what there is to do,
light the candle in his hand.
Like this.

How did Joseph's scent come to Jacob?
Huuuuu.

How did Jacob's sight return?
Huuuuuu.

A little wind cleans the eyes.
Like this.

When Shams comes back from Tabriz,
he'll put just his head around the edge
of the door to surprise us.
Like this.

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Of Flowing White and Violins in the Sky: The Bashert and the Yiddish Ethos in the Magic Barrel.

“Around the corner, Salzman, leaning against a wall, chanted prayers for the dead.”

It is exceedingly easy, at first glance, to view the end of Bernard Malamud’s *The Magic Barrel* as negative: as either Pinye Salzman’s utter disappointment at the match between Leo Finkle and his daughter Stella, or as a doomed premonition of things to come. Yet if we consider the nature of both the *Burial Kaddish*³³ and the *Mourner’s Kaddish*³⁴, the emphasis lies to a greater extent in the resurrection of the soul, rebirth into new life and the glory of Yahweh³⁵ rather than death itself.

Leo and Stella, the loveless rabbi and the repentant whore, are by the end born anew in their love for each other – a process subtly hinted at throughout the story. Critics have debated on whether this was the work of destiny, or merely a devious Salzman’s design. Considering Leo’s evolution from a mere rabbinical student to a man of God, the above point seems irrelevant. In this paper, I will focus on Leo’s growth as both a mode of *Teshuvah* (repentance and return of the penitent Hebrew) to Yahweh, which eventually leads him to a spiritual embrace of his bashert³⁶, or soulmate.

At first glance Leo Finkle seems a promising, intellectual young rabbinical student desperately searching of a wife. His reasons, however, do not include companionship or love: a wife merely cements his position as a New York rabbi³⁷. Clammed in his meager apartment with little else but books, Leo knows nothing of the world outside or himself or of his relationship with the very subject of his choice – namely the study of Talmudic and rabbinic law³⁸. While he learns the law judiciously and has very obvious interest in the subject, there is one element lacking in his rabbinical study – his reverence for God. For a significant portion of the story, Leo is ironically silent on the spiritual aspects of his learning. The word *God*, ironically, features only

³³ “The Burial Kaddish (Kaddish De-Itchadeta) is recited by mourners immediately after the coffin is lowered into the grave and covered with earth.” – Inside Judaism by Rabbi Alfred J. Kolatch. Consider these words in the light of Salzman’s recital: ...in the world which will be renewed/ and He will give life to the dead/ and raise them to eternal life...

³⁴ Traditional prayers recited for the dead, also known as Kaddish Yatom. It’s purpose is to provide consolation (nechemah), and to teach the mourners the importance of life and death in the conquest of evil.

³⁵ The English rendering of the tetragrammaton YHWH – the God of Israel – which in Hebrew translates into “I Am Who I Am”.

³⁶ According to the Talmud, Rav Yehuda taught that 40 days before a male child is conceived, a voice from heaven announces whose daughter he is going to marry. In Yiddish, this perfect match is called "bashert," a word meaning fate or destiny. The word "bashert" can be used to refer to any kind of fortuitous good match, such as finding the perfect job or the perfect house, but it is usually used to refer to one’s soul mate. The role of the bashert here is of prime importance, considering that a musical adaptation of the story at Houston was called Bronx Bashert.

³⁷ This is ironic, considering Jewish tradition considers marriage as the ideal state of personal existence. Consider for instance, the following words of the Talmud: “Whoever finds a wife finds favour with God” (Yevamoth 63b) or “A wifeless man exists without joy, without blessing or boon.”

³⁸ Collectively, this is also known as Halakha.

towards the middle of the story, when Lily asks him about his purpose for becoming a rabbi.

In this context how are we to look at Pinye Salzman, the impoverished fish-guzzling matchmaker? The debate among critics around Salzman present a number of faces to him: the Pan-like sorcerer, a caricature of the oft-satired Jewish matchmaker or a wily conniver paving the way for Leo to marry his own daughter³⁹. But in the light of a statement of Malamud's in a rare interview: "I would never deliberately flatten a character to create a stereotype. . . . Most of all I'm out to create real and passionate human beings" (Field and Fields 16) – we can see Salzman as a very human *schadchen*⁴⁰, "smelling frankly of fish" with "mournful eyes", and his speech flows fast in Yiddish rhythms ("You will see what means pretty", "a sliced tomato you have maybe?", "she is *partikilar*") He lives on his feet quite literally – appearing at Leo's doorstep at the mere thought of him, haunting the former with his constant presence. Like Mrs. Lutz the landlady in Malamud's *Girl of My Dreams*, he teases Leo with red herrings before the latter can find love, and in it, salvation. In the same way Madeline/Olga provides Mitka a revelation of himself, Salzman initiates Leo's redemption by making him (through Lily) question his faith, and (through Stella) testing his desire for redemption.

The first meeting between the two is testament of this. At face-value a traditional meeting between the *schadchen* and his client, their first encounter heralds a change in the air – for Salzman a "glow of pride" at last, in his work, and for Leo an "unpleasant tickle in his throat." The imagery of the full moon penetrating a cloud and "dropping out like an egg" as the two talk, only reinforces the forthcoming transformation: the full moon – a symbol of the Passover⁴¹ - and the egg both symbolize fertility and rebirth.

Salzman seems to anticipate this change as soon as he meets Leo, as well as his own role in it. He watches Finkle and is 'satisfied' with his 'ascetic' face. While it is possible he is just looking out for a fool to dump his daughter⁴² on, his efforts to match him with Lily Hischorn, his insistence on calling Finkle *rabbi* and his respect for Finkle's religious occupation ("All I said, you was a religious man") suggest otherwise. In this light, his overenthusiastic endorsement of the brides may be viewed as bringing the lingering question – of the sincerity of his motives in wanting to marry, and the rightness of his decision – into surface. Picture after picture reveals a woman with some flaw or the other (Ruth K is lame on her right foot, Lily H too old, Sophie P a widow), and Leo, in his discomfort, attempts to conceal his disapproval with vapid, silly excuses. His behavior in this scene and in their next meeting hardly befits a rabbi, and Salzman seems

³⁹ Malamud's Unmagic Barrel by Gary Solan

(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2455/is_n1_v32/ai_17156393/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll)

⁴⁰ Jewish for 'matchmaker', the *shadchen* was once highly respected in European Jewish societies, before becoming a figure of mockery as his role in marriages became more and more limited.

⁴¹ Passover, the festival commemorating the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, is celebrated in the 15th month of Nissan on a full-moon day, when unleavened bread is eaten with bitter herbs and lamb. The theme of return to the Promised Land – beginning with the Exodus – is a recurrent theme in Jewish writing. The first meeting between Salzman and Finkle is in February, and Passover occurs in March-April – which is ironically the month during which Leo's transformation (after his meeting with Lily H) occurs.

⁴² Stella, who in the eyes of Gary Solan and a number of other critics, seems to not be a whore at all.

aware of this. Perhaps his insistence on calling Leo ‘Rabbi Finkle’ lies in his knowing emphasis of Leo’s role, rather than awe.

But Salzman is not Leo’s only trigger to the divine. For a short while Lily Hirschorn, the only prospective bride Leo agrees to meet, takes on Salzman’s role. Her role here may be compared to that of Olga in *Girl of My Dreams*, whom the hero Mitka also meets under delusions of himself and of her, and whose dialogue with him pulls away the deceptive screen from his eyes. Her connection to Salzman is underlined by Leo’s suspicions of Salzman orchestrating a romantic interlude for the two, much like the Roman god Pan. But Lily’s questions trigger more than irritation, for when she asks him about his love of God, his answer holds not just anger but genuine shock (“I came to God...because I did not [love Him].”) It is with Lily that he realises his true condition – as loveless and unloved, as bereft of God and unable to connect with Him, and therefore unfit to teach His people. His sincere grief after his ensuing encounter with Salzman incites the beginning of his *Teshuvah*, his atonement for his spiritual lethargy, and like Salzman he becomes “a skeleton with haunted eyes”.

It is for the first time here that he lives like his people – like a Jew. He draws comfort from the fact that “he was a Jew and [...] a Jew suffered.” And suffer he does – his weight and appetite lost, his beard ragged: almost like a man in penance. Not for him the simplicity of Mitka’s choice to wrap Mrs. Lutz in bridal lace – he suffers. In the test of character that he undergoes here and later, he resembles Sobel of Malamud’s *The First Seven Years*, who agrees to work longer to procure old Feld’s daughter Miriam. Underlying this suffering is the constant reminder of how little he knows:

...Never in the Five Books and all the Commentaries – mea culpa – had the truth been revealed to him.

It is in this spirit that he decides to set things right – and the first step is to ensure that he marries a woman he loves. While this might seem a rebellion against ancient Yiddish norms, what Leo does here is following the old Jewish tradition of finding his *bashert* – his own ‘soul-friend’. During this phase, we see Leo starting to become “truly Yiddish”, and thereby able to relate to his future congregation.

Though Leo has, by his next meeting with Salzman, attained emotional maturity, Salzman’s work is not over. Having nagged Leo with the question, it is his lot to provide the answer – which Salzman does by dropping his packet of photographs in Leo’s apartment. There is a subtle shift in the way he sees the brides – rather than their physical attributes of earlier, he sees in them the inner hope that they have lost – a vision of what his life could have been, that like them – life, despite his “frantic yooohoosings” would have passed him by. It is the sight of Stella, however, that reveals to us the true nature of Leo’s transformation.

The first thing to note about his view of Stella is his immediate reaction, which matches the description of a man finding his *bashert*. He “lets out a cry” on seeing her face, has a “vivid impression that he had met her before...could almost recall her name,

as if he had read it in her own handwriting.” As Rav Yehuda⁴³ describes while speaking of the *bashert* in the Talmud, Stella comes to being as Leo’s true match, flawed and repentant as she is. He sees her faults too (“an impression of evil”) but loves her despite them, before even having met her. It is a scene that could be viewed as melodramatic unless seen in the eyes of a Jew finding the mate Yahweh has designed for him.

From here on, Leo transcends his role both respect to his people, and to Salzman. Where before Salzman ran after Leo, it is now Leo who rushes to his address. Where before it was Leo who had the final say, it is now Salzman whose cries shock Leo to silence. Where before he insists on his own choice, he now humbly asks Salzman if he “could be of service”. Where before Leo was in power, now he accepts his role as “Yiddishe kinder”⁴⁴ to Salzman. Leo picks up Salzman’s Yiddish rhythms (“just her I want”) in contrast to his earlier polished, rather stilted, American English. His eyes, once “heavy with learning” are now “heavy with wisdom”. In this, Salzman truly becomes Leo’s mirror, just as Stella is a mirror for Leo’s own flawed self.

With respect to his role as a rabbi, Leo becomes one with his people, and one with Yahweh. His decision to “convert [Stella] to goodness, himself to God” sets the seal on the reborn Leo Finkle, who has now truly taken on the role of the rabbi, of the “passionate prophet” that Lily Hishcorn envisioned. His encounter with Stella towards the end harks images of Chagallian art⁴⁵ - the final image of violins and candles revolving in the sky, with Stella wearing white, could have easily sprung out of Marc Chagall’s *Three Candles* or *La Mariee*. The violins and candles also symbolize Leo’s true Jewishness – candles are an integral part of Jewish festivity, and the importance of violins and fiddles to the Jewish ethos can be summed up in a single sentence: “the heart, especially a Jewish heart, is a fiddle: you squeeze the strings, and out come songs.”⁴⁶

In his transformation Leo also becomes almost godlike. In their final meetings, Leo feeds Salzman and vows to save Stella – eyes filled with “desperate innocence” – from a condition she clearly regrets, and does not swerve from his plan. His own union to Stella echoes the union of the prophet and the whore in the Book of Hosea of the Jewish *Tanakh*, which symbolizes the union of Yahweh to an erring Isreal. Leo’s love for Stella will result in salvation for them both and in a final acceptance of his own role as Yahweh’s representative to his people.

⁴³ A Babylonian amora or Jewish scholar, who debated over Jewish law. Much of his writings are in the Talmud. According to him, 40 days before a male child is conceived, a voice from heaven announces whose daughter he is going to marry.

⁴⁴ Yiddish child: Salzman calls Leo this when he first rejects Lily Hishcorn.

⁴⁵ Marc Chagall was a Russian Jewish artist based in France, whose Surrealist paintings drew inspiration from Jewish folk life, and revolved around the Jewish ethos. His most recurrent images include newly-married couples/brides, candles, flowers and violins – almost always flying. In an interview with Leslie and Joyce Field, Malamud observed: "It's true that I did make use of what might be called Chagallian imagery in 'The Magic Barrel.' I did so intentionally in that story, but I've not done it again in any other piece of fiction, and I feel that some critics make too much of Chagall as an image maker in my work".

⁴⁶ Attributed to Shalom Aleichem, in Maurice Samuel’s *World of Sholem Aleichem*.

Like Mitka and Sobel, and like many other Malamud characters, Leo not only accepts his fate, but embraces it wholeheartedly. In this lies the victory of these men over themselves and over the bleakness of their fate⁴⁷. Thus, when Pinye Salzman whispers prayers for the dead in a secluded corner, it is in truth a farewell to Leo and Stella's old selves, and a blessing on their new life – new in more ways than one.

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⁴⁷ Considering the post-Holocaust position of this story (it was published in 1954), this is a very integral part of Jewish writing in general.

Justifying the “Horror and Madness” of Partition Literature.

The need to write about a historical event that has attempted to melt into the past more than 50 years ago is still a relevant topic for most authors today. The constant reminder that communal unrest lurks within our own comfort zone stares us in the face everyday. This is the outgrowth of the second generation of Partition literature writers, who endeavor to establish the position of Partition literature as more than just a historical moment, but as a pervading phenomenon that has the capacity to reek itself into the psychology of those who were both a part of that immediate history as well as those who seem to have “moved” away from it.

The second generation of writers approach partition in a dissimilar way to that of the first generation writers, who wrote within 5 years of the aftermath of 1947. The kind of gore and portrayal of violence, mutilation, massacre and death Alok Rai terms as “Pornography of Violence” was abundant in the texts that emerged. The need for this kind of over exposure to the atrocities that were being committed by both communities was a response to the kind of insanity that had prevailed. Partition itself was seen, and still is, as a period of lunacy where an entire nation was not only unable to cope with the complete degradation of their so called “Independent” status, but also an attempt to direct the anger and frustrations of each community towards an invisible foe.

Those who wrote from the 70’s onward see partition with a sense of insight that only time can allow, and the texts that have surfaced often show the brutalities inflicted upon both sections in a more subtle and less grotesquely violent light. Perhaps the heat of the madness had trickled past through the passage of years and evolved into an objective whole, where readers can go beyond just the physical mass destruction. If we take the novel, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, it is only too obvious to see the kind of detailed description that he offers the reader, to not only make him/her understand the “un-understandable” but also to create in the reader a sense of horror and shock, and this is further achieved by the non emotional narrative voice that he adopts. By detaching feeling, and emotion he is paradoxically increasing sensitivity in the reader.

It is tedious to comprehend something that is devoid of reason and rationality. And it is this element that Manto stresses upon in his short story “Toba Tek Singh”. The metaphor for madness is a way of communicating a sense of incomprehension. For some the partition was seen as something unnecessary and unreal and abdicated the responsibility towards it actualizing. For some, it did not matter on which side of the “madman” boundary they were on, because all borders were shadow lines that reflect the upside down mentality of the opposing sides. Madness becomes a license that infused the literature of Partition. It absolves those who are victims as well as the perpetrators of brutality. To try and understand the insanity that housed mental asylums on both sides of the border is like trying to rationalize Partition. Therefore it would be wise to add that the writers of such texts showcased not the reason, but the dire distress to which it can drive those who are directly involved as well as those who are mere by-standers, like the man in “Toba Tek Singh” or even the vehement Gandhian nationalist “Jarnail” in *Tamas*.

Another form of madness was the conversions that were forced upon those who were abducted. In *Tamas* the psychology behind such a conversion is brilliantly shown. There is an

inability to internalize the new laws and rules that had been cuffed and shackled upon the individual; a few moments ago, he was a Sikh and now that would become just a recollection of a memory as he is forced into being a Muslim. He is uprooted from all his ideas and conditioned notions and is placed into a system that is both alienating and traumatizing to him.

Other authors too have tried to reveal the horror that was meted out to the victims of partition, especially the women who were raped, mutilated and abducted. In *Tamas* Bhisham Sahani talks about the women who commit suicide so that they would not be taken in by the Muslims. Death was better for them than becoming a victim at the hands of the opposing side. The trains that held corpses of children and women tell stories that are beyond the capacity to feel. This shift from the only kind of stability that people knew to complete anarchy and disorientation left the whole of India, as well the newly formed country, Pakistan, threadbare.

Partition is often remembered as an endless trail of bloodshed and hostility. A holocaust that could never be wiped out, an idea that betrayed all forms of rationale; “a ghettoizing of culture” that was never realized. Writers have for many years tried to depict the horror and madness that prevailed, yet have not been successful in doing so because there is a mutual understanding that it would be impossible to draw a picture that fits into a non-existent frame of justification.

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The heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and ... thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden of the past.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, [*Love in the Time of Cholera*](#)

Bankim Chandra's Bande Mataram: **A Feminist Perspective**

'Bande Mataram', which became India's national song, triggered millions of Indians into a new national awakening and consciousness. Sri Aurobindo called it the "mantra" or the religion of patriotism. The song which is taken from the novel *Anandmath* published in the 18th century envisioned a different position for women in Bengal. It stirred the Bengali women to participate actively in the struggle for independence. According to 'Amrita Chhachhi':

Women became the symbols and repositories of communal/ group/ national identity.

The song expresses Bankim's vision of Mother India as a Goddess as well as a woman who is holy and venerable. The song draws three images of women. The first is that of a provider and caretaker, the second image captures the strength of the mother and the final image is that of Hindu Goddesses, namely Goddess Durga –symbolic of strength, Goddess Lakshmi-symbolic of fortune and Goddess Saraswathi who is the Goddess of learning. The song encapsulates three aspects, the provider, the one who needs to be defended and the destroyer who slays the enemy.

Imagined nations are profoundly gendered usually in terms of a woman states, Benedict Anderson. Even in the colonial context, land was seen as a woman to be plundered. The usual way of typecasting women in nationalist discourses is in the form of wives or mothers where they become asexual figures i.e. those who are denied of sexual pleasures. This new construct of woman was a sign of the "nation" itself, embodying the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity and so on. The image of woman as 'goddess' or 'mother' served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home. In the song, Bankim deifies the nation. He mentions in the preface to *Anandmath* that even the sacrifice of life is of no account unless it is accompanied by Bakhti or religious devotion. Hence he portrays the nation as Goddess so that the people who fight and die for the country would become martyrs and their actions would become selfless.

Tagore's argument about nation being seen as God is that every injustice is justified in the name of seeing the nation as Goddess. Tagore places the nation below God in his 'Jana Gana Mana' as he is aware of the fact that any nation has its own vices. The land is not seen as God but dedicated to a God above all nations. In the novel *Home and the World*, Tagore constructs the nation in the form of a lover, as Sandip in the novel says, "it is no longer Hail Mother, but Hail Beloved, Hail Enchantress."

As they are never seen as individuals but as dependent figures, typecasting the 'nation' as 'mother' or woman is quite problematic. A woman's identity is always related to her male counterpart, not seen in terms of an individual. She is often seen in relation to

her father, husband and later on in relation to her son. Hence in the nationalist discourse, the sons were exhorted to fight and die for the motherland, an act of moral grandeur. Ironically daughters had no place in the protection of Mother India. Mother India was depicted as a weak woman who needs to be protected and defended by her sons at any cost.

In a patriarchal situation, it is the man who governs the woman at home. Hence nation seen in terms of a woman would mean people governing over the nation which ought to function for the people, by the people and of the people just like a democracy should. Thus the image is that of a woman who is denied of her individuality and expected to sacrifice her own 'self' for the sake of others. Therefore, the nation being seen in terms of a woman stands as a sign of man's bondage.

The concept of 'nation' itself is weak hence it is represented by the 'weaker sex' which is again a patriarchal construct. In our changing world, being economically wealthy, militarily strong and powerful or socially responsive and compassionate still leaves us with many disagreements and conflicts in national life. Women and children are the most vulnerable among the human race especially in a riot situation. The partition of India itself is an outstanding example of women who were looted and raped mercilessly. Hence, the land seen as vulnerable to external attacks such as external aggression, looting and plundering as implied in the phrase 'rape of the land' (in the colonial context). Partition itself can be seen as symbolic mutilation of the motherland.

In a world defined by man, the trouble with women is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange; valued on the one hand as a person in her own right and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between men. What stands between the family and man's quest for God is a double impediment fused into one- 'kamini-kancan.' That can be translated into English as "women-gold". One stands for the other, according to 'Partha Chatterjee'. Together they represent 'maya' i.e. man's attachment to and greed for things. Women and wealth or worldly desires are seen as perpetual distractors in the attainment of man's goal. A woman with a fearsome sexuality is to be feared and avoided. This could be one of the reasons why the nation is typecast in terms of the asexual figures of the mother and goddess.

Nation engendered as women is quite problematic. The history of any wars or battles be it, 'the Ramayana', 'The Mahabharata' or The Trojan War, women are always blamed responsible. Thus labeling the nation as women, all racial strife, communal riots, caste discrimination - the hurdles from which India is not free - reinforce the notion of women as the hidden reason behind and the cause of violence and destruction. Is there a need for engendering at all?

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I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.

Emily Bronte, [*Wuthering Heights*](#)

The Road Long Travelled...: Afro-Americans' Racial Race

The term 'Afro-Americans' refers to the people of African descent who have made America their home. The Afro-Americans have their roots in slavery that was practiced in the time of the Atlantic Slave Trade, between the 16th and 19th centuries. They were emancipated from their positions of servitude with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation after the American Civil War in 1863. But this did not; in anyway, bring about a change in their positions. Disfranchisement, political exclusion, beatings, racial stereotypes were the norm across the American country. Prevailing thought held that blacks, by definition, were inferior and therefore deserved second class citizenship, and thus they occupied the position of the 'other'. The laws were so inhuman that they inhibited the Afro-Americans from obtaining freedom. Also, there were no legal mechanisms or financial support to counter the deprivations forced upon them. In fact the Jim Crow Laws of 1890 which were enforced in the South were those of disfranchisement and segregation. The 'chaotic conditions' of Afro-Americans is the result of the gap between constitutional guarantees and systematic political oppression.

In a country built on the tenets of freedom, democracy, equality and the inclusiveness of all, the position of the 'Negro' has been an ambiguous one. The great 'American Dream' was open to all except the Afro-Americans who were left out in the cold. Throughout American history, African Americans have been discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. The historical racism and centuries of oppression has ensured that the Afro-American identity is a fractured one. They are racially African but politically American, because of which they are neither a part of, nor separate from America. The color prejudice and legalized racial segregation have only compounded their problems. So the definition of their identity involves a whole process of recreating the self.

African Americans' place in American society has changed over the centuries. Their journey from periphery to centre is both literal (in terms of chronology) and metaphorical (from slavery to selfhood). This journey can be best described as a race for their race's sake. Even while within the clutches of slavery they attempted to run a race for their race's sake with the people and community who looked down upon them. The Afro-American literature chronicles this journey and acts as a powerful, revolutionary weapon. Being a weapon of social ramification, the literature produced by the Afro-Americans also contains an effort to subvert the power traditions of America.

Afro-American literature has been closely related to the political, social, cultural, economic and psychological conditions of its people, which are based on the experience of Blacks in America. It is interesting to see how Afro-American literature has attempted to redefine and reconstitute the notion of identity that was fractured by the system of apartheid. In the sphere of art and literature they moved from being mere imitators to inventive artists. Their early writing was in the form of poetry in which they depicted their protest against slavery, but it had no style of its own. The slave narratives were

central to their literary culture for years. The best-known examples being Frederick Douglass's autobiography and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs. The position and the role of African Americans in society, issues of racism and equality were the important themes the writers dealt with. W.E.B. Dubois, the founder of NAACP (National Association for Advancement of Colored People) in 1909, in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* says: "The problem of 20th century is the problem of color line."

With the spread of education and increase in Black readership there emerged a new kind of writing which was centered on the consciousness of a rich heritage and pride in their own race. The Blacks made use of their own life style, rhythms, images, language emphasizing and celebrating their Blackness and rejecting everything white. Don L. Lee later known as Haki R. Madhubuti advised the Black writers:

The only thing I say to most young Black writers is never forget who you are, that you are not a writer who happens to be Black, but you are a Black person who writes, I think that's the key...

The Afro-American Movement is perhaps best known for the literature that came out of it. Their literature explores issues of freedom and equality that were long denied to them, along with the sense of alienation and separation from their homeland of Africa and isolation they experienced in their adopted country. Most of the writing echoes the culture they grew from, incorporating elements of oral poetry- rap, gospel and blues. 'The Weary Blues' by Hughes is an example for this. They succeeded in inscribing black letters on the white page. We also get a glimpse of Afro-American women's lives and their plight. Ntozake Shange speaks about the experience of nothingness that is born because of the double burden of being black and being woman, as in 'For Colored Girls':

She's been dead so long
closed in silence so long
she doesn't know the sound
of her own voice
her infinite beauty.

The important concept throughout their journey was 'change'. First they realized the need for change and then worked towards it. Langston Hughes, who was immensely popular and acclaimed as the unofficial poet laureate of the race, stated to the Negro writers:

...something has got to change in America - and change soon. We must help that change to come.

Change comes from revolution and challenging the hegemony. Through education, and socio-economic upward mobility, the African Americans rose from the bottom of the social ladder to the top. They demanded full access to and inclusion into the political, cultural and social milieu. They gave voice to their silenced tongues. By asserting the

self, taking pride in their black history and heritage, they assailed the hypocrisy of the Whites. They also questioned the canon by refuting the dominant White culture and hegemony.

There were many movements that served as milestones on their way to progress. The Great Migration, in which a large number of Blacks abandoned the South with its unfair laws, grinding poverty, clutches of slavery and oppression, was one such event. Another movement, the Harlem Renaissance, in 1920's and 40's, was marked by the open rejection of styles and techniques, in the arena of art, music and literature, of Europeans and White Americans and instead celebrated Black dignity and creativity. It was during this movement that the literature produced by the Blacks was not just read by the people of their race but absorbed into the mainstream American culture. The Civil Rights Movement, from 1950-70, aimed towards the emancipation of the Blacks was another powerful stand taken by the Blacks. The distinctive features of this movement include Montgomery Bus Boycott⁴⁸ led by Rosa Parks and the Washington March⁴⁹ led by Dr. Martin Luther King. Other events that supported their struggle were, The Black Power Movement⁵⁰ and Black Arts Movement⁵¹ which stood for racial dignity as well as freedom from White authority. Many writers and intellectuals, both men as well as women, gave a boost to the African American journey from the margins to the centre.

⁴⁸ Even the public transportation practices treated blacks as second-class citizens. On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks, a 43-year-old black woman, refuses to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama city bus to a white man. Her arrest sparks a black boycott of the city buses. , Rosa Parks' courageous refusal to bow to an unfair law sparked a crucial chapter in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

⁴⁹ The march towards Washington, on Aug 28, 1963, originally was conceived as an event to dramatize the desperate condition of blacks in the South, challenged the federal government for its failure to safeguard the civil rights and physical safety of civil rights workers and blacks. The march made some specific demands: an end to racial segregation in public school; meaningful civil rights legislation, including a law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment; protection of civil rights workers from police brutality; minimum wage for all workers. Despite tensions, the march was a resounding success. More than a quarter million people of diverse ethnicities attended the event; it was the largest gathering of protesters in Washington's history. King's "I have a dream" speech, given in front of Lincoln Memorial, electrified the crowd.

⁵⁰ Bobby Seale and Huey Newton co-founded the Black Panthers in Oakland, California. Unlike the civil rights activists who preach non-violence, the Black Panthers authorize the use of violence as self-defense. They asked for power to determine the destiny of Black Community. The Black Panthers gain notoriety for patrolling the streets in black berets, black jackets, and armed with weapons. Their message of self-determination and power wins thousands of followers throughout the country. They rejected the historical strategy of non-violence to embrace a doctrine of "Black Power," which emphasizes Black Nationalism and self-reliance. Violence is accepted as a legitimate form of self-defense.

⁵¹ The Black Arts Movement is the artistic branch of Black Power movement, was started in Harlem by writer and activist Amiri Baraka. The Black Arts Repertory Theatre is its key institution. It is (a New York based movement) usually referred to as a "sixties" movement, came together in 1965 and broke apart around 1975/1976. Black Arts, which was the first post-civil rights Black literary movement to make an impact as radical in the sense of establishing their own voice distinct from, the prevailing white literary establishment. It was a militant artistic movement which viewed the armed struggle as not only a legitimate, but often as the only effective means of liberation.

In 1865 on June 1st the then president Abraham Lincoln proclaimed America as "a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"⁵² One century later in 1963, with racial discrimination still being practiced widely across the country, Dr. Martin Luther King, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, and driven by a belief in non-violent resistance proclaimed in Washington, "I have a dream...". His dream was an end to racial discrimination and to secure justice and equal opportunities for Black (Afro-) Americans. In the victory of Barack Obama, Martin Luther King's dream became a reality. Echoing the sentiments of Dr. King, Obama cautioned the people, "the road ahead will be long, the climb will be steep. But I am hopeful that we will get there as a people". In his victory speech Barack Obama said "I am here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me". Obama made history on November 4, 2008 and turned the tide of racist history. His victory could be considered the ideological defeat of the White race.

Obama brings with him the promise of big change. He is the first Black president-elect of America even though he is the 44th. He projects himself as a symbol of change, inclusiveness and a new America. On November 4th people came to listen to him in millions as they did to Dr. Martin Luther King four decades ago. S. Prasannarajan said, "America is in the middle of a revolution, shedding its racial inhibitions..." On the 4th of November, America changed itself to make the dream of Afro-Americans a historical reality. In another century this could have been the mere fantasy of a slave. Now hope is no longer a four letter word. Afro-Americans know that this election is not the end of the road to change that they were looking for, but only the beginning. But we can see a clear progression in the betterment of their condition which was the result of long, centuries of struggle – the treading of a long arduous path. The Times of India best describes this journey- "Rosa Parks had to sit for Martin Luther King to march. King had to march for Barack Obama to run. Obama had to run for our children to fly"

The success that came with the change was not an overnight process but a hard earned fruit. It has taken a long time to consider them human beings, and not as a slave or beast or animal. The road to betterment of Afro-Americans has been a difficult path. Owing to their efforts, change did happen. The movement from the enslaved positions to being free citizens may in itself have taken long but acceptance as Americans can only come with the change in people's mindset. In spite of all, the Afro-American movement has remained a model for other movements/ groups who seek to assert a voice of their own and search for an identity. The characteristic feature of their difficult and long struggle was their unified and organized strength. They have grown from being a small weak plant to a strong tree. The Afro-Americans have left their mark on history for the rest of the world to look at them and admire them. Their life was a sorrow which they overcame; a tragedy-they faced; a struggle-they fought; a challenge-they met; an adventure they dared; a journey they completed and a goal which they achieved.

The Afro-Americans' condition was similar to that of Dalits in India, who are equally marginalized and denied basic human rights by the upper classes, specially the Brahmins. The word 'dalit' refers to all those who toil and are exploited and oppressed. So

the Afro-Americans could be rightly called as American dalits. The main difference between both is while the oppression of Afro-Americans was based on apartheid; the Untouchables were exploited based on the caste system of Indian society. Alladi Uma dealing with the question of education sees the similarities between the African-Americans and the 'Untouchables' of India, who were long kept in ignorance by being denied the opportunities of education. As with the slaves in America, education was a taboo to the 'Untouchables' of pre-independent India. The protagonist Bhaka in the novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand is an example for this. Similarly the whites wanted to keep the Blacks in ignorance so that they would not realize the humiliating circumstances in which they lived.

The upper caste people would be polluted by the mere presence of the untouchable or dalit, who were socially, economically and culturally deprived and disadvantaged group of people. Just like them the Afro-American people had to assume a posture of humility and servility in order to avoid attracting violence from the Whites who were superior, in race and color. Even till the 19th century the violence against both of them continued, and they are not free from racial prejudice even today. Both in India and America there were reservations and affirmative policies that were never implemented. Obama's success establishes that social justice is better achieved by providing equal opportunities than by reservations - a lesson that the Indian politicians need to take note of.

Obama, 'a dark knight in white house' as the Times of India calls him, puts an end to the race chapter of America. According to U.R. Ananthamurthy,

Obama's victory is the triumph of civil society. In India, civil society has gone down and the upper class has taken over. There was a time when we were progressive and they were regressive. Now it's the other way.

We have got to learn a lot from the struggle and the success that the Afro-Americans have achieved so far. Their long struggle is a lesson for us that is worth learning. They teach us to have a sense of self worth, to hope for the best, never to lose heart but to move on in life. They also impart lessons of courage and commitment to the cause, the will to change oneself, one's community and then the world, to have confidence in oneself and belief in the system of equal justice under the law. The question is can we have some change in our lives or rather are we willing to???

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The Times of India, Thursday, Nov 6, 2008

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

Barack Obama, *speech, Feb. 5, 2008*

Black Flowers: Goldmines of American Literature

Black feminist movement grew out of, and in response to the Black Liberation movement and the Women's movement in the United States. In an effort to meet the needs of Black women who felt they were being racially oppressed in the women's movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement, the Black Feminist movement was formed to fight this 'Double Jeopardy' that they faced.

The poor Black female was completely silenced and pushed to the periphery by racist, capitalist America. She could justly be described as a "slave of a slave". Breaking the shackles of the mounting layers of oppression was not easy for the African-American women. Thus the journey to the experience of 'self-hood' seen in these women is remarkable.

This journey from the 'margin to the centre', from 'slavery to self-hood' is captured vividly in the writings of the African American women. The metaphorical journey of the African-American women writing can be rightly described as 'Inscribing a black letter on a white page'.

Sojourner Truth was the first woman to speak against the 'double jeopardy' faced by the African-American women in her audacious speech "Ain't I a woman?" Truth, in this speech attacks the Universalist assumptions of the concerns of the white feminist ideology. While white women are helped into the carriages and lifted over ditches, she says,

Nobody ever helped me into carriages
Or over mud puddles...."

Then, she challenges the discrimination meted out to her in terms of gender. She says she works as much as a man and eats as much as a man and bears the lash too. But still she is made subordinate to the man. The rhetoric "Ain't I a woman?" questions the levels of discrimination that she is made to bear.

Another writer, Gwendolyn Brooks, in her poem "The Mother" exposes the tragedy of the women slaves who had to resort to abortions to save their children from being caught in the web of slavery. She poignantly confesses:

If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not
Deliberate

Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" deals with the similar theme of slavery and infanticide. Sethe, the protagonist kills her infant named 'Beloved' in order to save the child from slavery.

Brooks, in her other poem, "A Song in the Front Yard" lays bare the prejudices that the white women have about the 'black woman' who is in the backyard and who will always end up becoming a 'bad woman'. Thus, she can never be befriended. Here Brooks implicitly hints at the derogatory construct of the immorality of black women by the white women and throws light on how black women are portrayed as seductresses. In this poem, Brooks highlights the stereotypical constructs of the black women who are alienated and treated as the 'Other' by the white women. There is a rejection of that negative stereotype of the black woman here.

Maya Angelou is one of the great voices of contemporary literature and is a remarkable Renaissance woman. Her poetry is very often celebratory of a life that, despite all hardships and injustice, was often happy. In Angelou's poems, we see an enthusiasm for the self, a belief in the self, which is the most important creed in the lives of black women. Her poetry captures the phenomenon of resistance set against the background of post colonialism.

In her poem, "I know why a caged bird sings," Angelou juxtaposes the privileges of a free bird and the fetters of a caged bird. She writes,

The caged bird's wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So, he opens his throat to sing...

The metaphor of a bird struggling to escape its cage is a 'central metaphor' throughout the series of her six autobiographies. This metaphor invokes the supposed contradiction of the bird singing in the midst of its struggle.

There is a display of an impulse towards transcendence from the imprisoning environment. We see that the black women have been creative in singing songs and celebrating with an ever present spirit inspite of being caged and suffocated. Angelou says, "The poetry of the black women gives an insight into the burden of feminine sensibilities suffocated by masculine responsibilities".

Maya Angelou celebrates her womanhood and her body in her poem, "Phenomenal Woman". She says the secret of her beauty,

Lies in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips
The stride of my steps
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally,
Phenomenal woman
That's me.

In this poem, we see an enthusiasm for the self and belief in one's self. Angelou seeks not only in reifying female marginalization but also brings into the limelight her beauty. Here

we see the poetics of 'subversion' which Angelou uses in order to quash the Western construct that 'Black is ugly'. The poem is also reminiscent of the celebratory punch line of the Negritude movement that "Black is Beautiful".

"Still I Rise" is probably the most remarkable poem of Maya Angelou. It is remarkable because it encapsulates the history of slavery and oppression, prejudices and humiliation experienced by the Blacks in America and despite all this, still celebrates the human spirit. She says,

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise

Angelou attacks the false, condescending version of the Black history written by the Whites. The poem, hence can be seen as subaltern. We see in Angelou's poetry an almost healing aspect for the black audience that has to live under the shadow of the oppressive past. The poem is a call to the assertiveness and pride for the blacks. Her courage, self-determination and confidence makes her laugh like she has "gold mines digging at the backyard" and dance like she has got "diamonds at the meeting of the thighs". She captivates her audience lyrically with vigor, fire and vivid imagery. Finally, she says that she is the "dream and the hope of the slave" who has to 'Rise' amidst all the forces pulling one down.

A cursory glance at the poetry of the major black women writers reveals that the major themes they deal with are the rejection of negative images of black women, the relationship between black men and black women, importance of female sexuality and its relation to the process of creation and writing, relationship of black women to other women and their literary tradition, desire for liberation, socio-psychological inferiority, anger against marginalisational forms, etc. Although, sometimes these women become the mouthpieces typical to Afro-American downtrodden women, they also retain the specific position as universal writers of human beings above from the national, racial, gender, lingual, geographical levels.

We can therefore compare the flourishing of the African-American poetry of women to the blooming of the "furious flower". Gwendolyn Brooks has used the metaphor 'furious flower' to indicate the two significant intertwining developments of the Afro-American women poetry - radical (furious) as well as aesthetic (flower). These women have reached the 'Center' from the margin, have gained a 'voice' of their own and are now singing; having experienced 'Self-hood' they are now spreading their fragrance everywhere.

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It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.

Lewis Carroll, [*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*](#)

A Short History of the Bhakti Movement in Verse

The soul of India's identity
Is reflected in its sanctity
Men and women in their piety
Explored the notion of Bhakti in our society
Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavat Gita became a source of reality.

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

Doctrine of Adishankaracharya on non-duality
Emphasized “body” as Temporality
Reinforced the “Four Margas” to attain serenity
Emerged as a prophet of equality.
Bhakti gave way for welfare of humanity.

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

Approach of Alvars and Nayanmars with Shiva and Vishnu as their deity
Well known apostles of solidarity
Entire Bhakti movement gave way to religiosity
Reign of Buddhism resulted in equality
Revival of Hinduism progressed in unity

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

Basavanna as prophet paved way for a great reformation
Akkamahadevi first women to flow all conventional expectation
Women saints later carved their path for salvation
Bhakti movement debarred all superstitions
Reinforced the joy of sanctification

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

Lo! Ostentation “Paraphernalia of sects” were under reformation
The supremacy of Brahmanism was in deconstruction
Philosophy of Kabir led to Hindu Muslim reconciliation
Devotional literature led to a great integration
Vachanas, Dhohas, Padas, redirected to translation

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

The arrogance of false doctrines were under confrontation
The note of Bhakti gave way to devotion
Its greatness led to every religious liberation

Lo! Bhakti gave way for people's unification
A source of unifying grace to nation.

Bhakti-the way –the truth of life...

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Literature is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear voices talking about everything in every possible way.

Salman Rushdie, *speech, Feb. 6, 1990*

Theme of Death in Forough Farrokhzad's and Sylvia Plath's Poetry

*All day, all day,
Forsaken, forsaken like a corpse on water,
I floated towards the most terrifying rocks,
Toward the deepest sea caves.*

(‘Green Delusion’, Farrokhzad)

*After all I am only alive by accident.
I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way*
(‘A Birthday Present’, Plath)

Had she not died in a car accident, Forough Farrokhzad would have turned 74 years old next month. Farrokhzad can be considered the Sylvia Plath of Iran. She was beautiful, depressed, unconventional, feminist and died very young, though it was not suicide. Married in her late teens, she had a baby and was divorced by the age of 19. Her first book of poems, *Asir*, which means “Captive” was published when she was 20. She also had mental breakdown that year, and was institutionalized for a short period.

She can be likened to the poets of the Beat Generation, poets such as Ginsberg, Kerouac and even Bob Dylan, who expressed emotion and feelings and ideas so wonderfully abstract they became institutionalized in the American psyche. If we look closely at the definition of tradition, as written by T. S. Eliot in his famous essay, “Tradition and Individual Talent”, we understand that nothing new is ever created if young artists don’t take risks and try to change what they have learned from their masters. This can be applied to Forough Farrokhzad in the sense that she constantly tried to alter tradition by bringing in new perspectives to old subjects.

One of the great steps Farrokhzad took in her artistic life was to free herself from the influence of the romantic Neo-classicist poets. In an interview published in the literary periodical *Arash*, and reprinted as a foreword to her *Selected Poems*, she said:

...I have always relied on my own experiments... If I had not...I would have come to nothing. I would have become an imitator without consciousness. I should have made my own journey, that is to say I should have lived my life.

When her rebellion against traditional values, and social norms had gone far enough to give her the freedom of personality for which she had long fought, Forough Farrokhzad began her real journey in the realm of selfhood. It was then that she stopped writing poems which were the plain cries of an unhappy woman and started to be despised by society for writing poetry that is sometimes very close to what would be considered erotica:

In the silence of the temple of desire
I am lying beside your passionate body;
My kisses have left their marks on your shoulders
Like fiery bites of a snake.

(“The Song of Beauty”, *Rebellion*)

Now I move on to Sylvia Plath. The glamour brought about by Sylvia Plath’s suicide overshadows much of her work-- a glamour that has made her a sort of heroine and a poet damned by murderous art critics. Sylvia Plath was born in Boston in 1932. She grew up comfortably in middle class style and attended Smith College. Though Plath

appeared to be a carefree student who was the object of envy of many young women, she silently struggled with the monster of mental illness.

Intensity, imagination and attention to the evolving self characterized Sylvia Plath's poetry. She handled very painful and intense subjects such as suicide, self-loathing, Nazis, shock treatments, dysfunctional relationships, and homicidal instincts. Some of her poems such as "Daddy" and "The Moon and the Yew tree" show an amazing sense of control. The controlled flow of images combined with the structure of these poems successfully draws the reader into the suffering depicted in it. Many of her later poems are graphically macabre and somewhat surreal in their imagery. The synthetic and visual irregularities together create an unsettling experience and it is only the use of parody and black humour that rescues her poetry from total pathos.

Though having been born and having lived in different countries with different cultures and different religions, both Sylvia Plath and Forough Farrokhzad, shared astoundingly similar points in their lives. Their life spans (1930s to 1960s), their suffering as a result of insufficient fatherly affection in their youth, their search for paternal love in their adolescence and their marriage, divorce and motherhood, their suffering from nervous breakdown, their attempts to commit suicide three times and their premature and mysterious deaths stand as common themes in both their life stories.

The similarities flow into their poetry as well. Their belonging to the "confessional school" of poetry, their manifested courage in writing about tabooed subjects and feelings, their use of rough and colloquial language, their undermining of patriarchal rules, their rebellious behavior in their respective phallogocentric literary worlds, bring out countless similar themes in their poetry. This paper aims at bringing out a comparative study of two of their most recurrent themes—death and rebirth.

Death as a mystery attracts artists and suicide is a way of hurrying towards it. Suicide also becomes a way of protesting against the human condition and more specifically the female condition. Many reviewers of Plath and Farrokhzad believed that they belonged to the "confessional school" of poetry since both poets deal with the facts and intimate emotional and physical experiences in their lives. One of these first-hand experiences is death, appearing as one of the dominant images haunting Plath's *Ariel* and Farrokhzad's *Another Birth*. The poems in these collections address death in a nostalgic way. Even love is associated with death in these volumes.

One of the reasons death is portrayed so vividly by both poets is that they both tried to commit suicide during their lives. Plath attempted suicide when she at the ages of ten, twenty, thirty and thirty one, the last one being successful. Farrokhzad also attempted to commit suicide three times. Images of the grave and coffin, representing the maternal womb, could be seen as the semiotic space in which the poetry of Plath and Farrokhzad meet to resurrect and fuse their revolutionary feminine voice.

Plath's final poem "Edge" portrays death as the ultimate perfection for a woman: "The woman is perfected. Her dead body wears the smile of accomplishment." Similar themes can be observed in Farrokhzad's poetry, where she longs to embrace death, like in her poem "To Death's Realm". In "Perception" one can perceive strains of erotic pleasure in her portrayal of death: "I was full of lust ! Lust for death".

Both Plath and Farrokhzad portray the grave as heaven where they can embrace the warmth of death, casting away the chill of life to experience a deep pleasure. Both Plath and Farrokhzad pack their final poetry collections with death images. Plath and

Farrokhzad also wrote extensively about their depression, their neurosis and their long-term fascination with death. However as Folsom, the critic, notes, “Plath’s motivation in writing such ugly and terrifying pictures of death is certainly not its glorification.” Farrokhzad also uses death as a device for expressing anger and frustration by using images of resurrection in association with death as against images of destruction.

Farrokhzad’s death actually shocked Iran, at the sudden, senseless tragedy of a growing, still youthful artist cut down before maturity and fulfillment. Some claimed that Farrokhzad deliberately crashed her car to cast away her life in order to start a new one. They point to a verse from her poetry, “Let us believe in the opening of the cold season” that seems to be a prediction of the time of day, weather and season of the year in which she would die only to be born again. The poem apparently exhibits exact details. The poet did die shortly after 4:00PM on Oct 14th, and snow was falling during the graveside ceremonies on the 15th as she had noted in her poem. The actual events of the poet’s life from this perspective reveals that the love of freedom is so intense that it culminates in the desire to rip off their bodies from its petty existence in order to resurrect the other “season” of her poem.

Both Plath and Farrokhzad celebrate death; they welcome it, yearn for it, and embrace it by committing or attempting to commit suicide. Death is considered an act through which female poets can achieve a place and a voice of her own within the phallogocentric domain of language. However their desire for death is the desire to unite with their maternal self and paying their price for having a voice. As Farrokhzad says, “It is only voice that will last”. This voice strongly links the poetry of Plath and Farrokhzad through the themes of death and rebirth.

Forough Farrokhzad was born on Jan 5, 1935. She is considered the most famous of contemporary Iranian poets. She not only contributed to the modernization of Persian poetic tradition but also to the evaluation of popular Iranian culture. Her outstanding simplicity and her courage in going beyond cultural taboos provided her poetry with an originality that is unparalleled in Iranian poetry. She experimented with the idea of redefinition of boundaries posed by tradition and indoctrination. Her poems are both emotionally and intellectually rich and leave readers impressed with her ability to express her feelings and her passion profoundly and truthfully. These unique attributes make her poetry full of thoughtful messages. Her use of language is original and aesthetic in the sense that she is able to create personal expressions. She is unfairly unknown to English poetry readers because of the lack of proper translations. I hope to introduce her poetry to English readers through this essay. February 13, 2008 was the 41st anniversary of Forough’s death in a car accident at the age of 32.

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The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: The Role and Significance of Black Mammy in *Gone With The Wind* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

She nursed white babies at her breasts, offered black fingers to grasp when they tentatively took their first steps; she chastised them for forgetting their manners and warned them against heartbreak by fickle beaux. From being the first to diaper the little miss, to being the one who created her hourglass figure, by lacing her stays, she has been an integral part of the life of the Southern belle. Southern earth mother, mid wife, wet nurse, nurturer, source of wisdom, comfort and discipline, mediator and advisor; the black mammy has a special place in the American psyche.

Often depicted as huge, jet black, wide-hipped, garbed in a white blouse and skirt, complete with colorful head scarf; the mammy was an integral part of affluent Southern households, second in command to the mistress of the house. She was the shadow of her mistress, and though she was black, her code of conduct and her sense of pride were often as high as her owners. Self-sacrificing, long suffering, often world weary, but never resentful, the mammy mixed gentleness with sternness and often obliterated her own sexuality, in her role as surrogate mother and chaperone. She often had no family to call her own, save the one in whose employ she was in, and even if she had children, they were treated far more offhandedly than the white children in her charge.

Aunt Chloe in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was one of the earliest fictional depictions of the black mammy. The mammy figure was created in America, before the Civil War, as a Southern refutation of the Northern charges of black women being sexually victimized by white men. In Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, Ella, a black woman spent her entire puberty, locked up in a house where she was shared by a father and son, whom she called 'lowest yet'. The trauma she faced caused her to attribute all the evils of the world to the 'lowest yet'. It was against such extensive physical and emotional trauma faced by black female slaves, that the Northerners raised an outcry against. Historian Catherine Clinton argues,

The mammy was created by white Southerners to redeem the relationship between black women and white men with slave society in response to the anti-slavery attack from the North⁵³.

The defense raised by the South was, "I love my mammy, so how could I be cruel to blacks, having being nursed at black breasts."

As powerful a character as the English nanny or the Indian ayah, the mammy figures was a strong, reliable character, who served as the backbone of the Southern planter's household. Margaret Mitchell, in her bestseller, *Gone with the Wind*, presents Scarlett's Mammy as, "devoted to the last drop of blood to the O'Hara's, Ellen's mainstay, the despair of her three daughters, the terror of the other house servants." Due

⁵³ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) Pg 202

to her superior position in the O'Hara household, Mammy often looked down on the other house servants whom she rebuked as 'wuthless nigger', despite being black, just like them. Even the dashing Rhett Butler, deferred to Mammy, the head woman of the plantation. Mammy, who addressed Scarlett by such endearments like 'honey chile', was⁵⁴ indispensable to her, when Tara, fell on hard times. Mammy would have gladly put her life on the line, for her 'chile', Scarlett. Though the Emancipation Act gave freedom to the black slaves, despite Scarlett's repeated instructions to return to Tara, Mammy chooses to stay with Scarlett.

Ah is free, Miss Scarlett. You kain sen'me nowhar Ah doan wanten go. An' w'en Ah goes back ter Tara, its gwine be w'en you goes wid me.... Hyah Ah is and Ah stays.⁵⁵

Mammy was the only person whose goodwill and respect, Scarlett wanted to have. Through two marriages, starvation, poverty and pennilessness, Mammy never left Scarlett's side, despite not being obliged by duty to remain with her. Mammy's red taffeta petticoat, gifted to her by Rhett Butler, could never suffice as reward for the devoted loyalty she displayed over the years, to the O'Hara's. Mammy represents the female black slave, who has internalized the notions of loyalty to the white master. Mammy would rather fight than be free. She even fights black soldiers to protect the mistress of the house.

West-Indian writer Jean Rhys, in contrast, presents a subversion of the traditional black mammy, in the character of Christophine, in her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Domineering, tolerating no nonsense from anybody and a practitioner of obeah, Christophine is a force to reckon with, where Edward Rochester, himself, is wary of her and cannot see eye to eye with her. Like Mammy, Christophine has been a part of the Cosway family and is Antoinette's wedding present. But Christophine, though fiercely loyal to Antoinette and concerned about her wellbeing, is far more conscious of her identity as a black Martinique woman, than Mammy is, of her affiliation to the blacks.

For Christophine, Antoinette is 'beke' and does not fully belong to her. She is fully aware of the disparity that exists between their positions as colonizer and colonized, mistress and slave. Mammy, on the other hand, would let nothing in the world make her leave Miss Ellen's child, Scarlett. Antoinette's relationship with Christophine is one of need, where she looks to her for affection and comfort and as a surrogate mother, yet when she flies into a rage, she doesn't hesitate before cursing Christophine as a 'damned devil from hell'. Christophine's name, being derived from the name Christopher, meaning 'one who bears the Christ child' is an indicator of the burden she has to bear, in her responsibility to Antoinette. Edward Rochester mistakenly calls her 'Josephine', which links her to Joseph Chatoyer, the Maroon revolutionary from St Vincent. This association of Christophine to the Maroon revolutionary by Rochester is an indication of white hostility and suspicion towards the blacks. The plantocrats lived in constant fear of being burnt in their beds and of black slave uprisings. Rochester is always conscious of

⁵⁴ ⁵⁴ Gone With the Wind; Margaret Mitchell. Page 826

⁵⁵ Gone With the Wind; Margaret Mitchell. Page 826

Christophine's "otherness" and her black identity. In contrast to Christophine, Mammy however is simply called 'Mammy'. Her name is not of any consequence. Most Southerners, who spent their earliest years, clutching their mammy's skirts, instead of their mothers, would be at a loss for an answer, if ever questioned about their mammy's name. Mammy's denial of a name, and along with it, an identity as a free black woman, is seen in *Gone with the Wind*. While *Gone with the Wind* depicts Mammy as representative of the American South with the Civil War and plantation culture where anti-slavery laws were being enforced and slaves were being freed, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, presents Christophine an ex-slave whose hostility toward her white mistress is thinly veiled.

The black mammy was also the transmitter of language to white children. "The mammy first taught us to lisp and to walk;" wrote Southerner, Lois Blair in 1889, in his tract, *The Prosperity of the South Dependent upon the Elevation of the Negro*. Linguist, J.L Dillard argues that the Southern accent is, at base an Afro-American accent, the mammy being the prime mode of transmission. The black mammy fulfilled a lot of roles from wet nurse to wedding present, where an entire circle of life passed, and yet she remained as she was, solid, cheerful, unchanged in her loyalties and dependable. However the fact remains that the Mammy was a stereotype created to portray a sense of peaceful inter-racial relations in the South. The devoted mammy gave the illusion of a sense of this peace. Christophine emerges as breaking away from the stereotype of the happy, loyal family slave and asserts an independent black identity of which she is proud of. Through such a powerful character, Jean Rhys depicts the changing consciousness of the black female ex-slaves towards their colonial masters.

The stereotype of the black mammy has made its presence felt in cinema with *Gone with the Wind* being cinematized. The black mammy is also a character in the Tom and Jerry animation series, though only her slippered black legs are depicted on screen. Mammy's cheerful, round face grinned out of the boxes of food products in America, revealing the extent to which the mammy stereotype had been commercialized. She remains one of the most profound icons of American culture, as a social, commercial, psychological and racist stereotype that towers over the American imagination

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