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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**The notion(s) of ‘Death’ and the ‘Community’: Rethinking the Social Anthropology of Death**” submitted by **Ravi Nandan Singh** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of the University, has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree to this or any other University. This is a bonafide work.

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Chapter one

Critical Review of the Anthropological Descriptions of the Event of Death

The Anthropological descriptions of death as an 'event,' in a given community are attempts to discern the meaning behind the ritualistic activities observed by the persons of the respective community. These attempts at unravelling meanings use the real practice in its combination with what it considers as the symbolic and the imaginary domain(s) of the social, to illustrate a picture of structurally bound and stable community at large. In most of these accounts each category helps the other in retaining its shape. We wish to show that, in these accounts there is a systemic exclusion of the presence and effect of ideas and features of Science and western Philosophy in the given ethnographic context. That is when, these motifs were already in circulation and practice through various modes of colonial intrusion, and subsequently effected through politico-cultural negotiations of the freedom struggle and nation building. In order to understand these omissions and also the contemporary writings — suggesting that almost all categories of social are at the verge of extinction and every 'being' is touched by death (Giddens 1990; Beck 1992, 1995, 2000; Baudrillard 1983; Das et al.1998; Bourdieu et al. 1993), one needs to critically revisit the major anthropological-sociological writings on the phenomenon of death. This might help us to answer —What does death means in a given context, and how is it that death as an event has become a metaphor of meaninglessness in the contemporary world? In the process of tackling these questions, one hopes to show that, the continuous emphasis in the anthropology of death, on an essentially stable community with perfect homological relations between its persons and the corresponding cosmos, is in itself a half story. It could be argued that disruptions and asymmetries, which were present even then, if they are acknowledged in the anthropology of death, it might radically change the way, one looks at the entire corpus on the subject of 'death' and the 'community'. Further it is argued that after revising the above-mentioned subject matter, it may not necessarily follow that all the categories of the social are on the verge of extinction, as the contemporary writings would suggest. However, it does bring about

the notion of a transformed social being, that reveals the tension vis-à-vis the categories, rather than symmetry and stability only that it has been enquired with so far. This is taken as the premise to explain various perspectives through which the social is understood in the contemporary world with 'death' as an inextricable part of it. Related to the issues mentioned so far, there is also a parallel query in this introductory chapter and the second chapter. That is to consider various sociological-anthropological accounts of the contemporary world and also the writings on which it is based and critically look at its presumptions, which suggest that the world is based on an evolutionary path or a cycle. The said path or cycle has the order of decimation preset as following- the death of the primeval community- the death of personhood- the death of the organic community- and finally the death of the modern, rational, scientific individual. Effectually then, one has to continuously reiterate the existence of these categories albeit, in a transformed way. At the very basic level, it has to be stated right at the start that it is because these categories are there, we are worried about their disappearance. Thus this anxiety over an anticipatory 'loss' has to be seen as a legitimate social orientation in the contemporary world. However an attempt to understand this anxiety has to consider the context of an unstable background of variable categories that still render 'being' possible in unforeseen circumstances. That is to say the total negation of the categories of the 'social' may not be desirable, rather one could look at their variability and the associated context. It is important to emphasize that these categories do not exist outside our suspicion and scepticism that characterizes the contemporary world. In such a situation where, things in general cannot be conceived without their fragmented and disjointed nature, expecting the categories like- community, person, individual, family, father, mother, man, womanto be 'stable', reminds us that any enquiry on 'death' and 'community' has to be approached through the themes of 'stability' and 'vulnerability'.

In the first section, the attempt is to locate the major theoretical writings on the event of Death by theorists like Robert Hertz, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. Attention is also drawn to the ethnographic literature, over which all these accounts are based. In order to contextualize their works, one would genealogically follow, the theoretical

details, the composition and operation of a given ethnographic domain. So that it facilitates in answering the question — how does this knowledge stock helps in exploration of things and sets trends in addition of knowledge to the same stock further? Extending the same issue further, it is also considered here — how knowledge stock improves upon itself through a gradual movement towards a *certain* understanding of ‘things’ and ‘people’ who were considered as *incomprehensible* not long ago?

Following from the first section, I review the major theoretical debates on ‘Death’ and the ‘Community’, that happened in the Indian context of social anthropology from 70’s to late 90’s. Starting from the work of Veena Das, we move on to Jonathan Parry and finally to Meena Kaushik’s work, with a brief mention of the works of Peter Metcalf, Richard Huntington, Maurice Bloch etc. This review would critically highlight the emphasis laid in these accounts to a ‘coherent’ interpretation of the ritualistic observations at the cost of neglecting other empirical details signalling the presence of colonialism and ‘modernity’ as it were.

The third section elucidates — how the historical knowledge of colonialism, post-colonialism, nation building and the idea of ‘identity’ can help us to rethink the social anthropology of death. Then I go on to discuss the contestations around the idea of the ‘community’ itself, in the contemporary world. This involves, invoking the writings of Benedict Anderson and Jean Luc Nancy and engagement with these writings in the wake of the arguments of the first two sections.

Conceptualisations and Constitution of the Anthropology of Death

In this section, we start by discussing Robert Hertz’s work and then move on to Arnold van Gennep’s work, finally concluding this section by an extended discussion of Victor Turner’s work and the summary of the main arguments.

Hertz's essay –“A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death”, published originally in 1907¹, perhaps for first time specifically sought to understand the moment of death in a given community in terms of its ritualistic observations within anthropological means. Based on the ethnographic details² of Borneo – an island in Indonesia, his essay speaks of an “Intermediary period”. This “Intermediary period” is ritually marked and observed by the islanders as different from any other condition in their social lives. Though the phrase “Intermediary period” is a translation from the original work in French, it is of significance to underline the emphasis given to a processual “Intermediary” rather than a strict — marked out time period, which could have been called as the intermediate period. This “Intermediary period” then, according to Hertz's, is a period, which starts the moment — it is conceived by the people that some one (who must have been ailing) is now going to die. However, it does not end at the event of the death itself, nor does it end at the primary burial of the body. It ends at a ‘Great feast’, which is organized when the already buried body is completely rid of the flesh and odour (Hertz 1960). These bones are then taken at a specific site and are consecrated with a secondary burial, announcing the symbolic union of the newly dead with the already dead – old ancestors. This symbolic completion is not a completion in the strictest sense that one is done with the dead once and forever, but on the other hand it suggests that the two cosmos of the living and the long dead have come to a union for the greater beneficence. Thus, the message is that the worlds of living and the dead are permeable through symbolic communication of rites and rituals.

The “Intermediary period”, that had unsettled the delicately balanced equilibrium between the two cosmos — if it passes without any untoward incident — it provides occasion for the conclusive moment of the Great Feast. Even then, the feast is as tense as it is exhilarating; the community exhilarates because it prizes itself over having passed the “intermediary period” without any accident. It is tense because at this moment of exhilaration, a single fatal mistake by any person can undo the entire ritualistic exercise.

¹ This essay was originally published in 1907. It informs the work of van Gennep, whose own work- *Rites of passage*, was originally published in 1908, and the English translation was published in 1960. Also the accounts of Veena Das, Parry, Kaushik etc, are indebted to Hertz's work. Along with the above-mentioned essay, they however use his contribution on body symbolism as well. Using the reprint of his work, titled as *Death and the Right Hand*, published in 1960.

² Hertz is working with secondary data, however it is not limited to using anthropological accounts only; there are other details borrowed from – missionary and Travel records.

Thus, Hertz in his account is very sensitive to the peculiarities involved in an event of death. For him, this event warns the entire community of the intensity of the danger, which may befall depending on the social status and the social rank of the person who is about to die or is already dead and hasn't been treated with a secondary burial as yet. However he clearly states that, each death in the given community is significant. He notes that — “ when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of life, in the faith it has in itself” (*ibid.*: 78). Hertz further emphasizes that this is, one aspect of the social situation of a given death in the community; the other basic condition, which integrates everyone into observing the rituals, is that once the living person has died, its soul is a contagion — it can touch everyone, whoever does not participate in the ritual ceremony. This idea of the contagion is already devised in the rituals and is known to the community concerned. Thus, just after death, the body is transported in communitarian imagination into a progenitor of both horror and awe. It cannot be treated like a living body; it has to be carefully managed according to the ritualistic norms. Hertz clarifies that this observation should not be confused with psychological revulsion or disgust. In this case, ritualistic norms clearly dictate the physiological reaction expected of different persons in the given community (*ibid.*: 76). For example, he argues that in case of — death of a husband: the wife-now-widow is to be most touched by the contagion. It is manifested by the symbolised obligation to rub on her body his decomposing flesh (*ibid.*: 51). To explain this, Hertz argues: first, for the widow, pollution is inevitable and second, she needs to deflect any ill treatment by her husband through the acknowledgement that she is the one, who is most touched by his death, suggesting that though she is now widow, she is still his wife.

On a similar plane, Hertz provides different accounts of symbolic relations between the dead (unstable soul), the living and the transformed dead (s) - i.e. the ancestors. In doing so, Hertz clearly pronounces one feature of the social world he is interested in — that the most dreadful thing, in the given community (his own ethnographic context) is an event of death. This dreadful intensity can be buffered only by the respective community's ritualistic correspondence with all cosmos involved. This symbolic correspondence, incurs moral belief and ritualistic investment in varying degrees. At a general level it

involves all those who fall within the symbolic array and at a specific level, it involves the persons of the community according to the rank, status, age, gender, relation to the dead and the living. That is to say that, the community's "earned stable condition", after the second burial touches everyone involved, just as the dread and horror had. In other words, Hertz is suggesting that it is possible to think that at least, symbolically, the entire community could be the site of communication, at the moment of a death or at the "Intermediary period".

On a separate register, there is a need to make some comments on the organizing of this knowledge of the ritualistic observations of a death in a given community. Hertz is working with secondary data, so clearly there must be an existing literature, which must have come through on the bases of different methodological imperatives. Being able to make sense of this "anthropological" process also suggests, that conceptually one recognizes the symbolic meanings and their categorical assertions. This link has to be seen with — how this knowledge stock is further informed with general schemas, which work toward building — exhaustive and systemic models of understanding the social. This, approach toward a nomenclature and classification certainly suggests greater analytical as well as descriptive reach, but it also suggests that there is increasingly a greater movement and interchange of ideas, belief systems, and knowledge stocks, through various modes of cultural intrusion, exchanges and negotiations simultaneously. Noting this, we turn to van Gennep's work.

Arnold van Gennep's theoretical formulation suggests that the ritualistic applications to transform the existing subject from one cosmos to another, with minimum activity or agency on 'its'³ own could be collectively understood under the category of *Rites of Passage*. van Gennep is concerned about having a general *schéma* of the rites and the overall classification of events in which different *schémas* could be explained. The phrase- *schéma* as explained in the 1960 edition's introduction by Solon T. Kimball (Kimball 1960: vii) is supposed to be more flexible and dynamic than the word 'pattern',

³ 'It' has been used here because there is a suggestion in van Gennep's work and later as we would see more explicitly in Turner's work, that the subject is to be considered as an asexual being during the liminal period.

used by the English translators, so here, the phrase *schéma* has been retained. The crucial admission in the beginning of this book which distinguishes it, from Hertz's essay, is the emphasis on the similarity of events like "ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals" and also the change of seasons (ceremonies of full moon for instance), the change of the year (new year's day) etc. (van Gennep 1960:3-4). To exhaustively mention the classificatory notations itself is beyond the scope of the book, but that initiative has to be considered in the background. It is a significant step in making sense of all the moments of the social, which could be dangerous and threatening — intra community and at the inter community level. Next, van Gennep emphasizes the utility of recognizing the moment when one is to go for a journey, which entails movement from the known and familiar to the unknown and unprotected. This insight is crucial, because it is this movement and ritualistic observation of the same, which is evoked most often in the symbolic expression of communication between the living and the dead. He argues: "the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies" (*ibid.*: 20). He classifies these moments, as having the following modes in common: the movement from one world to another observed by the rites of *Separation* is a moment of/for *Preliminal* rites; similarly the moment of being in *Transition* is to be observed as a *Liminal* moment and the corresponding rites would be *Liminal* rites, finally the *Incorporation* or the *Aggregation* into a new world would be a movement marked by *Post Liminal* rites (*ibid.*: 21). It is evident that, van Gennep's formulations are tied with the context and he is emphatic that it should not be otherwise.

At this juncture, we can move straight to his description of funerals and their symbolic associations with the people involved (*ibid.*: 146-165). While van Gennep has clubbed as diverse 'Liminal' moments as "coming of age" and "funeral", at one plane of classification, he mentions their characteristic differences when he takes up the cases individually. So for him funeral rites are to be differentiated from others because, as he

suggests, from the 'data' he has followed — it could be said that the funeral rites specifically do not have much Preliminal rites. Rather they have an extended phase of transition marked with Liminal rites — announcing the Liminal moment to be far-reaching and more systemic (*ibid.*: 146). He also suggests, as Hertz does, that the widow and the widower are the ones who have to be most observant of this moment (*ibid.*: 147). To describe his general observations on the major proceedings of rituals by the community concerned, with regard to an event of death, van Gennep's account follows Hertz's schema. For instance, he argues, that the transitional period in case of a death, for the living people — works on a parallel level to what is believed is the situation of the soul. Thus the widow or the widower are treated at times as doubles of the departed soul and the symbolic treatment they go through to reach certain state, is considered the same for the soul also. He says for the Habé of the Niger plateau that "the period of widowhood corresponds, it is said, to the duration of the journey of the deceased's wandering soul up to the moment when it joins the divine ancestral spirits or the reincarnated" (*ibid.*: 147). He asserts that the moment of death transports the entire community into a Liminal phase, yet there exist specific mourners who become the actual referents of all symbolic communication of the people with regard to the status of the imaginary soul. So for instance, the wife as widow has to mourn most for her dead husband and vice versa; the son or the daughter according to marital status, and the context of matrilineal or patrilineal descent must ritually mourn most for the departed parent; similarly the people for a beneficent king or queen etc. In actual empirical practise, one would notice the contextual difference between a widow mourning and a widower mourning, a mother mourning and a father mourning, a son mourning and a father mourning, van Gennep himself doesn't go into such details. Further van Gennep also talks about the act of suicide, being an unusual death in a given community and its somewhat different treatment from other usual deaths.

The central concern of van Gennep is to develop an overarching classificatory schema, through which all liminal moments could be recognized. This classification with its theoretical plausibility provides us with very significant security to venture into a 'field', which till now seemed 'incomprehensible' or was known to a lesser extent. As we

approach Victor Turner's corpus in this light, the problematic gets further illuminated. It could be useful to illustrate this "security" by referring to Turner's response to the following account of Lewis Henry Morgan — "the growth of religious ideas is environed with such intrinsic difficulties that it may never receive a perfectly satisfactory exposition. Religion deals so largely with the imaginative and emotional nature, and consequently with such uncertain elements of knowledge, that all primitive religions are grotesque and to some extent unintelligible" (Turner 1969: 1). Turner, while introducing his study says in response to the above statement of Morgan that- "... (I) will try in fear and trembling, owing to my high regard for his great scholarship and standing in our discipline, to withstand Morgan's casual challenge to posterity, and demonstrate that modern anthropologists, working with the best of the conceptual tools bequeathed to them, can now make intelligible many of the cryptic phenomena of religion in preliterate societies' (*ibid.*: 4).

Turner's sense of "security" in suggesting — that it is possible now to understand the "emotional" as well as the "imaginative" of the various religious systems, paradoxically propels him to see ever more 'Liminalities' in the world. So he moves away from the life-cycle crises and occasions van Gennep was interested in. For him Liminality is a feature as common as that, which has subjects varying from — "neophytes in the Liminal phase" to "small nations", from "good Samaritans" to "dharma bums" (*ibid.*: 125). This is an acknowledgement or a recognition, which was either missing completely or was mentioned as a passing thought in van Gennep's *The rites of passage*. Taking a detour from van Gennep's relation with Turner's work, a discussion of structuralism and its adoption by Turner on the other hand becomes significant here. Once we start operating with the tenets of structuralism, it is clear that the "particular" could be connected to the "universal" and also that barring this "particular-universal" combination — intelligibility does not exist (Lévi-Strauss 1966). Thus, one can follow Turner's assertion about having found the meaning behind "things" and "events", (where Morgan could not) because his anthropological engagement was preceded by an exhaustive set of ethnographies. These ethnographies have managed to record and classify innumerable practises of various cultures under the domain of "particular-universal". Thus, an illusory 'intelligibility'

could be at place only if one is not ready to diversify the notions of “particular” and “universal”. Turner (1969, 1974) intervenes at two levels: first he diversifies the categorical expanses of categories, for e.g. as mentioned before, liminality for him is not only about “coming of age”, it could be extended to comprehend “dharma bums” and “small nations” as well. The second emphasis in Turner’s work rotates around the fact that, for him society is processual, which provides room for events and institutions, that are not necessarily merged with the already given stable organization. There is a departure from the discrete sense of “universal-particular” to bring about the relatively unstable and intertwined features of the social organisation.

Death, as Turner sees it — can be considered as a unique event, because it creates a void, which cannot be filled by any other living member. This void however could be acknowledged, as having affected the respective community, by them coming together as “close comrades” and mourning the “loss”. Turner further suggests that between the mourning for this “loss” and finding a suitable successor to fill the “void”, the comradeship, which develops, could be considered as “communitas”. Thus, this period is of “Liminality” and the exclusive association during it could be conceived as “Communitas”. Turner grapples with the relation between these two processual units while working against the backdrop of structuralism. In his attempt to understand the symbolic expressions of people in his ethnographic context, he comes across various meanings, which he suggests can only be understood when we recognize “body” as capable of communicating. He says,

“The symbols and their relations as found in *Isoma* are not only a set of cognitive classification for ordering Ndembu universe. They are also, and perhaps as importantly, a set of evocative devices for rousing, channeling, and domesticating, powerful emotions, such a hate, fear, affection, grief. They are also informed with purposiveness and have a “conative” aspect. In brief, the whole person not just the Ndembu “mind”, is existentially involved in the life or death issues with which *Isoma* is concerned”(1969: 43).

He thus affirms that— sexuality, food, and issues of “purity” and “pollution” are the symbolic expressions by which the body represents the ritual and social idioms. The body by its expressions exceeds the ‘structure’ laid out by the mind, it moves beyond the given, it proceeds us into a realm of “Communitas”. “Communitas” for Turner is related with the processes of Liminality, it is also a component of the ‘anti-structure’ as he calls it. Since this anti-structure is not to be seen as mere negativity of the “structure”, so Communitas could be understood as an ‘open’ comradeship, where there is a deliberate indifference or antagonism to the rigid rules and norms of the society. The examples he gives are varied to the extent that they cover –“ Tolstoy’s peasants, Gandhi’s *harijans*, and the “*holy poor*” or “*god’s poor*” of medieval Europe” (*ibid.*: 133). For Turner then, “communitas” is processual and it involves concepts of change and regeneration. It is argued here that — there may not be a given social or a given community, which we can evoke in our analyses as ‘static concepts’ (1974: 24). This recognition that the ‘social’ and the ‘community’ may not exist as a given, stands in contrast to Hertz’s and van Gennep’s account, where it has been suggested that the entire community becomes the site of communication at the moment of a death. Victor Turner argues that we may not have a singular community in the first place and second, the imperative of the social is effectually realized very differently through various processes, which leaves enough room for many areas for “Communitas” to come up.

Therefore it would be possible for us to think of events as symbolic assemblages that can be experienced and expressed in manifold ways. Further, since any one event (like Death in our case) can be associated with varying set of symbolic meanings, it is possible that this assemblage of symbolic meanings may not be used at the event of death only, but whenever experientially, emotionally or imaginatively people feel like evoking it. Turner’s in his extensive discussion of Metaphors and Archetypes in what he calls as “social dramas”, suggests that metaphors with their capacity to be facilitating in communicating “two separate realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image” (*ibid.*: 25) can be seen interacting through a more stable realm of

archetypes⁴. While an Archetype may have ‘key words and expressions’, with their ‘paradigmatic meanings’ and the source from which they were ‘originally drawn’. (*ibid.*: 26). Metaphors for Turner provide a free floating but an illuminating mode of expression, while its association with an archetype binds it into a stable context. Thus, Turner is remarking, that any metaphor (like in our case Death as a metaphor) cannot be used completely independent of — the contextual domain or the structure in which it has its root source. Though Turner moves away from Structuralism in a way, his work finds an essential plank in structuralism itself; it cannot be conceived without structuralism existing as it is, in it. His idea of the process of the social is the one in which, he also wishes to have a firm, immovable base, along with the possibility of — malleable processes he had been describing all along. Thus, he ends his book – *Dramas, fields and Metaphors* (1974) with this note:

“Structure and anti-structure are not Cain and Abel, to use a metaphor familiar to ourselves; they are rather Blake’s Contraries that must be “redeemed by destroying the negation”. Otherwise we must all perish, for behind specific historical and cultural developments, East versus West, hierarchical versus egalitarian systems, individualism versus communism, lies the simple fact that man is both structural and an anti-structural entity, who grows through anti-structure and conserves through structure’ (*ibid.*: 298).

Having examined these three accounts, Hertz, van Gennep, Turner, there is a need to problematise their theoretical endeavour. As we would move to look at the contemporary writings, it may become increasingly difficult to discern these two realms: “Structure” and “Anti-Structure” or that of “Growth” and “Decay”. The transient state of the present world may allot or wrench away ambiguous properties to and from “growth” and “decay”. In such a context, one needs to look at the space of “death” with its literal and ethno-physiological connotations but more significant is to relate it with the larger domain of uncertainty and insecurity — where “death” has become an imposing complex. The idea of impending death and decay may not allow us to settle in any idea of

⁴ There is a long negotiation by Turner to come up with a conclusive idea of Metaphor and archetype and for the same he evokes many a discussions. Taken here is the perspective of Stephen C. Pepper and Black, which Turner evokes and follows in his book– *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974).

conservation permanently or even momentarily. In that regard if one views the coming of structuralism, one figures that every cultural being could be meaningfully understood, and with this “security” one ventured into the ‘field’. However the contexts of knowledge were defined by colonialism, travel, missions, pilgrimages, wars, capitalism and patriarchy etc. The various hierarchies, usually conflictual, have their unique metaphors, symbols, expressions and activities of the realm to which the anthropologist belongs (i.e. of science, rationality and that of security). It is from this space that one wants to show, using different writings on community, that when the ethnographic accounts were being written, those practitioners (specific cultural actors within the ethnographies) were already *suspicious* of those ethnographic meanings themselves. Second, as a corollary — what did the suspicion and the conflict direct them towards? It could be argued, that far from the cultural actors of the plain and coherent ethnographic accounts, they were into a more precarious and unstable negotiation with what the anthropologist was relatively secure by believing in, i.e. science, medicine, insurance... or in other words a knowledge system which promised the world to them, just the way it did to the Anthropologist.

Now, if Hertz and Van Gennep are to be believed, these two features didn’t even require any negotiation because, for them both the ‘modern’ and the ‘primitive’ could remain together and remain discrete. The Structuralism of Lévi-Strauss placed the ‘savage’ and the ‘modern’ on the same plane, and proclaimed a way in which the cultural world could be known, from a vantage point of scientific rationale. Turner acknowledges, the movement between these two worlds, but thinks a process with a tender balance of the “structure” and the “anti-structure” would manage to bring about a newer but meaningful world. What I want to emphasize in this thesis is that the processes of the contemporary world like that of capitalism, imperialism, nationalism, nation building, post colonial nationalism etc. do not provide a stable and secure arena of a “structural” world, as it were, nor do they concede space for an “indifferent or antagonistic” mode of being as the Turner’s “communitas”. An enquiry into the being of the “community” would orient us towards an enquiry into the existential concerns of the beings of that community, and that would take us to the overarching question — how does death figure in our everyday lives? Deferring this discussion for the later part of this chapter, the next section follows.

The Social-Anthropological conceptualisations on Death vis-à-vis the Indian context

To start with, it is important to locate Veena Das's early writings, because, as we would see: it is these writings which actually prompt other Social-Anthropologists like Jonathan Parry and Meena Kaushik to go to the 'field' (in this case the Ghats of Banaras). Or in other words, Das's writings — lay down the rationale behind the entire exercise of mortuary rituals of Hindus at Banaras, which are then later descriptively told by Parry and Kaushik.

The initiative by Veena Das⁵ to describe the rationale of Rituals around the event of death in Hinduism, in her book – *Structure and Cognition* was unique in more than one way. This description in order to unravel the Meanings behind the practice of elaborate rituals around the event of death, took to a hermeneutic understanding of the scriptural texts of Hinduism like – *Dharmaranyā Purana and Grihya sutra* (Das 1982: 121). This 'book view' however was different from other similar initiatives by the Indologists, in order to describe the existence and functioning of caste within the social geography of the village. Such Indological accounts were already critically reviewed and dispensed by anthropologists like Srinivas, Dube, and Beteille etc. as they believed in the 'field view' through "participant observation" (Jodhka: 1998). Their criticisms were grounded in the fact that "The book view" misses the point by portraying theory and practice as synonymous features of the society. Most of the Indological accounts could be possible because it was largely believed by their authors that much hasn't changed in the Indian society from the time of the distant past. It is still under a time wrap; even geographically it is bound from all sides and is self-contained. The followers of "participant observation" did acknowledge the gradual movement of village towards "development", however they did not necessarily see that as a fatal threat to the stability of either functioning of castes or that of the village itself.

⁵ Though this initiative had started much before, through various publications in "The Contributions to Indian sociology", the emphatic articulation specifically around the issue of death came in the form of an essay to "The contributions to Indian sociology" itself. The said essay is — "The use of Liminality: Society and Cosmos in Hinduism" (1976), later published in her book – *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*. (1977, 1982 revised ed.)

In such a situation Das's work, which comes after the acceptance of the "Field view", could not have reverted back to the 'book view' and it doesn't. Her account right at the outset clearly states that "Book view" is not to be taken as a stepwise description of the actual practice of any social phenomena. Instead, it has to be understood as the meaningful combination of different categories: which, in practice, symbolically organize a structure of values on which it could be said that social lives are based (Das 1982 and 1998:121-133). Thus going back to the 'books' was defended on the count that it provided a symbolic whole from which the possible meanings of various ritualistic acts could be derived. This mode of enquiry and understanding, inspired by works of Lévi-Strauss, was prompted in the direction of unravelling the meaningful cognitive structures, in an attempt to show the plausibility of the rituals as part of a meaningful whole. Das's work then is also an academic intervention, so as to suggest that the extensive rituals performed in the given Hindu society at any given moment are not arbitrary and useless, as any strict scientific-rational account of the same, would induce us to believe in. She also wants us to know that — the practices of the social cannot be translated to mean real correspondence only, as functionalists would have us believe. Most of the things that happen at the level of the "symbolic" are related to both – the "real" and the "imaginary". Following Hertz, she argues that- "the sacred in Hindu belief and ritual should be conceptualized as divided with reference to the opposition of life and death rather than the opposition of good and bad, as in Srinivas" (1982: 119). She further argues that, it could be understood by following the symbolism allotted in Hinduism to rituals using the right and left as directions. She classifies (*ibid.*: 119) the same as following-

Rituals associated with the use of Right

1. Passage of time
2. Rites of initiation
3. Rites of pregnancy
4. Rites of marriage

Rituals associated with the use of left

1. Death rituals
2. Rites to Ghosts, demons, etc.
3. Rites to Ancestors
4. Rites to serpents

Thus she exemplifies using this classification that Hinduism does not operate with the opposition of pure and impure. It can be shown that pregnant women and mothers at the moment of childbirth, both belong to the right side, but pregnancy is not considered as impure, while childbirth is. Das elaborates on this very systematically, and it is the schema later used by both Parry and Kaushik. However, the latter also carry forward the description in an irreversible way, so there are many new insights in their accounts as well. Beginning with Das, the description of Liminality is common to all three accounts. Das has argued that, Liminality though is a vulnerable moment it is not a 'meaningless' moment. Her effort along with Parry and Kaushik's is to show precisely this, that, it is not a 'meaningless' moment; in fact it is laden with symbolic expressions which take care of the past, present and the future of all those who are involved in the process of mortuary rituals. The other important feature which is raised by Das, that is implicitly there in Hertz and van Gennep, and explicitly but without much exemplification in Turner's account, is that, the Liminal moment in case of a death has well directed symbolic expressions of sexuality and fertility.

Parry⁶ in an essay "Death and cosmogony in Kashi" (1981), develops a description to show that "Indian thought postulates a homology between body and cosmos". The idea of personhood is that — the person as the site of reference, while communicating symbolically with different cosmos along with the communitarian participation institutes a whole. The whole, when disrupted can be symbolically resettled through the practice and observation of the rituals. Within this symbolic whole, expressions of fertility and sexuality could be delineated, just as expressions of food and space could be. While, Parry's account is very significant for its description, yet, for our on going account, it is also crucial to observe the theoretical background,⁷ which at a fundamental level paves the way for Parry's account.

⁶ Parry has collectively summed in his book published in 1994, *Death in Banaras*, the ideas and descriptions put forward, much before, that is — just after his 'fieldwork' at the Ghats of Banaras, which started from September 1976. The first two important essays were published in early 1980's, first one in "The Contributions to Indian sociology" - 'Death and Cosmogony in Kashi' (1981) and second one in Parry and Bloch edited *Death and The Regeneration of Life* - 'Sacrificial death and the Necrophagous ascetic' (1982).

⁷ The precedence of Veena Das writings and Meena Kaushik's field work at the Ghats of Banaras in 1974-75.

Meena Kaushik's account, based on her fieldwork with the *Doms of Banaras* at the Ghats of Banaras, considers the fact that 'Doms' are occupationally tied with the everyday handling and ritualistic disposal of the corpse both in physical terms as well as symbolic terms (1976, 1979). Recalling, what Hertz said about the dead body, as a thing of "awe and horror", it could be imagined that 'Doms' have to be both within the social structure and outside the social structure in symbolic terms to be able to handle what other members of the society cannot. This inclusion-exclusion as it is, is institutional in Hinduism. The Doms, because of their occupational importance are indispensable to the Hindu social structure, yet at the same time, for what they do (touch Dead bodies-intrinsically and excessively impure things) they also cannot be integrated into the mainstream of caste relations and social structure, so they are considered as 'untouchables' (Kaushik 1976). These are the insights, which Kaushik elucidates, taking off from the previous accounts of caste relations put forward by Srinivas and his contemporaries. Kaushik, then moves away from Srinivas's suggestion that — Sanskritic (Brahminical) and non-Sanskritic (non-Brahminical) traditions are contrastable entities. She suggests in her essay: "the lack of Sanskritic elements in the untouchable ritual does not make it different from the basic structure that underlies the Brahminic ritual. In fact the former can be seen as a transformation of the latter" (Kaushik: 1976). The idea of inclusion and the exclusion of the 'Doms' or 'the untouchables' in the symbolic whole, portrayed in Hindu Texts was also registered by Parry and Das. Kaushik then, in order to describe various realms of ritualistic practices uses many descriptive tools like that of —'lateral symbolism', 'spatial symbolism', 'culinary symbolism', and 'Acoustic symbolism'. However the idea that — 'the basic structure' remains the same and also that the Brahminic ritualistic practices are a 'transformation' of the Doms' rituals is problematic. While it would be preposterous to say that the rituals of Doms' are radically different from the Sanskritic order, at the same time it can be argued against Kaushik's work that evocation of a "basic" structure assumes that no matter what — if one manages to prune other contextual details one would reach to this "invariable" basic structure. Independent of the fact, whether one is looking at the Brahminical rituals or those of others: the difference lies in surplus and scarcity of rituals not in the basic structure. This view could be contested by arguing that it would be more productive to look at the practise of rituals of a given community, for

instance, Doms in this case, with respect to their historical and cultural contexts. This is even more important when one is concerned with unravelling meaning(s) behind the ritualistic acts. In such a case, if rituals are to be considered as mere repetition of emulated practises, as in the case of Doms here, and if one has to derive meanings entirely from the Brahminical texts only then it is of little implication whether one is trying to understand Doms or any other caste. Just as on “humanist” grounds, Lévi-Strauss would suggest that cognitively there is no difference between the mental categorisations of the “savage” and the “civilized” (1966). One would suggest that this “equality” even if it exists, it does not remain so, at the operational level because the meanings it gives rise to are dependent on so many contingent influences that neither the equality in itself remains meaningful nor other categories are completely robust and sealed with the same repeated meanings. So it could be further argued that an effort directed towards unravelling meaning behind ritualistic activities has to take into account the changing contextual relations. Even the “basic” structure exists in relation with other elements that do not fit in symmetrically within it and once an exposition involves those ruptures, the “basic” structure itself is rendered with an instability and ambiguity that could be considered more proximate with our everyday lives. Bringing us to a conviction that the “basic” or the ‘irreducible’ within the social would always be an illusionary and futile combination. In this case the sense of asymmetry and turmoil could be approached if one locates the practise of rituals within the conflicts and negotiations of “colonialism”, “modernity”, “governance”, etc. This perspective and contextualisation is lacking not only in Kaushik’s work but is common to all the theorists we have discussed so far, including Das and Parry.

At that, I reassess Huntington and Metcalf book *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (1979) to evolve another narrative, which revises and contributes to the main tenets of Hertz and van Gennep’ work. In an attempt to explain the symbolic aspects of ritualistic practices, both authors emphasize on the expressions of sexuality and fertility along with various other contributions. In this section I look at their contribution on understandings of the expressions of sexuality through ritualistic practices. They are of the view that most of the rituals are opposed and categorized on the

grounds of “order” on one hand and “vitality” on the other. While, “order” comes from men, “vitality” from women. Bloch and Parry in a volume — *Death and the Regeneration of life* (1982), remark — “this volume focuses on the significance of symbols of fertility and rebirth in funeral rituals” (1982:1). As would be clear from the title and the opening remark itself, this book is an attempt to direct the enquiry towards the supposition that each death brings about a lack in a bio-physiological sense as well and in order to replenish that: fecundity and fertility should be exalted along with the mourning moments. In introducing this book, they criticize Huntington and Metcalf for conflating sexuality with fertility, which as per their understanding of the dominant beliefs: sexuality is considered as a dangerous thing and is prohibited from explicit and direct reference, fertility on the other hand has a recognized space. To which Huntington and Metcalf reply in the revised edition (1991) of their book, that their description of the duality is, in fact more dynamic than Bloch and Parry, where it is considered as ‘wooden’ or ‘static’, for example sexuality verses fertility, men verses women, death versus rebirth etc. This conversation could go on, but instead of improving on the malleability or the wooden character of theoretical categories, one would want to pose few questions and take it up further in the chapters to follow. How do we manage to meaningfully separate the two categories of sexuality and reproduction? In other words, are all symbols of sexual expressions transcendently linked to the basic, irreducible ‘structure’ of reproduction?

We would tackle these questions in more detail in the second and third chapter, for now we can move on to the discussion on community and the idea of personhood, that constitutes the central foci of our next section.

The Ideas of Personhood and the notions of Community

Most of the writings discussed in the preceding section, barring few (like that of Turner) view the category of “community” per se as a rigid and without close proximity to the practical⁸ world at large even when their claims originate from initiatives such as “fieldwork”. They consider, at least heuristically, the idea of “community,” “person,”

⁸ This is not to suggest that their writings are abstract or are not oriented towards the “practical” world at large. One is hinting at the for grantedness involved in their work; which in a way prevents them from revising the notion of “community” in a far-reaching, conclusive manner.

“individual” as total categories. Where community is constituted by shared norms of personhood; where total belief in the symbolic and the material practices by the persons, provides endless occasions to renew and reorganize themselves within the prescribed or the normative limit. As Beth A. Conklin and Lynn M. Morgan⁹ argue that “the Wari’ see the human body itself as a social creation, that is constructed and maintained through exchanges of substance between individual bodies. The conceptual framework for this biosocial vision is an ethno physiological model of human bodies as porous and permeable, open to penetration by the body fluids of other individuals.” They argue further: “the blood and its analogs- breast milk, semen, vaginal secretions, and sweat- can be transferred between people and between humans and animals through the skin, sexual intercourse, and by oral and nasal ingestion. Blood conveys qualities of identity so that interpersonal exchange of body fluids creates shared substance and hence shared identity” (1996:669). The authors pose this understanding of the Native Amazonian personhood to the North American idea of a ‘once and for all’ given body ‘as the biological raw material on which culture operates’ (*ibid.*: 659). Also in their description, it is considered that the North American cultural treatment comes through the idea of science and the practice of medicine and surgery along with others. As is evident, Conklin and Morgan’s idea of the wari’ personhood is in theoretical conjunction with what we have discussed so far through the accounts of Hertz, van Gennep, Das, Kaushik, and Parry etc. That is: the “person” is a synchronic part of the cosmos, which also inhabits gods, animals, demons etc. The said person can be ritualistically connected and communicated to any other feature of the cosmos through the use of “real,” “imaginary,” “symbolic,” means. While just as Conklin and Morgan try to show the diametric contrast of the North American identity — of individual, of science and rationality, legal rights and medico-surgical possibilities; the anthropologists we have discussed so far, even after sharing both of these inseparable realms by then, have presented the analytical picture of just one domain. It could be argued that, this thorough going — discrete picture of just one domain is the anthropologists’ creation at the cost of being indifferent or oblivious to

⁹ See also Inden and Nicholas on — *Kinship in Bengali Culture* on similar lines. This essay is chosen because of its recent publication compared to other such works and also because it is partially in response to the criticisms meted out to the similar theoretical exegesis, of which Inden, Nicholas and even Das were a part of in 70s.

the conflicts and negotiations of people it claimed to study. So, considering the presence of this conflictual negotiation and settling down with the “tradition” and “modernity”— a discretion created and nurtured by anthropologists — does not leave us with the peaceful “processes” of Turner either. Unlike Turner’s suggestion of movement from one “Communitas” to another in a processual community, there are “deaths” at the symbolic level of things that were considered to be as stable referents, as last limits¹⁰. So, what we need to look at now is, that, when the referents to derive stable meanings have crumbled down, does it essentially become a meaningless world as few anthropologists and other writers have come to suggest or there would be other ways in which we can think of revising this sudden sense of exhilarating “death” and “loss”? Let’s illustrate by two extensive quotes, to corroborate what has been described in this section and there after I will briefly mention few more writings on Community.

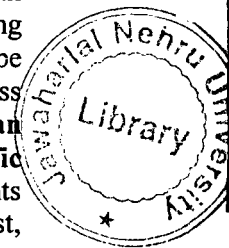
Quoted here is a passage from an introduction to an anthology on *Principles of visual anthropology* (1974) by Margaret Mead:

“Anthropology, as a conglomerate of Disciplines- variously named and constituted in different countries as cultural anthropology, social anthropology, ethnology, ethnography, archeology, linguistics, physical anthropology, folklore, social history, and human geography- has both implicitly accepted the responsibility of making and preserving records of the vanishing customs and human beings of this earth, whether these peoples be inbred, preliterate populations isolated in some tropical jungle, or in the depths of a Swiss canton, or in the mountains of an Asian kingdom. **The recognition that forms of human behavior still extant will inevitably disappear has been part of our whole scientific and humanistic heritage.** There have never been enough workers to collect the remnants of these worlds, and just as each year several species of living creatures cease to exist, impoverishing our biological repertoire, so each year some language spoken only by one or two survivors disappears forever with their deaths. This knowledge has provided a dynamic that has sustained the fieldworker taking notes with cold, cramped fingers in an arctic climate or making his own wet plates under the difficult conditions of a torrid climate” (Emphasis added) (1974:3).

This second account is from the travelogue *Triste Tropiques*, Levi-Strauss wrote towards later half of his career:

“There was a time when traveling brought the traveler into contact with civilizations which were radically different from his own and impressed him in the first place by their strangeness. During the last few centuries such instances have become increasingly rare. Whether he is visiting India or America, the modern traveler is less

¹⁰ Reference is to the death of “god”(Nietzsche 1961), the increasing profanity towards the sacred. The breakdown of symbolic communication that happened through the ritualistic messages, with the dead “ancestors”. The denudation of all the “symbolic” and the “imaginary” cover, which held the person at his place, secure within the cosmos.



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surprised than he cares to admit. In choosing his goals and itineraries, he feels especially free to select a particular date of European penetration, or a particular rate of influx of mechanization, rather than another. The search for the exotic boils down to the collecting of earlier or later phases of a familiar pattern of development. The traveler is like an antiquity obliged, by the dearth of material, to abandon his collection of Negro art and to fall back on bargaining for quaint pieces of junk as he tours the flea markets of the inhabited worlds.” (Emphasis added) (1992: 86).

After considering these articulations of ‘loss’, which still is rendered as the Anthropologists’ “loss” rather than the “loss” of the “communities” itself. However by now, one can discern both moods from looking at the given one. On that note one could turn again to consider the possibilities of thinking about ‘community’. In an anthology of essays contributing to the question of personhood and identity, edited by Surinder Singh Jodhka- *Communities and Identities* (2001), there are many accounts, which resonate with, or certify what Jodhka has said, while concluding his introduction: “it appears that much social science and historical writing on India, both of the older genre and the more recent one, remains naïve about both the politics of culture as well as the politics of academic knowledge”(ibid.: 55). While, there are greater discussions on the notion of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and further developments on these notions, in the writings on community in this anthology, without going into some of these details, the statement by Derrida in an essay by Hegde mentioned in the same anthology is revealing (ibid.:63). The said statement is “who and where “we” are, and what the limits of an “era” might be”. Considering this to be close to our line of enquiry, I, move to evoke few points from Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community* (1991) to see what are the important events which separate the domain of ‘us’ and ‘our’ ‘era’, from any other. One important insight comes from Nancy’s discussion of Levi-Strauss’s study of myths of different communities. He suggests that as it is, all discussions of myths have been so, where myths form a vantage point of a subject¹¹, points to a total. To the extent that ‘myth is the opening of a mouth immediately adequate to the closure of the universe’ (ibid.: 50). This amounts to saying that, within a myth’s description, we are given all the structural articulations which may help us to think of a stable life with precedence and pattern, if all the units of the given myth cooperate and function as laid out. If we relate this with our

¹¹ As the anthropological accounts discussed here considered the “person” of a “community” to be under the total spell of cosmic conjunction.

on going description, it could be argued that, the ‘symbolic wholes’ described by the anthropologists — in perfect synchrony with all the ‘cosmos’ — are descriptions of myths only. As Nancy argues further- ‘in order to say that myth is a myth (that myth is a myth, or that “myth” is a myth), it has been necessary to play on two quite distinct and opposite meanings of the word “myth” (*ibid.*: 52). Simply put, if one sees this in the context of the anthropological writings described above it would mean that, it made all the difference when the anthropologists studied “myths” as “myths” of one or another community and when the respective “community” did in different spatio-temporal era. The community by itself associated with those “myths” on a plane completely different from the anthropologists; the belief system was attached with their beings and there was no outside to it. However the anthropologist’s accounts comes when both participants – the researcher and subjects — increasingly know that the myths do not constitute the total. Notwithstanding that, the anthropological accounts fail to acknowledge this and thus their myth of an uninterrupted, without any conflict goes on. When the fact is: that “community” ceased to exist, even before one took to analyse it. Consider Nancy saying —“we know – at least up to a certain point – what the contents of the myths are, but what we do not know is what the following might mean: *that they are myths*” (*ibid.*: 45).

In such a situation, can we still think of a communitarian being? The affirmation is put forward by Heidegger (1962) as “being-in-common,” after a thorough revision of the “older genre” of thinking around the idea of “community”. He is saying, that community is experience of “being-in-common” because we relate with that, what we cannot know ourselves. To make it clearer, if one relates it with our discussion on “Death,” one would follow, as Heidegger reveals that, *one cannot experience one’s own death* and thus death is always experienced as the death of the other. As long as we can relate with this death, and there is very little possibility that we cannot, because we ourselves are concerned about our being as “*towards death*”. Thus it could useful to think in this research on the line suggested by Nancy’s understanding of Heidegger, that — “community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us* – question, waiting, event, imperative – in the wake of society” (*ibid.*: 11).

Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1991) argues how nations during their origin and growth came to ‘conceive’ and imagine themselves as a community with ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’. He argues that “ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” He further says “These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism” (*ibid.*: 7). Anderson further argues that this idea of giving shape to the imagined community was played out through different print media, which in the contemporary world could be extended to other modes of communication as well.

However, thinking of the newspaper and its reiteration — that we are part of a given “community” as Anderson suggests subdues the other greater possibility. That could be: thinking through the same newspapers with their everyday reports of violence, arson, fraud and socio-political appropriations. If both possibilities are seen together, there is a charged atmosphere of a disrupted “community” that comes to be present in our imagination of the social. This is the maxim over which most of the writings on ‘risk’ have come in recent times and I shall focus on this issue in Chapter two of the thesis. It may still be possible for us to think of community as a possibility, but in many a refigured way, which may not let any category settle down as it is, or become reified.

Conclusion

So far it has been argued that, though various accounts of different communities participating at the event of death exist, if one follows them over time or over different regions, these anthropological accounts are similar in what they exclude. This exclusion incidentally is of all those means, which facilitates them to write these accounts; they are for instance technologies of knowledge, science, and communication etc. One also tried to substantiate the above point by showing that the way the anthropologist was moving towards realizing that the world could be known, his/her subjects in different corner of that world were also now tied in this promise of universal being through various means of

colonialism-anticolonialism, nationalism-antinationalism, industrialization or other means like hospital, stadium, ballot, TV etc. So when the anthropologist enters the 'field', this 'field' is not the primeval 'field': which one may think of, while reading their accounts. The crucial question for us is, then, what could be the implication of this neglect or exclusion? So far it has been argued that: this has suddenly come to anthropologists as a moment of lack or loss, as specifically delineated by Mead and Lévi-Strauss. However, if one focuses on the negotiations, conflicts, and incommensurability of events and emotions as they were happening, this dead end may not have been the conclusion. But, this is not to suggest that the anthropologists were consciously excluding the other story because they were working in bad faith. In fact, the spaces provided by different knowledge systems were such that, to do otherwise was perhaps inconceivable. As one has evoked the account of Das initially, it is very clear that such interventions were also to fight off the stereotypes of 'irrational' or 'backward' Hindus. Similarly, the discussion on "community" in the wake of above discussions left us with possibilities of conceiving the being in an atmosphere of risk and uncertainty. Thus, the overall theme of this research could be spelled as an exploration of different notions of "death" and their implicative relations with the mutable "community."

I will now briefly introduce the themes of the chapters to follow. Continuing with the explorations of the first chapter, the second chapter will be an effort to illustrate, how some of the "structural-anthropological" accounts have given way to interpretations of the contemporary world as the one, that is, by virtue of its mergence with what were considered as factional and discrete units is now devoid of all "symbolic" relations. Related to it, is the persisting appeal in most of the contemporary accounts that "we" are one, in our suffering. The second chapter then, elaborates on the analytical implications of this acknowledgement, and shows the departure points of contemporary writings from the ones discussed in the first chapter.

Pursuing the critical theme raised in the first and second chapters that the structural-functional anthropological descriptions of death are half-stories because they do not involve the effects and affects of the already prevalent and all-pervasive modes of colonialism and governance, the third and the fourth chapters are organised. Thus, the

third and the fourth chapters are initiatives informed by dual consciousness. First, one has to illustrate the presence of the said, effect and affect of colonialism and governance using the same structural-functional accounts. Secondly, one also has to go back to certain exemplary writings of and on the colonial-postcolonial time that are sensitive in recording the conflictual impressions of people, compared to the anthropological writings. Thus, there is an evocation of Tagore's short story — *The Living and the Dead* (*Jibita o Mrita*) and Partha Chatterjee's narrative history: *The princely impostor?: The Kumar of Bhawal and the Secret History of Nationalism*.

The third chapter on "Death and Sexuality," probes the subterranean theme of tabooed activities and interpretive limits with which the corresponding 'Transgressions' are recognised by Jonathan Parry, on the practise of *Aghoris*. Using Foucault's account to critically revise Parry's work, one shows the convergence of the interpretive limits posed by Parry with the sanitary anxieties of the colonial governmental practises. Finally, the conclusions drawn are located in the purview of the present postcolonial situation.

In the fourth chapter, an attempt is made towards an exploration of the minor statements about existential being in the works of Tagore and Partha Chatterjee, there is an effort to draw out an 'existential analytic'. Following Julia Kristeva's work in psychoanalysis, on "Feminine Depression", this 'existential analytic' tries to map the "archetype" of marginality of a woman's being in the late colonial–post colonial situation. Considering the historical contextualisation, it has been argued, in keeping with the main theme of this research that the fragmentation of the existential being is more gradual, systemic and far reaching than it has been shown to be, if at all, in the "structural-functional" accounts. Further, it is argued that "death" and "depression" have merged in such a way, that the "depressive" being could be seen as a conspicuous expression of repressed "death" in our times. Extending the conclusions drawn from the discussion, I sum it up by allocating the present world with a greater urgency on the count of "depression", compared to the illustrations taken up in the chapter, where it is still not conceived with the clinical notions of depression as it is done today. Finally I use the fictional work of Anantha Murthy's novel, *Samskara*, to hint at general observations, coming after this research and looking beyond it.

Chapter Two

“Risk” “Uncertainty” and “Social Suffering” in the contemporary society

This chapter is an attempt to illustrate further, what has been said in the preceding introductory chapter. It is important to put issues like “risk”, “uncertainty” and “social suffering” in context with the Anthropological literature of death¹², discussed so far. It is argued here, that the affective-neutrality¹³, which marked the Anthropology of Death, is in contrast with the overt presence of grief and mourning in any discussion on risk, uncertainty and social suffering. Also the recording of the anthropology of death, seldom happens through the mention of ‘we’ from the anthropologist’s point of view, however all writings on risk, uncertainty and social suffering are addressed with a notion of ‘we’ (i.e. the writer is part of the writing and this is acknowledged unlike the anthropological recordings). Understandably, there is a crucial difference also in considering the ‘objects’ of description. In the Anthropological accounts — every ritualistic observation is centred on the physical presence of the dead body. In the latter, death and dying are discussed as methods and any activity involving “loss” is seen with the metaphor of death. This engagement comes in the wake of our understanding through the practice of science and medicine that death in itself is a meaningless thing and its occurrence marks the end of all meanings¹⁴, (if one recalls the introductory chapter: this realization was never

¹² It is important to qualify, that the evocation of two major trends of sociology and anthropology would be difficult to discern separately from each other. Particularly in the context of social anthropology in India, it is nevertheless important to see the historical traditions of knowledge systems, which limit the way in which we can possibly look at the world.

¹³ This affective neutrality has to be seen from the grounds of practicing the discipline itself. The difference between whom one weeps for and for whom one doesn’t at the time of death, is a crucial anthropological understanding which signifies who is part of the “community” who is not respectively. Heuristically it could be shown here that, the anthropological records don’t share the grief of the mourners, it is just grief of the mourners not their own. Where sociological writings are concerned, and as in the case of this chapter where the writers want to get away from the domain of sociology and theorize — mourning, grief... are key gestures with which the entire writings are sewn together. It is important to understand both, the movement from the sociological categories and the evocation of ‘we’; how different writings do this with their varied concerns.

¹⁴ This realization that we are “Being-towards-death” (Heidegger 1962:279-311) works in the background. The crucial issues here are – how that death might come to us and second while we are living, how death touches our lives? As we know from the brief reference in the introductory chapter that Death in itself

acknowledged in the anthropological literature on death) including the ritualistic observations around that dead body. Thus the writings on risk, uncertainty, and social suffering etc. are concerned about the way death i.e. loss or meaninglessness may intrude in any realm of our lives. In this attempt to describe the all-pervasiveness of death in our everyday lives, where the actual death is not even referred¹⁵ to is significant in seeing – how different writings make sense of the contemporary world vis-à-vis death.

There are two sections in this chapter. The first one discusses the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck within the context of conceptualising “Risk” and/in “Reflexive Modernization.” These stances are carefully developed as against the supposed stances of post modernism. It is also important to contextualize these writings as coming strictly from a tradition of sociological writings. Though there is also a demand from these theorists to move away from the old categories, which had been used in understanding the social. It is argued in these writings that they (Beck and Giddens) loathe the use of binaries and the evolutionary terms and that is one reason for questioning the old categories of the social. However, these writings because of their conceptual lineage revert back to just such tendencies. Speaking from the vantage point of “west” as the symptomatic site for the entire world, it is a bygone conclusion in their work that, what the “west” faces today as the “risk society” the rest of the world would eventually be mired with the same problems, if it were not already.

The second sub section, involves the discussion of Mary Douglas’s work on Risk from an Anthropological perspective. Douglas’ engagement though happens from a different plane compared to that of Beck and Giddens. It is however caught up with the application of categories of anthropology in the contemporary world, without considering the critical dimensions that make her kind of structural-functionalist account questionable at the first place.

cannot be experienced and thus never can be known (*ibid.*). Thus when, death is being discussed here, it is used as a metaphor, which can signify anything co-related with death in different cultures.

¹⁵ This seems to be the way ‘Death’ has to be understood with the context of urbanism and the contemporary world, where it is everywhere and yet not visible as itself — a physical finality.

Co-existence of "Risk" and "Reflexivity"?

It could be considered in the very beginning that most of the early writings were concerned with the application and effect of the newer modes of classification based on rational themes. This classification was considered at par with the polyvalent and amorphous themes evoked in *The Primitive Classification* by Durkhiem and Mauss (1963). It is important to briefly review the perspectives of the above-mentioned writings, so that, one is in a better position to contextualize the contemporary theories.

Weber's writings on Rationality, with an illustrative scope in his *The City*, were direct references to the practical application of newer classification. That is, an increasing trend towards reducing the gap between the thought and the practised at the level of governance. Similarly Durkhiem's *Division of Labour in Society* and specifically his study on "suicide" addressed these apprehensions. Marx's work for that matter was grounded with an axiomatic importance given to industrialization and mechanization, which for him gave way to explicit and subtle ways of profiting, exploiting and alienating in a methodological "modern" industrial society. Through his work he, also managed to argue that there exists a wholesome, widespread, conspicuous enemy — Capitalism. Durkhiem and Weber in various ways, refrained from that conclusion. In that regard Weber's discussion of Bureaucracy is revealing, for suggesting implicitly, its mechanical functioning with human units. Thus, it may make it immensely difficult to lay down blame/praise to any one functionary. Howsoever debilitating, liberating, neutral the exercise of Bureaucracy may be, by itself at any given juncture. This is when Bureaucracy, as it is, with its operative logic of rationality and expansive logic of equality, fairness, objectivity across previously existing social hierarchies was imagined and conceived as an overarching and systemic institution. This institution was to have control (through the division of an abstract and anonymous Labour) over whatever happens in the society either on the Everyday basis or as eruptive exceptional turn of the events. Today the contexts are considered to have undergone tremendous changes. To the extent that, for Giddens and Beck: any plausible enquiry of what they call at different places as "High Modernity," "Late Modernity," "Late industrialism," "Reflexive Modernization," could only be made, if existing categories of understanding the social

are radically questioned. Beck appeals in this regard, which could be Giddens (1990) appeal too, as following —

“Conventional social sciences, I therefore want to argue, even if they are conducting highly sophisticated theoretical and empirical research programmes, are caught up in a circular argument. By using the old categories (like class, family, gender roles, industry, technology, science, nation state and so on) they take for granted what they actually try to demonstrate: that we still live, act and die in the normal world of nation-state modernity.”(Beck 2000:211)

Beck further adds that, he should not be misunderstood, for, he is not arguing in favour of “Post modernism” but to the specific concerns of contemporary society fraught with risk and uncertainty. To describe the same, he proposes to use “realism” as well as “constructivism” with equal dexterity (*ibid.*). The fluidity of the terms “risk” and “uncertainty” are to be emphasized for both Beck and Giddens work. While discussing works on risk — risk is discerned from uncertainty as the former could have a classificatory possibility, while the latter may not be even perceptible to our senses. At the same time “uncertainty” may exist as danger nevertheless by virtue of our awareness and consciousness of it, which in turn is provided, contested, affirmed from various sites (Lupton 1999:5-13). Beck’s book *Risk Society* somewhat ambiguously, ventures into this distinction, where he does acknowledge that a quantitative effort to nominate, identify and classify — what is contextually called as “Risk,” did happen but it could not buffer the potentialities of Risks (Beck 1992). According to him, this could be the crucial difference between an early modern society where such nomenclatures did provide stability with their promises and the contemporary “Risk society,” which lives with an excess of uncertainties, derived from an excessive sense of Risks in everyday lives. Adam and van Loon point out that for Beck the movement from an early modern society to a “Risk society” seems to be *sui generis*. For instance, they remark that, Beck considers that — “Industrial society, which has involuntarily mutated into Risk society through its own systematically produced hazards.... balances beyond the insurance limit” (Adam and van Loon 2000:7). Also, they are of the view that Beck’s “risk society” is of irreversible and irreducible nature, to the extent that Beck may argue that —“Risk society

has already taken us beyond the security of Mathematics; we have to acknowledge that in this sense of constituting a new sort of reality, Risk is not reducible to the product of probability of occurrence multiplied with the intensity and scope of potential harm” (*ibid.*: 7).

In Beck’s work then “Risk” occupies a real and a potentially real threat. That’s why, it is an imperative for him to create a space of mediation in ascertaining the veracity and intensity of the different postures of risk for socio-political reasons. At the same time he is ready to concede that Risk and Uncertainty merge at various levels, though perhaps not at all levels. Similarly Giddens also argues that, the contemporary society, saturated with information and contestation of the specialist’s knowledge by other specialists has promoted us into a realm of a future worried civilization of ‘High Modernity’ from that of past oriented ‘Early modernity’ (1990). For him, the constricted world frame forces everyone to experience perhaps for first time the problems of the world as ‘we’¹⁶ of a single human species, that also with the awareness and certainty that most of the hazards of this world are human’s own production (1990, 1991, 1994). All of this, for him is part of what he calls as “Risk culture”.¹⁷ His Risk Culture is characterized by the loss of what he calls “The ontological security”: Ontological security for him is a comfort and confidence, that comes to people because of their “trust” and reliance on relatives, surroundings and things in general (1991: 35-69). To describe the same Giddens borrows from Kierkegaard’ discussion on Vigilius’ notion of *Angest* or Anxiety, which is a long running discussion in Kierkegaard’s own work itself. To just illustrate the point raised by Giddens we can consider this one small part of the discussion, where Kierkegaard differentiates between Anxiety and Fear. He says —“Anxiety as he (Vigilius) understands

¹⁶ Consider this ‘we’, which integrates us into a singular frame, because — we all are worried about the world at large and our situation in it. As one would move into the discussion further, one would realize, that this ‘we’ is a whole only when we take part in it as elements— responsible or victims of Risk. It does not extend itself to the cultural nuances of different postcolonial nations with any degree of historical subtlety. But, this ‘we’ is important for us to look at, because it is this caricaturist platform, which works as springboard for most of the exchanges within the present world, that of — information, bodies (as migrants), commodities etc. Thus it is also the site where ‘risks’ are managed and needless to say, we circulate within it.

¹⁷ Giddens’ “Risk culture” is not very different from Beck’s “Risk society,” however both do have certain features separate from each other, which grants them their authorial exclusivity (see Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994:174-197)

it is quite different from fear, since Fear is always a definite feeling about a known danger, whereas anxiety is a state of cloudy unknowingness, of baffled apprehensiveness about *possibility in general: about everything- or rather about nothing*" (Kierkegaard 2001:178, emphases added).

The reason why I have evoked Kierkegaard's discussion itself, is two fold. First, Giddens differentiation of Risk culture from Early modernity is based on something exclusive which has happened in the contemporary society but from Kierkegaard's discussion it follows, that it could be conceived conceptually as early as 1813-1855 (span of time, when Kierkegaard wrote) that also in a discussion involving Vigilus, who wrote even before him. It is important to remember this, so that one is alert towards any misconception that, these emotive spheres were completely unknown ever before. Second, what has been emphasized in the above mentioned quote- "possibility in general: about everything –or rather about nothing," is the key to understand our present times and it is to be seen how this "possibility in general" and its effects are theorized by different writers as we carry on, in this chapter.

In Giddens parlance then "Risk culture" is the one where "we" "dread" being (Translators of Kierkegaard's work, also use the phrase 'dread' for *Angest*). Where dread refers to a general apprehension, more close to what Kierkegaard in his discussion of Vigilus work allots to Anxiety/*Angest*. In Giddens' work however both anxiety and Fear supplant and nourish each other, so as to make it, just as in Beck's work, at times inseparable from the 'Risks'— as we imagine, conceive, experience them. However both Beck and Giddens, insist while talking about "Reflexive modernization," that it is now possible to "self-biograph" ourselves as individuals. Beck says, "The individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their Biographies themselves" (1994:13). Where "Reflexive modernization" is the larger process in which all of us are involved. For Giddens, it means — a discontinuous but radical reflection on the constitution of the 'self' and its ever-new renovation and re-alignment (1990:36-53). For Beck, "reflexive modernization" means "self-confrontation". Where the effects of the "risk society" cannot be "measured" by the parameters of the older realm of industrial society. Thus this

possibility of “self-confrontation” is simultaneously a site of “self-destruction” also — keeping this in mind “we” have to think of politics in the contemporary world. Beck suggests that this could be considered, as a space of “sub-politics”, where the most “liberating” will share platform with the extremely “conservative” and “xenophobic” political articulations (1990). Beck further proposes that the “imagistic” reach of media could “condense and concretize what is otherwise ungraspable in everyday life,” and that’s how, it may also usher a “new democratization of criticism” (1995:100). This for him exists perforce, because Risk is everybody’s urgency- “poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic” (1992). Thus, for him the “Risk society” may in fact transform us into “active co-producers” from any kind of blasé being (*ibid.*: 157). Further on, he also considers the overriding fact that Media can also “possibly produce or exacerbate inarticulateness, isolation, even stupidity” (*ibid.*: 193). At the same instance he suggests that owing to their active and urgent negotiation, people still may out smart all bluffs and falsities. Giddens resonating similar views, argues that a greater “individuation”¹⁸ has happened in the contemporary society. This “individuation” has pushed the private into the public domain and vice versa, leading to the rupture of familial ties and relations. That at the first place is prompted by lack of ‘Trust’, but as Giddens argues, it leaves us to look for more ‘Trust’, on which more stable relations could be found.

It is this search for “Trust”¹⁹ according to Giddens, that leads people into actively inquiring and interrogating the everyday procedures so that, at a long term: they are able to construct their own biographies and to that extent, risk is indeed a desired imperative. In a lecture titled ‘A Runaway World’ Giddens asserted that —

“ There can be no question of merely taking a negative attitude towards risk. Risk needs to be disciplined but active risk-taking is a core element of a dynamic economic and innovative society” (Caplan 2000:6).

¹⁸ Beck defines it as, “ seen from one angle it means freedom to choose, and from another pressure to conform to internalized demands, on the one hand being responsible for yourself and on the other being dependant on conditions which completely elude your grasp” (quoted in Lupton 1999: 70).

¹⁹ Though the discussion of trust is there right from the start in his writings on risk (1990,1991,1994), his evocation of ‘trust’ or lack of it in intimate relations is a full scale book called –*The Transformation of Intimacy: sexuality, love and Eroticism in Modern societies* (1992). We would briefly discuss the same in the next chapter.

At that note, if one has to re account the discussion so far, one would remark few features that ring across the preceding analyses.

Giddens and Beck's work are in response to a caricaturist idea of Post-modernism, Post-structuralism etc., which they have posed to themselves as the call of – “the demise of epistemology” (Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994:iv). Undermining the fact that Post-modernism, post-structuralism, etc. are quite varied within themselves and to reduce them to one homogenous stand, would speak only of our inability to engage with them and not of any inherent contradiction within the different stances of the same. However, notwithstanding this debunking, both Beck and Giddens do use many insights associated with the domain of “Post-structuralism” or/and “Post-modernism.” It is of significance to note these theoretical divergences, because only then it is possible to locate the conceptual lineages and their implications. For instance, Giddens in his work is quite emphatic about not using binaries and also wants to “deconstruct” — “the story line” of evolution (1990:5). However, this gesture does not involve a theoretical correction — making it possible to see different practices and beliefs as heterodox movements and not necessarily as a movement towards the singular space of “Late modernity” of west. Even when the ideological spread of “modernity/late modernity” is dominantly prevalent and all pervasive. For both Beck and Giddens, the present moment of this world has gone beyond the “story line of evolution” because everyone is more-or-less “modern.” Everyone shares the similar risks of nuclear weapons and contested specialist's advice. This basic homogeneity calls for a recognition, in which there is no longer, a need to differentiate between the socio-geographic divisions of this world while making the larger claims of “risk society”. Thus an evocation of a “we” in discussions involving “risk” is to affirm, that the older ways of being, have given way to “reflexivity” and now “we” have to live with the demands of this possibility. It seldom occurs to both Beck and Giddens that their analyses of the present world is immensely tautological: there is “risk” but there is also “reflexivity”, so the net result is rounded off. The “Person” had already given way to the “Individual”, in Risk society the individual's self is also sequestered and is drawn and tied into antagonistic features. In such a situation, Beck and Giddens add the imperative that: “we” should be involved in all the “peace and green movements”

(Giddens 1990:158-159), and “sub-politics” (Beck 1994:16-26). If “we” do not follow the same, then the die is cast for even those individuals who had carefully constructed their biographies. Giddens concludes his book— ‘The consequences of Modernity’ by suggesting that, if we do not participate in the urgent movements of our times then — “there could be nothing but a “republic of insects and grass”, or a cluster of damaged and traumatized human social communities” (1990:173).

There is a continuous attempt by both Beck and Giddens to argue from the vantage point of Western Europe and at the same time not let the option go, of extrapolating the conclusions to a more-or-less similar world at large. However, their discussions are tense also with considering the feature that, those societies which still have a long way to move, in order to be “late modern”, may not have a thorough going notion of risk²⁰. A resonance of what Aldous Huxley had to say about the Hindus of Banaras in mid twentieth century — “ here and there we would see a little troop that had sat down to rest-casually, as is the way of Indians, in the dust of the road and almost under the wheels of the passing vehicles” (Huxley 1991:65). It is a world-view, in which those who share a singular classification of threat of death, and the ways of dying and living are considered a part of it and the rest are exhorted to update themselves with that terminology. The non-western nations have been through various modes of negotiation and conflict with what is called as “uniquely” western (Giddens 1990:175). To expect that the ever-new phase of being, would come at the degeneration and extinction of the previous ways of being is a model of evolutionary logic par excellence. The on going account attests to the fact that coming from the theoretical lineage of the sociological tradition, though both Beck and Giddens differentiate their work from other sociological writings, they invariably work with the same reductionist and superfluous understanding of the world, which marked various writings of preceding scholarship. However, it has to be remembered that this formulaic notion of ‘we’ is more widely circulated then one would want it to be and

²⁰ Consider Giddens summing his chapter on Globalisation by saying-“ its most conspicuous features- the *dissolution of evolutionism*, the *disappearance of historical teleology*, the recognition of *thoroughgoing, constitutive reflexivity*, together with the *evaporating of the privileged position of the west*- move us into a new and disturbing universe of experience. If the “us” here still refers primarily to those living in the west itself- or, more accurately, the industrialized sectors of the world- it is something whose implications are felt everywhere” (1990:53).

that's why to negate and neglect it as it is, would be a reaction not very different from the method of systemic neglect and negation practiced in most of the theoretical understandings.

Now I shall turn to the work Mary Douglas and A. Wildavsky.

Fatal collusion of "Purity" and "Pollution": An Anthropological perspective on "Risk"

Douglas and Wildavsky do not share the language of mourning and loss put forward by Beck and Giddens. For them, most of the times, there aren't many disjunctures to be found between the practices of the "primitive" and the "modern" societies. It is a continuum of being in which "Risk" (though in different morphologies) is eternally there. Thus, they use the methods and techniques of understanding the social world reversibly. The commentators mostly discuss Douglas's work on Risk as a cultural account and she is mentioned as an Anthropologist of "Risk" ("Risk in cultures" as well as "Risk cultures"). It is of course prompted by her (this time with Wildavsky) own articulations where she claims to understand "us" and "them". Using her previous studies on "small-scale societies," proposes to "explain us to ourselves" (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). She is of the view that Risk has always been there in all the societies.²¹ This, she tries to attest by bringing our attention to the notion of "purity" and "pollution," — a principle which perhaps traversed/traverses all contexts of different societies (refer Douglas 1966). A principle which involved tremendous Body politics and does so in a more complex way, even today, with regard to incurable and contagious diseases like AIDS etc. (Caplan 2000: 39-45).

For Douglas, taboos exist because, they by disallowing and negating certain space, in turn allot irrevocable security and certainty to the consecrated things or beings. While in "primitive" cultures, such prohibitions were more total, in "modern urbanized cultures they are more fragmented and dispersed and thus hold less power" (Douglas 1966:40).

²¹ A view which Beck and Giddens would subscribe to and then differ, by showing the consciousness of "risk" in the present age as unprecedented and on such a large scale that, the extreme nature of it, takes it much beyond the activities of past.

Similarly, just as with notions of purity and pollution, she also deals with discussion of marginality (Liminality) to arrive at similar conclusions. She reiterates that a symbolic arrangement in the society exists where discrete functional grids are perceived with significant importance and it is considered that with their delicate balance they manage to retain a sense of security for the respective social being. She further says that for such symbolic arrangements to be stable there has to be a culture of “blaming”; we always need conspicuous enemies, things, to which we can accord blames for whatever we suffer.²² Consider her arguing:

“Whose fault is the first question? Then, what action? Which means, what damages? What compensation? What restitution? And the preventive action is to improve the coding of Risk in the domain, which has turned out to be inadequately covered. Under the banner of risk reduction, a new blaming system has replaced the former combination of moralistic condemning the victim and opportunistic condemning the victim’s incompetence” (1992:16).

Extending the same argument, she proposes that most of the environment related protests that “demonise” industries, capitalism etc. are modes of “blaming”. Activities such as these according to her bring together the community as victims, with similar or same sorrows. Throughout her discussion, however static or singular the frame of analysis it may be, it does point towards what Lupton says, after Douglas’s work that — “Risk judgments are political, moral, and aesthetic, constructed through cultural frameworks of understanding and implicated with the notions of the body and the importance of establishing and maintaining conceptual boundaries” (Lupton 1999: 56). It may be a little harsh on Giddens and Beck, if we say that they do not consider the political issues involved in discussing Risk. Both in fact clearly say so, right at the outset. They also remark about the “constructed” nature of Risk and reflect that because whatever one may say is “Risky”— is also to make a strong political remark, that’s why one has to question these accounts by a regular intervention and mediation: the room for which is provided by reflexivity. Where Douglas’s account drastically differs is, in her structural–functional

²² Recall Beck and Giddens saying that, our contemporary age is remarkable in the fact that, “we” know that Humans cause most “risks”.

axiomatic claim, which conceptually covers the entire eternity with all its similarities and differences and possible regulatory ideals at the end of it all. The formulaic underpinning is, we have vulnerabilities so as to invite stability. Such accounts completely bypass transformative events, which at each juncture change the meaning of domains — we work with these as part of the social. The contemporary age cannot be understood in nuanced terms if we do not take account of the various movements of people, things and ideas in political, cultural, colonial, imperial and informational ways throughout the world, rupturing the categories of existence of innumerable lives in tremendous ways. This lure, to explain a whole in such a way, that all dangers and Risks are wished in and wished out, by agents of that whole is an Anthropological Atavism. These accounts however, do not just simply traffic concepts from one cultural domain to another, nor are they naïve to the extent that they superimpose concepts from one context to another. It is the method, which is used to explain the ‘different’ by relating with the ‘similar’ outcomes. Here in this case it happens to be largely, structural–functionalist understanding along with an attempt to understand the meanings of activities and usages of concepts in different cultures. In that regard, this account does not qualify the different domains of the world as transformed, and in an incessant cultural negotiation and conflict, if it did, it may not have at its disposal well rounded categories of social with stable meanings to explain vulnerability as a precursor to stability and vice versa. The “we” put forward by Douglas, has inherent in it, notions of “us” and “them.” The crucial difference from previous anthropological accounts is that, there it used to be ‘us’ as modern and ‘them’ as primitive, here it could be possible to locate ‘us’ and ‘them’ within any given cultural location and overall proceedings of the world. Thus, this ‘we’ is different from Giddens and Beck’s ‘we’, which has a ‘we’ made up of individuals who have reflexively constituted their own biographies. However, both share the fact that, in order to have a stable ‘we’, it is an imperative to have someone to blame. In that concern, Giddens and Beck are disconcerted to note that there is no “other” to blame now, Douglas’s account suggests that it invariably is that way. ‘We’ is based in having one set of ‘us’ in opposition to one set or many sets of ‘them’.

At that, we now move on to exemplify the conceptions of the one who has been called as the “Postmodernist,” Jean Baudrillard, and the one who calls himself as the Postmodernist, Jean- François Lyotard.

‘Spectres’ of Postmodernism: Between Caricatured and Responsible Readings

This section has been written to show the possibility that, what has been variously called as “postmodernism,” could be very different, from one writer to another. However within this difference, it is also possible to show that the world at large and various institutions and systems of this world, at the present moment are given to strategizing in multiple ways. Resulting in a moment where any rule, category, limit etc. may have as many varied ways when it comes to a practical being. Any given feature may undergo a transformation in terms of its meaningfulness. In other words, there is an all out effort to capture the excess as soon as it is cognitivized (as it is known) and once it is bureaucratically given, different systems use it as per their varied methods, lending different bureaucratic shapes (different hues of control and within it different notions of freedom) to the same. To express the same, one would see that the metaphor of “game” is used very often. There is another important strain, which would be discussed here, just as in the preceding analysis, that is the notion of cultural evolution and death. The attempt would be to show the ways in which different accounts lend different meanings to the event, activities, things, people etc. within a supposed “Postmodernism” itself.

Jean Baudrillard: *Symbolic exchange and Death*

Jean Baudrillard’s work has been widely celebrated and detested as that of a “Postmodern” theorist. It has postured itself as a politico-conceptual space, which all the theorists we have discussed so far, have been negating.

The question of cultural evolution is central to his work and from that vantage point he announces that culturally we have evolved to the stage of “collective Death,” where this

“collectivity” is an aggregate or a heap of people²³, who happened or could not help but be there. He is of the opinion that: “The cemetery no longer exists because Modern cities have entirely taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of Death. If the great operational metropolis is the final form of an entire culture, then, quite simply, ours is a culture of Death.” (1993: 127).

Though his writings have various shifts and disjunctures, I will consider his book *Symbolic exchange and Death*, which directly confronts the issues we are concerned with. The central thesis in this book is approached through a cultural understanding of Economic transactions, which for him have undergone a tremendous change over the years, so as to push us into this “Postmodern” era. He argues that the age of Marxian notion of production is by gone, what remain today or what has ushered in is/are a burgeoning and bludgeoning mode(s) of consumption. Though this “mode of consumption” always existed, it now exists as a total, in which the “Imaginary” of all of our beings in our everyday is only invested so as to salvage a world to be consumed all over again, again and again ad infinitum. He says for this process that it “has only itself as an end” (*ibid.*: 21). In effect, he suggests that, this “mode of consumption” can undergo immense mutations to be itself and in such a situation when mutation itself is the process, how can one fix its identity? He exemplifies it by showing that money itself has become a sign — “purged of finalities and the affects of production” (*ibid.*: 21). Its increasingly “speculative” imagery suggests that the basic circulation of Money as a sign should be ensured at any cost. It is this circulation, which is the main stake, not production per se. Similarly, he extends his statement to argue that this circulation is not limited to money only as a system — in fact all the things and persons of this world have invariably become the ones who are capable to reproduce. That is, culturally the people, who were allotted different roles and were limited to them because of a strict hierarchy in terms of

²³ Baudrillard though started as a sociologist he gave away the concept of the ‘social’ in lieu for, what he called the “masses.” This he says, is a “lumpen analytical concept,” any attempt to define it is a “mistake – it is to provide meaning for that which has none”. However, here one can mention few lines, which still would help in conceiving what are “masses”; he says, masses form an “opaque nebula whose growing density absorbs all the surrounding energy and light rays, to collapse finally under its own weight. A black hole which engulfs the social” (1978:3-5).

the power play, have now merged to the extent that everyone could be part of a homogeneous pool.

Women are no longer subordinate to men, Labour is part of the organization, and the savage is modernized... and thus “everyone is reproductive: that is everyone has lost the concrete finality which once marked them from one another” (*ibid.*: 28). He argues for the proletariat, that it has acquired the criterion of a “normal” human being so as he “seizes” all modes in being “racist, sexist, repressive” (*ibid.*: 28). These modes of reproduction, in order to keep alive the processes and the systems are all pervasive and systemic. Its functioning now cannot concern itself with the emotional–personal unit, with which and ostensibly for which it was supposed to function at the first place. In its practice, there seems to be two features, with which Baudrillard is directly concerned. First, the way the present world has come to be, it has absorbed everyone in its pool, all rigid boundaries, which existed so as to remark and reiterate symbolic as well as real distances between different cultures and within the same culture, have been obliterated by western, industrial, scientific, capitalistic, knowledge pervasions. The ‘code of normality’ (*ibid.*: 29) which has ensured this pervasion, for Baudrillard could be made possible by “issuing illusions,” which in today’s context have become “simulations”— a domain of virtual, which has the claim to be the real and the authentic (for e.g. News). The second feature, is the presence of real fatal fact i.e. death, which is not acknowledged by those who peddle out these “illusions.” Thus the circuitous world of illusionary possibilities has become so overarching for Baudrillard that, he wonders if death “neutralized” as a “natural fact” may “gradually become a scandal” (*ibid.*: 160). He suggests that —

“There is an irreversible evolution from savage societies to our own: little by little, *the dead cease to exist*. [...] Even madmen, delinquents and misfits can find a welcome in the new towns, that is, in the rationality of a modern society. Only the death-function cannot be programmed and localized. Strictly speaking, we no longer know what to do with them, since today, *it is not normal to be dead*, and this is new. To be dead is an unthinkable anomaly: nothing else is as offensive as this” (*ibid.*: 126).

So Baudrillard's work is an attempt to show, that first of all, this excessively euphoric world has come into being at the death of all traditional boundaries. Second: when it doesn't agree with the presence of death around it, it only ensures that there is death everywhere, that the present world becomes "an endless mournful nothingness" (*ibid.*: 155). While arguing about accidents and catastrophes, he similarly argues that the routinization and ever presence of accidents and catastrophes within ourselves as part of our lives, pulls the definition of life towards itself i.e. life is not very different from the looming death at any given moment. He evokes a quote from Octavio Paz's theory of accident, where Paz says —

"The accident is not an exception or a sickness of our political regimes; nor is it correctable defect of our civilization: it is the natural consequence of our science, our politics and our morality...catastrophe has become banal and laughable because in the final analysis the accident is only an Accident" (quoted in Baudrillard, *ibid.*:161).

By now, it is clear that Baudrillard sees no possibility of recovery in the homogenous and elusive world of today. However, his sense of loss could be pursued when one considers his discussion on symbolic exchange further. Borrowing from Marcel Mauss's discussion on gift, he argues that in primitive societies (which for him is anybody's past) there was no "cash-nexus" and exchanges used to happen at the "symbolic" level. The exchange of gift considered the possibility of reversibility, i.e. a gift given as a moral-social object could be returned back at an appropriate time. This reiterated the social order and everyone's place was rigidly observed. In a contemporary world, capitalism observes an irreversible system of exchange; there is a singular lineage of accumulation through which all of us derive our material saps and are rendered incapable by the same. So then, we are in perpetual debt and bondage to consume and live. Baudrillard demands that we give a gift to capitalism, which it needs least i.e. our death (*ibid.*).

Needless to say, Baudrillard's work is reactionary and displaced from any theoretical responsibility. This rush is exemplary however and it does mirror, sociologically, a delirious mix of grievances and wishes of our times. Where the reminiscence haunts us

with such severe nostalgia that there is no escape but neuroses of condemnation and damning. Baudrillard is one such phenomenon, where present and past work as two blocks, the present is malleable and soggy and the past stands teasingly close-or-far as the shining solid rock with homes in it, which has Gods-Humans-animals-things in a picturesque hierarchy — ecstatically occupied in a never lasting carnival.

The notion of evolution, Baudrillard uses, we have come across before and have repeatedly argued that, it is this notion that one has to analyse more than ever before. It is the easiest to talk of a singular, morally condemnable world, if one does not observe the various subtle differences between different domains of the present world. One has to continuously emphasize that, within this relation in the present world, where everything is considered to co-related: the same symbols operate with multiple meanings and they have to be recognized with their multiple variations, that come out of tremendous negotiation and effort. Nevertheless Baudrillard's "we" is different from Giddens and Beck in considering that, this "we" is an apocalyptic "we," it has long lost, what Douglas says are "us" and "them" and it also doesn't offers room for "reflexivity", the way Beck and Giddens would argue for. However, it is also important to note, that Baudrillard himself knows that, going back to tradition is not possible, and to conceive a theory for that, in itself is a self-defeating exercise. Nevertheless, he still considers it is important to think of that, to which we cannot go back to, it suggests how far we must have moved and how close we must be to our death.

Now, one can briefly consider Jean-F. Lyotard's suggestions, that comes along with his announcement that — our present condition is a "Postmodern" condition.

Jean-François Lyotard: *The Postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*

Before starting to discuss this book, there are two important things, which separate Lyotard's Postmodernism with Baudrillard kind of Postmodernism. First, it does speak about a "we" in the sense that the world could be possibly reached out and understood as a common place. However, he is of the view that, what goes in it is subtle and

multifarious, it requires engagement from all contingents and contexts, not necessarily from, one vantage point. Second, it does not mourn this coming together and in fact, theoretically conceives the possibility that all dimensions of knowledge from all contingents and contexts of the world could be footed on an equal plane. In saying, that, he purports that this equality has to be seen as a possibility, not necessarily as how they are politically and culturally aligned, a space as it is fraught with the economics of power.

The said account is introduced by Lyotard as a study of the “condition of knowledge” in “the most highly developed societies”. However one critical difference between this undertaking and those like that of Beck and Giddens is, that the former is addressing the methods of meaning making (knowledge systems) in the highly developed societies. This knowledge stock or methodological meaning making had its “object” in the rest of the world which was/is not necessarily part of the ‘highly developed societies.’ However this initiative of meaning making did not happen without socio-political and economic exchanges between both of these domains. Beck and Giddens use that vantage point (of knowledge system) to elaborate the condition of modern industrial Europe and the world at large. So, where Lyotard’s account is a “radical departure” from its own tradition in critically questioning the “legitimacy” of its knowledge systems, that of Beck and Giddens continues with that inherited tradition and considers critically, the possibilities of salvaging the world, including the above mentioned knowledge systems without any substantial revision. Lyotard’s intervention then, is to assert that, the entire domain of “knowledge systems” make an assemblage of knowledge and information. That assemblage is used to legitimate and is legitimately used to implement decisions and policies, at the cost of transmuting other possibilities. He says that, those who use the knowledge systems for decisions and policies:

‘They allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system’s performance — efficiency. The application of this criterion to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear (1984: xxiv).

Now, the imperative is to acknowledge that the postcolonial societies are those, which have experienced that “terror – soft or hard” and survived disappearance. Lyotard’s discussion suggests that, possibility is there and it has to be considered. However, for that to happen, in Lyotard’s view, at most the legitimacy of different systems, that of science, politics, ethics are to be continuously interrogated. He says – “the point is that there is a strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics: they both stem from the same perspective, the same ‘choice’ if you will—the choice called the occident” (*ibid.*: 8). Thus, any questioning has to consider this interlinkage and also its practice, which transports us simultaneously into the realm of western metaphysics and along side with it, the cultural domain. But in this interrogation we, have to differentiate between different domains and any engagement with the present has to come out of the serious consideration of the implication of what is being said and done. If we notice, this ongoing discussion of postmodernism is very different from that of Baudrillard or the caricatured model, used by Beck and Giddens.

At the same time, it also has to be seen that the use of the “metaphor” of game, by Lyotard is though a political intervention at the level of knowledge. When one considers both science and storytelling as “language games” (*ibid.*: 27-47), at the face of the importance, which we have come to accord to science and its practices, this equation of it as a strategy, doesn’t help in imagining a stable relation with life at a general level. The instability on the other hand always seems ready to open up the abyss of death, as mentioned in preceding discussions. Thus Death and modes of dying in the present world has to be taken more seriously and any discussion of “legitimation” or “delegitimation” of science has to involve this discussion as well. Similarly, again a political intervention in the form of exhorting the narrative knowledge of *Cashinahua* (the site of Lyotard’s fieldwork), takes the shape of a romantic ideal. A dangerous limit of the same tendency is exemplified by Baudrillard’s work.

After considering, these different accounts, we move to the last section. In the preceding analyses, it was considered that the world could be experienced together, but there should be room to understand the being and becoming at each juncture and in a inclusive

language, which as Das mentions, could be felt as “an emersonian gesture of approaching the world through a kind of mourning for it” (Das et al, 1998:67). Where the world itself is, what Primo Levi describes as “the gray zone- where the drowned and the saved commingle” (quoted in Das et al. 2000:17).

Pain, Suffering and their Hermeneutic Renditions

In this section again, there are two sections. The first one deals with the work of Veena Das’s and her collaborators’ and the second section, similarly deals with Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators’ work. Both sections are brief and are presented here as an address and introduction, rather than description and thorough going critical appraisal.

The Continuous Spirals of Pain and Violence

In an attempt supported by “The Culture, Health, and Human Development of the Social Science Research Council” (New York); various social scientists namely: Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Margaret Lock, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds came together to register the proceedings of the present world from an “off-the-center” (Das et al. 2000: ix) position. This culminated into a series of three books, namely: *Social Suffering* (1998), *Violence and Subjectivity* (2000) and *Remaking a World: Violence, Suffering, and Recovery* (2001). The sensitivity, which strings together the three books is that — the present world as it is, is increasingly excessive in terms of its capacity to be brutal and painful. The discussion of Risk and Uncertainty we have had so far, in this context, changes its appearance. In these writings it is suggested that, the language of risk, insecurity and uncertainty may be valid. But the experience of pain has to be understood by tracing the impressions left by violence and suffering into different communities and persons in this world. Altering their subjectivities such as that there may not be a possibility of living in the same world in the same way as ever before. As Das argues in her introduction in the book *Violence and Subjectivity* that, “everyday Life is then something that has to be recovered in the face of a skepticism that surrounds it like a ditch. One is not safe simply because one never left home’ (2000:8). In such a

situation, it is understandable that the categories of social may undergo radical moulds and it may not be possible to approach the contemporary world with a given set of rigid categories of the social. Thus Das and Kleinman while introducing the first book — *Social Suffering* suggest: “it is no longer useful to insist upon artificial boundaries that divide an unruly world into tidy analytic chambers. The most interesting questions for theory and practice concerning social suffering are in the cracks between our categories and in the discursive processes that traverse our disciplines’ (1998:xi). Carrying on with their discussion, they also make it clear that, this initiative is not meant to promote policy making or new laws, but certainly a greater empathy with the world that is, has to be developed and if possible alternative spaces as well. Here “officially silenced voices could be articulated and recounted” and the voice “could be retrieved in the face of Recalcitrance of tragedy” (ibid 2001:3).

As can be seen, this notion of ‘we’ is different from the various notions of ‘we’ that has been discussed so far. It is important however to connect these writings with what has been mentioned before. One refreshing difference appears at the face of it, within the purview of the notion(s) of evolution. Very rarely in these accounts, the issue of evolution is raised in the blatant manner as in other descriptions, however if one closely follows the accounts furnished by Veena Das et al, one would follow that, the language of evolution and the idea of the present world as a moral quandary are omnipresent. At the same time, this possibility that the world could be considered as a “we” without evoking the historical contextualisation is an interesting moment. That is, if one reads Veena Das’s essay in the vein, that it attempts at looking for meaning and language of pain, within the everyday deliverances. In her chapter “Language and body: Transactions in the Construction of pain” in the book: *Social Suffering*, there is an attempt to carve out a possibility, in which a language of pain could be discerned in the everyday deliverances. For that, she uses Wittgenstein’s oeuvre very creatively and later discusses a novel of Tagore (*Ghore-Baire*) and a story by Manto (*Khol do*) in order to understand the sexual violence meted out to women of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh community at the time of partition. The issue of concern is that, how do women’s bodies become a sink or site to engrave through violence (mostly sexual) the mark of property and identity? She

manages to show, that at one level this generality of event itself provides a language of pain, which is silently shared, and second, it is a long drawn pain, which spills into the language one (the victim) uses to address anything. This second insight brings us to her second chapter, which is in the book: *Violence and subjectivity*, titled “Violence, poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity”. Here her concern is to “see the meaning of witnessing in relation to violence and the formation of the subject” (2000:205). This account is informed by her fieldwork, and it re-counts the ordeal of a high caste Punjabi woman who suffered various traumas due to partition. Without going into extensive details of the chapters one can mention here as a general argument vis-à-vis her accounts that there is a continuous effort by her to look for a cleft in the “whole” of the tradition, in which her “subject” is located. This cleft as a rupture disrupts the harmony of everything tied within that whole, it does not leave the possibility to go back to that “whole” ever after. Not only for the victim-subject but also for others. While, this is perfectly plausible and makes tremendous sense, there is also a never-ending Hermeneutic exercise in Das’s work. We have to recognize that these ruptures and clefts had appeared long before in these contexts through a long drawn systemic entry of Colonialism and spread of ideas through force and ‘soft-knife’ practices. One could argue that an account of the social world as that of a metamorphosis from coherent and peaceful “whole” to a suddenly erupted asymmetry is mistaken in its imagination of that “whole”. As argued in the last chapter, if only the anthropological accounts had included these renderings of “pain” right from the beginning, then this hermeneutic exercise of today would not have come as a shock. Moreover, it could also have considered the possibility that what exists as “pain” for one, also exists as “catharsis” for many others, in the same or varied contexts. This complicated “perversity” has to be part of our enquiry and it only could be, if we move beyond the singular continuum of “symbolic wholes” of any given culture. No doubt that the “longing and anxiety” has to be added to our methodological lens, as a value of the present world. At the same time, one has to rather try and record the genealogy of the gradual commencement and transformation of these features of “pain” and not conceive and present it as a movement from peaceful ‘yesterday’ to a catastrophic ‘today’. Otherwise, for instance it could be possible to hermeneutically locate the pain within the

longings of Giddens or Baudrillard, but with their implicit notion of an “evolution” gone wrong, one is left to mourn over — whatever one has participated into.

On that note, we now move on to Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators’ work on the same theme.

Everyday Being and the Interpretative Domain of “Social Suffering”

The collected essays published by the name of *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in the Contemporary Society* (1993), are an organised effort by Pierre Bourdieu and his many collaborators. The essays are mostly based on the interviews of Families and persons who according to Bourdieu are of least importance, in a nation–state like France. The recordings suggest that to such people, it is their employment status, health features, sense of past present future, which is of paramount concern. For them, all of it happens with a lamentation around, their own lives, though with a shared injury of beating one’s head against the apathetic bureaucracy. Bourdieu in his – “The space of points of view,” as the introductory chapter to this volume suggests that “to understand what happens in places like “projects” or “housing developments” as well as in certain kinds of schools, places which bring together people who have nothing in common and force them to live together either in mutual ignorance and incomprehension or else in latent or open conflict with all the suffering this entails — it is not enough to explain each point of view separately’ (*ibid.*:3). He further argues, that to understand it sociologically would be to move away from the fixed limits of the given nomenclature of enquiry and see possibilities of bringing together as many perspectives as possible to illuminate the given situation of pain and suffering. To illustrate this, we would discuss here just one account and conclude at that. In the chapter “A displaced Family” by Abdelmalek Sayed, there are various views of the family members, which define their organization as a family but it is also brimming with tension and threat, without any possibility of immediate repair. This family is one of the many immigrant families, who live in this “single dwelling,” two story houses called “stacked bungalows” (*ibid.*:23). This family stands displaced from an Arabic-Algerian past, from where they have moved and from the mainland France because of their class status and from any other white French by virtue of their black colour. The conversation initiated by Sayed, asking the daughter and the son in the

family about their neighbours meets with a terse reply: “we no longer have neighbours, we don’t talk anymore.” Then the son and the daughter start explaining that, their greatest torment is to be labelled pejoratively by one of their neighbours. For whom, everything they do, becomes noisy or smelly. If the cat runs on the stairs, the neighbour threatens to call the police. Similarly, what they cook, invariably offends the sense of smell of the neighbours. Both the son and the daughter continue to articulate their anguish:

Son: it’s always the same story. When they can’t say that living next to the Arabs is bad because they are dirty, because they smell, because they make too much noise, that they are always too many people at their place, even when they can’t say all that, they invent something else, you can always find something...’(*ibid.*:27).

Daughter: Three cats who are really ‘house cats’. They’re part of the family. Its over that, there is a conflict, they complain about them. Its not the cats they are complaining about, its us. The cats’ owners. And that’s why the cats, my cats, make noise...and how...? By running down the stairs, believe it or not! Like I told you... they hear the cats running... and then they say, they love animals. Which ones? All of them, no doubt, as long as they don’t belong to the Arab neighbours! This same woman has a dog.’(*Ibid.*: 29).

What appear, as the most important feature in these articulations is that, how social categories of ‘sound’, ‘smell’, ‘sight’, ‘taste’ etc. are so precariously disposed to an alternation and displacement of meaning. At the same time they become vehicles to inform the others about the unspoken language of hate and disgust.

The last two accounts involving Das and Bourdieu’ work have shown, as sociologists do, that the language of considering oneself vis-à-vis others happens nevertheless with a sense of social being and not merely as individuals. However, the imperative of the social itself has to be qualified.

Conclusion

As compared to the discussions, one had in the first chapter, this chapter informs us about — a paradigm shift in understanding the social space traversed by the notion of “death”. First of all, there is a conceptualisation, which emerges from the vantage point of an address of “we”. This supposedly involves both the theorist and the theorised as affected beings within a milieu of “meaninglessness,” “pain,” and “suffering,” amidst various other features of the contemporary world. However, it is argued in this chapter that, this notion of a “we” is also at times an extension of the logic of “evolutionary” cultural description that characterised the “structural-functional” anthropology. Therefore, it is of urgency to look at the various notions of “we” and critically revise them, so as to develop the methodological tools to recognize familiar and favourable niches for postcolonial nations. At the same time, this chapter also hinted to the fact, that, notwithstanding the analytical understanding of the social being on the lines of cultural evolution and extinction, there is an overrunning theme of the unsettledness of the analyst him/herself. Compared to the classical domain of “Anthropology of Death”, which recorded a physical event of “death” outside itself, these accounts speak of a death: they share with their “subjects”. Moreover, this sense of death, no longer is about the physical and the conspicuous event of death and as pointed above, it no longer exists outside, “over there”. This “subjective,” relation between the analyst and the analysed, with tension of the “unknowable” presence of death in the back ground is a relation that will make the categories of the social increasingly contingent and contextual. However, the existence of the relation itself, even as a lamentation would invariably be within the domain of the social. Thus one has to be circumspect towards the accounts that debunk such relations and categories in total.

Chapter Three

Death and Sexuality: The Purview of Sanity and the Sanitary

In this chapter we start with an elaborate discussion of what constitutes at more than one occasion, the way in which anthropology has tried to capture the meaning around the physical event of death. It is argued here, that, in most of these writings, the basic categories could be inverted in terms of their conceptual significance as per the demand of the contextualisation of various ethnographic locations. The larger frame however remains common to all of these accounts, suggesting with very few exceptions that the ritualistic observations around death are all about the control and the order of that society. Thus all little contexts become meaningful for the anthropologist only when there is a direct relation of dominance between one feature over the other, that is, when there is a binary relation with a clear supremacy allotted to one over the other. Acknowledging its due contribution, one tries to mention the extent to which the effect of death and sexuality can be conceived to have over various aspects of human life. It is argued from there on, that death may not start and end at death and similarly sexuality may not start and end at the expression of the sexual act. Thus, one has to move beyond the given anthropological accounts to consider how death and sexuality could be understood in broader ways of constituting human selves and offering various realms of experience, which can be construed to exist in asymmetric relation with order and control. It becomes all the more important to do so because in our contemporary lives, there are lesser and lesser funerals and death which import the entire community to a conspicuous space of expression; if one does not extend the meaning of death to everyday life, all the anthropological contributions may remain limited to a past which does not have any exactly replicable situation in the contemporary world. Considering these issues we move further, through the insights of Foucault's writings, to illustrate through an essay by Jonathan Parry, that how the law and the practice of 'governmentality' manages to set through different interventions a plexus of negations with regard to the practice of the 'Necrophagous' ascetic — the *Aghori*, from the colonial times to the contemporary situation of postcoloniality. Consequent to that, an ideal of spirituality emerges which does not

mingle with the corpse, excrement, menstrual blood, prostitutes, cremation grounds etc. At the same time, it's important to note that, Parry's essay is tense and ambiguous because it provides both clues, one – that the practice of *Aghori* is meaningful when considered in relation with Hindu notion of cosmos and two – since he is using the legal hearings (and other records of the colonial times) also, one has to read (though it may be against Parry's line of argument) as, what is the revulsion and the horror that pushes the government (in the sense of governmentality) to chastise the *Aghoris* (even by capital punishment) so that they and their followers might abide to more non-controversial practices. This direction of the chapter has to be seen more as an illustration rather than a generality, for, to reach any generality, the primary demand could be a rigorous engagement with historical records, first of all.

There are two sections in this chapter. The first reviews the anthropological literature on "Death and Sexuality." The second addresses the theoretical questions raised by Foucault in reference to the empirical problems put forward by Jonathan Parry.

Anthropological depictions of Death and Sexuality

It is important to start this section by recalling the theoretical contributions listed in the last two chapters, of Robert Hertz, van Gennep, Victor Turner, Das etc. with regard to the conceptualisation of the liminal moment *par excellence* (Das 1977:120) – i.e. the event of death in a given community. Various anthropologists have used the generalities evolved by these theorizations, thereafter to expand on, the themes that find oblique mention or sparse description in these theorists' work²⁴. However, these are the key theoretical orientations, which nevertheless provide a hermeneutic linkage between all the writings, to be discussed here, that of Richard Huntington, Peter Metcalf, Jonathan Parry, and Maurice Bloch etc. in greater detail.

²⁴ The writings we are going to discuss, without any exception use the theoretical contribution of Hertz, van Gennep, and at times of Das but Turner is least evoked and wherever his work is quoted, as for instance by Metcalf and Huntington (1979) it is only to certify the legitimacy of the issues they are raising (how for example the metaphors of growth and decomposition are the characteristic features of liminal moments.). There is no real engagement with the departure of Turner's work from a strict Structuralist understanding of the ethnographic contexts. Also, the idea put forward by Turner that "the attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of Liminality" (1969:102) also doesn't find any mention in any of these works, which we are going to discuss. In that regard it could be suggested that an important link is not even forged to start with.

In one such attempt to revisit and revise the work of Robert Hertz and van Gennep, Metcalf and Huntington in an edition called *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (1979), apply their insights to the ethnographic context of 'Bara' of Madagascar. Bloch and Parry critically comment upon this initiative in their edited volume on *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (1982), to which Metcalf has responded in the revised edition of *Celebrations of Death* (1991). In this section, this series of descriptions could briefly be evoked in order to see the range of questions and answers posed vis-à-vis the given context of Death and Sexuality.

As has been already noted in the earlier chapters, Hertz commented on the scope of second burial and the ritualistic observations of the same for the ethnographic context of Borneo. van Gennep further discussed that and what Hertz had called as the "Intermediate period" (remember that Hertz's discussion is only about funerals), he granted a relative autonomy to that period and considered this transitional period as that of "Liminality" with a pre destined direction.²⁵

Metcalf and Huntington after discussing extensively the contributions of Hertz and van Gennep, consider the case of "Bara" — an "ethnic group" of Madagascar- "sedentary pastoralists of the island southern plains" (1979). The main concern of Metcalf and Huntington is to understand the existence of "drunkenness, sexual liaisons and bawdy songs," during the period of liminality brought about by death (*ibid*). In other words, their interest lies in unravelling the meanings attached to the "phoenix theme of rebirth" (*ibid*), as articulated in gestures and activities around the marked periods of ritualistic

²⁵ With regard to Hertz's description it could be possible for us to think that the notion of the intermediate period is also about a notion of time, differentiated from the notion of time of everyday. Similarly when van Gennep speaks of the relative autonomy of the transitional rites (1960:146), he introduces further differentiation to the entire time of the liminal moment, and also specifies the direction in which the ritualistic observations derive their meaning from. These specifications have to be kept in mind, in order to understand the complex ways, in which, at times the same symbols are interpreted differently. Later in this chapter, we would come across Bloch and Parry discussing the notion of time in more or less similar ways as stated above, but they derive it from the works of Leach. Similarly, the notion of space conceived in various ways is also there, in most of these works, though used as a given category of explanation. An extensive comment on the same could be followed from Das's discussion of 'The concept of space' (1977:91-113). It is crucial to raise these points, because one has to emphasize continuously that the notion of Time, Direction, Space etc. are the categories, which we are going to analyse, over which all the descriptions. Ultimately it is important for us to see, how the relations between these concepts define the meaning of the given Anthropological observations.

observances. They argue that the Bara's idea of personhood conceives of a being as a proportionate and delicately balanced unification of "order" and "vitality." "Order" comes from the sperm of the father to an unorganised, moving volume of blood of the mother (*ibid*). It has to be followed that though the mother's blood, holds the potential of "vitality," it's organization only happens when an "order" is introduced through the father's sperm (*ibid*:107). Metcalf and Huntington further argue that it is this basic idea of personage which has to be observed strictly by the persons of Bara community, all of their life, by maintaining a balance between the father's family and the mother's family. In such a situation, the hypothesis put forward by Metcalf and Huntington is that a death is an overt impact of "order," which "upsets" the "life-sustaining balance" by subjugating the vitality (*ibid*).²⁶ Thus the rituals practised at the time of a funeral are emphatically concerned with bringing back the excess of vitality so that, after this transition period, the balance is again ordained. Metcalf and Huntington (*ibid*:90) devise, as following, the preceding explanations in terms of oppositional categories :

<i>Order</i>	<i>Vitality</i>
Male	Female
Father	Mother
Semen	Blood

²⁶ Recall the discussion of Beth A. Conklin and Lynn M. Morgan (1996). We had described there, in the context of the idea of the "fluid" notion of bodies in the conception of personhood of *Wari*(s) against the fixed and strict — clinical notion of bodies in North America in the first chapter. Contextually and conceptually the "Wari" of Beth A. Conklin and Lynn M. Morgan and the "Bara" of Metcalf and Huntington can be drawn as parallels. However, as shown in this on going account by Metcalf and Huntington, operationally the notion of personhood can be very strict even if it is diffused in symbolic practises like rituals. On the same line as we move further in this chapter, we would come across, Bloch and Parry's view, who would suggest an even stricter notion of personage, for the same "ethnic communities." Thus, it can be argued that it is important and even necessary to differentiate between the clinical notion of personhood (as individuals?) and "biosocial" models of personhood, but at the same time one has to be prudent and has to ensure that one does not extrapolates them to two opposite poles. Much depends on, how do we consider the working of the given nomenclature of the notions of bodies, provided in any society. What Metcalf, Huntington, Bloch and Parry are doing with their Structural-functionalist method, if is interpreted the way Beth A. Conklin and Lynn M. Morgan do then it is possible to think of "fluid" personage, but the same could be imagined of the clinical notion of bodies, when we look into the "constructions" of the conception of bodies and the inherent contradictions within them as suggested by few post-Structuralist writers (Butler 1990, 1993). Then it can be stated that, what we see as "fluid" or "strict" notion of bodies. much has to do with, our perspectival underpinning and to argue that any one community is inherently so, would not lead us to a sophisticated analysis of the society. With that concern in mind the ethnographies cannot be taken as unproblematically given.

Bone	Flesh
Sterility	Fecundity
Dying	Birth
Tomb	Womb

They are quick to qualify that these oppositions are not to be seen as rigid, discrete unities but as those, which have multiple scope of alignment vis-à-vis not one, but many categories and also they have room within themselves just as black and white has gray in-between (*ibid*). Then, they suggest, there are contingencies: for example Bone/flesh are complimentary when one is living, but becomes antagonistic to each other, when “breath has ceased.” So the corpse is perceived to signify liminality because there is still a decomposing flesh attached to the stable bones. Accordingly, Metcalf and Huntington categorize the events of “Burial,” “Gathering,” and “Reburial” with their corresponding features.

“Burial” for them is the moment, which starts at the disintegration of the “order” from the “vitality” which comes into fore by the cessation of the breath. This eruption is not disclosed instantly, till two architectural divisions are installed as the “male house” and the “house of many tears”— which is supposed to be the women’s division. So named because, they are expected to (and they do) receive the news of death and then the dead body with wails and tears.²⁷ While the “male house” has the symbolic male part (not mentioned in the description) the “house of many tears” has the dead body for a little longer (before burial), because the-still-there-flesh is supposed to be the sign of vitality (wearing off nevertheless). The architectural divisions and the corresponding separation of sexes is (to be?) observed strictly but in the night, both sexes are enjoined “to an obscene, boisterous togetherness”, marked by “loud wailing, singing, shouting, and gun

²⁷ It is important to think of the possible difference at the conceptual level between the normative rules and the practices. In anthropological descriptions dealt here, it becomes immensely difficult to discern, one from the other. However, one may still like to note the methodological difference between a working over an ethnographic context like that of Bara’s, where Metcalf and Huntington do not have any written record to base their analysis over, and on other hand like that of Hindu social system. It’s practice has been understood by going back to different texts like *Dharmaranaya Purana* , *Grihya Sutra* and *Preta Manjari* by people like Veena Das (1977) and Jonathan Parry (1980, 1981, 1982, 1994).

shooting in sharp contrast to the day time's silence" (*ibid.*:61-115). The third day men enter the "House of many Tears" and after putting the body in a coffin, a procession ensues, which is led by a wild run between the youth.²⁸ Simultaneously holding the coffin, it is an issue that who actually holds it, because it involves a kind of ritualistic competition between the numbers of youth present. There is also a cattle wrestling, where young men are supposed to prove their prowess by taming the animals. Finally, the young men and women take the coffin to the burial site at the mountain under the eyes of few elders, where one of them acts as the "Owner of the Death." Metcalf and Huntington argue that since "the owner of Death" inserts the body in a small tomb-cave, head first; the act could be seen as the replication of the moment of Birth. The elder, exhorts the ancestors to take this newborn (in the world of ancestors) and finally concludes the observations by stationing a green twig there at the gate of the tomb. Which, Metcalf and Huntington say, they were told that, it means, just as the corpse (who still is wet at the time of burial), the cut off twig is green and wet and will dry eventually in the process, killing off the witch (again not fully explained by Metcalf and Huntington, as in, how does it kills the witch?).

The "gathering" follows this event, which as Metcalf and Huntington suggest is the most important event in the Bara social life. It is observed with far more pompous and elaborately dressed youth. They also draw attention to the fact that, while at the burial ceremony people could at most consume 100 litres of rum, at the gathering, it could go as much as 500 litres. It is further argued that, just as the time of the burial, there are again two huts — women's and men's, but men often enter women's hut for various reasons. Then "the young men and girls dance together at night, form liaisons, and couple discreetly, but their public demeanour is somewhat reserved" (*ibid.*). This, reservedness for Metcalf and Huntington is in contrast to the time of burial, when spontaneity and unevenness were explicitly there, so they argue that, it could be so because the gathering is a well thought of organization, and thus has controlled expression, unlike the death and

²⁸ Metcalf and Huntington mention that, this youth is the one, who have had sexual experience and this race also is a kind of sexual contestation, in terms of who owns the body. The second part of this is clear, the first part is not explained exhaustively, as in what it meant by youth who have had sexual experience.

burial which were sudden and marked with insecurities. However, even the gathering is related with the looming insecurities incurred by the ghosts and witches; one, because of the general condition of the event and two, because of the effect of the rum²⁹.

After the “gathering,” in the harvest season itself, the “reburial” happens. The reburial, Metcalf and Huntington suggest, is conceived by the Bara as “doing the corpse,” “dropping the tree or branch,” and “moving the died one” (*ibid.*). There is no exact stipulated time but it has to be strictly observed as an event within few years of the death, by the relatives of the deceased. Metcalf and Huntington note that, this event is not as grand as the “gathering” but in terms of ritualistic observations, it’s the most important event. Here, the dried bones are reburied (kept in caskets already containing bones), in keeping with the familial lines. The procedures involved in fetching the bones to a predestined location are more or less on the same line as during the burial. It includes the running youth — “strong birds,” vying for the “bones” and then culminating the entirely day time event by a celebration with beef and rum in the evening. One stark difference to which Metcalf and Huntington specially refer, so as to differentiate this event from previous events is, that, all the reburial events take place at daytime and outside the village. Metcalf and Huntington, move to analyse the symbolism involved in the activities, which make all these three events definitive and complete. There is mention of “songs,” which are sung at the preburial night ceremonies, which as they suggest keeps changing like “popular music in much of the world” (*ibid.*: 97-98). However they mention one song, considered to be the most popular one of the year 1970, as a, “clever and rousing piece of ribald double entendre” (*ibid.*). Here is the song followed by Metcalf and Huntington’s interpretation of the same.

Now hide it

Now hide it, boys

Now hide it because there is a death

Together let us copulate, boys

²⁹ This general condition of insecurity has to be seen as part of the liminal condition. It is possible, as in this case, that an observation like gathering happens after certain resumption or return to normalcy is already there, and yet be concerned about the insecurities, which make people vulnerable at such moments. Thus, as put in the second footnote, these notions of time are to be seen in a more complex way, so as to configure the differentiation of time within a liminal moment itself.

Now hide it
Now hide it because there is death

“Brroo” flies the quail
To perch at the head of the *sely* tree
The eye wants to sleep?
The eye wants to copulate

“Brroo” flies the quail
To perch on a bump of a *sakoa* tree
The eye wants to copulate
The eye wants to ejaculate

“Brroo” flies the quail
To perch at the head of the mud
Hide it!
Hide it Boys!
Now hide it because there is a death
Together let us copulate
Together let us copulate
Whether big
Whether little
Now hide it!

Metcalf and Huntington interpret it as to suggest that—

“the onomatopoeic “broo” of the quail is an expression commonly used to refer to ejaculation in sexual intercourse. The word for quail is also the word for belly. The word for eye also refers generally to any center, hole, circle, or vortex, in this case the vagina. The vagina is also suggested by the word for mud, which refers generally to any wet slime or slipperiness. And the quail, according to the Bara, is quite incapable of perching at the top or the lower branches of a tree. There is the

suggestive image of the quivering quail looking for the appropriate place to hide”
(*ibid.*: 99-100).

Similarly, they also argue that, the songs also talk explicitly of childbirth and lament about the difficulty involved in it. Then, they suggest that Bara have a thorough going notion of energy, which they construe as *faha*. *Faha* is supposed to propel youth to indulge into dance, cattle fight etc. Its manifestation has to be through excesses and the excesses are to be stimulated at the first place by *faha*. These expressions, Metcalf and Huntington argue, manage to cross the limits of sexual boundaries, otherwise strictly observed. To the extent that, in practice such sexual activities may not take place, in theory, however i.e. through the songs and gestures of dances, it is suggested that incest prohibitions are also not to be observed.

Metcalf and Huntington, sum up the entire episode by extending these meanings to the overall functioning of these ritualistic events. They argue that, a death of a Bara is about the upset of the “vitality” (as discussed before), thus the entire ritualistic procedures are about sexuality and childbirth, so as to mean the dead as a newborn in the world of ancestors and facilitate its entry in that world. Also this birth as a dead is different from the real birth, where the real birth signifies an excessive sphere of vitality, this ‘dead’ as the “newborn” enters the sphere of “order.” The sexual play and evocation of childbirth signifies perhaps, that the realm of living ones is that of vitality, which the ‘dead’ one has left to enter another world.³⁰

³⁰ There is an inherent contradiction here, in Metcalf and Huntington’s interpretation, that the sexual play and evocation of childbirth is about announcing the dead as a new born and also suggesting that the dead is overcome by “order” and thus “vitality” has to wear off, so that finally it remains just bones i.e. pure “order” and thus belong to “sterility.” Even if we agree to this interpretation, it would make sense if we take the above given contingency and suggest further that, the Dead is a new born in the world of the ancestors but unlike the living ones, this newborn cannot indulge into sexual play or childbirth itself. Or otherwise we could interpret is, that the ‘dead’ as a new born in the realm of pure “order” is matched by an attempt by the living in the same vein, by trying to create an excessive sphere of vitality. However, over here our concern is larger and more exhaustive than just finding the logical coherence between the interpretations provided. Our interest, here is in the hermeneutic range to which interpretations may belong.

Till now, it has been discussed as an illustration of how 'death and sexuality' in its anthropological rendering could be considered as inextricably linked. To this description, Bloch and Parry reacted in 1982, by considering it as an useful initiative but misplaced and perhaps misconceived in its emphasis on sexuality and fertility as synonymous expressions.

Bloch and Parry in their edited volume — *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (1982), introduce their essays by saying that —“this volume focuses on the significance of symbols of fertility and rebirth in funeral rituals” (*ibid.*:1). It further qualifies in the same sentence that, while this may be the central theme, all contributors have found extremely difficult to delink their work with other relations of their ethnographic contexts. Bloch and Parry manage to classify the rituals observed at death in a community as two important phases “ the phase of disaggregation” involving “ temporary disposal of a corpse” followed by a phase of “reinstallation” involving the “ secondary burial of the corpse” at the end of which they say the “ collectivity emerges triumphant over death” (*ibid.*: 4)³¹. They reiterate on the lines of Hertz the functional importance for a society in minimizing their ritualistic expenditure over the death of what Hertz says could be a “stranger, a slave or a child” (Hertz 1960: 76). The other side of the same issue is to see through this relation that more the ritualistic observations, more is that, now-dead-person indexically related to the central concerns of the community. So when Bloch and Parry argue that “ death and reproduction are inextricably linked” (*ibid.*: 9) where reproduction or fertility as they demand should not be taken in the limited sense. In fact it should be seen as “ fecundity of people, or of animals and crops; or of all three” (*ibid.*: 7). It could be construed then, that only those, whose deaths are ritualistically saturated have generative capacities and thus “the stranger, the slave or the child” needless to say do not even belong to the realm of the production. Its crucial for us to take this clue because by this logic of who is most important in the given socio-cultural domain, the anthropological descriptions invariably and inadvertently bank upon the description of the ritualistic observations of a dead, adult, married man of a hierarchically higher or

³¹ Recall the discussion of Hertz's work, where he referred to the pattern of secondary burial as that of “double obsequies.” Bloch and Parry are moving along the same conceptual terrain.

highest status group³² and rest of the categories then are explained from that vantage point³³. Similarly, these distinctions and distinguishing characteristics are taken further, by Bloch and Parry, in order to see, who may get what kind of funeral, by classifying deaths into “good” and “bad” deaths. It would suffice to say here that, good death according to them is the one, which abides by the normative requirements of a funeral. For instance, in the case of Hindu deaths, both Das and Parry would argue at separate places that, a Hindu, who almost wilfully surrenders himself to death at the right age after having lived through all of his responsibilities, could be considered to have offered himself as a sacrifice and thus a good death (Das 1977; Parry 1982). It is significant for us to consider this notion of control and power with which the living beings are seen to be disposed in the realm of the social. So when Bloch and Parry argue that “sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular — is often seen as cause of death” (1982:18), it is implicitly also being suggested that this control and power are the dispositions of the living, where the living have to be the male-in-control, and women who no longer are “sexual” and thus not “dangerous.” Recall Metcalf and Huntington’s contention that, the “dead” was an intensely high “order,” where “order” is mainly “male,” and consider Bloch and Parry’s assertion that, it is male, who is not only opposed to death but also needs to control female sexuality and convert both death and female sexuality into fertility and fecundity. Thus, Bloch and Parry’s critique of Metcalf and Huntington’s work emanates from this realization that, they (Metcalf and Huntington) are using the categories of sexuality and fertility in an intermixed manner, while for them (Bloch and Parry) it is quite clear that—“sexuality is set in opposition to fertility as women is opposed to men” (*ibid.*:19). Therefore, this is what Bloch and Parry have to say to the entire episode of sexual play and other ritualistic observations, which we have briefly described with regard to Metcalf and Huntington’s description — “it is the necessary defeat of women, sexuality and biology which is enacted, rather than their indispensable part in the re-creation of life. In this case then [...] sexuality is, we suggest, opposed to fertility”(*ibid.*:

³² In that respect Meena Kaushik’s work offers alternative ways, by looking at the “untouchable” community of the ‘Doms of Banaras’ and suggesting that their ritualistic observations are as dense and rich as that of any other high caste Hindu’s. Thus also, telling us that, in the ‘regeneration’ of the entire community, all the groups hold importance, albeit in different ways.

³³ Recall Baudrillard’s mourning that all the inequalities have been flattened in the contemporary world, his mooring then, we can make out, comes from such ethnographic discussions, which take into account a functionalist perspective of the society and build their theory around what they think are nodes of power.

21). They further argue that their analysis suggests that “the symbolism of the Mortuary rites of the Bara [...] identifies women with sexuality, and sexuality with death. Victory over death — its conversion into rebirth — is symbolically achieved by a victory over female sexuality and the world of women, who are made to bear the ultimate responsibility for the negative aspects of death. In line with this, the sexuality of women is often closely associated with the putrescence of the corpse...” (*ibid.*:22).

To these criticisms of Bloch and Parry, Metcalf in the revised edition of *Celebrations of Death* (1991) quotes a feminist critique of strict binary oppositions and suggests how the analysis of Bloch and Parry hinges on “wooden” oppositions of male and female. Also, Metcalf argues that such descriptions “emphasizes a progressive domination of culture over nature and men over women” (1991:9). He further says that, such binary functioning may be coming from the “ideology of the western dominance” and may belong to “the modern technological society” but they do not hold for the Bara (*ibid.*).

Relegating Bara’s practice to a past, untouched by the “modern technological society” where such binaries rule, may seem to Metcalf as the only way in which he could defend his analytic grounds. He retains the more fluid scheme of binaries as compared to Bloch and Parry’s strict oppositional categories. From what we have been discussing in the last two chapters, it could be pronounced here that the anthropological descriptions do not come from “primeval” fields, even if they are about “primeval” cultures. In such a case, to suggest that there are purer realms, where binaries do not work and there are less pure ones, where only they work, may not be a sign of serious engagement with the complexities of the given context. Here, however we need to observe that, at a methodological level, in all of these descriptions, in various contexts, concepts are inverted to accommodate the meaningfulness of every regular or exceptional event. In one interpretation the dead could be a manifestation of “sterility” and “order” while being in the domain of ‘male’ and in the other one, the living could be the manifestation of ‘male’ while that of ‘dead’ as that of ‘female.’ But at the same time, the central concern, which binds all these anthropological observations together, is the premise that — societies are mainly inclined towards preserving and propagating their living beings. This

propagation and preservation is certainly not arbitrary and it happens through domination and control.

The preceding discussion shows to us in very many ways that ‘death’ and ‘sexuality’ are not only related to each other, they are transformative features. Thus if we move beyond the binary logic of Metcalf, Huntington, Bloch, Parry, Das etc., it would be possible for us to see that these transformative features do not remain limited to their own, they in fact affect the entire personage of a given being in multiple ways. In order to understand the same, we should aim to be familiar with the complexity involved rather than map it simplistically into binaries. From the issues raised so far, it is important to note that this complexity can be approached from a discussion on ‘death and sexuality’ which conceives of the notion of body also from the perspective of science along with other notions discussed in the ethnographies, because it is their co-existence that marks the contemporary world. Where co-existence is certainly not to mean, a side-by-side existence or one over the other, but a more dynamic relation where multiple forces continuously shape and reshape the cultural plexus.

Georges Bataille has been singularly preoccupied with the theme of ‘death and sexuality’ and it would be useful to draw few insights from his work³⁴. He suggests to start with that, it is common between humans and animals that they indulge in sexual activity, but it’s only humans who have converted their simple sexual activity into an erotic activity (1962:ii). He further says that, this eroticism — “unlike simple sexual activity is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children “ (*ibid.*: ii). Thus eroticism has to be seen as an “inner experience,” that, if at all has to be defined in terms of its working, it could be said, “eroticism, is assenting to life up to the point of death” (*ibid.*: ii).

³⁴ Though Bataille’s work is all about taking excesses to limit (especially — *Visions of Excess* 1985), which may not find resonance with a regular everyday, if we would want to transpose each into the other. Nevertheless it may provide useful directions in which excesses in the everyday can be conceived, so that at the end of it, we no longer have a notion of everyday where there are stable and uniform steps to move from one sphere to another. In other words, it gives us clues to visualize things beyond and between the interstitial spaces of the multifarious classifications, which identify us in the contemporary world.

This assent then immediately connects us to the impulsive task of crossing the limits posed by norms as “taboos,” which Bataille mostly refers as “transgression.” As a corollary to the above definition of eroticism, Bataille quotes the following from de Sade’s writings to take things further- “there is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image” (quoted in Bataille *ibid.*:ii).

From these initial references one may say unreservedly that death is not about death only. The depiction of anthropological writings, which try to capture the site of death as a prime site of exceptional articulations may not do full justice to the imagination and experience of death by persons of a community as a notion laden with multiple meanings, including that of a void. There are inter-relatedness with other concerns of Everyday in which a feature like ‘death’ is there as a metaphor, a name for an experiential moment of escape from one’s own self or on the contrary as something which pushes one to the deepest attachment with one’s own self. To go back to the idea that eroticism is an “assent” at the face of death and thus death could only be known through its association with a “licentious” image is to suggest that death could also be considered in everyday terms at the level of transgressing a given taboo (similar to saying that death is an unimaginable thing to happen! and all that is imaginable in our everyday to do, if is done, it invites the same import of experience and imagination as the way death is seen to have). Bataille argues that, “prohibitions are not imposed from without,” the “anguish” we feel at “violating the taboo,” completes the expression of “transgression.” Thus it is the “anguish,” which, while announcing the completion of the transgression also ensures the perpetual existence of the “taboo” (*ibid.*: 38). This, transgression is also not, something, which would exhaust the taboo if one repeatedly carries it out. Foucault in his obituary essay on Bataille responds exactly to this apprehension, which has a tremendous moral circulation in the present world. He says “transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable” (1977:34). At other instance in the same essay, he further says “Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a

spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" (*ibid.*: 35).³⁵ Thus, the "anguish," which appears at the transgression, also transfigures our "selves" with which we were part of the everyday. This momentary death, which takes us away from the everyday, never returns us with the same self again, and likewise this circle continues. To phrase this relation, Bataille comments that "eroticism" is then, the "disequilibrium" in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question"(*ibid.*: 31). Going by these accounts then, it is clearly not possible to consider the uniform selves of different subjects described in the anthropological writings, to be, now in sexual play for regeneration and now in silence in "fear and trembling." But, to go back to the idea of "disequilibrium," it could be posed as a question, that in this uneven realm of subjective experience and existence, how the relation with the world be possible? To which, Bataille may argue that, it is exactly this "disequilibrium" which manifests the "discontinuity" between two persons and thus create the sites for "communication". He says, the "disequilibrium" causes "dissolution" of sharp limits and propels the person to open up to the "other," whom one could not have communicated to, in the possession of an everyday self of the society. On the other hand, it is the real death of a person that brings about "continuity" to his being, a state in which there could be no "anguish", no "disequilibrium", no possibility of "dissolution" and thus no disposition to communicate³⁶.

The crucial question, however remains for us, is that, how do we think of reproduction and Death? Bataille responds to the same by saying that, though "death is really the opposite process to the process ending in birth, yet these opposite processes can be reconciled" (*ibid.*: 55). He is of the view that, in fact reproduction offers the space to produce new "discontinuous" beings, it resists the "continuity" offered by the event of death itself. However, it is the imaginative experience of this "continuity" offered by death, which disconcerts us, makes us shrink back to our selves. But that shrinkage never happens completely, it always keeps us at the edge of the horror of transgressing, and this

³⁵ Also consider Lacan saying in one of his seminars, " The naturalist liberation of desire has failed historically. We do not find ourselves in the presence of a man less weighed down with laws and duties than before the great critical experience of so-called libertine thought" (Lacan 1992:4).

³⁶ Needless to say, this notion of death evolves from the medical notion of death, provided by science. Yet at the same time, it is not strictly that and second, it is this notion of 'death' which informs all of our activities today, to the extent that one can say that, this notion of death has marked the death of all other notions of death. So, whichever way one looks at it, it is a notion of death, which is present between us.

enticement also becomes the pull of desire, which actually makes us transgress and then leave us anguished. While talking, with regard to the ethnographic descriptions (similar to what we have discussed here) of “horror” attached to the sight of a dead body, he says:

“the horror we feel at the thought of a corpse is akin to the feeling we have at human excreta, what makes this association more compelling is our similar disgust at aspects of sensuality we call obscene. The sexual channels are also the body’s sewers; we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them”³⁷ (*ibid.*: 57).

It could therefore be suggested that, while engaging with the meanings bestowed to activities at the event of death, by the anthropologists, there is no question of rejection of the possibilities in which symbols can be understood for different cultures. But it is important at the same time to mention the organizing principles, which make those meanings possible. Not many of the anthropologists, whose work we have discussed, would perhaps deny, that when they are working with any given culture, there are categories and meanings with which they themselves come to the ‘field’ and they help in shaping the ‘meanings’. No doubt that, at the same time they also undergo tremendous interrogation from the contradictory possibilities offered from the ‘field’ itself. In such a situation, the theme of ‘death and sexuality’ is an everyday experiential theme for all of us, including the anthropologists. Thus, using Bataille’s exposition of the “inner experience” may not offer any “concrete” (Lévi-Strauss: 1964) meaning to any context, and at times may even start with problematic assumptions derived from the anthropological renderings. Yet the analytic account like Bataille’s is crucial reminder to us, to consider that organizing principles of the society or the notion of dominion in general does not work always with a now this-now that logic, particularly when it comes to excesses like death and sexuality. Thus the ethnographic descriptions we have considered here may be methodologically, a

³⁷ It has to be kept in mind that increasingly, we no longer can see the dead body (except in displaced situations like Newspaper photos, T.V. cinematic images etc. where we can see it virtually and really when perhaps we are the survived part of the catastrophes, which are reported in the media) and thus, this above mentioned description has to be seen in conjunction with the taboo which dead body itself has become. More discussion on this account would be possible when we move to the second section on the ‘Necrophagous’ ascetic.

relatively simplistic and reductive way of making sense of the entire event. In short, the evocation of “inner experience” would only supplant our main discourses of “concrete” realities and perhaps unsettle their “main” character(s) as well. Because, as we have seen in this regard, the issue of sexuality and death are inexorably related with the issue of personage in a given community – where that personage in turn is at a transformative phase at any given juncture, continuously negotiating with memory, events, experiences, punishments and transgressions. Thus, to sum this section it may be useful to quote Bataille himself so that there is greater clarity to what has already been said.

“ We refuse to see that life is the trap set for the balanced order, that life is nothing but instability and disequilibrium. Life is a swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion. But since the incessant explosion constantly exhausts its resources, it can only proceed under one condition: that beings given life whose explosive force is exhausted shall make room for fresh beings coming into the cycle with renewed vigor” (*ibid.*: 59).

The ‘Necrophagous’ Ascetic and the Postcolonial Nation

In last section, it was shown how death and sexuality are features, greater than the acts with which they are associated, in that regard, the relation of death and sexuality with other things in our everyday life is under the purview of the government’s modes of functioning. Here we discuss an essay by Jonathan Parry – “Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic’ (1982)³⁸, which highlights that relation between the colonial government and Hindu social lives. To understand this relation between that of the Necrophagous ascetic and the government³⁹, we approach the problematic with Foucault’s work. It is important to illustrate the various ways in which ‘things’ and

³⁸ The essay is much more saturated with the references from the cases in which the colonial government had conducted legal proceedings against those who were seen to have ‘the habit of cannibalism’. Parry’s own position as an anthropologist, then becomes very complex, anthropologically he can make sense of the practice of the Aghori, but at the same time the way his description is given to exoticizing the sexual being of the Aghori, his descriptions could also be seen as to an answer to why the colonial government may be justified in banning their practices. Interesting to follow is that, Parry as an anthropologist uses scriptural texts, informers, annals of the legal proceedings, newspaper reports and above all ‘hearsay’ as a pool of information, and writes about the practice of the Aghori from that vantage point.

³⁹ Clearly the idea of government is not limited to the sovereign political power.

'people' who perhaps were meaningful and legitimate in their everyday existence come to be seen as stigmatised and unlawful. Yet this relation is not that of the powerful eliminating what it cannot tolerate, it is a more systemic decimation, which plucks things gradually from their context and also leaves them with new conditions for their survival. At one instance, Foucault says that, "the things with which in this sense government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility etc...men in their relation to other kinds of things, customs, habits etc..." (1991:93). It is this relation, that we seek to understand in the following analysis⁴⁰.

Going back to Parry's essay, it is argued there that the Aghori occupies an important position in the Hindu social system as that of a person, who has conquered death itself (1982). The same essay was placed within the extensive accounts of other observations in Parry's book — *Death in Banaras* (1994), there it is argued as in other essays by him, that — Kashi occupies a special place in Hindu cosmos, it is not only the primeval city, it also offers itself as the site of union of the dead and the divine. Thus in the essay 'Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic', he argues further, that a "good death" "is a sacrificial act" (*ibid.*:74). This "good" death not only helps in the "re-creation of the deceased" but also in the "regeneration of time and of the cosmos"(*ibid.*:74). Contrary to this, the Aghori, who occupies the cremation ghat as his permanent residence, eats "not only meat but excrement, vomit and the putrid flesh of corpses.... drinks not only liquor but urine"(*ibid.*:89) hold the power of regeneration himself, because he has conquered death itself. Thus this capacity allots him the role of a saint, who can bless people to have children. Parry argues, that this, power comes from the fact that the Aghori like other saints observed in the Hindu social imagery can practice "*Coitus Reservatus*" through which, Parry says "the natural direction of flow (of semen) is reversed by reabsorbing it into the penis after ejaculation" (*ibid.*:251). This provides the Aghori "magical powers"

⁴⁰ The analysis envisaged here is not to consider the reinstatement of the Aghori and his practices, but to see how relations circumscribe a given form of bodily practice. Thus, the Aghori is an illustration here, of a personage defined with relation to corpse, excrement etc. and the asymmetry of that personage with the colonial imagination and understanding of human selves.

(*siddhis*) “by which he may defy nature and control the world” (ibid.:251). Parry goes on to describe explicitly in his essay on the necrophagous ascetic that how for instance one Kina Ram (of whom it was said) used to “throw his urine on the crowds by way of blessing”. Parry was also told that “a lay follower may be initiated by the guru by placing a drop of his semen on the disciple’s tongue: while at the initiation of an ascetic the preceptor fills a skull with his urine which is then used to moisten the novice’s head before it is tonsured “(1982: 96).

This entire description, Parry arranges in line to his overall argument that the Aghori upturns the entire notion of purity and pollution, which is sacrilegious to any Hindu, to even think of and precisely from these transgressions (or the ability to do so) the Aghori is considered as a saint. Parry further elaborates, that the Aghori not only is to “withheld his semen”, he is also to copulate “when the female partner is infertile”(ibid.:91), i.e. when she is “menstruating” and “preferably”, she has to be a “prostitute”(ibid.:9) because according to Parry, hers is “one class of women who have a ‘professional hostility’ to fertility” (ibid.:91).

In all these accounts, there is no way we can discern how much is true or false. But our main emphasis is to discern the tension with which this essay itself is charged. While wondering about the well placed, middle class followers of one of the Aghori ascetic – Baba Bhagwan Ram who had taken to preach about an “egalitarian society,” Parry says: “As I would somewhat cynically interpret it, however, his considerable success amongst such people is at least in part attributable to the fact that this message is one which they can identify as ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’ and which they can caustically use to legitimize a more shamefaced and surreptitious concern to tap the source of a fabulous supernatural power” (ibid.: 94). At this juncture, one can turn around and ask, why all of a sudden the practice of the Aghori has become “shamefaced”, wasn’t it so meaningful till now, in Parry’s descriptions? How did Bhagwan Ram manage to reach an ashram, far removed from the cremation ground and take to preach about “egalitarian” society; and also by virtue of being in this clean legalized geography isn’t he separated productively

up to the colonial governments practice – stripped off any association with the putrid flesh, excrement, etc.?

In *History of sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault articulates the working of the phenomena in another context, but it could be seen as resonating with what has been discussed in the preceding paragraph. He says – “...it is easy to see that each of these great figures of sexual austerity is tied to an experience and to a cluster of concrete relationships: relations to the body, with the question of health, and behind it the whole game of life and death; the relation to the other sex, with the question of the spouse as privileged partner, in the game of the family institution and ties it creates: the relation to one’s own sex, with the question of partners that one can choose within it, and the problem of the adjustment between social roles and sexual roles: and finally, the relation to truth, where the question is raised of the spiritual conditions that enable one to gain access to wisdom” (1985:23).

Thus we go back to the clues in Parry’s essay itself, which suggest, how one by one the practices of the Aghori came under legal restrictions. At one point of time finally it was so that each doing of the Aghori could be corresponded with a severe medical ailment. That moment the Aghori became equally eligible to go to the prison, asylum, hospital, etc. all at once. Parry discusses the trial of one of the Aghoris, who was booked under the law proscribing the “habit of cannibalism” in Ghazipur in 1862, similarly he suggests there were convictions for similar other cases from Rohtak in 1882, Dehradun and Behrampore in 1884 (*ibid.*: 90). There is also slippage of categories when discussing the trial cases which again reinforces the legitimacy of the colonial law, because it is actually the fear that Necrophagy could be synonymous to cannibalism that the law attempts to efface the practice of the Aghori and needless to say, it has ‘our’ consent for the same. This consent can be located within the purview of “human rights” and “modernity,” which has ‘our’ selves as subjects. Thus this “subjective position” could be that of a moral agent of the colonial-postcolonial milieu, independent of the fact that the ‘subject’ is a ‘colonist’ or a ‘native.’ Parry claims that “what is certain, however, is that during the British Raj more than one Aghori was executed for the crime, and recently the Guardian

newspaper (Thursday, 6 march 1980) reported the death in police custody of an old ascetic...who was suspected of the sacrifices of five children whose blood he collected in bottles for the performance of rituals by which he sought to attain immortality” (*ibid*:88). Then, further Parry describes about the postcolonial situation, that the festival of *Lolark Chhath*, when the prostitutes used to perform at the tomb of Kina Ram, was called off “in late fifties after a serious disturbance among the university students” (*ibid*: 92).

Thus we can see that a multiple plexus comes into being, which cannot tolerate the asymmetrical relation with corpse, excrement, and prostitutes at any of its sites. From, these “subject positions”, there are different ideological convictions which easily convince us of the redundancy of a practice which evokes horror and disgust. So as we had said before, this relation of a personage is not about the Aghori, it is about the articulation of possibilities in which governmentality would propose the relations we can have vis-à-vis the corpse, excrement, space of the cremation ground etc. Thus, instantly we may find sociological answers to what and why, constitutes as the underground – slimy functioning of all illegal and debarred practices of *Tantrism* as opposed to the accepted and universally circulated ideas and individuals belonging to the realms of asceticism or spirituality which manages to nourish and is fed back itself by the other alienating processes of the present world. Finally, one can conclude by saying, that it is about the direction, about which Foucault says in ‘Madness and Civilization’ that- “modern thought is advancing towards that region where man’s other must become the same as himself”(1973:328).

Conclusion

In conclusion it could be considered, through the illustrations provided in the discussions we have had so far, that sexuality and death have an inextricable relation not only at the level of ritualistic observations but in fact this relation pervades and disconcerts the settledness of all realms of our everyday lives. Given the pervasiveness of ideas and application of science in the contemporary world, including our postcolonial location, it is an imperative to move beyond the paradigms of ritualistic meaningfulness and focus on disjuncture and dislocations which make other meanings possible, at times through the

predation of the previously existing ones. However, this relation does not work in any such simple manner and it is this complexity of the cultural beings, which has to be made sense of, by virtue of living in it. Thus the discussion on the *Aghori* with the analytical lens of Foucault's work does suggest to us, the incommensurability of a practice like that of the *Aghori* and the self of a nation. As has been said before, this is not about the *Aghori* per se, it is about a body whose personage is drawn in relation with excrement, corpse, cremation ground, menstrual blood, liquor, prostitutes etc. and the discussion shows to us that it is the ideological, moral, economic concern of the powers to lay down in unequivocal terms that any body's being drawn from any of these above mentioned matters would be illegal and perverse. Where illegality and the notions of perversion would feed into each other, conceiving of the subject as that, which should be either in the prison, asylum, clinic, electric chair or the electric bed (which is the contemporary crematorium) according to the degree and intensity. From this analysis, it appears that there is a strict control of even the minutest of detail over which our everyday sexual concerns are based and it may also seem that there perhaps was an age where the application of power was more arbitrary and less concentrated than today in terms of its reach. Such thought may lead us to think that, that past is dead now. This is, one idea of loss, which informs the collective memory in various ways. There is another one, which is posed as the contrary to the above mentioned. Writers like Baudrillard may mourn the death of the world, when and where there was a strict hierarchy between people and things. As mentioned in the last chapter as well, his sense of loss (which incidentally is more common than the first sense of loss mentioned above) would lament that, the 'ambiguity' and the fluidity of circulation of ever-changing values of sexuality, has effectively caused, both sexes to loose their demarcation and this, then has only brought us into a world denuded of all of its sexual prowess (Baudrillard, 1993: 87-124). There are others, like Giddens and Beck who argue that though there is greater risk and uncertainty in the contemporary world, the achievements of the sexual liberation could be considered as foundation to "reflexively" build a world, where there is "democratization" of "private sphere" (Beck, 1992;Giddens, 1992). Giddens in his book— *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (1992), discusses the possibility of such a world. He begins by suggesting that the changes in the

perceptions of sexuality have come into being because the male dominated world has been pushed by women's liberation movements to accommodate their notions of sexuality as well. He terms the contemporary age as that of "sexual plasticity," denoting that one needs to accept various preferences of sexuality, which exist in the contemporary world. In order to substantiate the same, he says that – "the transmutation of love is as much a phenomena of modernity as is the emergence of sexuality; and it connects in an immediate way with issues of reflexivity and self-identity (*ibid.* :34)". Further in the book he discusses sexual "addictions," sexual "troubles" etc. to come to the conclusion that "a sexually addicted civilization is one where death has become stripped of meaning; life politics at this point implies a renewal of spirituality (*ibid.* :203)". We seem to have come full circle by coming back to a "life politics" based on romantic love, which would renew our "spirituality." Though, even a basic 'Reader' on gender would provide a much more nuanced understanding of women movements, feminist struggles and gender relations and perhaps, there would be other books which would try to salvage modernity less crudely than Giddens, his wish is defined by other kind of death which he seems to think, lies in future if we do not transform our lives radically today. In that sense this lamentation to build things is not very different from Baudrillard's kind of lamentation, which calls people to remain indifferent. All of these sensitivities would find resonance at different level in different versions of collective memories and imagination. It is important to listen carefully to all of them so that we can discern one subdued whisper from the other, and at the same time one has to continuously reiterate that any serious engagement with any of the contemporary strain of writing would show that it is not about eulogizing the past or going back to it. Considering, what people think they have lost or found is always the realm of a careful presence, it may also be suggested that it is indeed the realm of pain and violence. However, as we stated at the start of this chapter, eroticism as an emotive manifestation also emerges from this collective 'discontinuity', where things are not silent as death itself. Thus as a possibility, reproduction can take place in a test tube, but the erotic activity may not take place there ever, telling us in unambiguous ways that, sexuality may only exist as a space of expression and experience if we conceive and live with the possibility of "anguish" death offers to us at each moment.

Chapter Four

Depression: An Involved “Being-Towards – Death”

In this chapter we take up Partha Chatterjee’s – *The Princely Impostor? : The Kumar of Bhawal and the Secret History of Nationalism* and Tagore’s – *The Living and the Dead (Jibita o Mrita)* to try and understand the manifold ways in which Women’s beings are considered to have meanings in situations of turmoil as well as in that of regular everyday posed by the transformative period of Decolonisation–Postcoloniality. Thus the question in all of its urgency can be posed as – what is worth dying for a woman placed within a specific normative role in the affective and emotive realm of personhood devised by kinship and other institutional moulds as well as accidental moments? Inversing the question, the same urgency acquires a directive for the woman’s personage in the form of – what one may live for and how much of it is “life” in terms of fulfilment and content? That is, if there is a movement away from the meaningful normative zone into the “Zero degree of meaning” – as Kristeva puts it, then the woman’s being becomes extremely tense and precarious. Immediately saturated with the radical possibilities of rejection from the normative realm and thus poised for a psychic disintegration, in extreme cases culminating into death. Such departures at the time of which or in which, Chatterjee and Tagore respectively are writing purports woman’s personage as an existence — struggling to extend these limits and be accepted in that struggle.⁴¹ Truly, all these measures do not start and end at the level of woman’s being itself, they are affected by the connections and dependencies of the relations, she has with her loved-lost objects, viz. the mother, the husband and the child etc. Thus from these orientations the main theme of enquiry becomes – how does the tension between the acceptable realm of the normative and the transgressive realm of “zero degree of meaning” manage to carve an

⁴¹ A situation which Kristeva tries to understand in Hegel’s propositions as following- “ A Woman will only have the choice to live her life either *Hyper-abstractedly* (‘immediately universal’, Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen (‘immediately particular’, Hegel said). But she will not be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity, of the catastrophic-fold-of-‘being’ (‘never singular’, Hegel said)” (Moi, 1986: 173). In this essay one’s enquiry is set in order to affirm the presence of this “singularity” vis-à-vis the woman’s being, but also to show the ‘catastrophes’ involved in these modes of being.

arresting space, of what has been called as “feminine depression”, in Kristeva’s work? “Feminine depression” that is manifested in the range of a precarious preservation of woman’s being and the capacity to live to other contexts such as — destruction by suicide and extreme denial of any mode of being (s) with other possibilities. Considering this discussion as of an illustrative scope to understand not the origin but the emergence⁴² of “feminine depression” in a language and in categories familiar to us in the contemporary post-colonial situation.

The discussion is divided into two sections. The first one based on the analysis of Partha Chatterjee’s: *The Princely Impostor? : The Kumar of Bhawal and the Secret History of Nationalism* and second one based on Tagore’s work: *The Living and the Dead (Jibita o Mrita)*. These accounts though are different in their rendition, organization and method: the former being an empirico-theoretical work; the latter strictly belonging to the category of ‘Fiction,’ what brings them together here is the similarity at the level of considering both fact and fiction — what are the limits of a woman’s being, tied with the certain demands and promises of the transformative social realm of post-colonial society? In order to put forward the problematic(s) and seek the answers, I have used mainly the work of Julia Kristeva, in the field of psychoanalysis, following the conceptual lineage of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan etc. Considering these directions, one may emphasize again that the above-mentioned analytical unity (of Narrative History and Fiction) should be seen as an effort to capture the context. In the spirit, in which, Wittgenstein for instance imagines a room for it, as following:

“One makes a false estimate of the psychological interest of the if-feeling if one looks at it as the matter-of-course correlate of the meaning of the word; it must

⁴² Undoubtedly, there must be other scenes of ‘struggle’ between the strict realms of the ‘normative’ and the ‘transgressive’, unsettling both, coping with its effects, surviving it or collapsing before it and thus on a general level it could be said that they do not exist independent to each other (refer chapter two). Still the significant feature to be pointed out here is that in the past ages it’s existence must have been dealt differently but over here when one is talking about the postcolonial moment, one is talking about a life and it’s being which has adopted certain clinical values. For e.g. a state of ‘possession’ or ‘trance’ would have had different symbolic significance and that’s why disposed to different meanings of experience, while if one has to make sense of the same now, it would be an imperative today to look at it from the clinical vocabulary (even the subject her/himself) of being(s) of mind-body (psychoanalytic–psychiatry etc.) and its expression. So it is the dynamics of this sociological imperative that one is approaching to explore here.

rather be seen in a different context, in the context of the special circumstances under which it occurs” (Wittgenstein, 1980:66e).

Bibhabati's Unambiguous "No"

There is a brief description of Chatterjee's exhaustive and elaborate account, thereafter, it would be easier to specify the direct subject of our inquiry and the questions related to it. Chatterjee in his “Narrative history,” as the sub-title —‘The Secret History of Nationalism’— suggests, is primarily interested in delineating the politico-legal negotiations around a litigious issue (a prince ostensibly dead, reappears after more than a decade, claiming to be alive and legal owner of his property) of cultural identification, personhood, ownership etc. which spanned almost the entire first half of the twentieth century. Involving in its “enormous net” – “doctors and bureaucrats, priests and prostitutes, soldiers and artists, professors and holy men, besides hundreds of peasants, not to speak of lawyers and judges” (*ibid.*: xi). For Chatterjee, this politico-legal negotiation, involving these many people and more as a collage of the colonial Indian nation, represents – as understood by the methodological lens of “governmentality,” the hard fought, ambiguous and at times contradictory battle of nationalism with a clear message of the plausibility and necessity of an Indian state, governed by the Indians rather than the British. The contradictions or the ambiguities involved in the struggle also suggest that the politico-legal negotiations were to happen by participating into the colonial practises by those who were demanding a self-ruled government. That is to say, the process of nationalism was as systemic to the system as it could get and it did not operate on a register of unequivocal opposition of the colonial practises *in toto*, as some of the descriptions of anti-colonialism may suggest. Interestingly it is the repeated emphasis on the cultural specificity or the “ethnological” details, as put by Chatterjee, which rendered “authenticity” and thus authority to the claims put forward by the nationalist Indian lawyers. Keeping in mind, these overarching theoretical underpinnings of the entire work; now, we can look at the case itself in a simultaneous effort to contextualise it with the character of *Bibhabati* over which this section is based on.

The owners of the Bhawal estate [“with an annual rent income of Rs.650, 000 in the early twentieth century” (*ibid.*: 1)] were three brothers, by virtue of inheriting it as heirs. The

three married brothers were called as Ranendra, Ramendra and Rabindra, married to Sarjubala, Bibhabati and Ananda Kumari respectively. They had three sisters as well, who were called as Indumayi (the eldest among all six siblings), Jyotirmayi (the second eldest) and Tarinmayi (the youngest). They all used to live together; the sisters also along with their husbands and children. None of the brothers had any child, however Ananda Kumari later in her life adopted one (see supplement one). The estate owing to its huge income was continuously gazed upon by the British government, which had succeeded once to take it under control and put the actual owners under the legal duress and observation of what it called as the “Court of Wards” (functionally a legal status devised by the colonial government suggesting that since the wards are not fit to take care of themselves and their subjects efficiently the government would do it for them, tendering them a fixed salary or pension in return). However Bilasmani — the mother of the heirs fought it back through the Calcutta high court. Thus at this moment, the eldest Kumar – Ranendra, was the main decision maker, while the property was shared equally in terms of returns by all three brothers. On April 18th 1909, Ramendra – the second Kumar leaves for Darjeeling with his wife – Bibhabati, her elder brother – Satyendra and “ a retinue of twenty-one servants” (*ibid.* :1) .The place in Darjeeling arranged by Satyendra was actually supposed to be a therapeutic place in the mountains because Ramendra Narayan Roy was suffering with syphilis , in its grave phase , “the ulcers had broken out” on “the legs and arms” (*ibid.* :1). Around May 6 Ramendra was reported seriously ill and a telegram suggesting the same was sent back to the *Rajwari*. Doctors of repute were pressed in service by Satyendra including Ashutosh das Gupta – the family doctor, who came as part of the troupe, which came from Bhawal to Darjeeling along with the ailing Kumar. After couple of days — it was reported that Ramendra died and a grief stricken Bibhabati went into uncontrollable lamenting and hysteria. Soon after the report of the death, rumours started circulating that Ramendra’s dead body was not cremated with proper Hindu rituals and in fact one was not sure if it had been cremated at all or he was even dead at the first place for that matter. This rumour nourished itself with the people suggesting now and then, that they had seen, someone like Ramendra with a group of sadhus. Jyotirmayi – one of the sisters of the Kumars’ actually took up to inquire at the holy places (pilgrimages).

Meanwhile, within a few years, in 1910, the eldest Kumar also died. Gradually the “court of wards” overtook the entire estate on behalf of those who were now dead and on the behalf of those (like the youngest Kumar) who were there, but were considered unfit to “manage the estate” (*ibid.*: 4). Satyendra managed to convince Bibhabati to leave Bhawal’s Rajwari and live in Calcutta. He interceded on her behalf (since he was trained in law) and also managed to obtain her insurance claim and a regular pension.

Then in 1920 or 1921, at Buckland Bund, Dhaka: a Hindi speaking Sanyasi appeared, clad in loincloth and with matted hair. Because of his appearance, and his resemblance to Ramendra, he was immediately taken in by the people after initial rounds of interrogations, as the second Kumar of Bhawal – Ramendra Narayan Roy. As the word spread, Jyotirmayi the sister, actually took the elaborate initiative of calling the Sanyasi home, inquiring and confirming about not only the informational details but also his body marks and announcing, along with many other people of the estate, that the Sanyasi, indeed is the second Kumar. Needham — the manager appointed by the ‘court of wards’ wrote about the “extraordinary” (*ibid.*:9) event to Lindsay — the collector and District magistrate of ‘Dacca’, asking for an enquiry in the entire matter. The Court of Wards came up with the clear and unambiguous message that the second Kumar is ‘dead’ and it can prove it to anyone if required and thus the Sanyasi is an ‘Impostor’ and nobody is to pay rent to him. Thus started the rounds of suspicions and convictions, with the circle of non-officials – peasants, relatives, friends of Kumars becoming increasingly on the side of the authenticity of the Sanyasi’s claim. As Chatterjee says — “for the next twenty-five years, as events would unfold around this sensational case, there would be few in the whole of Bengal, regardless of region, caste, class, gender or social status, who would not come to hear of the Bhawal Sanyasi and his claim” and “have an opinion too” (*ibid.*:14). Following Chatterjee’s own serial of narration, it would be interesting to locate the second Kumar’s biography as it is — the way he grew up, behaved, and supposedly ‘died’ the controversial death. He was considered to be extremely dextrous in killing animals in the form of the sport of hunting and often would go far for *Shikar* with “distinguished English visitors” (*ibid.*:33). Even earlier, as a young boy, the Kumar energetically and creatively opposed his formal education, the limit being reached when

he filled his English “tutor’s inkpot with urine”(ibid.:34)at which the man left. It follows from these considerations that he was least concerned about the estate matters. However, had a keen interest in settling accounts if Englishmen tried to impose any kind of supremacy.

At the age of 18, he was married to Bibhabati, “ then a girl of thirteen”. Bibhabati’s mother was a descendant of a famous Uttarpara *Zamindar* family but was “widowed at a young age and lived with her brother in Uttarpara” (ibid.: 34). The marriage of Ramendra with Bibhabati was construed by some as an unequal alliance; the brides’ side being the ‘lower’ partners in terms of status. On the personal front “the marriage didn’t bring any noticeable change in Ramendra’s lifestyle” (ibid.: 35). Bibhabati was seldom visited by him and was separated from even seeing him very often because she was to stay in the “women’s quarters”, where strict “purdah” was maintained (ibid. :35). While Ramendra enjoyed the company of young men, who grew on his generousities, “egging him on his extravagant pursuits, and generally fleecing him” (ibid.:35). Also, his sexual escapades with a dancer named ‘Elokeshi’ had become widely known, considered to be ‘his first mistress’ and probably there were many more after her (ibid.: 38). Indeed, if the moral history of these sexual journeys has to be established most emphatically, it could be summed up in saying that by twenty-one Ramendra had contracted syphilis. That was 1905; in 1909, he took the therapeutic trip to Darjeeling because of the same syphilis.

The life of Bibhabati, as his wife can be conceived in-between the range of activities taken up by Ramendra. Having been brought up along with her brother Satyendra by her widowed mother under considerable “hardships”, she also was accustomed to the “enlightened circles of the Calcutta middle class” and “unlike the women of Bhawal Raj family, she had gone to school” (ibid.:38).Bibhabati was not keeping well at Rajwari and she informed her mother about it. Her mother after having come to know of her chronic illness (anaemia), was concerned to the verge of being very nervous about the entire lifestyle of Bibhabati, and through her letters extolled Bibhabati to push herself to consider more enthusiastically and sensuously, her relation with her husband. It appears from the regular exchange between the ‘anaemic’ daughter and the ‘nervous’ mother that

both are tied in a mournful depression over the ways in which Bibhabati's life had come about and beyond this communication, they had no room to articulate these apprehensions. Though it seems, Satyendra, the brother took a proactive interest in managing a secure life for his sister (the greater details of these features would become clearer as we progress).

Again following, Chatterjee's narrative scheme, we come back to the question – "what happened at Darjeeling?" As the Sanyasi emerged with the claim of being the second prince of Bhawal, there was an immediate public articulation of the suspicion, people have had regarding Ashutosh Das Gupta – the family doctor. So it was alleged in so many words, in a printed booklet, that Ashutosh poisoned the second Kumar and had a licentious link with Bibhabati: Bibhabati's personage as a loyal wife was questioned because she refused to recognise the Sanyasi as the second Kumar and stuck to this position, as we will see, her entire life. Ashutosh filed a defamation suit against the publishers of the booklet. He lost the case at the lower court but the high court ruled in his favour because as Chatterjee points out "clearly much more was at stake here than the alleged defamation of a doctor from a rural charitable dispensary in Dacca" (*ibid.*: 77).

By now questionnaires were issued by the colonial government to seek information on what is what by the higher authorities to those who were directly involved into controlling and managing the Bhawal estate and also the witnesses at Darjeeling (*ibid.*: 46-71). As it turned out, the moment of the supposed death and the contested burial became the site of scientific enquiry. Mixed with the opinions of the Sanyasi and its own, the Board of Revenue prepared a note entitled – "The Story of the Sadhu" as following:

"The sadhu says that he is the second Kumar of Bhowal – Kumar Ramendra Narayan Roy. His story is that on the midnight of the 8th of May 1909, the doctors' thought that he was dead and declared him to be so. The body was then removed to the burning ground where it was place on the funeral pyre and before it was set on fire, heavy storms and rain came on which drove away the attendants, that the rains subsiding the attendants returned to the burning ground but found that the body had gone; they, however, set fire to the wood and returned home with the story that the dead body of the Kumar had been cremated. The story further is that when the

attendants had run away, a Sanyasi who was close by came to the funeral pyre, perceived that the life was not extinct, removed the body to his quarters and by the application of some charm the body was brought back to life..." (*ibid.*: 58-9).

It was this story with numerous little variations and substantiations to it by various people invoked during the course of the suit, filed in the name of Kumar Ramendra Narayan Roy in 1930 at the court of first sub-judge of Dacca district, that became crucial and decisive. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into extensive details, when one is analytically interested in Bibhabati's biography, it is however crucial to point out that Bibhabati observed all the ritualistic moments of widowhood, in keeping the normative conformity. When she moved to Calcutta and continued with her quiet life, Chatterjee considers the possibility of thinking if "she (was) secretly relieved that she would no longer have to suffer the ignominies of such a married life?" and, as she was later called on, in the court, her terse replies also seem like an indicator of a long pressed negotiation with fate and destiny and at the same time a reticent tension with things and events as they happened (including the court proceedings) [see the appendix two]. Further, her refusal to think of the 'Sanyasi' as the second Kumar reminds us of her affirmation to go on with her life as it is. These are the crucial junctures, which pose her being to us, and it is precisely from these observations that we would think of the limits of her existence. But before that, we need to go back to the main narrative. The case as it went on, in the backdrop was the "swadeshi movement", "riots", "non-cooperation movement", "khilafat movements" etc. On the other hand Chatterjee exemplifies how for instance the legal discipline in its due course made use of extremely sophisticated arguments about identity and personhood from both sides. The arguments were inclusive of a precise examination of things from ethnological perspectives along with considering their scientific rationale. Thus, from weather reports to mental conditions with respect to memory, from the cleft of the plaintiff's nose to the mark on his genitalia, from scaly feet to the colour of his eyes, every possible detail was verified and cross-contested. Similarly there were different accounts of the serial of what happened at Darjeeling; needless to say, in the process there were many lawyers from Indian side and various other people as officials who were antagonistic to the sadhu's claim.

After hearing and undergoing all the rigours of Law, the judge of the lower court Panalal Basu delivered the judgement in the favour of the plaintiff on August 24, 1936, while the verdict of A.N. Chaudhri was in the contrary. Justice Charu Chandra Biswas was assigned further to find out the truth; he upheld Basu's conclusions. At that, the case was appealed for in the High Court (by the court of wards), and Ronald Francis Lodge, decided against the Biswas's findings. He concluded – "I am satisfied that the plaintiff is an impostor, supported by Jyotirmoyee Devi and others in the full knowledge that he is an impostor." (*Ibid.*: 338). Finally it was left to the discretion of Sir Leonard Costello to decide, who left for England and was supposed to come back to India with his judgement, but in the meantime as Chatterjee points out "Europe plunged into darkness, World War II had begun." So he sent a written opinion, which was read by Biswas in the presence of other judges including Lodge. Costello's judgement had argued and decreed in the favour of the lower court and had upheld the plaintiff to be Ramendra Narayan Roy. Chatterjee, considers this decision to be an important acknowledgement in the direction of authoritative Englishmen thinking that the Indians themselves were rightly placed, if not better placed in terms of understanding and regulating their lives. In other words, this moment signifies a crucial movement towards decolonisation for Chatterjee. In the meantime, after the judgement of Basu, Ramendra Narayan Roy was given his share and his sister also got him married to a thirty-year-old woman – Dhara Mukherjee. Rani Bibhabati again appealed against the decision which was considered for the last time and "their lordships" (*ibid.*; 375) of the privy council decided for the last time that the plaintiff in fact was Ramendra Narayan Roy. This was July 31, 1946. "Kumar Ramendra Narayan had finally established in three courts of law that he was who he claimed to be — himself" (*ibid.*: 383).

The next day a huge procession was in order, Kumar was just about to leave when he was seized by a stroke and collapsed; he died within two days.

Bibhabati was awarded Rupees 8,00,000 by the court of wards as she was one of the widows, she refused to take it by saying – "but are they not giving it to one because they think I am the widow of that man? If I take the money, will I not be accepting that I know to be false?" (*ibid.*: 385).

Chatterjee also tells us that “Rani Bibhabati always insisted, until her death twenty years later that although she had been defeated in every court of law on earth, she had won in the ultimate court of appeal: the man was trying to offer *puja* in the name of someone who was long dead. The goddess had punished him.”(*ibid.*: 384).

Arguably, the least one can say regarding Bibhabati’s stand is that, there is an exemplary articulation of an opinion, in which it could be considered that the fixity and conviction is helped by the normative standards of the traditional order of being a woman-wife-widow. As Partha Chatterjee points out, in this articulation there is a secret possibility that Bibhabati employs a sense of urgency in securing herself into a quiet life of a widow. Starting from this assumption, it is argued here that, this quietitude in itself is a shield for her preservation and it prevents Bibhabati from any psychic disintegration but one needs to go further and consider the force of this denial itself, in order to see that there is a greater tension in coming to terms with the recognition of the Sanyasi as her husband than mere vindication of an unpleasant past. In this context, Chatterjee has argued that, Bibhabati’s decision can be considered as an exercise of agency, given the fact that Bibhabati never had a satisfactory relation with her husband. He also argues that, during the entire law proceedings, almost all the nationalist lawyers thought that Bibhabati herself would never have had taken that decision. It was under the pressure of her brother and her vulnerability as a widow, which forced her to take that decision. Chatterjee says, “Consistently with their progressive nationalism, however, they were unwilling to grant that Bibhabati herself might have shaped in any way the decisions that determined her life”(*ibid.*: 381). It is useful to underline this irony, but it is also important to understand the pulse of this conviction, and one may argue here that it is this normative realm of conviction, of which Bibhabati is also a part. So, one should not consider that there lies a realm of agency, which provides her a quiet life of a widow, withdrawn from the political participation of her people (future compatriots) and on the other hand lies the submission to her husband all over again. In fact, one would argue here that at this juncture of postcoloniality, there is a great amount of conflict in which for example Bibhabati’s being is placed. Her decision could be seen as what Chatterjee argues for but moving beyond, it could be also seen that, this is a compulsive defence to seek the purest space of

normative being where preservation could be granted but nothing beyond it. Following that Bibhabati has only the option of constantly limiting herself to an ever-purer space of an astute widow. It is this tension that one seeks to understand using the work of Julia Kristeva and attempts to show the probable presence of this tension and its effects in a sociological mode, so that one emerges from this discussion as more familiar with the beings within the contemporary post-colonial world. In the next section, when one looks at Tagore's story, it would be explicit that, it is the complex interplay of transgressions by the widow which even deny her this protective and shielding space of minimal acceptance and that rush her into a suicide, of which Tagore says – "(she) was dead, to prove that she had not died" (Tagore: 1892). For now, we move on to the analysis of the first section.

Kristeva in her early work – 'Revolution in Poetic language' (1986) tries to accord a primacy to the pre linguistic state by calling the activities of this level (much before the Freudian "Primary process") as " mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof..."(Kristeva: 93) all as part of what she calls as the "semiotic" process. The "semiotic" process for Kristeva starts when energy is channelized in the mother's womb itself and the drives are to be inscribed with certain fixity. It's these initial anarchic waves of this process, which nevertheless put a mild mark and have themselves felt, providing a regular stock of energy all along in human life, which pushes her/him towards the sensuousness of the undefined, paralinguistic, unexplored i.e. towards transgression.⁴³ This energy stock is considered by Kristeva as "chora", defined as "the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a non expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated" (*ibid*: 93). As one can think of, at the level of gestation, there is an ample movement and marking within the "chora" which can just be felt as the "semiotic"— the fulfilling moment(s). Thus, it is the security and nourishment of the mother's body, that

⁴³ This openness or transgression is not only to suggest a sexual traversing, which could be the costliest eruption because it comes at the face of not only restrictions and proscriptions but also a totalistic stigma and complete rejection that at times could be literally equal to death but also included in these traversions are movements away from the normative-stable roles. As we would move forward, it would be clear in this chapter that sociologically it is the realm of women's work, political participation, occupying the role of thinking subject and related matters which are to be seen with a sense of opening up a direction of relief but at the same time constantly bringing closer to the perilous situation of being rejected or left to oneself.

allots the “chora” this “motility”, which the “semiotic” process enjoys. This makes the mother’s body a “shelter” unparalleled with anything in the outside world. Before being born, the regulations which were earlier appearing as “traces”, start taking shape and after being born, through the adoption of language and the discipline the child also develops the much stronger sense of psychic organization which Kristeva calls as the “symbolic”. The recourse to the “symbolic” is akin to the following of the (Lacanian) “Real”, closer to Freudian “super ego”. It toes on the line of the grammar of being, the minute necessities are to be followed in order to preserve the psyche’s wholeness though this discipline becomes too regular and at times is devoid of any sensuousness. As we have already noted that the mother’s womb could be a “shelter” unparalleled with anything outside, so as the “symbolic” procedures come into place, they could be considered to be acting as the ‘conditionals’, i.e. If you follow this, you live in this outside world, otherwise – ‘there is nowhere to go for you except Death or to the Mother’. When one knows that going back to mother also doesn’t exist except killing her in the process and killing oneself. For Kristeva, this seems like a crucial mould in one’s life, so whenever one seeks to return to the “shelter”, one also seeks to harm one’s most loved object — one’s mother, thus most people instead of doing this, displace that return to one self in a “narcissistic” way and kill oneself through the serial phases of Depression. This brings us to consider that “matricide” which is considered as the necessary requirement in order to metamorphose out of the primary fixation on one’s mother, disposes us to the most difficult situation- to kill in our own psychic being that object who only could have been the “shelter” at the time of crises, and if one doesn’t exercise that, the primary condition of living in outside world is not fulfilled, so one would never be accepted in the “symbolic” realm. For some, this crises must be gotten over with, for most it becomes infinite deferment. So considering once more, the realm of the “symbolic”, Kristeva argues, it can also be called as the “Phallic” and it “insures the subject’s entrance into the universe of signs and creations. The supporting father of such a symbolic triumph is not the oedipal father but truly that “imaginary father”, “father in individual prehistory” according to Freud, who guarantees primary identification”⁴⁴ (1989:23). Needless to say

⁴⁴ There is yet another way to understand the “semiotic” and the “symbolic.” Here is, what Kristeva had to say in an interview, when asked to define the two “...by symbolic, I mean the tributary signification of

that both the “semiotic” and the “symbolic” are intertwined in the physiological as well as the abstract meaningfulness provided-deprived by the language, and as they “fold” a shape, that organization becomes our Being⁴⁵. Thus one can make out that there is a clear emphasis on the virtue of the symbolic, it is the holdfast of our psychic being, to the extent that, the subdued “semiotic” may only manifest itself when there is an ample support from the “symbolic” or in other case there is no “symbolic” realm to go to. So moving further, Kristeva proposes, “once the break instituting the symbolic has been established, what we have called the semiotic *chora* acquires a more precise status. Although originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic” (1984: 118). But we may ask, what pushes the woman’s being in this case towards this transgression – why the symbolic is to be transgressed? Kristeva answers it in an essay, called “Stabat Mater”, writing it in first person, she says: “I yearn for the law. And since it is not made for me alone, I venture to desire outside the law. Then, narcissism thus awakened — the narcissism that wants to be sex — roams, astonished. In sensual rapture I am distraught. Nothing reassures, for only the law sets anything down. Who calls such a suffering *jouissance*? It is the pleasure of the damned.” (1985:175).

Here one comes back to the Freudian conjuncture suggesting that “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, one may have an overarching “death drive”. Kristeva accords the same possible function to the free run of the “semiotic” i.e. “on the path of destruction, aggressivity and death” (1984:95). But as she mentioned in the last quote in first person,

language, all the effects of meaning that appear from the moment linguistic signs are articulated in grammar, not only chronologically but logically as well. In other words, the symbolic is both diachronic and synchronic; it concerns both the acquisition of language and the present syntactic structure. By semiotic, on the other hand, I mean the effects of meaning that are not reducible to language or that can operate outside language, even if language is necessary as an immediate context or as a final referent. By semiotic, I mean, for example the child’s echolalia before the appearance of language, but also the play of colors in an abstract painting or a piece of music that lacks signification but has a meaning. These are just a few examples” (Kristeva, 1996 :21).

⁴⁵ There are a lot of criticisms of Kristeva’s work by feminists and philosophers on the account that it reduces everything to the woman’s being as the ‘mother’, thus is inherently an essentialist position. For instance Nancy Fraser says “neither half of Kristeva’s split subject can be a feminist political agent”(Fraser, 1992:189) similarly, Moi says that “Kristeva is unable to account for the relations between the subject and society” (1985:171). These criticisms are valid and are significant political interventions, yet at the same time, one is convinced that if a critical and sensitive engagement with Kristeva’s work is taken, one may be able to overcome this genuine anxiety. This research work is an attempt in that spirit.

this death is also metaphoric, it is the death of the compulsions that tie woman's being to an ossified "symbolic", lending her to the monotony of bearing the "symbolic" weight of meaning in whatever she does. Thus the movement has to be taken up, in stead of its threat in order to constantly bring oneself towards a region of sensual being of one's own, which could have a "singular" feature. However, as noted before, it would be extremely difficult to embark on any such journey, if the support from the "symbolic" is lacking or is radically uncertain, thus, one needs to affirm once again that the semiotic and the symbolic are to be balanced sociologically along with the "singular" being(s).

Coming back to the case of Bibhabati, it could be argued using Kristeva's terminology that in her case there is an extreme identification with her mother's being and in shadow of that she has imagined a symbolic system for herself in which toeing on the exact line of the ritualistic realm is to provide a plentitude to her. Anything otherwise, seems greatly unsettling; she is not even ready to consider the consequence of the "semiotic" assumption. This shrinkage from the "semiotic" leads her into an extremely frozen state of being: where, any thought of, the other than the supportive "symbolic," brings her entire psyche into an unsettledness, reminded again and again by her mother as one, where she can only think of "suicide" as an alternative (Chatterjee, 2002:43).

To start afresh in considering her biography, if we think of "shelter", there is a curious identification with her mother who is a widow living with her brother. Bibhabati chooses to do the same several years down after her husband dies. On the other hand, it is Jyotirmayi who provides an emotive "shelter" to the Kumar, by accepting the Sanyasi as the brother at the first place. So beyond the co-incident of these occurrences, there is a sociological realm of the "symbolic" sanctity allotted to the space covered under the taboo of Incest, and having a co-originary relatedness with the mother⁴⁶.

Moreover, her identification with her mother rings through their correspondence also, where her mother continuously reminds her of the "symbolic" realm of the possible and if

⁴⁶ From Sophocles' — 'Antigone' based in Greek kinship to these three phenomena, there is clear sociological imperative to the relation of siblings, that could be explored in the psychoanalytic domain. In that the Freudian "band of brothers" who (mythically) killed their father, could be considered as a separate realm from a "band of sisters". Here in this case the relation of brother-sister should be seen in the archetypical context of Incest.

it would not be approached, how her daughter's life would be exactly like her own - depressive and suicidal:

“ It is wrong that nothing is prepared for you separately and that you either have to eat things that are not good for you or else starve. I have been much pained by this. When you have to spend all your life in that house, how can you afford to be so timid? [...] You will never be well again if you are indifferent and unmindful about your food.... I have explained this to you many times, but if you don't follow it, I will have no alternative but to commit suicide. I have experienced many troubles and mental worries in life and have borne them all by myself, but I am now living only for your sake” (Chatterjee, 2002:43).

Bibhabati's anaemic body exudes the lethargy, which her mother is worried about. There is a greater helplessness every passing moment for her, but at the same time since she cannot/doesn't abide by the suggestions of her mother, there is a covert acceptance of what may happen otherwise (i.e. if I do not manage to be in good health, I will be like this forever, or, if I do not do something to change my life now, my life would be like my mother — ‘troublesome and worried’ etc.). In such a condition, this everyday torment to be an object of desire for her husband and vicious negation of this object — primarily by the rejection handed out by Ramendra himself on one hand and severe deterioration of health on the other. In this anguish, isn't it much closer for her to be her mother — to be the widow — who lives in the “symbolic” sanctity of purity and doesn't have to live with the continuous demand of being the sexual object for her husband? Wouldn't the quietitude of widowhood offer her an “oceanic void” away from the realm of desire of the conspicuous sexual object — her husband? Thus, if one has to place these observations, vis-à-vis the “the vital necessity” — “Matricide”, “... the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation” (Kristeva, 1989:28), then clearly it can be visualized that this deferred process becomes endless here in the case of Bibhabati. Under such a circumstance, Kristeva argues:“... the maternal object having been introjected, the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self is what follows, instead of matricide.... I make of Her (mother) an image of death so as not to be shattered through the hatred I bear against myself when I identify with her...” (*ibid*). Moving further if one looks back at the drowning of Bibhabati in the “oceanic void”, one need not wonder, why

it could be so, for instance this also is the psychic world, where there is “ a feeling and fantasy of pain, but anesthetized, of jouissance, but in suspense, of an expectation and a silence as empty as they are fulfilled. In the midst of its lethal ocean the melancholy woman is the dead one that has always been abandoned within herself and can never kill outside herself” (*ibid*: 29-30).

Recalling the scene of the supposed death of Ramendra at Darjeeling and Bibhabati's lamentation and mourning at that instance, it could be argued that this event converges with her imagination of the symbolic realm completely, the imaginative cocoon in which she had fatalistically housed herself. Her grief in the form of symbolic observation (mourning and lamentation) is for herself to attest the loss of the desired object i.e. the husband. This husband is the “archetype” of the socially sanctioned loved object, he is not only the husband who has died now, here in Darjeeling, this death is the sum total of all possible semiotic-symbolic routes leading to any desirable object. Chatterjee points out that “she wept uncontrollably when the conch shell and iron bangles, markers of her married status, were removed from her hand and ritualistically broken. Arriving in Jaidebpur, she is said to have remarked how she had first been made queen in the royal household, only to be brought down to the status of a beggar” (2002:85). There are other recollections of the witnesses in the court, how Bibhabati reacted to the knowledge of the death of her husband in Darjeeling: “she was disconsolate. She began to pull off the jewelry she was wearing and to throw the pieces all over the room” (*ibid*.208). It can be argued at this juncture that it is this symbolic lamentation and mourning which becomes a social fact par excellence. It could be said, it was not only that the death led to the realization to mourn, it was the mourning, which established the death. For Bibhabati, it was clearly a transformative moment and an irreversible one – she cannot even think of an un-mourning and thus of any other being of her husband than dead. It is this certainty that plants Bibhabati into a symbolic realm of an unambiguous – “NO,” when the Sanyasi appears. For her, this quietitude had such immensity that it acquired uniformity in the form of a mood. All of her recorded interviews or cross-questionings illustrate her terse and monologic replies, where there is a steel like guarding of any possible linguistic utterance other than the one which resonates the death of her husband- who had been

mourned to death in her own body. So, it could be relevant to consider what Kristeva has to say, she says that “ [moods] lead us toward a modality of significance that on the threshold of bioenergetic stability, insures the preconditions for (or manifests the disintegration of) the imaginary and the symbolic. On the frontier between animality and symbolic formations, moods - and particularly sadness – are the ultimate reactions to our traumas, they are our basic homeostatic resources” (1989:22).

Taking a detour, if for a moment, one proposes that Bibhabati considers the possibility of thinking of the Sanyasi as her husband, it would be here that, she would have to accept the radical uncertainty of the law as well. Doing that, would have involved living with the suspicion of the law keepers, that to start with her Husband is not recognized by the Law, now he is, now he is not... For her husband was the syphilic philanderer, how could he be the saint; the inverse of her loved object, the Sanyasi was her own ascetic-self that she hated so carefully. If at all she had to accept the Sanyasi, she had to move again into the “symbolic” realm of accepting the desired object as an “archetype” of an erotic object. Sociologically, it is easy to follow that whether she co-habits with the Sanyasi or not, her mere acknowledgement that he is her husband would have sent the message of sexual acceptance as well, and it is here that the (post) colonial situation comes to fore — what if the law decides after all scientific enquiry that the Sanyasi was not Ramendra and was a Punjabi vagabond? Can Bibhabati take that risk?⁴⁷

From, what happened in the narrative, this leap seems to be too great a leap to be taken by Bibhabati, who has imposed herself to the sacred realm of the “symbolic”, the otherwise is to be resisted and this resistance of the otherwise becomes her reason to live. While concluding this section, one more illustration could be provided to signify Bibhabati’s fixity to her pre-ordained psychic self. This example in itself if extended to its metaphoric limits can substantiate the overall arguments, one has made till now. At

⁴⁷ Even after considering the various possibilities of negotiation that existed with the law before the colonial time, it is not difficult to imagine that whatever we are discussing here, is possible because there is a law which devises a discipline into things and matters. For any other historical time, based in rigid normative standards, there could have been a practice of a different law (for e.g. ruling by *Panchayat*) it is possible that Bibhabati could just have been forcibly made to accept the Sanyasi as her husband. Thus, this degree of immunity for Bibhabati from the immediate social force also has to be seen in the context of (post) coloniality.

one juncture, Satyabhama Devi, the Kumar's grand-mother, wrote a letter to Bibhabati (*ibid*:87). While Bibhabati was already aware that Satyabhama was convinced that, the Sanyasi was Ramendra. Bibhabati refused "even to open Satyabhama's letter" (*ibid*.: 87). This resistance is the exemplary resistance, for us it may also suggest the lure of the "semiotic"- only if the letter (the self was opened up- transgressed). She would have been fearfully convinced. It is the fear of the possibilities, which has guided Bibhabati's life, but it's the same, which has preserved it as well. She took control of her loved-hated object and she was provided with the symbolic "shelter" by the sacred realm of space shielded by the purity of incestuous restrictions. In the next section, we would consider the situation, where there is a "semiotic" search within the "symbolic" but there is no "shelter".

Kadambini's Fatal Affirmation of her Being

At that we move to the second section of this chapter, which could be again started by briefly summarizing Tagore's short story – 'The living and the Dead.'

Kadambini is a young widow with no one on her father's side to go back to and also without a child from her late husband. However, she dotes on her 'little nephew'- her brother-in-law Shradhashankar's son. Her fondness for him is excessive because of her own loneliness and also because as Tagore says "bringing up someone else's son seems to create a greater attachment than to one's own offspring, since one has no real claim upon him, no right other than the bonds of affection" (*ibid*.: 73). In her loneliness there is at times a withdrawal from the living-material world; there is a complete immersion in a realm of minimal excitation and show of energy. While she was in one such state, she lost her pulse and stopped breathing. This was diagnosed as death by her brother-in-law, his wife and other people in the house. Since they were taken in by the suddenness and gentleness of her death and they didn't want themselves to be exposed to the suspicion of the police etc. they appointed four Brahmin workers from the house itself to take her to the ghat and cremate her. At the ghat, it was stormy and rainy. While, two of the accomplices went out in search of wood the other two positioned themselves under the shelter of a hut, a little away from the corpse. After a restless wait for their accomplices to come back. they sensed movements in where the corpse was kept and also at the same

time in the hut. Scared, they ran away. Later, when they met the other two accomplices on their way, they narrate the incident. Returning back towards the ghat and not finding the body, they decide to announce that they cremated her.

Meanwhile, Kadambini in her exasperated return to life realizes dreamily that she is alive after death; so is almost in a half human half dead world. Considering the honour and things at stake regarding her in-laws house, she decides to go to a childhood friend's house. This childhood friend, Jogmaya, though receives her in her dazed state; she is never warm about the arrival of Kadambini. After realizing that she probably would stay at her place only, she grows tense about her husband being there and this young widow who has nowhere else to go. Jogmaya pushes her husband to enquire about the background of Kadambini's coming to their house. He goes to Kadambini's in-laws house and discovers that she is long dead. After returning from there, he narrates the entire story to his wife and they have an altercation over it. Kadambini staying in the next room hears everything and in a startled and overwhelmed mood leaves the house in the night itself. After hiding the entire next day, she secretly goes into her in-laws house and manages to embrace her nephew – who was ill when she was taken dead. At this embrace she realizes she is living. Soon a mêlée ensues and her brother-in-law and his wife swoon and swear that it is not befitting for her as a ghost to haunt their house and cast a spell on their only son. Kadambini tries to prove that she is alive and she never died by hurting herself and bleeding profusely but when she sees that they are still unconvinced, she jumps from the roof and dies, in order to prove as Tagore says “she was living.”

Moving on to analyze this narration and Kadambini's character in that context, one can start by suggesting that other than the two deaths which seem to happen during the narration, there is one death perhaps the most grave one which has already occurred to her, just as we are introduced to Kadambini's character. That is “she has no relatives on her father's side; they had all died one by one. In her in-laws family too, she had no one truly to call her own – no husband, no son” (*ibid.*: 74). So Tagore announces this urgency, which for us in other words means – Kadambini has no ‘shelter’ the way

Bibhabati had. No sacred cover shielded by the taboo of incest. As we would see, wherever she goes for an asylum, there is a tension, precisely from her being in a realm where erotic liaisons can be symbolically imagined. This being is death like, a perpetual death. However, the story could be considered from here on with a radical possibility of searching for acceptance for this being. But as we can make out, it is the incongruity of such a being in this world that eventually accepts her - when she proves her being by killing herself. In other words, the opening remarks of Tagore already anticipates the closing remarks; that she is dead at the first place if she stretches out from this symbolic death like being into the “semiotic” terrains of friends, loved objects. This departure would never return her to that critical, symbolic, preservatory space and she would have no option but to die. It is extremely interesting for us to consider this departure because it is the journey she takes, transforms her realm of being-in-this-world. From the blasé being there is an urgent, exhilarating demand to be accepted. It is a fictional narrative and for that reason the delirious being of Kadambini undergoes radical displacements within the “symbolic” realm, which leaves her with a troubled and exciting zone of not having precedence, not having a law. Thus, when she discovers that she is not cremated and is alive, she undertakes the journey with a euphoric and fearless spirit of stepping out in the night, transgressing each shade to overcome her most dreaded taboo. “She was filled with an immense sense of power, of infinite freedom – she could go anywhere she liked, do whatever she wanted” (*ibid.*: 76). She “walked boldly across the dark cremation ground with no trace of shame, no trace of fear or misgiving.”

The fact that she considered herself half dead and half alive and almost as an incarnation in which she was symbolically freed of her in-laws house is revealing as well. If we immediately contrast her this moment with her usual everyday at the in-laws house, it becomes apparent, that this moment is working as a release. For instance, when she was at her in-laws house, even the way Tagore describes the moment of her death, assumes a contrasting disposition compared to her current state: “For some unknown reason, her heart stopped beating. Everywhere else in the world, time ran as usual; but it stood still forever in that tender loving heart”(*ibid.*: 74).

Further, when she chooses to go to her childhood friend's house, again there is a tense reminder to her in various ways to bring herself back to the "symbolic" realm of the law and adherence. But being under the realization that she is already dead, there seems to be a sheer inability in even thinking in the direction of that need. She thinks with regard to her friend that "she (Jogmaya) seems to live in a different world, taken up with her husband and family and daily chores...she is part of existence, I am part of eternity." (Ibid.: 79). Thus, when Jogmaya's husband arrives, Kadambini "made no move to cover her head, showed no sign of either embarrassment or respect" (*ibid.*: 79).

Kristeva considers this symptomatic space as that of 'feminine depression'. She speaks of it as one in which the depressive woman "remains constantly restrained by an aching psychic wrapping, anesthetized as if "dead""she further says that "for that reason, depression appears as the veil of a black perversion – one that is dreamed of, desired, even thought through but unmentionable and forever impossible" (Kristeva, 1989: 82).

Thus Kadambini's departure back from her friend's house is again reverse from, what it was, while going. There is an exhilarating urgency to reach for the loved object and be accepted by the entire household as a lightening at the same time there is timidity now by considering the pressing of the law once again.

"How Kadambini got back to Ranihat is hard to say. At first, she kept out of sight, hiding all day in a ruined temple, hungry and alone"....

And when she is found with the child – her only loved object – the insistence to be recognized is so livid that she bleeds herself, quite in line with what Kristeva says "in more primary fashion, *any possibility for action* would appear to be seen by her fundamentally as a transgression, as a wrong doing. Acting would amount to compromising herself and when the depressive retardation underlying inhibition hampers any other possibility of realization, the only act that is possible for such a woman becomes the major wrongdoing – to kill or to kill oneself" (1989: 81).

We know from the narration, what Kadambini eventually did! After considering the lopsidedness of any affective realm, be that of the "symbolic" or "semiotic" and the

modular possibilities, one is left with the question – is death or a pure vegetative state the only two acceptable returns to stability for a woman's being in the case of an unsettled “symbolic-semiotic”? To answer this we may move on to the conclusion.

Conclusion

The mutual working of the “symbolic” and the “semiotic” purports a larger sense of urgency to a woman's being connected with the occurrences of the outside world. Considering these two exemplifications of limits posed to the modes of being, around the time of hectic decolonization, it is conspicuous that the effect of the transformative social realm can affect different personages differently. If one extends the imaginary of these narratives to the contemporary world, there is a possibility of things to happen just the way, they happened then, but they may also happen otherwise. As Chatterjee points out, soon around the time of independence, the legal system of Divorce came into being. If one looks at it from the notion of ‘divorce’, one doesn't know how it would have changed the lives of Bibhabati or Kadambini, but it is plausible to think that Kadambini, could have found an acceptance in the supportive spaces, like that of Friends, clinic(s) (psychoanalysis as a healing possibility can also be considered), or even a “singular” being, with a professional occupation. Having said that, it is clear from the illustrations that any movement outside the symbolic realm of acceptance and at other times an unsettled symbolic cosmos in itself may push a woman's being to much greater urgencies and larger sense of anxieties. It is statistical corroboration of a fact of this kind, over which Kristeva also has based her work on the “feminine depression”: “ Being caught in woman's speech is not merely a matter of chance that could be explained by the greater frequency of feminine depressions — a sociologically proven fact. This may also reveal an aspect of feminine sexuality: its addiction to the maternal Thing and its lesser aptitude for restorative perversion” (1989:71). Thus it is important to have a cognisance of the contemporary world and be open towards accepting the movements of both of the affective realms, the “semiotic” and the “symbolic”. It is the acceptance by newer realms of kinship and other bonding, which have to be strengthened in order to bring about a synergetic space for the woman's being to be in a relatively stable space to negotiate the increasingly fragmentary and broken lives of today. However, as a sociological

imperative, one can make out from the contemporary living-beings that both perverse and/or cathartic moments may exist simultaneously. In such a situation, one can only suggest that it would not only be useful but necessary to seek to know “Melancholia and Depression”, because moving beyond personhood and affective possibilities, sociological sight of this feature of the psychic world also “ shows us the importance of abyss”(Kristeva, 1996:52).

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In order to remark on the overrunning themes in the previous chapters and their plausible extensions, this conclusion emphasizes on them through devising them into three broad arguments. While connecting these arguments with specific examples from the previous chapters, the main attempt however is to, illustrate the argumentative points by using the storyline of U.R. Anantha Murthy's novel – "*Samskara*".

Firstly, it could be suggested that a 'death' like an unknowable chasm has appeared in the consciousness of our milieu⁴⁸. There are ways in which the categories, once, perhaps seen as well-rounded and with coherence are now seen as splintered in our experiences – leaving an ineffable void in whatever one does as a social actor. Secondly, there is a shift also in what could be considered as the 'spirit of the times' or *Zeitgeist*, as compared to previous epochs. It could be argued that, far from the circuits of 'purity' and 'pollution' operating in opposition to each other, there is a greater entwinement of the two, to the extent that there could be enforcement in the social, that is, towards transgression (as different from towards-'purity'). So instead of the purity-pollution complex, a purity-perversity⁴⁹ complex could be envisaged. While, as mentioned already both of these

⁴⁸ Till now, in all the chapters, we have been using "our times" or "contemporary period" etc., at this level one can allot certain fixity and clear names to these features. '*Milieux*' could be used to signify the general environment in which we live and from which, we can derive properties relating to our existential-sociological conditions. The actual consciousness and its relative circulation, which comes to us through the participation in different media (print, electronic, etc. as techniques which disseminate knowledge, information, biographies etc.) could be considered as the '*Zeitgeist*', which together means "the spirit of the times (Terrell et. al., 1999: 953), while the word when seen separately, '*zeit*' means 'time (epoch, age)', while '*geist*' (ibid:335) could have various meanings ranging from 'mind' to the 'spirit', so the adjectives could be 'intellectual' and 'spiritual' respectively. This range suits our descriptions as well, so one must hold on to both the possibilities.

⁴⁹ This 'perversity' should not be seen as the moral repugnance of the present world, however that dimension does exist within this fold, consider Baudrillard and other postmodernist works (see chapter I and II) based on structural-functional anthropology. However, over here it has been used in order to show that, how for instance, there isn't any 'pure' thing or being which manages to exist in our milieu, for it to survive the imperatives are to 'transgress', 'adopt' and 'be-adept'. This range of movement, at the same time is also bound with the cultural memory and for every transgression there is also a space of overwhelming anguish. Together with the adaptive and the surviving capacity of the 'transgression' and the

features would be inseparable and would not draw their content by negating each other, in fact a corollary of what has been said could also be, that, the 'purest' is the most 'perverse' in our milieux. Thirdly, it can be said, in wake of the above two arguments that, it may appear that the 'social' and the 'sociological' have come to a fluid and transient momentum, but the contrary of this view, is equally plausible, if not more. Borrowing few phrases from Jorge Luis Borges, it would be fit to say that our milieux is like a "garden of forking paths" (Borges, 2002) and at any given moment it is like a "labyrinth" (ibid.). So, a simple categorical impression of the social world, which rules out ironies, contradictions, meaningfulness, meaninglessness, is immediately a simple version of social world based on cursory and closed set of contextual dimensions. It still would be more enriching if one adopts the perspectival outlook of Weberian '*verstehen*' as a methodological tool and seeks to understand the incommensurables.

As has been emphasized in earlier chapters, the spreading out of the materials discussed here is underlined by the wish to understand the *Zeitgeist* (The spirit of the times) and the corresponding milieux. The various ways in which one can differentiate the contemporary atmosphere from the previous ones. In that attempt, one starts with the knowledge that, 'death' and the 'community' exist as events at one level, just as they always were — people die, people live. Beyond this, if one is to follow the anthropological intervention, there is a repetition and reiteration through various models of the social world, that the regular events of being together and death and dying were/are of paramount concern to different human societies in varying customs — expressed through ritualistic moments. This intervention, however by virtue of being implicated within the already devised theoretico-conceptual logic of understanding the social domain depicted the respective cultural context in keeping with the same Structural-functional or Structuralist frameworks. As has been shown in this dissertation these depictions were partial towards mapping a 'coherence' and 'unity' which I have suggested did not exist at the face of a mature negotiation of the very same people with decolonisation and postcoloniality subsequently. Thus it has been argued that in order to cognitivize the social domain of 'meaning' vis-à-vis ritualistic practises one has to make sense of the

admonishing and devastating capacity of the anguish, our lives are to oscillate between newer notions of 'pure' and ever-new urgencies of 'transgression', which follows.

conflicts and negotiations present in that period of time also so that one configures the divergences within the varied approaches to the given 'meaning'. It has been further argued that if that space of conflict is merged with the consecrated practises of death rituals then most of those rituals in terms of 'meanings' in our everyday lives turn out to be just reified and repeated practises albeit with an overwhelming sense of 'loss'. Right at the start of this research (see the introductory chapter), it has been argued that, the fact that the anthropologist could travel and inhabit most parts of the world in itself suggests that the social world already was rendered translatable to a set of people who were legally sheathed. For example, the anthropologist could function at any of the 'field', because by and large his/her security had been ensured both by the knowledge of the respective 'field' and by the police-military at the service of the respective government. This deflates the anthropologist's idea of evolution because as obvious from the above features, both of the 'evolved' and the 'evolving' co-existed (our concern is not to go into actual detail of how it happened, when did it happened, or if it was conflictual or not, what is important is, that they existed) at various levels of negotiation. So, it can be argued that, if seen from this perspective one can go back, through historical works to look for traces of this co-existence but the question, which emerges from this is that, how the present world is different from the above stated realm where apparently both the 'traditional' and the 'modern' were already at the negotiating plane? The search of the answers to this question has been the major preoccupation of this research work and it is here that one comes to configure the '*Zeitgeist*' of our milieux. It has been shown through various chapters in this research work, that it is this present world where the above-mentioned 'co-existence' is actually pronounced into every activity one participates into⁵⁰. Thus, there is a longing for what has been lost and most of the ritualistic practices can no longer be seen in their symbolic capacity and that's why, they could be even considered as meaningless by the practitioners themselves. Notwithstanding this negative

⁵⁰ Still including the overarching theme of evolutionary logic, many postmodernists, as mentioned in previous chapters, consider this 'co-existence' as the sign of death itself. The 'communities' for them have lost their pure character. This thinking is in accordance with the evolutionary understanding of things, for them, it is more like- if in toto, all of us have evolved to the highest rung of the cultural being, where else we might could go but extinction, through a death, which may mark us as catastrophe or apocalypse. It is easy to debunk this line of thought, but as one has always maintained in this research work, it may not be useful to do that, because this feeling of a moral death of the 'community' is prevalent, one needs to make sense of it, by discerning the contexts.

atmosphere of denial and resentment, at the same time there is also a greater combative and competitive struggle to carve niches, retrieve lost objects, etc. The myriad methods adopted to 'be' in this world are guided by a tremendous consciousness of 'risk' 'vulnerability', 'suffering' etc. So it should not be viewed as ironical if theorists like Giddens and Beck construe this combative struggle to 'be' as a greater room to think of one's biography (see chapter two). Thus in the latest part of this conclusion, we move to a third degree of understanding the present world and look at the anguishes and adaptations, which could be seen as pointers of a world which is now mature in its transition, yet, to some extent has acquired a relative permanence in its transition itself instead of being directed to a "settling down."

As has been already stated that to understand the present milieu, one could move to works other than strictly sociological or anthropological and look at the spectrum of sociological relations, which intuitively inform us about so many features that are conspicuously present. Using this methodological spirit, one took to analyse works ranging from Travelogue of Levi-Strauss to Narrative history of Partha Chatterjee, from Baudrillard abstruse work to Tagore's simply written short story. This is taken up partly to suggest the range of our milieu (in terms of its historical connectivity) and also to suggest the heterodox meanings, which can be derived from the present world, if approached from dissimilar perspectives. That is to say, that, these works and their analyses show that there are numerous ways in which people's activities could be interpreted and it does not depend always on the empirical "presence." If one follows certain cultural trends, one comes to understand a certain *Zeitgeist*, which speaks much more than a study based only on a discrete period of time. To illustrate this point and what has been said till now in this conclusion, one could take the following example from Jonathan Parry's work. Parry for most part of his career, as an anthropologist has been preoccupied with the task of elucidating the composite meanings behind the ritualistic acts of Hindus at the Ghats of Banaras, while observing after death-rites. For him, the meaningfulness of any such ritualistic act exists in homology with the imagination of the entire "cosmos." Parry in his book, *Death in Banaras*, which in many ways is his most exhaustive and refined work, writes in the preface, about the relation between the

ritualistic acts and the effects of the latest developments at the Ghats of Banaras as following-

“Research in Banaras was carried out between September 1976 and November 1977 and in August 1978, August-September 1981, March-April 1983 and April 1992. Though the last of these visits was extremely brief, it was long enough to establish that there had been some important changes in the previous nine years... New bones of contention have arisen on the *ghats*, and new factional alliances formed between rival groups of sacred specialists. The second striking change has been the opening of the electric crematorium at Harishchandra *ghat*, a technological innovation which has not only had a dramatic impact on the ‘traditional’ division of mortuary labour, but which has also led to significant modifications in the rituals which accompany cremation. *Though I briefly report on some of these recent changes, the ‘ethnographic present’ to which this book primarily refers should be taken as the period between 1976 and 1983. The illusion of timelessness which so much in the mortuary rites is concerned to create is just that – an illusion*”.

[Emphasis added] (Parry, 1994:x).

Two features from this paragraph to explain the above-mentioned concerns of ‘historical continuity’ and ‘*Zeitgeist*’ are undertaken in this context. First is the reference to a development like “the opening of the electric crematorium.” The empirical moment which marks the actual coming of ‘the electric crematorium’ is important, but the crucial issue is – could that crematorium have come up just as any other thing, is it not important to take note that its conception and functioning happened in a milieu which had already departed from the kind of atmosphere, Parry is describing in his book? If all the ritualistic observations would have been as important as Parry’s description, could anyone have agreed to think that one’s relative, who is dead now, is perhaps nothing more than an “environmental threat”? It is here, that historical continuity becomes important, because if as anthropologist-sociologist, we do not figure the *Zeitgeist*- the spirit of the times, how at all, are we going to sociologically imagine the meanings (or the lack of it), which are not directly apparent? Thus, it follows, that what Parry considers as “the ethnographic present” if only has to be indexical to the empirical, then there is no way, in which one

can really be sensitive to communitarian beings and existence of things in relation to them. Such discrete templates of time may provide us a discrete story of the social world, which at the sociological level could be abrupt and arbitrary. The second feature, that is, the mention of “illusion” is related to the just mentioned theme. Incidentally, Parry connects most of the ritualistic observations of Hindus at the ghats of Banaras to their sacred texts, and finds meanings from there to make sense of every little gesture. In such a situation, when he says, “ the illusion of timelessness which so much in the mortuary rites is concerned to create is just that – an illusion”, probably, the hint is to acknowledge that, the relation he establishes between the ritualistic act and the symbolic cosmos, is not directly associated with the ‘real’, ‘chronological’ practical time, in which most of these activities actually occur. So, the only possible way, for him, to make sense of the two things together, is to suggest that one is completely “illusionary” and second is the really real. Again, this understanding negates the cultural memory associated with ritualistic practises completely, it is not that when an “electric crematorium” comes into being the previous practises of cremation are abandoned or are not thought about. This negation is a simple reaction to a vast number of complicated questions that pose a conflictual relation with Parry’s main interpretation of what he considers as “the ethnographic present.” People live inextricably bound within those ritualistic practices and their polyvalent beliefs do not operate on an “all or none” law. It is not as if, the living world is united with the cosmos through the practitioner’s observation of rituals and is tied into an infinitely cohesive realm of meaning, as Parry describes it, in most of his work. Or on the other hand, whatever one does under the ritualistic schemes is nothing but illusion. To counter this, one undertook in this research, the second degree of understanding the ‘co-existence’, mentioned earlier, it is here that, one needs to sensitively understand the relation between these two (or many) features and not debunk one for the authenticity of the other. To make this cognition more elaborate, and also to touch upon the subtler plane of living with ‘anguish’ and ‘transgression’ in the present world, the general picture of U.R. Anantha Murthy’s novel *Samskara* (1978) follows. There after one could conclude by illustrating the arguments to be made through instances borrowed from the preceding chapters as well as the novel.

In ‘Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man’, Anantha Murthy starts with a background where, in an *Agrahara*⁵¹ of *Madhva*⁵² Brahmins, headed by a Praneshacharya, a death is announced. The dead is a Brahmin by birth, and had been an iconoclast for major part of his life preceding his death. He is called Naranappa. The news of his death is announced by Chandri, a ‘low caste’ and a ‘concubine’ of late Naranappa, while Praneshacharya is busy baby-feeding his terminally and chronically ailing wife. He had married her in that state itself, in order to impose not only celibacy on himself but also simultaneously observe the Dharma of a married life. Praneshacharya is remarked as a great scholar of Sanskrit texts and is a person of wide renown. He has won various rounds of arguments at the sacred centres of learning like Kashi etc. and was also awarded shawls and other symbolic Prizes. At Naranappa’s death, the male members of the clan (based within the Agrahara) came to Praneshacharya to seek a solution for Naranappa’s cremation — for an iconoclast like him, according to them deserved to be outcasted long before, when he was living.

Naranappa after a certain moment of his life became reactionary towards Brahmanism. He did whatever he could to deconsecrate things and people related with the normative dharma of Brahmins. He even threatened to become a Muslim; left his wife and didn’t come for her funeral; mixed up with the ‘lower castes’; got Chandri home to live with him; ate what she cooked including meat and as one of the Brahmins of the clan – Padmanabhacharya said –“he drank too” (1978:6). While narrating his deeds another Brahmin of the clan Lakshmana recalled –“he comes to the river in the full view of all the Brahmins and takes the holy stone that we’ve worshipped for generations and throws it in the water and spits after it” (*ibid.*:7). Another set of complaints are rolled out, that he

⁵¹ The glossary entry of the book explains Agrahara as following-“Villages or land assigned to Brahmins for their maintenance: an exclusive settlement of Brahmins”(Ramanujan, 1978:149).

⁵² Similarly the Madhva, entry is explained as following – “ *Madhvas* and *Smartas*: Brahmin sects, traditional rivals. Madhvas are the followers of the philosopher Madhva (13th century) who taught *dvaita* or dualism (soul and godhead are two entities, not one). Smartas follow Shankara (7th century) who taught *advaita* or monism (soul and godhead are one and the same). Madhvas are strict worshippers of Vishnu, and bear only Vaishnava names. For instance, Durgabhatta (a smarta) is named after Durga the goddess, a manifestation of Shiva’s consort; nor does his name carry the suffix *acharya*. Note also how the name of the heretic Naranappa (set against the entire Brahmin community) is a form of Narayana (or Vishnu), localized to Naranappa, with none of the Sanskritic ‘markers’ of orthodoxy like *acharya*, *bhatta*. (*ibid.* 1978:150).

made Garuda's son "run away from (Agrahara) and join the army"; he caught fish from the sacred pond of which it was believed, if one eats that- would vomit blood and die, but he "together with his Muslim gang, dynamited the tank and killed off god's own fish" (*ibid.*:11).

Praneshacharya, amidst this conflictual aftermath of Naranappa's death announces the urgency as, "Naranappa's death rites have to be done: that's problem one. He has no children. Someone should do it, that's problem two"(*ibid.*:4). Meanwhile nobody is to eat, till the dead is cremated.

While Brahmins were figuring the possibilities of cremating Naranappa, Chandri moved forward and gave away all of her jewelleries, which evoked a twisted 'yes' from most of the Brahmins present there. On the condition that if the gold be given to them they could think of cremating Naranappa. Praneshacharya in an attempt to reason it out gets inextricably woven into his own dilemma and conflicts. He gets reminded of his own encounters with Naranappa. Once, when Praneshacharya went to Naranappa to reprimand him over the news that he has influenced Shripati (Lakshmana's son-in-law) to leave his wife, Naranappa on account of Shripati's decision, starts explaining his own life decision – "o acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure- except of course some barren Brahmins! You fellows- you Brahmins – you want to tie me down to a hysterical female, just because she is some relative, right? Just keep your dharma to yourself- we've but one life- I belong to the "hedonist school" which says- borrow, if you must, but drink your ghee" (*ibid.*:21). And when Praneshacharya visited Naranappa for second time, he went to the length of exhorting the Acharya for drinking along with him- "Chandri! Where's the bottle? Let's give the Acharya a little of this holy water?" (*ibid.*:23). But the very day, Naranappa also elucidated the discrepancy according to him in Praneshacharya's teachings of vivid erotic poetry and at same time his admonition and proscription of any satisfactory sexual relation in one's own life. This claim from Naranappa, appeared to Praneshacharya as an ideological confrontation and he suddenly found himself introspecting over all of his dharma, learning, biographic moments, when he tried recalling that moment. He wonders "if there's no answer in the ancient code-books, it's truly victory for Naranappa, and defeat for him, the acharya. The original

question was really why he hadn't helped excommunicate Naranappa all these years. It was because of Naranappa's threat to turn Muslim. By that threat, the ancient codes had already been defiled. There was a little time when the Brahmin's power of penance ruled the world. Then one didn't buckle under any such threat. It's because the times are getting worse such dilemmas torment us..." (ibid.:47). In the meantime the corpse had started smelling, there is also a fear of plague (about which the Brahmins don't know as such that there is an epidemic, they see it more as a curse), there are rats dying all around and vultures are hovering over the Agrahara. Few are also perching on the rooftops and would refuse to go. The Brahmins and their family members are in a deplorable state of hunger and anxiety. The male Brahmins barring the children, however, in various ways manage to transgress the original prohibitions and eat prohibited food at prohibited places and by doing that and even otherwise are reeling under a severe spell of unknown fear and anxiety.

Praneshacharya, having failed to come to a decision as 'who' should cremate Naranappa, decides to go to the Maruti's temple and prays there for long. Chandri, who is equally concerned about the cremation of the rotting corpse, also feels drawn towards the radiance of Praneshacharya and is very concerned about him as well. So, when Praneshacharya returns from the temple without any answer- hurt and helpless, in the pitch-dark night- an entranced Chandri in an attempt to touch his feet, ends up in a state where Praneshacharya is pleased to embrace her, followed by a dream like sleep with her. At midnight, when he is awake he is touched by the proximity of Chandri's body and the ambience of the woods — together with smeli, sound, colour etc. This transgression, transforms Praneshacharya to the extent that when he gets back to his house, he even thinks of his ailing wife as a liability. On the other hand Chandri, can't take the indecision of the Brahmins anymore, she calls a Muslim friend of Naranappa and together, they cremate the body (no one in the Agrahara knows about it). After this episode, Chandri leaves for a far off place secretly, that night itself.

The Brahmins are even more anxious now and are pressed by the (imaginary) rotten smell of the corpse. Meanwhile, Praneshacharya feels like "a baby monkey loosing hold

of his grip on the mother's body as she leaps from branch to branch, he felt he had lost hold and fallen from the rites and actions he had clutched till now" (*ibid.* :75). Most of the Brahmins have already sent their family members to their respective relatives and at this point Praneshacharya is left with "his bedridden menstruating wife, some crows and vultures" (*ibid.* :81). Soon, she also died. Praneshacharya after cremating her starts afoot "meaning to walk wherever his legs took him, he walked towards east" (*ibid.*:87). At other places, several Brahmins of the Agrahara die of hunger, dread, plague etc. and at more than one occasion are given a makeshift cremation.

Praneshacharya while going in that direction, comes across an 'inferior' Brahmin called Putta. An extremely glib talker, Putta chats him up with his mundane and earthly things ranging from riddles to marriage matters. Together they reach a car festival, where Praneshacharya is treated by Putta or by himself to the "Bombay Box", bloody "cock fights," a coffee in a common restaurant. Most of all, he is finally taken by Putta to a woman, who is probably a 'prostitute'. All this while, Praneshacharya doesn't disclose his identity to Putta, he just mentions himself as a common Brahmin out to beg. While in the car festival still, Putta forces him to go for a feast where common Brahmins (of high origin, Putta couldn't have gone) were being treated. Realising that he has been recognized, Praneshacharya runs away from that place but meets Putta again. He had decided by now that he would go back to his Agrahara but after boarding a cart he wonders –"he will travel, for another four or five hours. Then after that, what?" (*ibid.*:138).

Using the backdrop of this fictive scene, it would be possible still to draw analogical conclusions with respect to this research and about *zeitgeist* in general. Most crucial at the level of personage and interrelatedness between different activities and social actors could be the following reflection by Praneshacharya — "...my dilemma, my decision, my problem wasn't just mine, it included the entire Agrahara. This is the root of the difficulty, the anxiety, the double bind of dharma. When the question of Naranappa's death rite came up, I didn't try to solve it for myself. I depended on god, on the old law books. Isn't this precisely why we have created the books? Because there's this deep

relation between our decisions and the whole community. In every act we involve our forefathers, our gurus, our gods, our fellow humans. Hence this conflict. Did I feel such conflict when I lay with Chandri? Did I decide it after pouring and measuring and weighing? Now it's become dusky, unclear. That decision, that act gouged me out of my wife's existence, my very faith. The consequence, I'm shaking in the wind like a piece of string." (*ibid.*:109).

It is the remarkable feature of our times that, at the level of existential concerns, our personages are bound with conflicts, which seem unprecedented in their scope and effect. Significantly, it is neither the kind of 'reflexivity', that Beck and Giddens say that one has "control" over wherein one can "self-biograph" oneself, nor it is the nostalgic and cynical moment — when everything can be transcendently linked to 'death'- the way post-modernisms based on structural-functional anthropology, seem to suggest. These are the two total myths which envelope our lives in the present times. At the same time, one is not suggesting that they do not affect our lives or as is common to suggest nowadays, that our lives fall in-between the two. It is part of the characteristics of these myths of our times that they include us in their working, so as one can never be able to decide their scope, size, location etc. nor one could negate its presence completely, or in other words — one cannot be outside it. Much as Jean Luc Nancy says that "myth" of our times is that "there is no myth" (1991: 61). If we recall from earlier chapters (chapters one and two) the discussion on the essential prevalence of emotive relations or lack of it through any feeling drawn from 'suspicion to scepticism', we have a clue here to figure how at all there could be a way, to think of "community" today. Again, recalling Nancy: "Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence" (*ibid.*: 35). If, as one has already said, our *zeitgeist* is defined by the suspicion-scepticism complex which continuously reminds us (on a mythic level) that "there is no myth" is true, and as is mentioned here that "community" is the one which resists "immanence", isn't it possible for us to put the two together and say that, it is the "community" of today which perpetuates the myth that "there is no community"? Once we come to imagine a community, which is touched by suspicion over its own being we come to understand the present world — where all of us act with the given modes of scepticism and

circumspection in order to 'be' at the face of excessive risks and vulnerabilities. Coming back to the issue of the working of the above-mentioned myths (of absolute control over our 'lives' or total loss of all that was meaningful), it could be said that, they effectively traffic our lives; they traverse our beings. So the general idea about our personages could be that in our activities, thoughts etc. all of us are touched with these two features, and all of us consider it more paramount than the other person because it is the thread of suspicion-scepticism which informs us. Reflecting over the question of the suspicion-scepticism, one moves to the second conclusion, in a way of saying that, the traffic of which we are part, shares its being with the milieu in which it exists, even when it may appear completely detached from it. Thus, another feature to be mentioned is, that all of us are informed about the 'dead', which is between us — just like the Agrahara. And now, it is (if it ever was) no longer about the 'dead' (which we know from the story, is no longer there and has been cremated long ago, but that does not matter, this 'dead,' not cremated once at the 'symbolic' level is going to remain with us in limbo forever), it is about each one of us. It is about saving and surviving at the face of two total myths, which suggest that 'there is nothing meaningful left' on one hand and on the other that 'now is the time of reflexively avoiding death and making a life out of that avoidance'.

This brings us to our next conclusion: it could be argued that it is not purity versus pollution that regulates our lives today, but it is the purity–perversity association, which renders us — our beings. Recall Bibhabati's life (chapter four), ironically, it follows from the general understanding through the theories of our times that, her escape from "feminine depression" could only have been possible, if she would have moved away from the closed realm of the "symbolic" or the "normative" purity to a "semiotic" or a diffused and "perverse" life — with numerous conflicts and contradictions.⁵³

⁵³ Consider Kristeva saying – " if the *denial of the signifier* with depressed persons reminds one of the process of perversion, two remarks seem necessary. First, in depression, denial has a greater power than perverse denial and affects *subjective identity* itself, not only the *sexual identity* called into question by inversion (homosexuality) or perversion (fetishism, exhibitionism, etc.). Denial annihilates even the introjections of depressive persons and leaves them with the feeling of worthless, "empty." By belittling and destroying themselves, they exhaust any possibility of an object, and this is also a roundabout way of preserving it...elsewhere, untouchable. The only traces of object constancy that depressive people maintain are in affects. The affect is the partial object of depressive persons; it is their "perversion," in the sense of a drug that allows them to insure a narcissistic homeostasis by means of nonverbal, unnameable (hence untouchable and omnipotent) hold over a nonobjectal thing (Kristeva, 1989:48)." The same concern at the

It could also be drawn from this that, it no longer works as an antagonistic pair where purity exists in opposition to the perverse (recall that the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic' were similarly tied). Infact the purest is the most perverse at the same time and it is their mutuality, which defines our lives. For instance, Praneshacharya abides by the utmost rigour required to be a Brahmin and after a stream of delirious escapades, himself acknowledges the openness and release, which perhaps his ideology had forced him to choke. He comes to identify his own past of a book's law abiding Brahmin, as perverse. He muses- "this is me, this, this is the new truth I create, the new person I make. So I can look god squarely in the eye... I chose to be something else and lived by it, but suddenly I turned at some turning... what happened at that turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. I hung suspended between two truths like Trishanku, how did the ancient sages face such experiences? One wonders?" (ibid.98). It is this wonder, which murmurs in us today, exhilarating and perplexing — how could one ever be so pure? To be that "pure" today could only be a "perverse" being, of course the other interpretation of this argument is more comforting and is thus adopted by reactionary stands, that — what exists today is perverse and it exists such as, by predating the purity of yesteryears. So if one goes back to this notion of "pure" past, we can prevent some amount of "purity" from being perverse, if not all.

This brings us to the last conclusion from this research on the *zeitgeist* and the milieux in which we live. It is apparent from the discussion one has had so far in this research that the social 'labyrinth' in which we exist today operates with a complexity and subtlety perhaps more intense than ever before. The categorical pervasiveness between things has brought about the milieux, which is urgent, perpetually tense and multifaceted. Quite close to what Borges explains as "the garden of forking paths" – "the explanation is obvious. The garden of forking paths is a picture, incomplete yet not false, of the universe such as Ts'ui pên conceived it to be. Differing from Newton and Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not think of time as absolute and uniform. He believed in an infinite series of

level of community seems even more urgent: " Today, what upsets us and frightens us is not so much sex but the threat of permanent pain, of the potential cadaver that we have become. Who among us wants to confront this directly? Depression remains a secret force, perhaps even a form of modern sacredness (Kristeva, 1996:84)."

times, in a dizzily growing, ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times. This web of time — the strands of which approach one another, bifurcate, intersect or ignore each other through the centuries — embraces *every* possibility. We do not exist in most of them. In some you exist and not I, while in others I do, and you do not, and in yet others both of us exist. In this one, in which chance has favoured me, you have come to my gate. In another, you, crossing the garden, have found me dead. In yet another, I say these very same words, but am an error, a phantom (Borges, 2002:11).” While this could be considered as the constitutional view of the present world, the related realms of the punitive and the performative could be envisaged by evoking Foucault’s description. Michel de Certeau presents such a view of Foucault’s perspectives by pointing out that: “He (Foucault) begins with a *proliferating* system examined in its *present status* (essentially our contemporary scientific or juridical technology), and moves backward to the past. It is a surgical operation. It consists in *isolating* the cancerous growth from the social body as a whole, and thereby in *explaining* its contemporary dynamic by way of its *genesis* in the two preceding centuries. Drawing on an immense mass of historiographic materials (penal, military, academic, medical), this method disengages the optical and panoptical procedures which can increasingly be found to proliferate within our society, thereby identifying the disguised indices of an apparatus whose structure gradually becomes more precise, complex, and determinate within the density of the social fabric or body as a whole (de Certeau, 2000:187). It is not mere co-incidence that de Certeau considers the increasing pervasion of the optic and the panoptic as “cancerous.” The idea is to suggest that the institutions like ‘hospital’, ‘asylum’ at one level signify excessive proximity with death and at other level they also constantly remind us that, it is not the stationary institution, which sweeps between us but the criterion of defining ‘death’ and “the proximity to death” in a community. So we come back to the scene of the Agrahara in Samskara: in our milieu the dead is amidst us but it is not the post cremation, symbolic ancestor, it is one of us or it is in one of us. One is made to believe and one acts with that belief that the societal urgency is only to discern, diagnose and discard that dead respectively. The overarching and the most systemic power lie with these methodological institutions in renewing the definition of what is ‘dead’ because it is clearly known to

everyone courtesy clinical sciences that there is no intrinsic meaning to 'death' itself. It is the void no one can 'know' so it can be a vector of whatever it is made out to be.

Appendix One

In Delhi Road Accidents:

No. of people died yesterday:3

No. of people died since January 1st :16

(A neon sign put up by Delhi Traffic Police at the I.T.O. cross-section, "asking" people to drive safely. This record is of 6th January 2005.)

"A permanent modern scenario: Apocalypse looms- and it doesn't occur. And still it looms... Apocalypse is now a long running serial: not 'Apocalypse Now', but 'Apocalypse from now on'"
(Susan Sontag: *AIDS and its metaphors* 1989, quoted in Giddens 1990:134).

"Since life is priceless that's why security has a price"
(Tr. from. '*jeevan annol hain isiliye surakhsa ka mol hain*': recorded from Metro working site, Barakhamba road. The saying appeals to Workers to invest more in their labor of Carefulness).

"Those who work are afraid they will loose their jobs,
Those who don't are afraid they will never find one.
Whoever doesn't fear hunger is afraid of eating.
Drivers are afraid of walking and pedestrians are
afraid of getting run over.
Democracy is afraid of remembering
and language is afraid of speaking.
Civilians fear the military,
the military fears a shortage of weapons,
weapons fear a shortage of wars.
It is the time to fear.
Women fear of violent men and men fear of fearless women.
Fear of night without sleeping pills and day without pills to wake up"
E.G.

(A poem put up by a Left oriented student's organization- AISA, in SSS-II canteen, JNU, 2005.)

LOOK UNDER YOUR SEAT
THERE COULD BE A BOMB
RAISE ALARM. EARN REWARD"

(A warning stencilled on the back of all seats of few
DTC buses and most of the old private buses in DELHI.)

"LEARN NOT TO BURN"

(After a little literature-advising people to prevent a fire from occurring at the first place, it suggests few do's and don'ts in case of a fire. Here I am mentioning the first one).

In case of detection of fire

(1) Raise an alarm by shouting 'FIRE' 'FIRE'.

(Fire prevention and extinguishing instructions, hoarded in front of SSS office, JNU).

"Und es geschah, dass Gott sie allmählich vergass,

Zuerst das Gesicht, dann die Hände, und Zuletzt das Haar...

(It happened (very slowly) that it gently slid from God's thoughts:

First her face, then her hands, and right at the end her hair.)"

("The drowned girl" in Bertolt Brecht 1990, quoted in Baudrillard 1993:159).

► These accounts do not find any direct reference in any of the chapters as it is, but are mentioned here because they offered a direction in which a concrete enquiry and engagement could be perused with regard to the conceptualisation of fear and insecurities in the present times (see Chapter Two).

Appendix Two

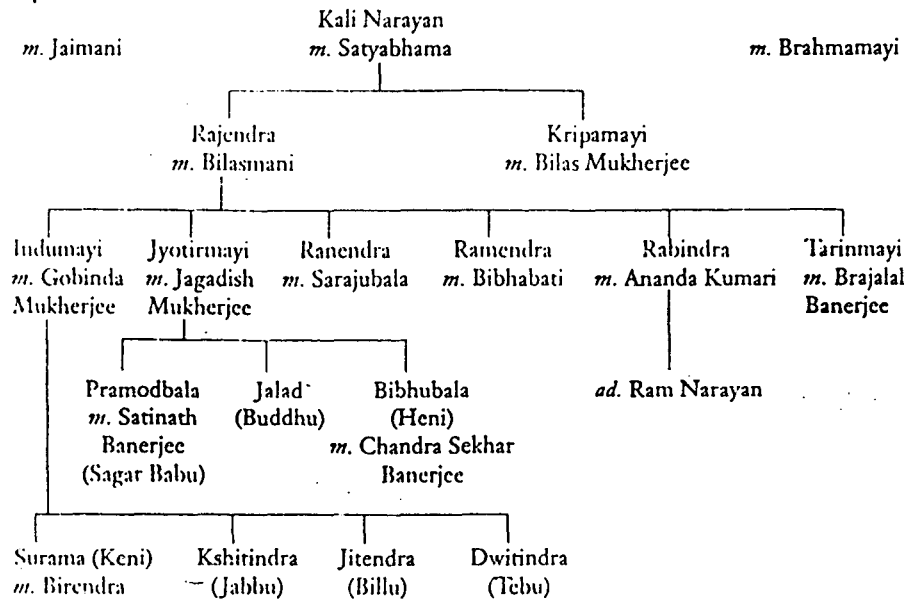


FIGURE 1. The Bhawal Raj family tree

Appendix Three

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Q. When you came to Jaidebpur after your marriage, did you feel that you had fallen into the hands of an illiterate and debauched man?

A. No.

Q. Can you swear that you did not feel terribly hurt because your husband would not sleep with you?

A. No, I did not feel hurt.

Q. Do you remember if your mother ever sent word to you that "Bibha should try to see that her husband sleeps with her in the same bed"?

A. It is possible that she did.

And again:

Q. If it is suggested that before the trip to Darjeeling, the Kumar was a man of loose moral character, would that be a correct statement?

A. He was my husband. I don't want to make any remarks on his character.

Q. Would you say the same thing about the character of the Eldest Kumar?

A. He was a respected elder. I don't want to make any remarks on his character either.

Q. And would you say the same about the Youngest Kumar?

A. I don't want to make any remarks on anyone's character.

And again:

Q. Are you suggesting that your husband could not stay without you even for a few days?

A. I have never said such a thing.

Q. Did the Kumar miss you very much when you were apart?

A. I will not try to explain to you.

Q. Was the Kumar someone who was very fond of his wife?

A. I have never noticed him being interested in that subject.

Q. Some married men go to great lengths to please their wives. What was your husband like?

A. I cannot make comparisons with others.

Q. Did your husband act on your advice?

A. Not always.

Q. Have you ever felt that your husband's main concern was his wife?

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