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Editor's Note

International Journal of The Frontiers of English Literature and The Patterns of ELT is a Journal to present the innate talent of Fraternity of English Teaching Community spread across the world and to give direction to the researchers to further their activity and accomplish their task. The focus of the journal is to present the scholarly work and findings in the area of English Literature, Language and the different patterns of ELT.

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Abuse, Anxiety and After: Sexual Abuse of the Girl-Child in Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder* and Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*

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Abstract

*A major aspect of the subalternization of women, in India, is the sexual abuse that the girl child has to face, often from members of her own family. This grim reality often remains invisible due to the prevalence of social taboos. However, such a shroud of silence only exacerbates the condition of the survivors of such abuse who often have to grapple with entrenched psychological problems, at times evolving into post-traumatic stress disorders of varying intensity. The paper would explore these issues by analysing the representation of this social malady through two plays: Dina Mehta's *Getting away with Murder* and Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*. The paper would strive to explore both the authenticity of representation and the facets foregrounded by such dramatisation.*

Keywords: subalternization, sexual abuse, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder

A study of child abuse in India, prepared by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, in 2007 (henceforth SCA), offers an eye-opening insight into the grim reality of sexual abuse of children in India. According to a survey conducted among 12,447 children, 53.22% (SCA 74) of the respondents reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse. Furthermore, as the study reveals, more than 72% of the respondents did not report the incidents of abuse to anyone and in almost half the cases, the abuse was carried out by uncles, cousins, friends and classmates (SCA 81). Such data offers an unsettling glimpse into the lack of security which Indian children have to grapple with from a very early age and as the report itself acknowledges, such a pervasive crisis largely stems from a claustrophobic socio-cultural condition where the forces of shame, fear and silence throttle not just the ability of the children to voice the abuse that they experience but also the capacity of the parental figures to adequately respond to such reports, especially

since the perpetrator is often either a member of the family or someone close to it. The report therefore declares:

The subject of child sexual abuse is still a taboo in India. There is a conspiracy of silence around the subject and a very large percentage of people feel that this is a largely western problem and that child sexual abuse does not happen in India. Part of the reason of course lies in a traditional conservative family and community structure that does not talk about sex and sexuality at all. Parents do not speak to children about sexuality as well as physical and emotional changes that take place during their growing years. As a result of this, all forms of sexual abuse that a child faces do not get reported to anyone. The girl, whose mother has not spoken to her even about a basic issue like menstruation, is unable to tell her mother about the uncle or neighbour who has made sexual advances towards her. This silence encourages the abuser so that he is emboldened to continue the abuse and to press his advantage to subject the child to more severe forms of sexual abuse. Very often children do not even realize that they are being abused. (SCA 73)

The report also refers to another study conducted by Save the Children and Tulir in 2006 in Chennai which not only came out with similar findings but also highlighted how such problems were not just proportionally higher among upper and middle classes but they were also equally prevalent in both nuclear and joint families. Such details foreground how dangers lurk at intimate corners for many Indian children who often have no other option but to bury the traumatic experiences deep within their minds as the opportunities for administrative redress or social justice are pitifully rare. Such abuse, coupled with the persistence of female foeticide across India, growing number of rape, molestation and other crimes against women and various other socio-cultural discriminations and injustices not only points towards a predominantly patriarchal paradigm but also the extensive interpellation of women within such ideological frameworks which prompts their own participation in many of the processes of subjugation. Such conditions are also illustrative of the subalternized condition which Indian women still continue to confront, whether at home or elsewhere, as the nation-space remains dominated by patriarchal interests which continue to treat women either as a liability or as an inferior creature bound to domestic chores or as an object of sexual gratification.

However, the consequences of such subalternization are not limited to various material deprivations. In fact, in case of the sexual abuse which girl-children often suffer from, the trauma may lead to deep-rooted psychological scarring which manifests itself in a number of varied forms, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) of varying intensity. As Dr. Edward Rowan states,

Survivors of rape, child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, natural disaster, terrorism, hostage-taking, and war—all situations in which a person is rendered helpless by overwhelming forces—may show the characteristic manifestations of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)... Survivors are “disconnected from the present” and continue to react to life experiences as if they were anticipating, experiencing, or responding to the earlier trauma (Rowan 29-30).

In fact, such survivors, as various other psychiatrists and researchers report, often suffer from a whole gamut of psychological and behavioural problems:

Child sexual abuse (CSA), particularly within an individual’s family of origin, has been implicated as a risk factor for a wide variety of adult psychiatric diagnoses and behavioral problems, including borderline personality disorder (BPD), dissociative identity disorder, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, alcoholism, eating disorders, somatization disorder, sexual dysfunction, and suicide attempts. (Smith 147)

The nature of these problems is such that the afflicted individuals often suffer from various obstacles in everyday or professional interactions which can also have a variety of detrimental ramifications. In the absence of adequate counseling, therapy and familial or institutional support, the situation might further deteriorate and become life-threatening. However, because of the cluster of shame, fear and social taboo associated with such topics, admitting the presence of such a problem and seeking relevant medical help may also become difficult for the concerned individuals. Subalternized on the basis on both age and gender, these individuals therefore find themselves imprisoned in their own personal infernos where they recurrently re-experience the traumatic event of the abuse from which there seems to be no escape. As Dr. Rowan explains,

Overall, the victims, and then the survivors, lose faith in what is supposed to be the natural order where children are cherished and protected, and where they are safe in the family and community. For them the world becomes unjust. (Rowan 37)

Many of these symptoms vividly manifest themselves through the character of Sonali in Dina Mehta's *Getting away with Murder*. As one who had been sexually abused by her drunk uncle in her childhood, she desperately grapples with repressed trauma which push her into moments of hysterical agitation and infantile regression. Her friend Mallika worriedly reports:

I'm really worried about Sonali. Something's eating her...Her headaches, her mirror-gazing...What does one make of that?...She herself talked of a truth hiding in the dark, gathering strength enough to surface, coming to a point...then blanking out. (Mehta 73)

The play offers a vivid portrayal of this psychological crisis which becomes evident from the way in which Sonali regresses into a childish voice as she looks at the mirror and frantically oscillates between present and past in her attempt to confront the horrible, buried truth which unhinges her mind:

Someone must help...help me (*moves to the mirror, stares into her face intently and then begins to speak in a petulant 8 year old voice as she regresses in time*). Don't want to sit near him, Mother. Don't like to be touched...(looks away from the mirror and declaims in her normal voice). "When you tickle us, do we not laugh? (*Back to the mirror, regressing.*) Don't! Don't! (*Laughs wildly as she squirms.*) Your fingers are not kind, they hurt...don't...(squirming, laughing helplessly) ha ha. Stop it, stop! (*low, on a note of pain and fear.*) What are you doing to me, leave me alone. (Mehta 66)

Such responses clearly illustrate how victims of PTSD, being "disconnected from the present" keep "anticipating, experiencing or responding to earlier trauma". The nature of this trauma becomes further clarified either when Sonali recalls "Every time I took a bath I could hear him outside...breathing...waiting to look at me without my clothes on" (Ibid), or when Mallika informs us how in each of Sonali's paintings, uncle Narottam is always painted in a menacing red.

However, the consequences of this trauma are not just confined to the psycho-somatic distress she regularly experiences. Her traumatic memories of being sexually abused by her

uncle also evoke in her an entrenched sense of women's subjugated status and the conviction that "To be born a girl is to be subject to violence and servitude" (Mehta 63). It is this conviction that also propels her eagerness to know about the sex of her unborn child and the plan to undergo an abortion if it is a girl. The trauma of her childhood experience thus becomes instrumental for a potential foeticide which also foregrounds the tragic cycle of violence within which Sonali seems to be caught. The text also suggests that her earlier miscarriage may well have been a deliberate one, prompted by her reluctance to give birth to a daughter who too may suffer from similar victimization. Such destructive behavior is often associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and Dr. Rowan mentions, "Self-identification as a "victim" or "damaged goods" may result in low self-esteem and create a pattern of self-destructive behavior" (Rowan 37). Aptly enough, at one point of the text, Sonali does lament that her husband Anil got stuck with "damaged goods" (Mehta 91). Such statements illustrate that even the death of the abuser and substantial temporal distance from the event of the abuse are not always enough to soothe a scarred psyche.

Part of the problem with Sonali, however, also has to deal with her entrenched sense of guilt with regard to the supposedly accidental death of her uncle. She is only able to overcome her hysterical episodes of rage or regression after she has recalled, with the help of her brother Gopal, the way in which both them had conspired to stage the accident that led to her uncle's death:

Gopal (*moved*): Come with me then, Sonali...It's bedtime...and I can see the big bulge under your nightie as you smuggle the toy cart up the dark stairs...(he goes and stands behind her).

Sonali: Yes...yes. I feel your eyes on me and I'm terrified you will snatch it away – you're so possessive of your toys, you've never been taught to share. But you don't, do you?

Gopal (*they move in unison, one behind the other, miming the incident that took place years ago*): I climb up after you and screen you as you place it on the topmost step.

Sonali: I centre it with care. When I stand up (*she gets up*) we look at each other wordlessly (*they turn to each other*). (Mehta 89)

Alongside the trauma of the actual abuse she had suffered, it is also the horror and guilt associated with the staging of the accident, that led to her uncle's fall and death which were

responsible for the nightmares and attendant psychological complications Sonali had been experiencing. Thus, even an act of successful resistance becomes fraught with anxiety and repressed upheavals, especially due to the patriarchally entrenched notion of women deservedly being the subjects of male violence in one form or another. What further complicates matters for Sonali is the barrage of accusations she had to face from her mother and the resultant pent up resentment which manifests itself through some of her frantic outbursts: “‘Jack fell down and broke his crown’. But he always falls over things, Mother when he comes home smelling like that!...You always blame me, Mother” (Mehta 85). As opposed to the desired source of refuge and protection, the image of the mother, as represented by such statements, is one of neglect and injustice. The same sense of pent-up resentment again flairs up when she points to the contrast between the image of Uncle Narottam she paints and his portrait in their previous house: “Not like the portrait of Uncle in Mother’s house is it? She put fresh flowers before it everyday and Gopal and I were urged to remember his kindness and pray for him” (Mehta 86). Unwittingly or otherwise, in the traumatized psyche of Sonali, her mother thus appears as an accomplice and Sonali’s resentment is further emphasized by her recollection of several pieces of typically patriarchal instructions which her mother communicated to her. She remembers, for example, how her mother believed that “a woman’s failure to bear a son is just retribution for misdeeds in her past life” or that “just as a scorpion enjoys stinging people with all the pent-up venom in its tail, lordly men desire to sting their women”. Confronted by the recurrent image of her mother during her own moments of hallucination, Sonali not only manifests her anxiety regarding her own transformation into someone like her mother but also the apprehension of allowing in her daughter’s life, a re-enactment of the trauma she herself has had to endure.

This cluster of psycho-somatic distress caused by sexual abuse during childhood, patriarchal interpellation, a shroud of silence and other attendant issues are also foregrounded, in different ways, through the behaviour and actions of Mala in *Thirty Days in September* who had to endure sexual abuse at the hands of his uncle from the age of seven to her teenage years. It is this particular trauma, which went on, either within her home or during the summer holidays spent at her uncle’s house that leads to emotional and psychological entanglements in her adult life because of which neither is she able to sustain a

relationship for more than thirty days nor is she able to feel satisfaction except when she is being exploited by dominant older men. Her fumbling, hesitant confessions to the counselor give us an insight into this warped world:

What I am doing is terribly wrong!...It has to end in a month's time. In fact I like it best when I can time it so it lasts for thirty days. I even mark it on my calendar. After that, I have to – move on, if you know what I mean...Well it means that it is no longer satisfying to me, and I don't mean the physical part of it, although that is usually the main attraction for me...not that I actually enjoy it when they are doing it to me...sometimes I do, with the right kind of people...the right kind of people are, let me usually older men...I think I like it – I don't know how to put it...When they – sort of – you know – use me...I cant explain it. (Dattani 18)

Such hesitant, inchoate responses reveal to us the extent of the psychological disorder a person can experience on account of sexual abuse during childhood. The unwanted imposition of sexual experience on a young child not only creates an unbearable burden of silence and shame but also corrodes a person's sexual health. Not only does it become extremely difficult for them to lead normal sexual life but the trauma of those early experiences creates a prison of repetitive anomalous behaviour from which there seems no escape. As Dr. Rowan explains:

Such individuals experience a damaged sense of self, chronic guilt and shame, feelings of ineffectiveness, and a chronic sense of despair and helplessness. They may idealize the perpetrator, have difficulty in establishing and maintaining trusting relationships, and display a tendency to be revictimized or to victimize others. (Rowan 30)

This entire paradigm almost entirely matches the kind of borderline personality disorder displayed by Mala's character in the play. As she was repeatedly abused by her uncle, she has a fascination for older men with whom she enters into casual sexual liaisons to masochistically experience that feeling of being 'used' which is exactly how she responds to the original trauma by dramatising her own revictimization. What makes this paradigm all the more obvious is how she tries to end these affairs within a month which again matches the duration of the summer holidays during which she was sexually abused by her uncle. This becomes all the more explicit when she is actually in bed with Deepak as she hallucinates

about the spectre of her uncle and agonizingly re-lives the entire the sequence of abuse she suffered as a child:

Man: Touch me here.

Mala withdraws her hand sharply, frightened.

Man: You don't love your uncle?...

Man: Quickly, before someone sees you. Touch...

Man: There! You feel that? It means I love you. Your uncle loves you.

Mala begins to cry...

Man: Hold your frock up. Up over your face! Shut up!...

Man: Think of your school. Be still and put your arms up, come on. Yeees! What did you learn in school today? Hmmm? What? Tell me...

Man: Good. Good. Keep singing...Again, don't stop until I stop. See, I love you even though you are so ugly. Keep singing...Nobody will tell you how ugly you are. But you are only good for this...Only for this. See how much I love you. See, now go away. Quickly...

Man: (now more moralistic than before, the furtiveness gone) You like it! You enjoy it. After four years, you have become a whore! At thirteen you are a whore! (Dattani 42-44)

The combination of emotional extortion, promise of love, command, threat and vilification which conditions this entire sequence, along with the severe abuse, is largely responsible for that personality disorder which Mala faces as her adult behaviour is only a manifestation of the trauma she faced during her formative years. What made this trauma all the more critical in case of Mala was the unresolved repression, born out of her inability to communicate the truth to her mother, or when she did, because of her mother's refusal to accept and respond meaningfully. Along with the actual trauma of the abuse it is this lack of essential support from her mother which made her all the more agonized and miserable, as evident from the following outburst:

Mala: I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when Uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he

came to stay with us. You were bust in either the puja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could tell you why I was crying he would tell me to go to you. You always fed me and – and you never said it but I knew what you were saying to me without words. That I should eat well and go to sleep and the pain would go away. (Dattani 25-26)

This pent up resentment becomes even more explosive when she later asks:

Mala (To Shanta): Where were you when he locked the door to your bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes every day of my summer holidays, add tem up. Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty-one or whatever. That’s how long or how little it took for you to send me to hell for the rest of my life. (Dattani 53)

This is precisely what the governmental report identifies as “conspiracy of silence” and adds that

The shame, secrecy and denial associated with familial sexual violence against children foster a pervasive culture of silence, where children cannot speak about sexual violence in the home, and where adults do not know what to do or say if they suspect someone they know is sexually abusing a child. (SCA 74)

The situation becomes all the more complex and horrifying in case of Dattani’s play where, we eventually learn, that Shanta’s silence is less a product of ignorance or prejudice but is more a consequence of her own secret shame of being subjected to the same trauma during her own childhood and that too at the hands of the same perpetrator.

Shanta: ...I – I cannot speak. I cannot say anything. My tongue was cut off...My tongue was cut off years ago...(To Deepak) Please save her. I did not save her. How could I save her when I could not save myself?... (To Mala) You say I did not help you? I could not help you. Same as you could not help me. Did you ever see the pain in my eyes. No. Nobody saw anything. Nobody said anything. Not my brothers, not my parents. Only (pointing to the Man) he spoke. Only he said, he saw and he did.

The man backs away looking at Shanta with a warning.

Shanta: I was six Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen...and it wasn’t only the summer holidays. For ten years! For ten years! (Dattani 54-55)

The domestic space thus becomes a site of generational sexual abuse endured alike by mother and daughter and the domestic space becomes inscribed by patriarchal perversion signified by

the doll with ragged limbs, with its dress lifted and pinned to its forehead. ‘Home’, no longer a site of serenity and sanctity, becomes a doll’s house where women are not just treated as toys in male hands but as hapless objects of illicit male lust, trapped in prisons of silence, shame and unbearable agony.

While discussing one cluster of emotional responses associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Dr. Rowan mentions that

Avoidance and numbing are seen as efforts to avoid thinking, feeling, or talking about the trauma, to avoid activities, people, or places associated with the traumatic event, and to be unable to recall certain aspects of that event. The traumatized individual shows decreased interest in significant activities, feels detached from others, and has a restricted range of affective responses and the sense of a foreshortened future. (Rowan 29)

If analysed in the light of Shanta’s climactic revelations we would see that many of Shanta’s own reactions conform to this particular pattern. This is also evident from her inability to confront a cheating supplier of newspapers and magazines who initially exercises uncanny control over her. His authoritative attitude probably triggers in Shanta memories of her childhood trauma and thus renders her vulnerable to the conniving supplier whose commands she follows. In neurological terms, we can say that for victims of PTSD the nervous system remains in a “rapid response mode and this hypervigilance may produce sustained fear” leading to responses that are “automatic and beyond conscious control” (Rowan 34). As evident from the responses of Sonali in *Getting away with Murder*, such responses may often be self-destructive and emblematic of low self-esteem. This is exactly what happens with Shanta, who, unable to cope with her daughter’s revelations and resentment, not only recounts her own trauma but is so overwhelmed by the experience that she even tries to actually cut off her tongue in a paroxysm of agony preceded by gestures of literal dumbness:

I cannot shout for help, I cannot say words of comfort. I cannot even speak about it. No, I cant. I am dumb. (To the Man, speaking like a mute person making unintelligible sounds.) Uh, eh, oo, oo, aa, aa, aaaaaaaaaa. Gesturing with her hands to say that he’ll not tell anyone while making the sounds.) Aaaa, ooo eee oooo aaeeeeeeee, aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaeeeeeeee! (Dattani 55)

Her gestures and action represent a dramatic embodiment of that silence of the subalternized woman which pushes her doubly or even triply in the shadow and it is these shadows which

subvert that rhetoric of modernity which lies at the heart of middle-class male narratives of urban progress.

However, the enactment of subjugation and crisis are often accompanied by episodes of self-assertion and defiant resistance. While Sonali and Gopal's staging of their uncle's fatal accident refers to one kind of resistance, *Thirty Days in September* focuses more on the psychological healing that is necessary to overcome such trauma even if the abuse has stopped a long time back or the perpetrator himself is no longer alive. Dattani, therefore leads his play to a climax where Mala's confrontation of her uncle and his eventual death finally enables her to come to terms with her reality and thus paves the path for a comparatively improved personal future. What is important to note here is that for victims of sexual abuse, simply the cessation of abuse itself is never enough. While that condition is indeed of paramount significance, there is also an important struggle against memories and entrenched psychological disorders which must be incessantly carried out. It is this struggle which is embodied on stage as Mala literally hits out at the hallucinatory image of her uncle in a violent attempt to undo the violence she was subjected to:

Mala hits out at him with her fist. The Man doesn't flinch.

Man: Don't cry.

Mala: (hitting him hard) Aaah!

Man: I said, don't cry!

Mala continues to hit at him each time with more anger as the Man speaks, unaffected by blows.

Man: This is our secret!...Ready for a real birthday present?...What did you learn in school? Come on sing it. Sing!

Mala grabs him by the throat and tries to strangle him, heaving with the effort.

Man: Thirty days has September. April, June and November. February has twenty-eight. All the rest have thirty-one! Once again. Keep on singing! Stop only when I stop.

Mala: (one last violent shove) You are dead! You deserve to be dead! Die! (Dattani 57)

It is only through such therapeutic violence, the kind of violence which she could not exercise in the past, that Mala is eventually able to rid herself off of the traumatic aftermath of her childhood abuse and progress towards the possibility of a life to togetherness with Dipak – a life no longer encumbered by traumatic memories or self-destructive behavior. In this sense both plays envisage a horizon of hope where moments of panic and hallucinatory relapse are counterbalanced by reinforced prospects of harmony, composure and togetherness.

The plays of both Dina Mehta and Mahesh Dattani, with their insightful exploration of sexual abuse of girls, not only manage to dramatise a deep-rooted aspect of women's subalternization in India but also serve to shatter that shroud of silence in which most such victims writhe. The playwrights' dramatic representation not only serves to heighten awareness about a critical social malady but also offers a cathartic paradigm through which viewers/readers may overcome their own personal horrors.

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Untold Histories of Migration: A Postmodern Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*

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Abstract

Since 1980's diasporic writing, multiculturalism, dalit literature, subaltern studies and feminist writings have gained inroads and become prominent in literature and cultural studies. Diasporic literature deals with two kinds of migrations, the people having migrated either forcibly as in case of indentured labour occurred during late 18th and 19th centuries, or willingly as in more recent contexts of global life in order to seek better prospects in life and career. In Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* the former condition is delineated through a panorama of characters who migrate to an alien land in a ship called the Ibis. The journey revisits the past memories, symbolizes identity transformation and deviates from the notion of purity. Ghosh makes a sensitive exploration of the lives of migrants, indentured labour and transportees in his epoch-making book. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the celebrated novel as a site for diaspora and multiculturalism.

Key words: Colonialism, Diaspora, Migration, Multiculturalism, Opium War,
Postmodernism

Contemporary Indian writing in English has marked its greatness by projecting rich form and style in narrative techniques, by providing innovative themes from historical archives in the production of third world literature. The works created especially in the late 20th century are known for the new pattern in writers' ideas, thoughts and emotions which are postmodern. As Ihab Hassan points out, postmodernism is essentially anti-elitist and anti-authoritarian tendency that rebelled against the single voice of authority and the idea of fixity. In India, writers of the 80's and after have shown enhanced awareness to the realities considering binary and multiple perspectives. Consequently, postmodernism has rejected

restrictive assumptions and elitist hierarchies in favour of several marginalized points of view and realities. As a result, diasporic writing, multiculturalism, dalit literature, subaltern studies and feminist writings have gained inroads and become prominent in literature and cultural studies.

Diasporic writing deals with two kinds of migrations, the people having migrated either forcibly as in case of indentured labour occurred during late 18th and 19th centuries, or willingly as in more recent contexts of global life in order to seek better prospects in life and career. Prof. Makarand Paranjpe argues that “to the first category belong all those forced migrations on account of slavery or indentured labour, while the second would encompass the voluntary migrations of businessmen and professionals who went abroad in search of fortune”(8). Later the Government of India *Report of High level Committee on Indian Diaspora*, classifies into three categories based on economic imperatives of immigration: a) Colonial Diasporas such as indentured labour and *girmittias*; b) Mobile Diasporas in the Gulf and other neighbouring countries since 1970s and c) Indian Diasporas of professionals and skilled workers in Advanced economies of the world. However, the present study is limited to the first category the ‘*girmittian diaspora*’ of Indian subcontinent in colonial period and its relevance to the postmodern period.

The history of Indians migrating to other countries can be traced back since the dawn of civilization. But only in the 19th century and after migration in significant numbers as indentured labour is evident in historical records. The impoverishment, a direct consequence of colonial rule on the one hand and the abolition of slavery in the west on the other played a major role in throwing vast number of migrants to the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Surinam and other places wherever there were sugar plantations. They were economically beleaguered labour force seeking their livelihood in distant lands. This was mainly in response to the enormous demand for cheap labour that arose immediately after British abolished the slavery in 1834. Indian migration, however, seems very significant as it creates a tremendous cultural and civilizational impact even today.

The migration, for the old diaspora, was considered to be final journey as there was little or no attempt on the part of migrants to return the homeland. While in the postmodern

context the journey of the migrants, the so called 'sojourn' is temporary as in case of the present diasporic writers who make frequent visits to their motherland and respond ambivalently to their dual or even multicultural societies. Amitav Ghosh, with his multicultural and multilingual back ground explores the various shades of migrant experiences and poignant tales of migrants in his books beginning with *The Circle of Reason* (1986) to the most recent *River of Smoke* (2011). In his novel *Sea of Poppies* the cultural and civilizational influence of old diaspora is delineated through a panorama of characters migrating to an alien land in a ship called the *Ibis*. The journey revisits the past memories, symbolizes identity transformation. Ghosh makes a sensitive exploration of the lives of migrants, indentured labour and transportees in his epoch-making novel *Sea of Poppies*. His multicultural perception makes an interesting reading of this work which refuses specific cultural pigeonholing. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the celebrated novel as a site for diaspora and multiculturalism.

Set against the backdrop of opium war and migration of Indians as indentured labour to sugar plantation islands, *Sea of Poppies* explores the socio-cultural and civilizational impact on Indian diaspora as a consequence of colonial exploitation. As a member state of Commonwealth Nations, India had a colonial past in which it experienced exploitation and dominant power of British Empire. With the advent of postmodernism in literary scene after 1980's and 90's in India, history is viewed from decentralized approach as against west's centric approach. Thus grand narratives were challenged and rejected to replace with local narratives mainly in third world countries that experienced terrific colonial exploitation. It is interesting to note that these nations produced diversified literature in response to their past imperial experiences. The writers of the Commonwealth or third world nations join and share experiences of sufferings and colonial legacies through their literary works. It is this past that motivated and inspired Ghosh to take up the historical background of Raj during 1838 in the present novel.

Sea of Poppies, published in 2008, outlines how the histories of opium war, indentured labour, British colonialism are amalgamated to form a historical narrative. The

colossal ship, *Ibis*, a former exporter of slaves is now refitted for transporting Indian Indentured labours as ‘*girmityas*’ to Mauritius.

They were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on ‘*girmits*’ –agreements written on pieces of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld. (72)

The characters in *Sea of poppies* can be said to represent Indian old diaspora consisting of indentured labour in colonial period. The process of migration allows them to move from one social position to another as in the postmodern sense the hierarchies are blurred. What is significant is that the ship *Ibis* becomes a vehicle of transformation in which high caste Deeti acquires a low caste of leather workers, the half caste Zachery Reid passes for a white person, the zemindar of Raskhali estate becomes convict and the French orphaned girl disguises as Indian Brahmin. It is the *Ibis* that turns out to be a cultural utopia where all barriers of culture are laid defenseless when confronted with humanitarian ethics. The travel across the troubled waters indeed results in displacement, rupture and dislocation. Further, the travel across the *kalapani* remains a powerful image of losing one’s caste and kin. However, a new era began when the migrants dared to cross the black waters even it was prohibited to travel to foreign lands and islands by the purveyors of purity, despite the religious belief associating the sea with netherworld from which nobody returned home.

Ghosh maintains these reflections in a fictive form in the present novel. Deeti, an unfortunate *girmitya* who intends to perform journey to Mauritius plantation, at her first sight of *girmityas* on their March probes into the troubles of crossing the sea and its ultimate implications to loss of caste:

...to know that you were forever an outcaste; to know that you would never again enter your father’s house; that you would never throw arms around your mother; never eat a meal with your sisters and brothers; never feel the cleansing touch of the Ganga. And to know also that for the rest of your days you would eke out a living on some wild, demon-plagued island? (72)

Later when Deeti gets into the ship along with Kalua who rescues her from sati, she assumes a new name and chamar caste to which Kalua belongs. Though she comes from a high Rajput

family, Ghosh carefully transforms her from upper to lower caste so as to completely eschew the hierarchical structures in the ship.

Ghosh asserts similar postmodern perspectives to another character in the novel who seems to subvert from centrality. It is no wonder that Raja Neel Rattan Haldar, Zemindar of Raskhali, is also a victim of colonialism whose financial survival depends on Mr. Benjamin Burnham's trading business. The uncertainties in the opium trade made the English man to force for the repayment of debts accrued that exceeded the value of entire Zemindary. Unable to foresee the swift changes that engulfed the family and estate, thus the Raja ended up as a bankrupt to be transported to islands. Like Deeti he too feels the void of the ocean and loss of human connection as if visited by a nightmare. "He saw himself as a cast away on the dark void of the ocean, utterly alone, severed from every human mooring" (342).

A drastic change appears in Neel at Lalbazar, his former apartment, awaiting transportation to the jail at Alipore. It is ironical to note that though "his allegiance was to the Buddha, the Mahavira, Shri Chaitanya, Kabir and many others such---all of whom had battled against the boundaries of caste..." he had ever eaten something that was prepared by an outcaste. He claims that it was his prerogative to on a Raja's guddee and day today routine as a performance out of the "...demands of a social existence, by samsara---none of it was meant to be real; it was just an illusion..."(267) A sensation of nausea erupts when he sighted the food prepared by an unknown hand. Even though he takes few morsels as a matter of survival, his very skin seems to peel off from his body as soon as he had ingested as if "transformed [himself] into a moulting cobra, a snake that was struggling to free itself of its outworn skin."(268)

In a historical perspective, Ghosh aims to connect the traumatic experience of imperialism with displacement of people and consequential catastrophe on characters like Ah Fatt, a person with mixed lineage of Indian Parsi and Chinese. However, he appears to be Chinese "suggested by the shape of his eyes and the colour of his skin- but in his high-bridged nose and his wide, full mouth, there was something that hinted also at some other provenance"(327). The book *Journey to the West* gifted to Ah Fatt in his thirteenth year

becomes responsible for a growing interest in him to visit the west none other than India or *Jambudvipa*--- his father's very own homeland. Despite his father's insistence that India is no good place for him, Ah Fatt performs his voyage to the mighty land to find his origins only to put himself in further troubles. In that way he ends up in Alipore Jail where he finds Raja Neel Rattan Halder as a cellmate. Both of them as convicts are placed on the *Ibis* along with other *girmitiyas* to be transported to the Mauritius Island across the black water.

The schooner brings new spirits for the migrants. The ship takes image of a new home as the demented figures "create communities of choice" as they creatively reclaim new familial relations that give them strength to survive and tie them to each other. And the migrants obtain a new identity called '*Jahaz-bhai*' and '*Jahaz-bahens*'. The black sea is very symbolic as expressed in following lines: To Deeti "all the old ties were immaterial now that sea had washed away their past" (431). As the relationships among the boarders on the ship are getting revived and aligned, they are allowed to restart their lives with a fresh breathe. In his observations, S.K. Sareen remarks, "Migration that leads to separation may be seen as rebirth, rebirth in a new place/city/country marked by a new culture, different flora and fauna, new adjustments and so on... it takes the memory back to the earlier birth even as the migrants have to '*build a new world.*'"(86) *Ibis* is very special because one of the things that happened on the ship is that, regardless of the nation, religion, caste, the differences among the migrants erased to form a spirit of solidarity. Whether the migrants are indentured labour or *girmitiyas* or convicts or lascars with varying national background---what is fascinating is that when they all headed to Mauritius Island, they created a new community called *jahaz-bhai* and *jahaz-bahen*.

There is no denying the fact that the ship erased all the hierarchies on the sea and later, on the plantation colonies by implication. Bhikhu Parekh observes that the differences among the shipmates were lost and a sense of solidarity emerged to efface the traces, if any, of all social hierarchies. Similar kind of observations have been made by Vijay Mishra who points out the process of erasure of social hierarchies and the formation of culturally homogenous community when he says that "The ship, the medium of mercantile capitalism, is the first of the cultural units in which social relation were re-sited and renegotiated. In the

case of the old Indian Diaspora it produced a site in which caste purities were largely lost as well as a new form of socialization that went by the name of *Jahajibhai*.”(74) Hence in this context, the concept of postmodernism that wages war on purity is focused to admit the cross-cultural issues such as hybridization and globalization. In any case, it is safe to propose Ghosh’s postmodern novel *Sea of poppies* essentially a critique of dominant colonial power hierarchies and modernist elitism.

Postmodernism responds to the emerging voices of displaced, dislocated subalterns and migrants who were forced to be silent in the imperial, elitist and power dominated society. The sufferings of Indian indentured labour are depicted in many creative writings other than English. Abhimanyu Anant’s *Lal Pasina* (Red Sweat) is one such novel that depicts the miserable conditions faced by *girmityas* in sugar plantation colonies. It also documents the harsh and cruel treatments by colonial officials and their Indian agents which are close to the conditions of slaves. Similar portrayals of hard ships and struggle by Indian labour in Fiji are found in novels like *Savera* and *Karvat* written by Joginder Singh Kanwal.

The message that Ghosh conveys through this novel is the ultimate spirit of solidarity, out of the ruptures of colonialism, the civilizations are unmade and again made. The migrants, sufferers, coolies, victims and convicts - products of exploitation, abuse, oppression, indebtedness, pain and destruction are compelled to gather on the ship. The *Ibis* becomes a powerful symbol as they leave behind the hierarchical structures of caste, religion and community and forge a identity of *jahaz-bhai* and *jahas-bahens*, to imply it to the birth of new civilization and dynasties in the islands of sugar plantation.

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Technical Students' Perceptions on the Prescribed Language Text Book- Skills Annex: Functional English for Success

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the present study is to find the students' opinion and expectations towards the newly introduced text book for B. Tech. first year English. Responses are collected randomly from one hundred and twenty students through questionnaires and oral discussions. These students belong to different branches of B. Tech. first year of two different colleges, which are affiliated to JNTUH. They have used the text book for one academic year. The data is analysed qualitatively. As the students are examination focussed, they have not practiced the given CD even though some of them know the importance of a CD for language learning. The present text book is sufficient to face academic examinations of JNTUH; but, some students are using study guides as a ready reference before their examinations except for grammar and vocabulary. Students are mainly interested in the story-based content.

Key words: English, language learning, prescribed text book, students' perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English is increasing continuously throughout the globe and it is recognized by every educational institution in India including the professional institutions. For having a uniform language learning experience, it is necessary to have a prescribed text for English. It is customary to have a prescribed language text book for undergraduate students to meet their present and future needs.

Most of the Engineering students fail to foresee their future needs to excel in language skills. Engineers may have technical knowledge and creativity, if they are unable to share

their knowledge and fail to convince their colleagues or supervisors, their knowledge will go unnoticed, unused and unrewarded (Jeyachandra, 2009). After completing their school, the students' attention would turn more towards professional courses and less on English. This awareness towards English can be brought through different ways and possibly through their technical skills like computer skills.

The software boom in India and particularly in Hyderabad has a positive influence on the learners to use technology for language learning. JNTUH also recommends the use of technology for language learning for undergraduate students to make the text more learner-friendly by reducing the teacher-student gap.

Though there are research findings (Kern, 1995; Nelson and Carson, 1998, *etc.*) on students' perceptions regarding the language learning, little research has been done on the prescribed language text book with regard to technical students. The learners' opinion on the newly introduced text book with CD is worthwhile.

The study of AlShumaimeri (1999) highlights the importance of needs analysis as a basis for textbook development. The present study is an attempt to bring out the students' requirements, difficulties and attitudes towards the prescribed text book, Skills Annex: Functional English for Success, for B. Tech. first year English.

Objectives of this study are:

- What are the technical students' perceptions regarding the newly introduced text book for B. Tech. first year English?
- What are the students' requirements which the prescribed language textbook can fulfill?

This study is limited to the five units, which are prescribed by the JNTUH for B. Tech. first year students.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One hundred and twenty learners' opinion is collected from two different colleges, which are affiliated to JNTUH. They belong to ECE, CSE, MECH, CE, and EEE branches of B. Tech. and completed first year. The data for this research is gathered through both personal interviews and questionnaires from the learners. The questionnaire is designed with a mixture of open-ended, close-ended and 'Yes-No' type questions to gather opinion from different types of learners. The randomly collected data is analysed qualitatively.

2.1. THE TEXT

The prescribed language text book, Skills Annexe: Functional English for Success, has six units with corresponding listening and speaking exercises in the audio CD. However, the JNTUH has prescribed (R-13) five units, except unit-II, for the B. Tech. first year students.

Units are built around academic vocabulary. Each unit is theme-based.

“Skills Annexe: Functional English for Success is a contribution of general English for use in undergraduate programmes. It has been written bearing in mind the need for comprehensive language learning materials for students at the level that will not only bridge the gap between their knowledge of English acquired earlier and the competence presently required of them but also help them become more proficient so that they are able to use the language fluently and with the degree of accuracy necessary for self-confidence.

Every unit in the book has sections on each of the four communication skills as well as vocabulary and grammar. The main objective of the skills and language sections of the book is to enable efficient use of the items covered in them to perform commonly required functions in several social, study and work situation.” Skills Annexe (2013).

The text is meant for undergraduate programmes. It acts as a bridge between the past and present knowledge of the learners. Language skills including vocabulary and grammar are focused. The main objective is to enable the students to meet their social and professional requirements.

2.2. THE LEARNERS

The learners belong to different branches of B. Tech. (ECE, CSE, MECH, CE, and EEE) and completed first year. All of them belong to two private engineering colleges, which are affiliated to JNTUH. The prescribed text book, Skills Annexe: Functional English for Success, is common to all branches. Using the text book, the students have written three internal examinations and the final examination. The learners have completed Intermediate either in regional medium (English / Urdu) or English medium.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNERS' RESPONSES

3.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

There is widespread assumption that engineering students could obtain better knowledge and comprehension of their technical subjects through English (Jeyachandra, 2009).

A large number of students use English for academic purpose and not for social purpose. They use English sometimes in social situations. However, they think English is very important for their life. For some learners the reasons for studying English were 'to pass the annual exam', 'English is useful in the future', and 'to enter a good job'. It can be either their present or the future need, but the learners need the language and they could recognize its importance.

3.2. GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

At present, a majority of Indian youth not only lack fluency and polish but also embarrassingly deficient in grammar (Jeyachandra, 2009). It is quiet common that engineering students lack minimum grammar, which is required for them in their professional life. They need constant practice and up gradation of their grammatical skills.

Almost every student is satisfied with grammar and followed exercises in the five units. According to them the text covers most of the grammar. For them, the instructions for the exercises are easy to follow. Most of the students felt it as a continuation to their previous learning experiences of grammar and vocabulary. From the students' point of view, no

grammar point is missing. Only by using the text book they could face their internal and external examinations easily. Most of the students did not use study guides for grammar practice. Students are completely comfortable with the grammar of five units. Students have no complaints for facing the examinations or while dealing with the grammar exercises of the text book. They were able to follow the grammar-based exercises of the text very easily.

Students have not used any study guides as a part of their examination preparation for vocabulary. The findings of Evans and Green (2007) indicate that students' receptive and productive vocabularies are generally inadequate. This applies to Indian conditions as well. Students need continuous practices to use and reinforce their learned vocabulary. For this, students need to use their learned vocabulary in different situations.

3.3. READING SKILL

“The themes of the reading texts and the pieces themselves have been carefully chosen to include fiction as well as factual writing that would be of interest and relevance to present-day students” Skills Annexe (2013).

Students' reading is tested through comprehension passages, lessons and also through their writing of given exercises, examinations and assignments.

Most of the students prefer story-based content like 'A tea party' or a biography of a famous cricketer like 'Sachin Tendulkar'. Lessons and comprehension passages are learner-friendly, All lessons are glossed. As they are technical students, their expectations towards the non-technical subject like English are different. Most of the students have expectation of listening stories from their English teacher or text. They would like to have some change to shift over to the other ways of learning and want to avoid monotony of routine content-based learning. Since their expectations are not satisfied only through technical subjects, they would like to satisfy their expectations through some means. This particular need of the students has to be taken into consideration, while preparing the content of the text.

The text book is sufficient to meet the students' requirements to write their examinations the JNTUH has been conducting. But students are using the study guides for preparing their examinations. Some students who did not use any guides for the three internal examinations

also used the study guide for preparing the annual examination. The reason is readily available ready-made question and answers before the examinations.

3.4. WRITING SKILL

According to the study of Evans and Green (2007) students' problems centre on academic writing. Cai (2013) suggests that the skills the students find difficult are those less taught in their previous academic courses. The students are given five different assignments covering all five prescribed units. Every unit has exercises on writing skill. They are easy to follow for students. They are able to make progress in their writing skill. For example, when their writing is compared to their initial assignments and internal examination with the final assignment and the last internal, apart from the unit-wise writing tasks which are given in the text.

3.5. LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

It has become a common phenomenon to integrate language textbooks with audio and video as additional or supplementary resources for classroom language learning activities (Nalliveettil & Ali, 2013). To practice listening and speaking skills the exercises in the text are supported by an audio CD. Most of the students could not understand and recognise the importance of CD. It is necessary to know CD's importance by making them use at home as well as by testing the listening and speaking skills in the exam (s). Only then, a majority of them could make use of it. Every student is informed about the importance of CD, they are not sure of its importance until and unless they are using the CD.

3.6. THE RELEVANCE OF AUDIO CD

There are number of worthwhile educational, economic and societal goals that are more likely to be accomplished with the use of multimedia technology in the teaching and learning process (Capper, 2003). Knowing the varied advantages of a CD, an audio CD is included along with the prescribed text to improve listening and speaking skills of the learners.

Technical resources are designed and introduced to improve the language proficiency of the students (Nalliveettil & Ali, 2013). When the question on the CD is asked, a majority of

the students are unaware of CD's importance. Some of the students feel that 'for overall language development' and some other students understood that the role of the given CD is to improve listening and speaking skills. As students are examination focused, a majority of them would use the CD, if it is directly tested in the exams.

The researcher's (Pratibha, 2014) previous study with the third year B. Tech. students regarding the AECS lab attributed a lot of importance to computers for improving their communication skills.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Students have accepted the importance of English. They are habituated to use a study guide as a part of their preparation for examination but not a CD. They are examination focussed and are interested in the text book material (CD) if it is tested in any of the examinations. They have used study guides for facing their examinations except for grammar and vocabulary. Students are interested in a story-based content, a biography of cricketer, *etc.* Students need to have more practice in using vocabulary and improving their writing skills. The skills, which are practiced through the given CD, should also be tested in any of the examinations.

APPENDIX

1. What is the necessity of English in day-to-day life?
2. Do you interact with others in English in social or day-to-day life? Yes / No
3. How important is do you feel English in your life?
4. Are you satisfied with the prescribed text for language learning? Yes / No
5. My learning experience in this course was facilitated with the use of a text. Yes / No? Not sure
6. The instructions for the activities in the text were easy to understand. Yes / No
7. The information in the text book activities contributed to my previous knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Yes / No
8. The learning activities in the textbook made this a more interesting course. Yes /No
9. My interest in learning the language skills has increased as a result of taking this course. Yes /No

10. I gained confidence after attending this course. Yes /No
11. Do you think that any of the skills which are relevant to improve language skills were missing in the course? Yes / No
12. Do you think that it is enough to refer only textbook to face the internal examinations? Yes /No
13. Which other books did you use to prepare for the final examinations?
14. Which language skills are emphasized in the text book?
15. By practicing the given CD, one can face the examinations easily. Yes / No
16. Even though the content of the CD is not directly tested in the examinations, are you ready to use it? Yes / No

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