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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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KEYNOTE

The Postcolonial Hydrogothic

Pramod K Nayar

This talk examines the postcolonial graphic novel that focuses on water and water-related crises. I use texts from the Indian subcontinent whose poetics works to link water crises, colonial histories, and postcoloniality. The texts include Orijit Sen's *River of Stories* (1994); Sarnath Banerjee's *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (2015); Subhash Vyam and Gita Wolf's *Water* (2018); Venkat Ram Singh Shyam and S. Anand's *Finding My Way* (2016); and Srividya Natarajan, S. Anand, and the Vyams' *Bhimayana* (2011).

Hanna Straß proposes that we need to look at contemporary environmental crisis in terms of a historical continuity to which new forms of uneven, unjust, and unequal practices have been added in the form of 'development' or 'industrialisation' (2016: 228). Such an idea underpins work on the postcolonial novel's rendering of the 'toxic Gothic', or Gothic toxicity, as a strategy for registering environmental pollution/crisis, colonial histories, and contemporary political choices in the postcolony. Pluvial – to do with both excess and scarce water – terrors are omnipresent in the social realm, through the organisation of water, and through the ways in which water organises the lives of humans and non-humans, materially and symbolically, as these texts document.

I suggest in my talk that a certain hydroterror operates through three principal modes in the graphic novels – hydrogothicity, hydro-mythopoesis, and hydrocolonialism. I argue that hydroterror captures the chaos, guilt, injustice, and anxiety lurking beneath the façade and rhetoric of growth that is said to guide a new nation. Hydroterror is a thematic and aesthetic working, in this fiction, through of the nightmare that is post-imperial development within capitalist modernity in a postcolony.

PRESENTERS

Why Can't the Subaltern Speak? A Critique of Not-So-Chic Postcolonial Theory and Literature

Dhanuka Bandara

It is safe to say that in US academia, the “postcolonial moment” is over. Postcolonial theory enjoyed its moment in the sun in the early 90s. Even in its glory days, postcolonial theory, and scholarship in general, attracted a number of detractors who were often of Marxist bent such as A. Sivanandan, Aijaz Ahmad, and Benita Parry. In an essay memorably entitled “All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times” (1989), Sivanandan eviscerates the “culture turn” as necessarily complicit in the capitalist/neo-liberal project. Ahmad and Parry both understood postcolonial theory as re-inscribing the binary of the western self vs colonial other, albeit in theoretical terms. This paper argues that the early Marxist critique of postcolonial theory/studies got it right; and that it anticipated later works such as Walter Benn Michaels’ *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006). The paper will have two components; the first will be a critique of postcolonial theory that will focus on the work of three major postcolonial theorists: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. The second will be a critique of Shehan Karunatilaka’s *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* (2022). Overall, the paper contends that both postcolonial theory and literature entrench and perpetuate the binary of the western “enlightened” self vs benighted colonial other; ironically, this is the same distinction that postcolonial theory attempted to do away with in the first place.

Keywords: theory, postcolonial, imperialism, neoliberalism, self/other, orientalism

**Resisting the Stereotypes of Colonial Ethnicity:
Proto-postcolonialism in *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet***

Apala Dasgupta Barat

Sarat Chandra Das was headmaster in a British-run school in nineteenth-century Bengal when he travelled twice to Tibet. His second visit involved strategic data-collection for the British government. On the subcontinent, Das was a pioneer in Tibetology, Himalayan exploration, and travel writing. Dismissive of Das' achievements, British writers represent him as a self-serving collaborator (e.g., the caricatural Huree Babu in *Kim*). Implicit in their identity-tag for Das as "babu" is an ethnic stereotyping of the English-educated (and thus, hybridised), middle-class Bengali as a soft-living, biddable servant of the Empire. A post-2000 revival of interest in Das is indicated by and centres on the reprints of his travelogue titled *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*. My paper argues that recent readings of *Journey* in blogs, academic essays etc., invoke Das' ethnic identity to valorise him (e.g., as the first Bengali cosmopolitan traveller) only to reinforce the pejorative connotations of a colonial ethnicity. For instance, Das' self-transformation into an intrepid explorer or a cosmopolitan traveller is deemed extraordinary primarily because he is perceived as acting out of character for a "babu". I posit that such readings feed the postcolonial zeal for rehabilitating subaltern voices as instances of empowered ethnicity. Further, such readings overlook how, in *Journey*, Das actively resists ethnic stereotyping. Bhabha acknowledges that the hybridised colonial object can become a figure of active resistance. By demonstrating that Das deploys narrative strategies in *Journey* to subvert the assumptions of colonial ethnicity, I establish that *Journey* might be read as a proto-postcolonial text.

Keywords: Tibet, travel writing, babu, ethnic stereotyping, hybridity, proto-postcolonialism

A Different View of History: Rudyard Kipling and the Art of Imperial Conquest

Amitendu Bhattacharya &
Shradha Kochhar

From the 19th-century 'Great Game' to the 21st-century 'War on Terror,' a series of failed Western incursions into Afghanistan gave the country its moniker the 'Graveyard of Empires'. These events also cemented Afghanistan's reputation as an unconquerable and lawless territory in popular discourse. Academic studies often reveal systemic prejudices, cultural nescience and political miscalculations dogging every Western manoeuvre in Afghanistan. However, an individual actor's ability to either transcend the deep chasms or precipitate matters between the Euro-Americans and the Afghans finds little or no importance in such scholarly analyses. In addition to military intervention and the occasional political cooperation, the 19th-century British engagements with Afghanistan comprised clandestine information-gathering. Therefore, the colonial individual's intrepid explorations of Afghanistan were vital in building the 'information order' that governed colonial policies and strategies concerning the region. Rudyard Kipling's fictional narratives set in Afghanistan and its border areas with British India perceptively portray the individual agency of some of these pioneering explorers. This paper applies Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of 'sedentary' and 'nomad' spaces, and Massumi's realms of the 'virtual' and 'possibility' to read Kipling's Afghan-inspired narratives. It becomes evident that Kipling's fictional characters defy rigid socio-spatial divisions and that an inexplicable deviance from the expected marks their movements, actions, and motivations. This paper argues that the characters' cultural hybridity, inscrutable impulses, and counterintuitive ambitions serve as a narrative ploy for Kipling to highlight colonial Britain's flawed and inadequate understanding of the Afghan 'other' in actual contemporary history. The epistemic gaps at individual and collective levels underlying the West's relationship with Afghanistan, as spotlighted in Kipling's narratives, persist to this day.

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling, Afghanistan, Great Game, British colonialism, individual agency

Transcontinental Diaspora, Transculturality, and the Digital in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

Asis De

Conceptually, transculturality implies the experiences of movement through multiple cultural spaces across places and an acquisition of views and values from varied cultural paradigms other than the ethnic one. Ideas like cultural homogeneity, multicultural nation-state/s, and the 'culturalist' approach, which have already been criticised (Welsch: 1995; Berg: 2011), are under heavier challenge as transnational/transcontinental communications become increasingly virtual. In this post-national age, the idea of transculturality may be redefined as a possible mode of personality orientation integrating a global consciousness with the self. To elaborate upon my point, I would take Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* (2019) as a case study in which the Calcutta-born but Brooklyn-based Bengali narrator Dinanath Datta's successive travels – beginning with his trip to the Sundarbans, and then to Oregon and Los Angeles, and ultimately to the lead destination of Venice transculturally interconnect people and animals, trade and economies, settlers and refugees, and languages and religions in unique ways. I explore how the migrant identity of people flocking to Europe from South Asia has become closely attached to that of a transcontinental refugee. I discuss the role of digital communications (unlike Ghosh's earlier novels) as means of transcultural connections across places as many interactions in the narrative have been embodied by text chats, video calls, phone, email, and social media destabilising the commonplace perceptions of time and space. How Ghosh deals with the issue of vernacular transculturality would be another point of investigation.

Keywords: trans-continental migration, transculturality, refugee, globalisation, digital transculturality, vernacular transculturality

**Contemporary Challenges of Subalterns:
Select Oral and Performance Practices of Indo-Gangetic
Plains**

Jai Dev, Sukhdev Singh & Shivangi

The goal of post-colonialism is to free the oppressed from the perspective of their oppressor. When the oppressed started to understand the cycle of oppression, it became more prominent in the context of imperialism. However, if we examine them closely from the perspective of subaltern Indians (untouchables and backward castes according to the Brahminic order of society), they appear to still be under the oppressive clutch of Brahminic rule. B. R. Ambedkar argued that the untouchables are not a member of the Hindu family in his essay “Who Were the Shudras” and in the first two roundtable conferences, which were held in 1930 and 1932. Ambedkar, in *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India* (2014), stated that the moral clash between Buddhism and Brahminism has shaped Indian history. In this paper, we would like to convey the decolonised version of history that the totalitarian ideology of Hindutva has told, up until this point, from the perspective of an Indian subaltern. For this purpose, we dwell on the current situation of the subaltern communities, especially in the Indo-Gangetic plains, and narrate a few stories from their past that did not find a place in the colonial version of history although they are still alive in the oral and performance practices of the particular communities. They are still present because the struggle to reclaim the past and present is still ongoing. We discuss the issues that today’s subalterns face regarding representation in various fields, and the Brahminic oppression’s control over information and education in conclusion.

Keywords: subalternity, nativism, caste, decolonising, postcolonialism, Brahminism

Leonard and Virginia in the Colony: An Exploration of Colonial Conjugalities through Intimate Narratives

Gayathri Madhurangi Hewagama

What does a reading of the Woolfs, Leonard and Virginia, offer postcolonial discourse in 2023 when the topic seems long since to have reached a point of academic exhaustion? Leonard's anti-imperialist thinking, its strengths and weaknesses, has already been the subject of much discussion, as has Virginia's relative non-involvement in imperial politics, a point contested by more recent scholars. I choose to situate these larger postcolonial global politics within the more conventionally personal space of conjugality and explore how Leonard could be placed in the role of benevolent imperialist/patriarch in relation to Virginia as the 'mad woman' who dared to walk out of her attic. Leonard may have been a 'penniless Jew', yet one must not ignore Virginia's Anglo-Indian ancestry, possibly linked to a Bengali bloodline. In fact, moving past the aggrandisement of identity, so often concomitant with literary canonisation, will show Leonard and Virginia as a man and woman whose legacy offers us not just their writing but also the complex psychology of two deeply ambivalent personalities (dis/)united in marriage. Focusing mainly on their 'intimate narratives' that are both story and history – letters, diaries, and auto/biographies – my intention here is to complicate popular polarising views such as the sainthood that has been bestowed on Leonard for his devotion to an intelligent yet mentally unstable and racist woman for whom Eastern *natives* were “mahogany coloured wretches or caged monkeys”, while exploring the presence and play of the politics of the imperial colony in the Woolfs' personal relations, including myself in this play as a post/neocolonial reading subject.

Keywords: imperialism, conjugality, racial politics, intimate narratives

Talking about English(es) in a Linguistically Tensed Context: Insights from an Undergraduate Classroom Setting

Nandaka Maduranga Kalugampitiya

The notion of New Varieties of English (NVEs), which has developed into an academic discipline of its own, provides important vantage points to understand and contest the politically and ideologically charged ‘life’ of the English language in postcolonial contexts like Sri Lanka. The notion of NVEs has been discussed extensively within academia; nevertheless, the ideas emanating from such discussions have yet to reach the public in an impactful manner. Based on an analysis of an undergraduate-level learning/teaching setting in which the notion of NVEs is discussed as an academic topic, the present study explores the extent to which the tensions that define the postcolonial ‘life’ of English at the present historical juncture shape such discussions. This paper is based on an analysis of the responses gathered through a focus group discussion conducted with a cohort of students who have recently completed an undergraduate-level course unit focused on the idea of NVEs as part of an English Studies programme at a leading university in Sri Lanka, supplemented by the author’s experience of having taught courses with a focus on the idea of NVEs at the same university. The paper examines how the postcolonial identities of both the students and lecturer determine the direction of the class discussions on NVEs-related topics.

Keywords: English, NVEs, postcolonial, undergraduate, tension, insecurities

Postcolonialism and Refugee Experiences: A Study of Select Literary Texts

Fathima M

In a world that is constantly geared towards consumerism and extremism, threats of displacement, and homelessness, where do we place refugee experiences? Postcolonial theories respond to a part of it, but it still presumes the presence of a nation (or an imaginary home) as a fixed structure. For refugees, these structures are not just lost but they feel pushed into a state of being invisible. Climate change and growing extremism will result in more displacements, and certain nations are more vulnerable to it. In this context, postcolonial theories do not become redundant per se, but there is a need to expand the scope of various kinds of postcolonial experiences or the experiences of feeling perpetually homeless. This paper argues that there is a need for newer paradigms of postcolonialism to better comprehend refugee problems and migrant experiences. I read the invisibility and perpetual homelessness of refugees in Dina Nayeri's novel *Refuge* (2017) and Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017). One of the major questions reflected in these texts is the precarious state of refugees that needs to be addressed through a different framework within postcolonial studies.

Keywords: homelessness, refugees, postcolonialism, children as migrants

**Critical Arrivals:
The Traveller in Romesh Gunesequera's *Noontide Toll***

Sagar Taranga Mandal

This paper examines the idea of ‘arrival’ in Romesh Gunesequera’s novel *Noontide Toll* (2014). The novel focuses on a period of transition for Sri Lanka when, at the end of the civil strife in 2009, the State embarked on a path of neoliberal economy. Gunesequera’s portrayal of the island nation situates it at a cusp of various aggressive forms of neoliberal experiments and concomitant realignment of traditional communities. Against this background, I explore the reasons behind a global cohort of travellers travelling to regions that, as newly appointed handmaidens of transnational capital, are known to manifest signs of political unrest and infrastructural chaos. The paper relates this phenomenon to the cache of foreign tourists whom Vasantha, *Noontide*’s protagonist, carts across the island in a minivan. What incentives do these backpackers have in journeying to a place still simmering under the ravages of a protracted war? And, here, I am not simply referring to a particular group of Western travellers who arrive at extreme places to claim liberation from their own oppressive modernities. But I also seek to engage with a more affective form of arrival – in the form of a paradoxical return – that embroils both diasporic returnees and indigenous communities of post-war Sri Lanka. Gunesequera locates this return happening at the level of the quotidian, working itself out through a commemorative counterculture, opposed to hegemonic representations of the State. The ensuing outcome for both foreign and native stakeholders is an overlapping trajectory of negotiations that this paper seeks to unfold.

Keywords: Gunesequera, Sri Lanka, economy, tourist, memory, war

Differentiation or Discrimination?
The Effect of Schneider's Dynamic Model on the Study of
World Englishes

Dushyanthi Mendis

Edgar Schneider's Dynamic Model of the evolution of Postcolonial Englishes (2007) claims to identify a typical developmental process underlying the formation of varieties of English known as World Englishes in postcolonial linguistic environments. The model has five evolutionary stages that Schneider claims postcolonial Englishes pass through – Foundation, Exonormative stabilisation, Nativisation, Endonormative stabilisation, and Differentiation. Differentiation is achieved when a variety of English is recognised as having its own linguistic and cultural identity, and is no longer tied to a colonial parent. Differentiation is contingent upon satisfying several criteria, which are not only dated and unrealistic, but prevent varieties of English already demarcated as belonging to the “Outer Circle” (Kachru, 1985) from reaching the fifth and final stage of linguistic evolution. Using Sri Lankan Englishes as a case study, this paper argues that Western theoretical constructs such as the Dynamic Model represent a form of scholarly imperialism, serving to permanently compartmentalise and label Asian Englishes as second language varieties by placing them in an inferior position in relation to first language varieties such as American, Australian, or British English.

Keywords: differentiation, Dynamic Model, scholarly imperialism, Sri Lankan Englishes, World Englishes

**Glocalising Manga:
Queer Narratives of South Asia in *This Fluffy Love***

Lakshmi Menon

Boys Love (or BL) is a genre of media that depicts male homosexual relationships. The term, though originating in Japanese manga comics, is now used to describe what is today a transnational, transcultural genre of books, comic books, animated and live-action films, and series that has found fans and followers in several parts of the world, including South Asia. This paper aims to examine BL as it manifests in the South Asian sphere specifically; it has had a significant impact among fans in countries such as India and Sri Lanka where fear of censure from a largely oppressive society and existing notions of homophobia often discourages creators – in that it often provides a new rhetorical space to parse LGBTQ+ issues. This paper will look at the work of Sri Lankan artist ‘Papadamn’ – examining their popular BL manga *This Fluffy Love* – the first BL manga to be set in South Asia, and to feature South Asian characters and culture. It will attempt to answer two questions: the first is how exposure to, consumption, and creation of BL helps fans negotiate their own attitudes towards sex and sexuality, particularly while located in spaces where the mere discussion of these matters is considered taboo. Second, through an examination of *This Fluffy Love*, it will also question how their socio-economic or ethnic identities play into the texts that they produce.

Keywords: manga, gender, sexuality, lgbtq+, South Asia

Aspects of Gender Identity on the Usage of Questions in Hindi

Udeshika Perera

Gender identity, shaped by personal experiences, cultural norms, and social expectations, plays a significant role in shaping individuals' linguistic behaviours and communication styles. Through the process of socialisation, early exposure to different linguistic patterns and gender-specific communication styles shape individuals' questioning strategies from childhood, reinforcing gender norms and practices based on the sociocultural expectations associated with gender roles. Reflecting those societal expectations and communication preferences, traditional gender norms may prescribe different purposes and functions for questions posed by males and females as males might be inclined towards fact-seeking questions, while females may lean towards rapport-building questions according to the power dynamics of male-female communication. Therefore, this study aims to explore how gender identity intersects with the power dynamics of male-female counterparts in discourses in question-usage of Hindi through the content analysis of purposively sampled discourses, based on a qualitative inductive research approach, of the Hindi film *Queen* by *Vikas Bahl*. The purpose of this research is to acknowledge the existence of gendered discourse practices in Hindi, wherein certain question forms or functions are associated with masculinity or femininity, which facilitates a deeper comprehension of the cultural and societal factors influencing the usage of questions in Hindi. Recognising these aspects fosters inclusive language practices, promotes effective cross-gender understanding, and encourages communication that transcends traditional gender norms.

Keywords: gendered discourse practices, gender identity, Hindi language, socialisation, power dynamics

**The Postcolonial Significance
in Lucian De Zilwa's *The Dice of the Gods* and SJK
Crowther's *The Knight Errant***

Vihanga Perera

This paper examines Lucian De Zilwa's *The Dice of the Gods* (1917) and SJK Crowther's *The Knight Errant* (1928), two works considered among Ceylon's/Sri Lanka's pioneering English language novels, as postcolonial fiction. Assessing the historical significance of these works in the evolution of Sri Lankan English creativity, scholarship has framed discussion on some aspects of the two novels in question such as, among others, their concern with inter-class relationships, social commentary, realism, and satire. Simultaneously, opinion by some authorities on Sri Lankan Writing indicate a shying away from in-depth analysis of both novels, which has discouraged the works from scrutiny within a contemporary postcolonial studies paradigm. This paper engages in a comparative reading of De Zilwa's and Crowther's work with works of some leading writers in the postcolonial canon: notably, the early Achebe and Naipaul, and from Ceylon/Sri Lanka, Martin Wickremasinghe. The discussion draws on the reach and depth in De Zilwa's and Crowther's responses to empire in general and, in particular, to the political and sociocultural setting in early 20th century Ceylon/Sri Lanka, which they represent with a seriousness of intent normally undervalued by the critic.

Keywords: neglected novels, postcolonial literature, South Asian writing, Sri Lankan writing

Contextualising Development, Dams, and Displacement through Orijit Sen's *River of Stories*

Ved Prakash

“Unlike the urban people who look at rivers as resources that they can exploit for their own use, the Adivasi way of looking at the rivers, nature and forests is so different. They say we are the children of this nature that nurtures and sustains us.” These lines have been stated by Orijit Sen in the context of his work *River of Stories* (1994), India's first graphic novel. *River of Stories* documents the environmental crisis and displacement of marginalised people in the name of progression and development. The novel talks about the construction of a dam on the river Rewa and it shadows the narrative of the Sardar Sarovar Dam built on the river Narmada (the fifth largest river in India) in Navagam, Gujarat, despite the protest by the inhabitants of the Narmada Valley. After India's Independence, the first Prime Minister of the newly formed nation, Jawaharlal Nehru, had the vision of making the country recover from years of colonial robbing. As a result, the building of dams was seen as a possibility for growth. Thus, on 5 April 1961, the foundation stone of the Sardar Sarovar Dam was laid. However, many view dams as a source of threat as they lead to soil erosion, sedimentation, species extinction, flash floods, earthquakes etc. This paper will examine how effective graphic narratives can be when it comes to foregrounding the reality of climate crisis/eco-disaster. While referring to newspaper archives, this paper will deal with the plight of the people of Narmada Valley through *River of Stories*. Moreover, addressing the question of development in direct contrast to the forms of displacement, this paper will look into the purview of dams and understand their relevance/irrelevance concerning the planetary conditions of ongoing exploitation.

Keywords: graphic novel, environmental crisis, dams, displacement, development

‘Madness’ in the Trauma Narrative *July* by Karen Roberts

Sureshika Piyasena

The novel *July* (2001) by Karen Roberts begins by referring to mob violence as a ‘madness’ and it ends with the ‘madness’ in an individual. Based on the 1983 riots against the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, the protagonist Priyanthi Silva falls in love with her neighbour, Niranjana. Despite their ethnic differences, they secretly marry. During the riots, Priyanthi’s brother Hemantha murders Niranjana and as a result, Priyanthi is driven ‘mad’. This clearly shows how mob violence affects individuals – even though the 1983 riots were sparked by political motives, we see two families that experience a personal tragedy. The madness of the mob and its irrationality is transferred to the protagonist. In the face of political madness, she is unable to accept her reality and is driven ‘mad’ herself. The personal and the public intertwine to make a point about violence. This paper discusses *July* as a trauma narrative and analyses its representation of madness in the light of the theories of Elaine Showalter, Sigmund Freud, and Cathy Caruth. Breaking away from Freud’s theory of hysteria, Showalter suggests that ‘madness’ was perhaps the only tool that some women had for breaking free of their restrictive social roles. Priyanthi’s role too is restrictive among her family and society. Caruth points out that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience meet at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect. This paper revisits this intersection.

Keywords: trauma, madness, mob violence, narratives, riots, ethnic conflict

**Women as Minorities:
Resisting Muslim Women in the Literary Texts of Ameena
Hussein and Sharmila Syed**

Sanjutha Thiraviyanayagam

The long history of prejudice against women is reflected in many literary texts. Instead of entirely focusing on how women are discriminated against, abused, objectified, and oppressed, this paper discusses representations of women's agency. This paper discusses resistance narratives by women from minority communities in Sri Lanka through a selection of literary writings by Ameena Hussein and Sharmila Syed. This paper critically analyses the ways in which Muslim female characters in Ameena Hussein's and Sharmila Syed's texts resist the systematic imposition of sociocultural and religious constraints. The resistance discussed here is directed towards marital rape, child marriage, stigma associated with infertility among women, exclusion of widows, and biased social expectations related to feminine beauty. The discussion primarily focuses on the influence of class and education on women's resistance. This paper highlights how Syed challenges the articulation of the concept of privileged women's capability and unprivileged women's incapability to resist the system in the selected literary texts. At the same time, Hussein frames some of her characters' resistance as a result of their education and privileged status in society. This paper emphasises that resistance does not necessarily need to be a product of class and education; the resistance does not necessarily need to be overt and could be covert or of any form.

Keywords: feminism, minority, constraints, class, education, resistance

Exploring Rodi Victimhood through the Radala Woman: An Analysis of Prasanna Vithanage's *Gaadi*

Kanchanakesi Warnapala

This paper explores Prasanna Vithanage's Sri Lankan film *Gaadi* (2019) (Children of the Sun), which is based on a failed rebellion that took place in the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka in 1814. In the film, the Kandyan aristocracy plans a coup, with the aid of the British, who had already occupied the Maritime Provinces of the country, to depose the King of Kandy, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, who was of South Indian Tamil descent. When the rebellion fails and the Kandyan aristocrats are forced to flee, their women are captured and granted two options by the monarch: death by suicide or survival by marriage to the Rodi. This paper contends that while *Gaadi* reveals feudal and caste-based oppression in colonial Sri Lanka where women's bodies become the battlegrounds in the struggle between colonial and native men, its portrayal of the Rodi, outcasts or untouchables, is problematic. Although the film seemingly dismantles grand narratives of Kandyan honour and privilege through the depiction of gendered and caste violence, it fails to voice the concerns of the Rodi, especially its women. Instead, the film focuses on the pain and suffering of the excommunicated upper-caste woman through the depiction of an inter-caste relationship between a Rodi male and an upper-caste, *Radala* female. Romanticising inter-caste coupling, the film becomes a feeble attempt to salvage the outcaste when it explores the victimhood of the Rodi women through the body of a *Radala* woman. This paper argues that the film ends up reestablishing hierarchical caste and gender relations, unravelling the nexus between patriarchy and caste.

Keywords: caste, patriarchy, gender, Rodi, Radala, film

**“I confess I have ...”:
Pablo Neruda, the Latrine Cleaner, and the Discourse on Rape**

Carmen Wickramagama

Neruda’s public admission in his *Memoirs*, titled *Confieso que he vivido: Memorias* (1974), to raping a latrine-cleaner belonging to the low sweeper caste while in Ceylon continues to garner attention in the political and cultural domains today. Ironically, the attention is generated by the high-profile status of Neruda himself, as a celebrated poet and ardent political activist who championed the rights of the oppressed, and not the victim who to date remains anonymous. This paper will look at a range of texts, including Neruda’s *Memoirs*, biographies, essays, short stories, and a film that address Neruda’s rape of the latrine cleaner for how they present the event and what place is assigned to the rape victim, who fits the “gendered subaltern” of Gayatri Spivak’s classic formulation. The interrogation of texts that variously approach and, sometimes, circle around Neruda’s startling revelation highlights the inherent discursivity of rape that continues to be inflected by the gender, race, and class of those involved in the act and participating in the discourse, despite its indisputable status as a real-world event and the equally indisputable pain of the suffering victim. The indifference of some authors, the callous disregard of others, and the discomfort of still others vis-à-vis the Ceylonese latrine cleaner, I argue, serve to highlight the chasm that continues to separate the elite intellectual from the (gendered) subaltern with regard to important issues of social justice.

Keywords: Pablo Neruda, latrine cleaner, rape, subaltern, Ceylon/Sri Lanka

RESEARCHER PROFILES

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Asis De is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English, and Director of Research (Humanities and Social Sciences) at Mahishadal Raj College, India. He also acts as the Secretary of the Postgraduate Faculty Council (Addl. Charge) at the Mahatma Gandhi University, West Bengal. In publications and conference presentations in Asia (India, Nepal, and Bhutan), Africa (Egypt and South Africa), the United States and Brazil, and in Europe (Belgium, Germany, England, France, Scotland, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Austria, and the Netherlands), he has worked on migration literatures, cultural identity, transnationalism, ecological humanities, disability studies, and tribal studies. He teaches Indian Literature in English, Postcolonial Literatures, Dalit and Tribal Literatures, Cultural Studies, and Diasporic Literatures. His latest publication is a co-edited volume entitled Amitav Ghosh's Culture Chromosome: Anthropology, Epistemology, Ethics, Space (2022), published by Brill. He is a life member of IACLALS and regular member of EACLALS, PSA, GAPS, SIEF, and MESEA.

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