

SUKUMARI BHATTACHARJI*

*A Revaluation of Valmiki's Rama***

It is important to begin with the context, compositional stratification and literacy strategies of the *Ramayana* before we initiate a discussion of the text. Scholars agree that the composition began around the third century or second century BC. About the 2nd or 3rd century (some think that around the first half of 4th century BC,) the text came to acquire the present shape. Possibly around the 6th century BC, several of its episodes inspired regional ballads in different places. Sometime in the 3rd or 2nd century BC, several of these ballads came together to form a partial structure for the different sections (Kandas) of the *Ramayana*. About the end of the 2nd century BC, either Valmiki or some other great poet gave them a coherent shape. Within a hundred years of this — that is, between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD — the main narrative, spanning all Kandas between the Ayodhya and Lanka, was enriched with descriptions and literary tropes. Later, the first Brahmanya or Bhargava part was added on. As a result, the first half of the Adikanda as well as the Uttarakanda were completed by the 2nd century AD; the next major addition came around the 3rd century AD and the fourth and final addition or interpolation occurred possibly at the beginning of the 4th century.

There are many differences between the original narrative and the later additions; they are evident in language, grammar, tropes, themes as well as in religions and philosophical values. An analysis of these differences gives us an access to the nature and form of the different strata. The epic has two main parts. One is the original Kshatriya narrative which extends from the Ayodhya to the Lanka Kandas and includes the second, the Brahmanya or Bhargava addition; that is, the first half of the Adi or Balakanda and the Uttarakanda. In the original narrative, Rama is not divine, he is a human being: he

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becomes an incarnation of Vishnu in the addition. At the beginning of the *Adi Kanda*, Valmiki asks Narada: "Who in this entire world is so full of merit, courage, piety, gratitude, truthfulness, steadfastness, integrity... who looks after the welfare of all creatures — who is learned, able, handsome, self controlled, radiant, free of anger and envy? Whom do even the god fear when he is enraged in battle? (1/2 - 4). Narada replies: "I am going to describe the being who possesses all these virtues and who equals Vishnu in heroic qualities" (1/2/18). In another version Narada replies: "There is none who embodies all these qualities even among the gods. But there is one such man among men; listen to his account as I narrate it." (1/11).

Ramachandra is the "embodiment of these infinite virtues". If we discuss certain aspects of his character, we will perhaps acquire a better grasp of the social meaning and significance of the *Ramayana*. In the narrative he first appears as a son. We see him at the beginning as an obedient child who at the behest of his father, goes to kill demons who were disrupting the sacrificial rites of Vishvamitra. Lakshmana accompanies him. An additional segment was appended here to prove his divinity. This deals with the Ahalya episode. Rama hesitates to kill Tadaka and Vishvamitra tells him: there is no sin in killing this woman (1/25/27). The killing of demons establishes Rama's valour. Then Vishvamitra leads the two princes to the royal court of king Janaka where the wedding of his daughter was being organised. The daughter was actually the child of the Earth Goddess (Dharitri), King Janaka discovered her while tilling the soil. Hence she had been named Sita (the ploughshare). She was going to be won for marriage through a test of martial valour. It is important to note that this form of marriage was really a variant of dowry which prevailed in earlier societies. Rama could effortlessly string and break the Haradhanu - (the bow of Shiva) - at the court, and he was married to Sita. Among other wedding gifts he received male and female slaves and one hundred girls. The four brothers came home with their four brides and lived very happily for some time. Then Dasaratha desired to anoint Rama as the young heir apparent. Even though, legally Rama, the eldest son was entitled to the throne, we find that Dasaratha had sent Bharata away to the Kekaya kingdom and he had not invited king Janaka for the ceremony. Nor had he sent him any message. When Kaikeyi evoked two old, unredeemed pledges to make Bharata the heir apparent instead of Rama and when Lakshmana was beside himself in rage about this, Rama tells him: "Brother, long before this, when father married our mother Kaikeyi, he had promised our

grandfather, the king of Kekaya, that her son would inherit the kingdom" (2/107/3). Bharata had been sent off to Kekaya out of the fear that either he or Kaikeyi might invoke the promise and make some demand on this basis. Even though Dasaratha had insisted that "Bharata will never do such a thing, he is more pious than even Rama", Kaikeyi did not raise the issue, but got her way by reminding Dasaratha of the promises that he had made to her.

Rama's coronation had been announced the day before. He had spent a night of self-purification in the sacrificial fire chamber (Agnigriha) along with Sita. In the morning, when he was told about his terrible future, Rama had only one reproach: "I can enter burning flames at my father's command, why does my father not greet me as was his wont? Only one strange thing lacerates my heart, why did the king not tell me about Bharata's coronation himself? Had he commanded, I would have happily sacrificed Sita, my kingdom and even my life for my brother Bharata" (2/19/6-7). What is significant here is the idea that Sita could be given away like the one hundred girls who had formed a part of the dowry. Sita, the married wife, is not a person here, she is a mere object of exchange. This used to be the social location of women.

Lakshmana wanted to accompany Rama in the forests. Rama objected, but then relented after a while. When Sita made the same request, he tried to put her off by reminding her of the travails of life in the forests. He told her: "Stay back in the city and serve your parents in law." Brahmanical literature says that the bride is given away to the groom's matrimonial lineage. Ramachandra speaks in very much the same language here. But Sita's counter argument renders the lineage as secondary: Sita — whom Rama could happily have given away with Bharata — says: "I would not desire even heaven if you are not there. If I am separated from you, Rama, I will bid farewell to my life." (2/27/21), 2/19/5). Her words did not come from a sense of duty, nor from the role model established by chaste wives. They were spoken out of great love. Rama took her along with him and Sita committed herself to an exile for thirteen years.

Rama's love for his brothers is evident a number of times. He always treated Lakshmana and Bharata with deep affection, even if Lakshmana served him unremittingly like a slave engaged in hard labour, Rama gave his shoes to Bharata as a symbol of his own presence, he did not give him his upper garments. Bharata placed them on the throne for thirteen years. He himself sat below them and governed from Nandigram. This indicates a spirit of servitude which

was an accepted value in the social milieu of those times. Also, the older brother was revered virtually as a father. Sumitra said in farewell to Lakshmana: "Look upon Rama as Dasaratha". In ancient times, the older brother represented the father authority - not just in our country, but in many other civilisations as well. Bharata came to Rama to plead with him to claim his throne. Rama refused him, for he was committed to his father's pledge. He had complete faith, moreover, that in due time Bharata would restore his patrimony to him, once the exile was over: when he heard about the exile, Rama said, again and again, that he had no hankering for the throne. Nor did he argue that as the eldest son, he had absolute legal claim to the throne, irrespective of Dasaratha's promises to Kaikeyi. He did maintain a remarkable absence of covetousness in this respect. He would not be swayed from this even in the face of the combined counter arguments of Jabali, Vashistha, Lakshmana and Kaushalya.

In the forest, demons would often attack them and disrupt the meditation and the rites of the sages. Rama and Lakshmana were often forced to slaughter many demons. Sita objected that this was unnecessary violence, revealing a tenderness of disposition. Rama persuaded her, however, that this was necessary in order to relieve the sages from terror. On their way to the forests, on their first night of exile, they came upon the kingdom of Guhaka, the king of hunters, and a friend of Rama. Guhaka greeted them with a feast. Rama refused it, saying that according to the rites of their penance, they would only eat wild fruits. They could not receive gifts of food from others. But Guhaka could oblige them by feeding their horses, which is what he did (2/50/43, 44). Later, during their exile, the threesome did receive food from sages like Atri-Anasuya, Bharadvaja and others. Did they refuse Guhaka's gifts because he was a low caste hunter in cast?

Maricha arrived in the form of a golden deer, commissioned by Ravana. Sita wanted to possess it and would not be dissuaded, so Rama set off with his bow and arrows. Sita was left in charge of Lakshmana. Maricha cast an enchantment and Sita had the illusion that she could hear Rama cry out in danger. Terrified, she abused Lakshmana and forced him to go in search of Rama. This was unfair of her, but what lay behind it was great fear about the beloved. It was not, once again, a sense of duty, but the passion of true love.

After Lakshmana had left, Ravana came to Sita, at first disguised as an ascetic. He asked for hospitality and Sita made her obeisance to him and asked him to wait a while. Ravana then assumed his own form and tried to seduce her. He talked about his own powers and

wealth, he talked about his great desire for her and he also referred to her sorrowful existence as the companion of a poor and weak mortal husband. He also said that he would not be able to live without her (3/62/13). Sita replied to him: "You are but a jackal, and you desire to capture a lioness! You want to take out the fang from the poisoned fangs of a deadly serpent by teeth thrusting your fingers into her mouth. You want comfort after drinking lethal poison, you are about to thrust a needle into your eye, run your tongue across a razor. You desire to capture Raghava's beloved? You think you can cross the ocean with a log tied across your back? That you can reach out and grab the sun and the moon into your bare hands? You think you can rape Rama's beloved wife? Can you capture burning flames into a piece of cloth, can you abduct the devout wife of Rama?" These arrogant words come out of great love and trust. Sita had been with Rama in times of happiness and in time of trouble, had followed him from the palace to the forest. She had come to understand and know him, to place all her love and faith in him. She would find any rival of Rama absurd, however great his might and wealth.

Rama and Lakshmana were told of Sita's abduction by old and aged eagle Jatayu, a friend of Dasaratha who had watched it. Jatayu the big bird had witnessed the abduction. He was the sole witness to the humiliation of his friend Dasaratha's daughter-in-law. He alone had tried to obstruct Ravana, but was battered and defeated, he lived on just so that he could convey the news of Sita to Rama. After he died, Rama and Lakshmana performed his last rites as meticulously as they would do for their own father. Here Rama is courteous and dutiful. Then, in front of Lakshmana, he began his lamentations for Sita, and Lakshmana began to comfort him. However, when Lakshmana had abandoned his bride Urmila and followed Rama into the exile, Rama had not even mentioned that act of sacrifice. On the contrary, when Surpanakha arrived on the scene, Rama cruelly mocked her and advised her to choose Lakshmana instead. Even as a joke, it was tasteless. Lakshmana was too courteous to reproach Rama about it. In Rama's code of brotherly love, any acknowledgement of Lakshmana's silent and long separation from his wife seemed to be irrelevant, nor was there any gratitude about that. Sita herself never mentioned it either. Social norms were such that such services were taken for granted. But brotherly love was freely expressed when Lakshmana lay unconscious on the battlefield and Rama mourned: "How would my own life on recovering Sita help me now? There may be other women who are like Sita if I search throughout the

world. But there will not be another brother like Lakshmana who is a warrior and an adviser" (6/49/5). Once again when Lakshmana was stunned unconscious by the Shakti arrow, Rama repeats this: "Wives and friends are freely available but I know no land where another brother can be found" (6/101/15) or (Lakshmana), now that you are about to die, my life is meaningless, Sita or victory also appear as hollow gains (6/101/49). So we see, again and again, that love for the wife becomes subsidiary and insignificant in comparison with love for the brother. Also, Sita's love is more committed than Rama's love for her. So he can think that a wife is easily available, she is also easily disposable as well. This was a conviction that Rama held from the beginning. Even if we admit that his mourning for Lakshmana occurred at a time when Lakshmana was facing death, and some exaggeration was, thus, inevitable, still the two loves remain indisputedly unequal. Much of this is dictated by the social norms of the times which we shall discuss later. But the main contention remains that Lakshmana is not just a brother, he is also a man. So he has a place above Sita's.

In the Kishkindhya section, the friendship between Rama and Sugriva was based on mutual expectations. Sugriva's elder brother Bali had appropriated his wife and kingdom which he now enjoyed. Rama would restore both to Sugriva and in exchange, Sugriva and his army of monkeys would look for Sita and help Rama in his battle against Ravana. Both settled their pledges. Rama, moreover, bestowed much courtesy and gratitude upon Sugriva. But the first requirement was to defeat Bali. Rama demonstrated his ability to do so by piecing seven palm trees together with a single arrow-shot. Then he encouraged Sugriva to ask Bali for a combat. Sugriva however, was defeated and Rama could not come to the rescue for both the brothers looked exactly alike and he dared not hurt either of them. In the second round, Sugriva put on a garland of flowers as a mark of identification and Rama, hidden behind a tree killed Bali. Bali discovered what had happened and he abused Rama very strongly (4/17/16): Rama had violated the fundamental law of combat by striking at the enemy from behind cover. Did he, a Kshatriya warrior himself, not know that this was a cowardly act? Bali had earlier thought: "Rama was pious, how can he sin?" (4/16/5). But he is expectation was belied since he needed Sugriva's help to recover Sita, he himself being helpless in exile. When Bali abused him, Rama tried to fabricate a series of false arguments in his defence: "Kshatriya kings procure meat for themselves by hunting". Bali objected: "They

are allowed to kill only five kinds of beasts in hunt: porpoise, crocodile, cow, snake(?), rabbit and tortoise. Monkeys are not on their list" (4/17/39,40). Rama said; "This is Bharata's Kingdom, I depute for him and dispense justice. You have lived with your sister-in-law and that is a crime". Yet the Kishkindhya Kingdom did not belong to the Ikshvaku dynasty, it belonged to the monkeys. Rama also argued "All hunters hunt from behind cover" (4/18/38). But Bali had earlier pointed out: "The flesh of monkeys is forbidden meat for the Brahman and Kshatriyas. Ultimately, it was very clear that even if Rama would not admit it, he had, in fact, killed Bali through unfair means, like a coward. Why was that? Just so that he could look after his own interest. Such was Bali's valour that Rama feared that he might not be able to overpower him in a face to face combat. So he sacrificed the codes of a warrior heroes for the sake of self interest. This episode seems to cast doubt on tales of Rama's exploits in exile. The legend of his killing of 14,000 demons looks like an unreal fairy tale. In the very first combat Rama suffers a moral defeat.

Ravana brought Sita to the Ashoka grove at Lanka. Female demons kept guard around her. He would come to her often to tempt her with all the wealth of Lanka. When Sita proved adamant, he set her a deadline: unless she surrendered within a month, she would be carved up into pieces and cooked to be eaten. In the meantime, the army of monkeys had been looking for her everywhere in vain. It was Hanuman who leaped across the ocean, came to Lanka and came across Sita at the grove. How did she look then? "Emaciated by fasting, miserable and wretched, sighing all the time, looking like the waning moon" (5/15/19). But when Hanuman had first met Rama, he had appeared to him, even in the middle of his pathetic lamentations for Sita as: "Handsome, fair, powerful like a bull, with glowing complexion, arms like the trunk of an elephant ...wide chest, konine shoulders, long and rounded arms, solid as walls." And Lakshmana looked the same (4/3/10, 12, 14). It does not appear that the pain of separation had emaciated them, even though that was the first thing that Hanuman noticed about Sita. When Hanuman had reassured Sita, she narrated "a small tale about his conjugal life" and gave him a jewel from her forehead as a message to Rama when Hanuman brought it to Rama, he said, I won't live unless I see her, with her large black eyes," (5/66/10). He also said, "Her eyes are deep and black, she does not see any hope among the demons, I alone am her saviour, she is helpless without me". (6/5/15). When Sita asked Hanuman about Rama's welfare, she also enquired: "In his present

misery, is he able to perform all his duties as a prince and a hero?" (4/36/18). She is not anxious about his physical welfare alone, she wants to know about his dutiful, martial valour, his honourable royal soul. Her love intends to inspire and uplift, to elevate love into a higher goal. This love is of a different order and it is in this love that Rama repeatedly humiliates at the end of the narrative.

Sita also had her fears. She asked: "Has he not forgotten his affection for me during this exile? Are you sure he is coming to save me from this danger?" (8/36, 40). May be, there was some truth in the first part of the question, since at the end of the war, Rama doubted Sita and forgot his love for her. The second part of the question was partly belied but was also partly realised. Sita was, indeed, rescued from Lanka. But Rama made it clear that the battle was not fought for her; her liberation turned into loss. We shall come to that later.

When Rama entered Lanka, his first thought was: "Vaidehi, whose eyes are like the baby deer's, now lies on the ground and suffers in my absence" (6/24/8, 9). "When will my chaste Sita who is like a daughter of the gods, embrace me and shed tears of joy?" (6/5/20). After the war was over, Hanuman told Rama that Sita was keen to meet him. The pious Rama plunged into a deep reflection at this with somewhat moist eyes. Then he sighed, looked around and commanded Vibhishana to bring Sita to the court, bathed and dressed (6/114/4, 5). Sita herself wanted to come immediately. Just as she was, so long had the separation been. But she obeyed her husband. She came on a palanquin, that made its way through a large crowd. Vibhishana tried to part the crowd but Rama said angrily: "Let Sita come on foot" (6/114/30). Hanuman, Lakshmana and Sugriva thought that Rama's command denoted some displeasure with Sita (6/114/33). Rama's feelings were indeed, ambiguous since he feared scandal mongering by people. Princess Sita went on foot to meet her husband across a crowded and public royal court.

When she made her obeisance to him and stood with her head bowed, Rama began to express his inner thoughts. Later on, after her so-called ordeal by fire, Rama would say that he himself had no doubt whatsoever about her chastity, it was just the fear of scandal among his subjects that made him think of abandoning her. Yet, at this point of time, according to Valmiki, he did express his "innermost thoughts".

What were these thoughts? What did he say on getting Sita back, after all his lamentations in the forest when she could not be found? "I triumphed over my enemies in battle and I have also achieved your

release. My manhood is vindicated, my revenge motive is satisfied, I have undone a wrongdoing. My enemy and my dishonour have both been destroyed. My manhood and my efforts stand vindicated. I have redeemed my pledge, I have recovered my self-control" (6/115/1-4). At this, Sita's eyes filled up, at the same time they brightened like a doe's. Rama continued: "May you be well. But, remember, all my efforts in war, all my success which I achieved with the valour of my friends, was not meant for you. I did what I did to protect my honour, to undo the calumny that my great lineage had suffered. Your moral character, however, is no longer trustworthy. Your presence now offends me, just as the lamp hurts one who has a sore eye. All the world lies before you, you can go anywhere you like, I permit you to do so. I have no more need of you. No upright man, born of an honourable lineage, would take back a wife who had stayed in another's house you have been in the arms of Ravana, his lustful gaze has besmirched you, I cannot take you back and tarnish my pure and glorious lineage. I have got what I wanted from my victory, I do not desire you. Go wherever you like, choose Lakshmana, or Bharata, Shatrughna, or Sugriva or Vibhishana. Ravana could not have kept his hands off a beautiful, attractive woman like you" (6/115/15-24).

In reply, according to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita says: "Valorous one, I am not what you take me to be. May your own strength of character give you confidence to trust me" (6/116/6). In Gorresio's version of *Ramayana*, and in the Vanaparva of the *Mahabharata*, there is a somewhat different articulation. Rama says to Sita: "Vaidehi, you are free to leave now. I have done my duty. It was not seemly that you would spend the rest of your life at Ravana's city after leaving me as your husband. That is why I killed the demon (Ravana). But for a person like me, for someone who knows the difference between piety and impiety, it is not possible to live with a woman who has been with another man. It does not matter whether you are chaste or unchaste. Maithili, I can no longer take my pleasure from you, you are like the clarified butter which has been licked by a dog." (3/275/10-13)

We should note a few things here. In the entire dialogue, neither Sita nor Rama used an intimate form of address, nor did they call each other husband or wife. While Sita calls Rama Mahabahu or the strong armed one, Rama calls her Vaidehi, Maithili or Bhadra. Rama says unambiguously that even if Sita is chaste, she remains unacceptable. She had been taken away by another man, so just as clarified butter which is licked by a dog cannot be used for a sacrifice,

he cannot “enjoy” Sita. In ancient India, the “enjoyment” is the fundamental basis of conjugal relationship. Rama tells her cruelly that he did not go to war to rescue her, but to ensure the piety of his Ikshvaku lineage which would be damaged if Sita was to spend her life in Ravana’s household. When Lakshmana had taken his farewell from Sumitra before following Rama into exile, his mother had told him: “Look upon Rama as Dasaratha and upon Sita as me, your mother”. No Rama tells Sita to select either Lakshmana or Bharata or anyone else as her companion. Ordinarily, the scripture would allow only the widow to live with her brother-in-law. Does Rama then want to say that he is dead as far as Sita is concerned? Is a woman abandoned by her husband to be compared with a widow? And what about Sugriva or Vibhishana. Is Sita to live with a monkey or monster? Who gave Rama the right to humiliate Sita? Surpanakha had desired to marry Rama, did that make him butter which has been licked by a dog? Did his lamentation for Sita express real grief, or mere frustration about losing a source of enjoyment? Even though Dasaratha was polygamous, Rama had been content with a single wife. But this was no great thing, for Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna were also monogamous as well. On the other hand, in the original *Ramayana* of Valmiki, there is a sentence about his coronation as heir: Rama “wives” will be pleased. May be in those days, princes had many wives, but twice Sita was the chief consort Rama did not remarry at the time of the Asvamedha sacrifice; he used a golden image of Sita instead. At the same time, it does remain true that all four princes were monogamous and Rama could claim no special distinction. His love for Sita was, indeed, expressed when after her abduction his grief drove him nearly mad. That is why his words — “you are free, Vaidehi, you can leave” — sound entirely out of place. Later, the gods declared Sita to be entirely chaste. Rama then claimed that he had known that all along, but he had spoken otherwise only out of fear of scandal. However, Valmiki called these words his “inner most thoughts” second, he could have asked her to clear herself, if he had doubts about her chastity. Third, Hanuman had seen that even after Ravana tried to terrorise and tempt Sita, she remained firm. Fourth, Sita, too, could have doubted Rama’s fidelity. Fifth, no scripture says that you can abandon your wife if you doubt her. Sixth, even if you do so, you do not need to describe her as butter licked by a dog in front of demons, monkeys and a younger brother. Seventh, he had neither the need nor the right to tell her in public to select from among her brothers-in-law, or the kings of monkeys and

monsters and Eighth, Sita became 'as intolerable to him as the lamp is to a man with a sore eye.' Whose affliction are we talking about? Who is guilty?

In response to Rama's terrible words, Sita said: "My body was touched when I was hardly conscious, I was overpowered. That was not my fault, fate alone is to blame. What I can control is my heart and that belongs to you. I am helpless if my body is overpowered. I have grown up with you, and still you think you do not know me! I am, indeed, accused. You cannot forget that you married me when I was a mere child, you forget my adoration, my strength of character" (6/116/6, 9, 10, 15, 16). She makes a distinction between body and mind. Rama gave priority to her body which he could not protect from another, a stronger man. But the mind that had remained true since her childhood, commanded no importance whatsoever. Sita asked Lakshmana to prepare her funeral pyre since her life was meaningless once she had lost Rama's trust and love. According to Valmiki, Rama did not countermand this demand and Lakshmana started building up the pyre. While going around it, Sita said: "I remain true to Rama, let the god of fire protect me." In the Vedic age an Ordeal by Fire was common practice, it was called "Satyakriya" or the Act of Truth. The gods were invoked to stand witness to one's purity. Sita invoked the god of fire and then she called out to other gods. Later Rama would say: "It was necessary for Sita to enter the flames in public view since she spent a long time in Ravana's household (6/118/13).

After the ordeal was over, they returned to Ayodhya and some time passed by blissfully. Sita became pregnant, she developed a craving to visit the sanctuary of Valmiki and Rama agreed to satisfy it. But his subjects began a whisper campaign: "Ravana had abducted Sita and had enjoyed her, how can Rama enjoy her now? Now we have to follow suit since the king is a model for his subjects" (7/43/17, 13). Rama brooded over it and concluded that he needed to banish Sita, even though he admitted "I know in my heart of hearts that Sita is famous for her purity" (7/45/10).

Rama terminated his conjugal life with a lie to Sita. This was the second time that he abandoned her, even after her honour, had been cleared by the gods in front of Rama and Lakshmana. Rama did not even think it necessary to try and convince his subjects about Sita's proven chastity.

A little while after this, a Brahmana lost his son in his childhood. Rama's priests told him that this had happened because someone somewhere in his realm had sinned. It was discovered eventually that

a Shudra called Shambuka was engaged in penance so that he could achieve immortality. He told this to Rama himself (7/6/2). "While the Shudra was still talking, Rama took out a bright weapon and beheaded him." The gods praised him and said: "Rama, you have served the gods, you prevented this Shudra from attaining heaven" (67/2, 4, 7, 8).

Then Rama decided to perform the Asvamedha sacrifice. A golden image of Sita was constructed for the purpose. Lava and Kusha, Sita's twin sons, who had been born in Valmiki's sanctuary, had grown into adolescence in the meantime. Valmiki advised them to attend the sacrifice in the garb of young ascetics and to sing the tale of Rama for the assembled people. Rama sent for them and when they had introduced themselves, he sent for Valmiki. He asked him to send Sita to the court where she would prove her chastity, yet again through another ordeal. Valmiki swore that the twin belonged to Rama, he pledged all the merit he had accumulated through his penances (7/96/20, 21). But this was not enough for Rama.

So Sita had to prove her chastity for the third time in front of her own sons, the curious and suspicious assembly, in front of sages, priests and the entire massive crowd which had been invited to attend the sacrifice. The first time had been at Lanka, the second time was when she was abandoned during her pregnancy for fear of rumours and the third time was at the royal court. Sita, the daughter and the wife of kings, came forward to prove herself. She did her obeisances to all her elders and her husband and she went round the flames. Then she said: "If I have never even thought of another man apart from Rama, if I have been Rama's in words, heart and action, if I am speaking the truth, then let the goddess Earth take me in" (7/97/14, 16). As soon as she had uttered these words, the earth opened up and the goddess Earth appeared enthroned. She took Sita upon her lap and both then disappeared. Rama and his subjects were anxious simply about her physical chastity. Now Sita proved that her radiance came from the purity of her heart. Her words came from a far higher conception of conjugal love.

This time Rama could not tempt Sita back to him again. Sita did not ask the gods to testify to her chastity. The daughter of Earth wanted to go back to the earth itself, she refused the glory of the queen, of the mother of princess. A husband was supposed to protect the wife from all dishonour. But throughout the epic, Rama dishonours his wife. So Sita withdrew from him entirely. She proved that she was pure, she also proved that she was not a mere object of enjoyment.

Since Rama was obsessed about his lineage, she left two heirs to carry on his line. So this one time Sita stood up for the self respect of her entire sex. Rama went into deep mourning again, he cursed Mother Earth for not restoring Sita to him. But he was forced to pay a high price for his groundless suspicions.

After he had ruled for some time, Brahma informed him that it was now time for him to return to heaven as Vishnu. Rama slowly descended into the water of the Sarayu and the gods took him to heaven where he was Vishnu and Sita was Lakshmi.

The epic raises several questions about Rama's character. The killing of Bali from behind a cover was definitely a crime for a warrior hero, it was a cowardly and selfish act. We find evidence of caste discrimination when Rama refused the hospitality of Guhaka and when he killed Shambuka to revive the dead son of a Brahmin. In the kingdom of Rama, the life of a Brahmin obviously carried far greater value than the life of a Shudra.

We find his rejection of Sita to be his most problematic act. Were his lamentations after her abduction mere rhetorical flowerishes?

We need to remind ourselves that all the epics of the world conclude with a victory in war (See the *Mahabharata*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *El Cid*, *Kalevala*, *Nibelungenlied*, etc.). Even the *Ramayana* at one time had ended with the killing of Ravana. Bhasha does not refer to the Balakanda and Uttarakanda. In the 6th century, well after Valmiki's *Ramayana* had acquired its final addition, Bhatti wrote his own epic which he called *Ravanabadham*, even though it did include the fire ordeal episode. The *Raghuvamsam* does not refer to the rejection of Sita at Lanka and it uses only a single ambiguous hold to indicate her ordeal by fire. At the same time, there in the 14th Canto Sita was more explicit when she sent Rama a message through Lakshmana which said: "He saw with his own eyes that the fires made me pure" (14/69). Probably, Kalidasa disliked the fire ordeal episode in the *Ramayana* and he left it out of his own text. At the same time, this sharp retort by Sita expresses his own sympathy for her cause.

What can explain the contradictions in Rama's character? On the one hand, he was a true warrior hero with a strict code of heroism. He gave up the throne and went into exile to redeem his father's pledge, thereby upholding an ideal morality. He killed countless demons to make the forests safe for the sages. He performed the last rites of Jatayu, who was a friend of his father. Why would such a man commit three wrongs: the killing of Bali, the killing of Shambuka and the rejection of Sita.

II

We cannot find a complete explanation within the textualisation of his character. We need to understand the entire epoch when the text was composed; that is, roughly the age of the Kushana Empire, between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD. When the sections between the second half of the Adikanda and the Lankakanda were composed. This was a time when the country went through profound changes in its social philosophical and intellectual structures. Even earlier, there had been waves of foreign invasions; very gradually, their beliefs, rites, social customs penetrated into Indian traditions. Between the 4th century BC and the 2nd century AD, there were Yavana Saka, Parada, Pahlava, Kushana and Murunda invasions. The larger changes that occurred were reflected in the Bhargava additions in the epics.

Vatsyana's *Kamasutra* was composed in these times. Twice it referred to women as a commodity, an object of exchange (2/1/13, 4/1/1). The *Bhagavadgita*, too, was composed at this time where the entire responsibility for miscegenation was ascribed to women (1/40), even though, obviously, both men and women need to be equally implicated in the process. Clearly, there was a panic about marital and sexual relationships with foreigners. Women came to occupy a far lower location as a consequence. Manu does not allow her access to the sacred thread: for her; marriage is the single sacrament, service to the husband is the substitute for the study of the Vedas and asceticism was translated as patrilocality.

This, then, was the age when women were denied institutionalised education and were reduced as object of exchange. She is considered as the sole cause of miscegenation, the most evil of beings. Foreign invasions intensified fears of miscegenation. A Syrian author, Bardosanes, wrote a book in 140 AD, called *Book of the Laws of the Countries*. There he observed that the Kushanas never expected sexual allegiance from their wives, they saw them as mistresses. No doubt, these fed into fears about a slackening of conjugal relations in the Aryavarta region and these fears led to an incarceration of women. Suspicions about her became rife.

When we come to the second phase of the composition of the *Ramayana*, where the last half of the Yuddhakanda belongs; we find that the Kshatriya hero is not merely a great warrior. The epic had in the second half moved away from epic values to aesthetic values.

Once Rama moves away from the ideal warrior to the ideal king, he becomes the measure of perfect conduct whose moves are

prescribed in contemporary religions scripture in the *Mahabharata*, in Manu and in some epigraphic remains of those times. From the Maurya age, and especially in the Kushana time, the king was elevated to a divine status. It was in Kushana times that a royal mint was founded for the first time. Foreign trade as well as internal trade expanded and again culture and handicrafts developed further. The king's stature grew, since he was in charge of all these activities. His subjects were stratified into the wealthy and the poor: we find evidence of this in the Jaina Prakrita Texts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The king had to ensure that the wealthy was secure in their wealth and the poor remained in subordination. The *Mahabharata* and other contemporary texts, therefore, ascribe divinity to the king, (*Mahabharata*, 12/65/28 and *Manu Samhita* 8/5, 14).

The Shudra had to secure the three upper castes. He was not supposed to accumulate wealth. In case he did so, the scriptures prescribed that he should spend that in the service of Brahmins and in sacrifices. The upper castes had free access to Shudra women and the Shastric prescriptions underlined their subordination and dishonour. As the Vaishya section increasingly moved towards trade, the Shudra's allotted task became agriculture and husbandry. Very rarely did he gather wealth. Manu does refer to 'self sufficient' Shudras (7/138) and "righteous" Shudras. Medhatithi, the commentator, allows such a Shudra to cook for sacrifices. The *Yajnavalkya Samhita* allows some rights in the sacrificial ceremony to the Shudra (1/121, Manu, 3/165). Vrihaspati says that he could offer gold to release himself from unpaid labour on the fields (12/16) and that he had to pay the highest rates of royal taxes if he was a merchant. All this indicates an upward mobility in economic and social spheres which made them a source of anxiety for the upper castes. This context explains the intolerance towards Shambuka, even though the *Gita* does allow women and Shudras salvation if they worshipped Krishna. In India the sacralisation of the king involved the duty of preserving caste hierarchies. The first king in the *Mahabharata* (Prithu, the son of Vena) promised to prevent miscegenation (12/50/114-15).

Why was miscegenation such a menace? First of all, there were about five or six foreign invasions within a span of four hundred years that significantly introduced a foreign presence as well as expanded the scope of miscegenation within the social body. Foreigners were gradually absorbed as Shudras and then some of them were given the status of Kshatriyas. All that upset and confused the tidy scheme of four Varnas and new regulations slowly emerged

to deal with mixed castes. This led to a fragmentation of castes. Again, even if foreign elements were ascribed a Shudra status, their victories and power forced a superior ascription which the lawgivers resented. (See *Mahabharata*, 7/158/20). This was fuelled by the pervasive anxieties about the Kali Yuga, the final epoch in the four-age time cycle: all Shastras had characterised miscegenation as a characteristic of it and it was assumed that the Shudra would then no longer accept his subordination. Not only would he encroach upon the professions earmarked for upper castes, he would also despise them. Already by the 1st century AD., we find such fears in the *Yugapurana* (Verses 50, 53, 54).

Fears also gathered around women, for, Shastras unanimously declared that women would lose their chastity in the Kali Yuga; worse, they would become self-reliant and autonomous. (See *Yugapurana*, verses 83-66; *Mahabharata*, 3/188/77). She would even engage in agriculture (*Yugapurana*, verse 83). Possibly, the foreign women in their midst were not entirely dependent or subordinate and their example provided an alternative to some women of Aryavarta. At least, some resentment about her subordinate status was articulated in the Vanaparva (in the Bhargava interpolation) in the *Mahabharata*, when Draupadi tells Satyabhama that she was no more than a servant to her husbands: "I serve the husbands whom I regard as angry serpents." At the same time, the Bhargava interpolation, too, ascribed this servile status to women. She was not allowed any independence, she could have no contact with other men.

Why was that? There was some accumulation of private property at the upper echelons where the men became determined to ensure that their children would inherit the wealth and transmit it down the legitimate lineage. Women's freedom would breach the absolute certainty about the bloodline. So Shastras were composed to prescribe an absence of freedom for women, to put her under lifelong bondage: to her father in her childhood, her husband in her youth, and to her sons in her old age. To make assurance doubly sure, the woman was forbidden to approach any other man. At the same time, the man was not bound to her, he had every right to many wives, to mistresses and to prostitutes. Monogamy was not required from him, there was no male equivalent to the word Sati. That is why, when the monster Viradha snatched away Sita, Rama was not worried by the fact that she was in the hand of a monster who ate flesh and could eat Sita. His only worry was that she had been touched by another man. Ravana had to touch her in order to abduct her. The mere touch was

enough to make him lose all conviction in her chastity. He was no longer sure that his future progeny would be legitimate heirs to the Ikshvaku dynasty. Here, Sita as accused, was not allowed to defend herself: Social norms marked her out as guilty. The same thing happened to Shambuka

In the Kali age, women, Shudras were supposed to defy husband and upper caste's, Sita respectively, story is a metaphor for the abduction of women by foreign invaders.

III

What do we know about the sacred kingdom of Rama? We find that an ambitious Shudra was killed there, so that a Brahmin child could be restored to life. It was the king who performed this sacred duty. The fears about the Kali age were inculcated to consolidate the power of the upper castes, the wealthy and the rulers, while the poor, the so-called "low" castes and women did not have basic human dignity. In the Bhargava interpolation, in the *Ramayana*, in the *Mahabharata* and in *Manusamhita*, the woman was an object of exchange, an object of pleasure. In the realm of Rama, the Shudra was killed, in the *Mahabharata*, Ekalavya was crippled. What is the significance of the Kali myth? It functioned to ensure the hierarchies. To preserve the status quo.

We find an account of four kings from three different groups in the *Ramayana*: Dasaratha, Sugriva, Ravana and Rama. Dasaratha himself died in great grief but the description of his rule seems to suggest prosperity and peace among his subjects. A similar picture seems to hold for the realm of Sugriva and Ravana. So the concept of an ideal realm was widely shared and Rama, too, followed the pattern. He departed from it on two occasions: in the killing of Shambuka and in the banishment of Sita. The first was to safeguard Brahmin interests, the second to please his subjects.

In Dasaratha's realm Shudras faithfully served the upper castes, (1/6/29) and there was no miscegenation (16/12). One assumes that Bharata's rule followed these precepts. Bali, the king of monkeys, was a despot and a brave warrior, Monkeys did not observe caste, so the king was not required to prevent miscegenation. But when Sugriva became king, he took his sister-in-law Tara as his wife. Again, the demon king Ravana, too, was not supposed to protect the realm from miscegenation. Mandodari's lamentations after Ravana's death and Hanuman's account of the prosperity of Lanka suggest that Ravana was a successful monarch. At the same time, there are many indications

that Ravana had dishonoured many helpless women.

Rama came upon the throne rather late in life and he ruled to augment the fame of his ancestors. His subjects adored him, crops were plentiful, rain was abundant, the air was gentle. All castes performed their ordained rule, there was no envy, everyone was happy, pious, honest. Rama ruled for 11,000 years, he defeated many kings, he acquired great fame (6/128/102-7). It seems that his subjects were satisfied with their ruler. When these subjects began to cast aspersion on Sita, Rama demanded that Sita should prove her chastity to disarm their suspicions, as well as his own (7/95/6).

So in all these realms, women do not command respect, they have no inviolable dignity. In Rama's realm, Shudras are similarly deprived. They served faithfully, but service was enjoined upon them. It was not spontaneous.

Ramachandra's identity as ruler lies in his ability to rule over Shudras and women firmly, to keep them in their place — so that all the anxieties about Kaliyuga may be allayed. He preserved social order, social inequality. He pleased the gods by killing Shambuka. He was an obedient son, he was true to his friend and caring about his subjects, he loved his brothers, he dispensed justice and he performed the sacrificial rites; all this made him the most perfect of kings in his times. The norms commanded that a Shudra who aspires to something beyond his caste-ordained duties, must be killed. They laid down that an abducted woman must go through humiliating ordeal and penance.

Rama obeyed these norms. He bequeathed the throne of Ayodhya to Bharata, while his own sons who were born of Sita, were given the kingdom of Koshala and Uttarakoshala. Even after Sita had conclusively established her chastity, the sons of her womb were not allowed to inherit the throne of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

Rama is the example for a new conception of kingship, he was no mere epic hero. The epic hero was simply valorous, he was not the exemplary king. Rama was one such warrior — hero upto the killing of Ravana. Then the epic was overhauled and his narrative location was revised in the first half of the Adikanda and in the Uttarakanda. He now emerged as the king who is the guardian of the Varna order. He protects his realm ever-vigilantly from all self-assertion by women and Shudras, he guards his people from the encroachment of Kali. He had to pay a price for his role. Monogamous himself, he lost his only wife, he sacrificed his own conjugal happiness to the emergent values that spelt a new emphasis on female chastity. Did he suffer

great pain? Or did his cruel words to Sita truly express his "innermost thought"? If the latter was true, then the epic narrative was overpowered in the hands of the Shastras.

These days we find a fierce attempt to artificially receive the vision of Ramarajya in popular consciousness. Is that vision truly desirable, even after the experience of Deorala and Arwal? Do we subscribe to the oppression of Shudras and women, do we endorse the killing of a Shudra, the banishment of an innocent, pregnant woman?

RECENT MANOHAR TITLES

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Hirōyuki Kotani

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Hirōyuki Kotani is Professor of History at the Tokyo Metropolitan University.

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SUBHORANJAN DASGUPTA*

A Novel Protest Against Globalisation

On November 9, 1989, the Council of Ministers still ruling the German Democratic Republic decided to open the border to the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin. The Berlin Wall fell on the same day as several thousand East Germans responded to the decision by travelling to various parts of West Germany. Those who visited were given a 'welcome allowance' of DM 100 each. More than any other event, this collapse of the Wall and the crossing over of thousands symbolized the then irrevocable eclipse of state socialism. With no contending ideology around, global capitalism's advocates declared the end of history in that heady phase.

But, in the midst of this tumultuous period — to be precise, just a week before on All Soul's Day, November 2, 1989 — a German art-historian Alexander Reschke was spotted on the opposite eastern side, in Danzig. He still carried the embers of 1968 uprising with him and a chance meeting occurred between him and a Polish widow, Alexandra Piatkowska who specialized in gilding. They were both over 60 but they fell in love. And out of this love which itself defied long-standing German-Polish enmity, a unique idea flowered. Professor Reschke described the 20th Century as the Century of Expulsion and proposed that they could attempt in their own small way to bring the uprooted back to their soil after their death. How? By building the German-Polish Cemetery of Reconciliation. Describing it as "our great nation-reconciling idea" both concluded that "dead enemy was no longer an enemy".¹ A simple and fervent hope inspired the two. In the words of the Professor, "What we call home means more to us than such concepts as fatherland or nation, and that is why so many of us long to be buried in our home soil... No, I am not referring to the right to a homeland demanded by our refugees'

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association. Our true home has been lost to us forever, a consequence of our crimes - but the right of the dead to return is something that could and should be urged.”² These words not only tried to invoke the spirit of reconciliation among peoples but also hoped to cement it with the harmonizing concepts of redemptive memory and cumulative identity. An old German widow, for example, who had to leave Danzig in 1947 as a refugee and had found her shelter, say, in Cologne, aspired to return to the soil of her birthplace after her death, not as an intruder but as a friend. German Alexander and Polish Alexandra were also convinced that their ‘borderless’ idea would inspire many others in different parts of the fragmented globe. They just wanted to set the paradigm or the counter-paradigm of reconciliation in motion when capital and market basking in the glow of their recent victories were projecting another kind of a unilinear world. Their joint venture-vision appeared so salvational at that particular moment, so profoundly critical of what was going on. Indeed, Gunter Grass himself articulated his corrective dream in the voice of Professor Reschke, “all those who had fled, all the Armenians and Crimean Tatars, Jews and Palestinians, Bangladeshis, Estonians, Poles and finally Germans ... Many died on the way. Typhus, hunger and cold. And the numberless dead. Millions. Buried by the roadside. Individual graves and mass graves. Death factories, Genocide — the still unfathomable crime. Therefore, today, on All Soul’s Day, we should”.³

Yes, the two protagonists of ‘The Call of The Toad’ began with boundless energy and with the help of the strong Deutschmark. Those Germans who wanted to be buried in Danzig — still an indestructible part of their intercultural identity and memory — made contributions and the meticulous Professor Reschke supervised the accounts. He did some intelligent investment and profits began flowing in. But he himself and Alexandra did not pocket a pfennig - both wanted the surplus to be invested in newer ventures, in newer cemeteries, in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia. But some other members of this organisation, Polish and German, had already scented the gold. They were determined to turn this essentially self-sufficient, humanist enterprise into a crass, money-spinning machine. At this stage of the novel, Grass unmasked the advance of the profiteering motive with superb insight. It all began with the proposal of catering to the living, that is, “We should also build comfortable retirement communities”⁴ for the once-displaced Germans now armed with the formidable Deutschmark among the beachpines on the shores of the Baltic. A

catchy slogan 'Twilight of Life in the Homeland' was floated for the purpose. Then came the really macabre suggestion which clashed in spirit and substance with the original idea. Vielbrand, the most astute businessman in the group, declared, "Space should now be designated for the reburial of bodies and bones ... I believe we can handle well over thirty thousand as a start. Economies of scale."⁵ This proposed necrophilia was pegged to the cause of uplifting the Polish economy with the help of the Deutschmark. Heated arguments followed with Alexandra Piatkowska laughing out aloud and asking cynically, "If this enterprise would improve the health of the Polish middle class?"⁶ Her apprehensions were bearing fruit for she had asked her lover sometime back, "What should we Poles do when you fat moneybags come with Deutschmark?"⁷

The outcome of the bitter struggle that ensued was predictable — the might of the marauding, transborder currency won. While 37,000 reburial applications with basic fees raised to 2000 DM were rapidly processed, a conscientious member Erna Brakup protested, "If reburial goes on here, ladies and gentleman, soon there won't be no room for real dead people ..You only get reburied if you're rich and German. And the Poles make money out of it. But if you are a poor devil your bones can stay where they put them in bad times. There's no justice to it".⁸ Alexandra Piatkowska went one decisive step forward and said, "Disgrace has befallen us ...From now on the dead will be disposed of unconsulted. Greed and sacrilege have the upper hand. More and more German demands are on the agenda".⁹ The most trenchant condemnation was voiced by the German Professor who before tabling his resignation outlined the immoral victory of the aggressive market in the following words. There is no point in dissecting his statement because Grass' prose hits the nail on the head and reveals what the current phase of capitalism is all about, "Here and now the limit of the acceptable has been reached. This reburial business is thoroughly reprehensible, if not obscene. No, I no longer recognize our idea. What was lost in the war is being retaken by economic power. True, it is being done peacefully. No dictator rules, only the free market. Am I right, Herr Vielbrand? Money rules. Frau Piatkowska and I both regretfully must draw the line. We resign".¹⁰

In one of his many interviews Professor Amartya Sen observed that statements made by creative writers in their texts often communicate the reality more effectively than prolix economics. He told me, "Often we (economists) miss the forest in pursuit of the trees, and sometimes literary remarks bring us very sharply back to

the central issues".¹¹ I was reminded of his estimate while reading this remarkable novel, 'The Call of the Toad' written during 1989-91 and published in 1992. It served as a running, creative commentary on what was happening in the heart of Europe. It defined in literary terms the essence of globalisation which, to depend on, Professor Amiya Bagchi's formulation, "is a policy deliberately aimed at spreading certain institutions, modes of doing business, producing and trading commodities, services and information in all the states of the world".¹² Taken to its logical and extreme conclusion, this single-minded pursuit, after the co-option of a few compradors, as it happened in Poland's Danzig, would hardly hesitate to indulge in necrophilia if that ensured profits.

This calculated co-option did not turn Poland into an Arcadian example of market economy. Without wasting a single word on what Poland had been in the days of state socialism, Grass underlined the later reality with the help of cutting enquires and razor-sharp exposures. According to the German Professor, this reality was pockmarked by "thriving black market, the children begging outside his hotel, the increase in crime and the increased power of the Catholic clergy".¹³ The recently enacted currency reforms added to the woes provoking Alexandra Piatkowska to comment in fear, "Poland (is) now doomed to live next-door to the Deutschmark. What will we do when you come with fat moneybags to buy us?"¹⁴ Piatkowska's question is our question too. While the question went unanswered, Grass depicted the massive infiltration of casino-capitalism across the border, "The joint venture businesses that put on such a show of optimism are already falling. Just as a year ago the Americans refused to take over the rundown Lenin Shipyard, now the Norwegians hesitate to buy into the deficit-ridden Paris Commune Shipyard in nearby Gdynia. At best we see pseudo-deals between foreign firms that have post-office box addresses and native factory managers, each taking a cut".¹⁵ But the global market ensured a criminal profusion of goods even in this grim scenario — Greenland crabmeat, Norwegian smoked salmon, sliced mortadella, Spanish olives and even a fruit called kiwi from faraway New Zealand. This exotic list ended with the remark, "Expensive, too expensive".¹⁶

No matter how much and how many delicacies glittered in a few shops way beyond the reach of the common man, the erstwhile socialist Poland succumbing to the assault of the market was mired in chaos and despair. Market did not keep its promise. With the help of a few pithy sentences, Grass described the actuality which followed

the supposed end of history, "Prices rose higher and higher, in utter contempt of wages and salaries ...Not only the farmers were complaining, the overall mood was in keeping with the wet, cold May. Report followed report, each filled with disaster, and because nothing was right at home, the politicians took refuge in the vast perspectives of the European idea. Unified, the Germans were more disunited than ever, and free Poland surrendered to the tyrannical decrees of the Church. No sign of spontaneous revival. Even in the middle of May, no rape blossoms in sight."¹⁷

It was not possible for Grass to accept this futility as the last word. Accordingly, he invented a counterhythm in the dream and praxis of a colourful and determined Bengali entrepreneur, Subhas Chandra Chatterjee, who wanted to conquer the city-streets of Europe with his environment-friendly, gaily painted cycle rickshaws. A friend of Alexander Reschke and holder of a British passport, Chatterjee has advanced step by step inside Fortress Europe and has made Danzig his home. He is not only eager to produce and sell his vehicles carrying melodious, tinkling bells but also keen to introduce the Bengali, Indian or Asian ethos in the West. To attain that end he has brought over his relatives from Calcutta and Dhaka who are cooperating in an ideal manner with their Polish colleagues. Envisioning the unstoppable future which would see a great migration, Chatterjee told Reschke in their very first encounter: "As long as the old European order prevails, there will indeed be problems. But it won't last. As the ancient Greeks knew, all is flux. We shall come. We will have to come, because it's getting a little cramped over there. Everybody pushed everybody else; the end will be one great push that will be impossible to stop".¹⁸ There is, decidedly, an element of rosy naivete in this Bengali entrepreneur's vision, especially when he said, "Even the Poles, who just want to be Poles, will learn that next to the Black Madonna there is room for another black divinity, because of course we will bring our beloved and feared Mother Kali with us."¹⁹ But in that particular phase of history with socialism beaten and battered and the market fired by aggressive avarice, Grass, perhaps could think of no other better counterpoint. He described the cycle rickshaw in admiring terms "Spotlessly clean. A folding red-and-white striped top for the protection of his passengers in inclement weather. The frame dark blue, without a rust spot or any sign of peeling paint"²⁰ and turned it into the commodity of deliverance. The dream of this deliverance was articulated by the eloquent Chatterjee who proclaimed, "The future belongs to the cycle rickshaw. Not only in

impoverished Europe. All over Europe”.²¹

This conviction was based on the logic of consumer-utility, social benefit as well as on the capitalist concept of untapped markets. Reschke listened spellbound while Chatterjee outlined his blueprint, “(He) held forth on the impending collapse of the automobile traffic in all the urban centres of Europe and on the advantages of the highly manoeuvrable, virtually noiseless, and, it goes without saying, exhaust-free bicycle rickshaw for short-to-medium distances in cities, then spoke more generally on the revitalization of Europe by new blood from Asia”.²² The blueprint turned into feverish action when the Bengali “bought into the former Lenin Shipyard” as the new liberal laws permitted him to do so and began producing cycle rickshaws in two medium-sized hangars left empty because of the shipbuilding crisis. There was no stopping him after that. His positive entrepreneurship challenged the pseudo-deals manipulated by the West and won the trust of the Poles. In short, “hope moved into Poland with Chatterjee”.²³ After extending his operations in other cities and towns of Poland — Warsaw, Lodz, Wroch and Poznan - he entered other metropolises of Europe — Madrid, Florence, Rome. How did Europe react to his vehicle or rather to his visionary concept of inner-city traffic neither deafened by noise nor smothered by exhaust fumes? Here is the record of the reaction, “Considering the traffic situation in the western and southern European urban centres, Chatterjee’s success was assured: political leaders jumped at his idea and - in Amsterdam and Copenhagen immediately, in Paris and Rome after some hesitation, in London with reservations, and in Athens only after receiving certain favours - granted him concessions for inner-city rickshaw routes”.²⁴

As I have said, almost a childlike adulation on the part of the author dictated the portrait of this Bengali, enormously successful in Poland. Bengali hands were not oppressive and old Poles exploited for long seemed to find the Asian dominance acceptable. They even did not mind when the main thoroughfare of Danzig — which had been once Grunwaldzka, then Hindenburgallee, then Stalinallee — was renamed Rabindranath Tagore Allee under pressure from the Bengali minority led by Chatterjee. This simplistic vision or subtext of fantasy in the novel, at a deeper layer, serves as a redeeming example of interculturalism which, as Rustom Bharucha suggests, is invested with the potential to work against the depredatory logic of multiculturalism.²⁵ What Chatterjee inspired in Poland and the West is that counter-paradigm of globalisation effectively explained by

Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "This is the spread of human civilisation, artefacts, institutions, patterns of living, information and knowledge to span the planet earth".²⁶ Symbiosis is the synonym for this kind of 'spread'. Its impact enlivened Professor Reschke even in his hour of defeat prompting him to conclude, "Today I know we failed, but I also see that some good has come of it. Right can come from wrong. Frugal Asia is setting the table for German gluttony. The Polish-Bengali symbiosis is blooming into marriage. It is proving to a nation of shopkeepers that titles of ownership are of limited value. It announces the predestined Asian future of Europe, free from nationalistic narrowness, no longer hemmed in by language boundaries, polyphonically religious, superrich in gods, and above all blessedly slowed down, softened by the new warm and wet climate...".²⁷

CONCLUSION

It would be wrong to assume that the irreparable breach on the Berlin Wall, the rapid process of reunification of Germany, the collapse of the socialist regimes in East Europe and the consequent triumph of market-driven global capitalism prompted Gunter Grass to speak out for the first time against the so-called end of history. A radical Social Democrat, Grass always called for a strict social control of the market forces and, to that, extent always opposed that ideology which endorsed the free and unhindered flow of capital, goods and services around the globe. In fact, when he was asked to comment on the future and destiny of the developing world, he was even prepared to ignore his 'social-democratic' position and speak in favour of something more radical. We know that he greeted the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and while talking to me, on more than one occasion, stressed that the objective conditions of an armed revolution were present and palpable in India. What enraged him most in our country was the vulgar and smug pockets of fabulous luxury in a sea of poverty and repression.

It is this coherent ideological position that provoked Grass to open his assault in his first epic, the celebrated *The Tin Drum* (published in 1959). In that unforgettable chapter entitled 'The Onion Cellar', Grass describes how the rich in post-war West Germany, while getting wrapped in the cosy folds of the economic miracle, buy onions in a special restaurant to cry. In other words, the tragic memory of the nation has also turned into a commodity which has to be bought and manipulated, "For 12 marks an ordinary field, garden and kitchen-variety onion ...A paring knife for 80 pfennigs ...It did what

the world and the sorrows of the world could not do: it brought forth a round, human tear. It made them cry ...To cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad”²⁸

This crass commodification of the human emotion at the personal level provides the psychic base of advanced industrial capitalism not only in Germany but elsewhere. At the individual level, it creates the one-dimensional being absorbed in his or her petty pleasures or sorrows and at the societal level it creates the Economic Fortress which is not only eager to keep the price of coffee and rice down to the very minimum but also rapacious enough to acquire the patents of neem and basmati. Moreover, this link is not fortuitous; in fact, it can only be broken by another form and content of globalisation which, at one level, is warm and humane and, at another level, not a victim of grossly unequal terms of trade. By depicting the vibrantly human component of this ‘Other’ globalisation in another remarkable novel *Headbirths or the Germans are Dying Out* (published in 1980), Grass strengthens the critique we have already encountered in *The Tin Drum*. In this novel, a childless German couple, against the backdrop of the impoverished third world, constantly deliberates if they are going to have a child or not. They debate the pluses and minuses of this essentially human longing in terms of profit and loss and intermix their vacillation with political observations such as, “Rudi Dutschke’s death left me rather cold ...Yes, of course, he showed us certain important contexts ...About the North-South differential and all that - about us getting richer and them poorer”.²⁹ But Grass is not willing to leave the differential at the layer of the inconsequential ‘all that’. He takes the visionary step forward and in the closing paragraph of the novel paints an alternative landscape which not only permits Indian computer experts to enter the well-guarded West but also unqualified children. The novel ends with the heartfelt celebration of this counter-paradigm, “Now from sidestreets and backyards, from all directions, come more and more children, all foreign. Indian, Chinese, African children, all cheerful. They fill the street with life, wave from windows, jump from window innumerable. All cheer for the little Turk ...They run their hands over the well-preserved VW where sit our childless teacher couple not knowing what to say in German”.³⁰

‘The little Turk’ in the above quotation has been deliberately stressed because Turks constitute the largest Asian minority in Germany and have been targeted by the Neo-Nazis after the Reunification. The rise of the Neo-Nazis in post Berlin Wall Germany

seems to substantiate Grass's fear and misgivings about the nature and pace of the Reunification itself. In an incisive essay on this subject, he has outlined how the utterly false logic of globalisation or journey beyond-the-nation-state propelled by capital, technology, finance, telecommunication and expertise, in a pernicious reverse-move, encouraged the spread of obscene nationalistic impulses bordering on neo-Fascism. In other words, the much-trumpeted end of ideology *a la* Fukuyama has brought with it the revival of the nationalist ideology in its worst imaginable form. The victims of this nationalism — sorry globalisation — were Ayshe Yilmaz aged 51, Bahide Arslan aged 14, Yeliz Arslan aged 10 - all Turks murdered in Moelln on November 13, 1992 by the Neo-Nazis. Acts such as these provoked Grass to write his essay 'Losses' in the same year where he linked the recent assaults with Auschwitz and Birkenau and with the planned slaughter of nearly half-a-million Romany and Sinti people during the Third Reich. Burdened by the crushing weight of this historical memory and in quest of a new human identity truly universal in quality and character, Grass called for a unique expiation of the Nazi form of globalisation. He ended his essay with the words, "Let half a million and more Sinti and Romanies live among us. We need them. They could help us by irritating our rigid order a little. Something of their way of life could rub off on us. They could teach us how meaningless frontiers are: careless of boundaries, Romanies and Sinties are at home all over Europe. They are what we claim to be: born Europeans".³¹

This then is the counter-paradigm Gunter Grass has to offer. Its need and urgency increase and intensify with the advance of that other globalisation which Grass detests. As the courtjester — that is how he defines his role of the committed writer — Grass mocks and attacks the false paradigm with fervour but, at times, a sombre, almost tragic intonation deepens his words. Faced with the onslaught of a process which he alone, as a creative writer cannot halt, he imagines, not only his own country and his continent, but also the entire world as a grim and foreboding landscape. In a series of sonnets written in 1992, appropriately titled 'Novemberland', the poet in him reflects :

*The fear spreads. November threatens to stay.
No more those long days of joy.
The last flies drop from the glasspanes.
And freeze follows the lightning pace of time.*

But why this real stagnation in the guise of deceptive rapidity?
Precisely because -

*Where we stand, there wayward market
Has fattened us. Thanks to total grief and pain,
We are nurturing despair in the name of market
We have even granted a massive rebate
On our sins and crimes.*³²

This sensitive despair turns into full throated accusation in the last published essay, his Nobel Lecture delivered in 1999. Addressing that august assembly in Stockholm, Grass said, “We look on in horror as capitalism rages unimpeded, megalomaniacally ...It has turned the free market into dogma, the only truth and intoxicated by its all but limitless power, plays the wildest of games, making merger after merger with no goal other than to maximize profits. Globalisation is its motto, a motto it proclaims with the arrogance of infallibility ... Only hunger seems to resist. It is even increasing. The poor counter growing riches with growing birth rates. The affluent north and west can try to screen themselves off in security-mad fortresses, but the flocks of refugees will catch up with them: no gate can withstand the crush of the hungry”.³³ This prediction, in one intense sweep, posits the counter-paradigm of a brilliant creative writer. It elevates the theory-and-discourse-in-opposition to the level of an adamant vision and speaks of a frontier-less world, inherently human and redemptive.

NOTES

1. *The Call of the Toad*. Translated from the German by Ralph Mannheim (Secker and Warburg, London, 1991) Page 9 and Page 17
2. Ibid, Page 28
3. Ibid, Page 27
4. Ibid, Pages145-146
5. Ibid, Page 160
6. Ibid, Page 160
7. Ibid, Page 117
8. Ibid, Page 172
9. Ibid, Page 178
10. Ibid, Page 204
11. *Dialogues with Four Nobel Laureates* (Dasgupta and Co. Kolkata, 2001)Page 12.
12. Amiya Bagchi's essay 'Globalisation, Liberalisation and Vulnerability - India and Third World' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, November 6, 1999). Page 3219.
13. *The Call of The Toad*, Page 41

14. Ibid, Page 117
15. Ibid, Page 170
16. Ibid, Page 228
17. Ibid, Page 228
18. Ibid, Page 36
19. Ibid, Page 37
20. Ibid, Page 45
21. Ibid, Page 46
22. Ibid, Page 46
23. Ibid, Page 170
24. Ibid, Page 174
25. Rustom Bharucha's Essay 'Politics of Culturalisms in an Age of Globalisation' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, February 20, 1999) Page 477
26. Amiya Bagchi - Essay referred earlier
27. *The Call of The Toad*, Pages 233-234
28. Gunter Grass *The Tin Drum* (Pantheon Books, 1961, New York) Page 509
29. Gunter Grass *Headbirths or the Germans are Dying Out* (Fawcett Crest, New York, 1982) Page 146
30. Ibid, Page 148
31. Gunter Grass' essay 'Losses' in *Krauts* (*Granta* 42, Penguin, Winter 1992). Page 108
32. Gunter Grass *Novemberland* 13 Sonette (Steidl, Gottingen, 1993). Pages 21 and 7
33. Gunter Grass, Nobel Prize Lecture, Pages 7 and 8.