Debriefing the Satanic Gyres of Patriarchy: A Bengali Gynocritic and Her Daughters

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Abstract: The language employed by women authors bear a 'difference' guaranteed by the author's femaleness. This contributes towards the development of the female literary tradition as a challenge to the male tradition. Voicing her daughters through her short stories 'Mira's Madness', 'Distress', 'Abuse', and 'Rage', Sanjukta Dasgupta, a Bengali gynocritic, explores women's experiences of trauma, frustration and fears imposed upon them through several constraints of the society. Dasgupta's short stories contribute towards women's writing and female creativity, transcending the various historical boundaries. It is a result of her intense observation of the dynamics of our society where women emerge as 'the second sex'. This essay will investigate the unheard chronicles of the women of the society, a story that never makes it to the headlines. It will also vindicate how women can understand other women's predicament and play an important role to assist them in need. Mira, Suchandra, Preetilata, Malati, and Alo, like Dasgupta's other women protagonists, negate the androcentric power structures of society, and expose them. Permeated with the spirit of creation Sanjukta Dasgupta's short stories interrogate women's caged freedom emphasizing the need of liberty for women, as evident through her *Lakshmi Unbound*, a response and a challenge to patriarchy.
Keywords: *Indian English, women author, short stories, difference, interrogating patriarchy, liberty.*

> 'May I offer my life as oblation in freedom's quest.'
> (The last sentence of "My Emancipation" – Translation of Rabindranath Tagore's "Amaar Mukti Aloy Aloy") in *Tagore: The World Voyager* [Bose, 2013: 28].

Introduction

The term 'identity' is cardinal to the dynamics of contemporary cultural and literary criticism. It is a paradoxical term which not only enhances similitude, but also asserts difference or contradictions, especially when we explore the idea of 'identity' in the context of women authors, their writings and their creative characters. The history of

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women's struggle for vindicating their identity will corroborate that under the satanic gyres of patriarchy women for a long time continued to exist a life which is 'male-identified' and her roles have been limited as well externally specified through the male figures associated in her life since her birth when she is identified as the 'girl child' of her father. This process of pseudo-identification of the women has made them to be comfortably considered by patriarchy as the 'second sex' where their 'difference' of their self, mind and soul remains unrecognized, dominated and exploited in one way or the other. These imposed identities are subtly coercive and seldom are women able to extract themselves from this strong hidden adhesive which unconsciously entraps them just as a wild python does mercilessly upon its prey before swallowing up the creature, or like as a Venus-fly trap, without leaving any trace. The woman's body and its specific characteristics which are biologically, culturally and literally different becomes a space where patriarchy treads to explore only to control and violate it, as Victor Frankenstein attempted with the female monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This violation serves as a reprimand upon the liberating, self-willed woman for interrogating the patriarchal advances, and also emerges as a metaphor of repercussions faced by any woman for employing her freedom of choice by crossing the 'lakshman-rekha' which she is not expected to transgress – a metaphorical patriarchal admonition and sexual politics to affirm manhood [Bagchi, 2019: 7]. Succumbed to these entrapping processes of imposed identities the woman emerges as the Eastern 'Lakshmi' [Dasgupta, 2017: 11] and the Western 'Angel of the House' [Woolf, 1970: 238] only to be subjected to sexual exploitation, rape, murder, acid attacks, dowry deaths, child marriage, abuse of the girl child, female infanticide, female foeticide, marital rape, sexual harassment in workplaces and domestic violence among others. Amidst all this turmoil which unfortunately continue even today, the true self of the woman is lost forever, and she continues to remain as the 'other' sacrificing her life at the altar of patriarchy without any reverence and respect for her as an individual, but to her pseudo-identifications which satisfies the male ego where the idea of the individual identity of the person as a woman ceases to exist. It is of utmost necessity to interrogate patriarchy and debrief its violent ramifications and enable women to lead a life of their own, realising their own selves. It is therefore imperative for women to be empowered in this era of cultural and economic globalization where they will exist and be respected and honoured at par with the men i.e. 'balance for better', the UN theme for international women's day 2019. This clarion call ventured by the United Nations women's organization focuses on treading towards a gender-balanced world, where women are not considered and treated as the other. In recent times due to the spread of education and enthusiastic endeavours undertaken by various organisations exploitation upon women have been checked to a great extent, if not completely eradicated. It is necessary to eradicate such inhuman crimes which are committed upon women – often these do not make it to the headlines, it remains concealed within the abysmal depths of the patriarchal structure of the society, unknown, and unheard. Women's experiences easily 'disappear, become mute, invalid and invisible, lost in the diagrams of the structuralist or the class conflict of the Marxists' [Showalter, 1997: 219]. Like feminist activists addressing such issues through various endeavours, the entelechy of the creative writers have enabled them to explore these unheard and unknown phases of women's life, the disguised and subdued messages of women in history, in anthropology, in psychology, and study these sensitive issues to vindicate its seriousness and emphasize through their creative medium the need for liberating women from the androcentric clenches. Sometimes they have been able to quiver the society through their argument leaving an indelible impression among all sensitive minds. Writing is an activism

for a writer; it is the only possible way by which she/he can express her/his political standpoint, ideology, worldview, dreams and visions; leading towards a harmonious fusion of ideas [Dasgupta, 2015: np] in 'a thinking, understanding world of creative participation' [Fraser, 2015: 66]. Through their creative writing the creative artists continue the art of discovering the mystical humanity. As communication of life can only be possible through a living agency therefore writers through their art of writing communicate and nurture the growth, development and progress of a culture which grows, moves and multiplies in life [Tagore, 2003: 21] as *yat kincha yadidam sarvam prana ejati nihsritam* i.e. 'all that there is comes out of life and vibrates in it' [Tagore, 2005: 54]. Therefore the author being the 'world-worker' is able to 'transcend the limits of mortality' [Tagore, 2005: 55] towards an existence where all the people are coordinated by the vision of the poet to be 'receptive as well as creative' towards an 'inspiring atmosphere of creative activity' [Tagore, 2003: 2] through which 'a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which [the poet's] generosity of conduct is expressed' [Tagore, 2001: 495]. Through an expression of her/his own worldview and ideology, the author is able to voice 'universal, human experience' [Parthasarathy, 2002: 11]; this has facilitated an interrogation of the hypothesis of 'marginality' [Paniker, 1991: 12] which has often been used to describe Indian literature written in the English language as

> English is no longer the language of colonial rulers; it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, attending to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling [King, 1987: 3].

The English language is not 'a medium of merely utilitarian communication' but 'a potent vehicle of progressive thought and passion' [Bose, 1996: 515] for Indian writers in English to voice their observations addressing several burning issues through a creative homogeneity involving a cultural comprehension between the East and the West towards a ubiquitous magnitude by exploring the dynamic secrets of existence and discovering 'the principle of unity in nature not through the help of meditation or abstract logic, but by boldly crossing barriers of diversity and peeping behind the screen' [Tagore, 1996: 379]. Employing the global *lingua franca* the Indian women writers continue to strive a reinvention of womanhood by addressing issues of women and their lives. Through their endeavours they have been able to break the silence and emphasize the need for women to journey towards 'self-discovery' and 'a search for identity' [Showalter, 1977: 13] through their creative medium. These creative endeavours by women help their struggling fellow sisters and daughters to recognize themselves, and their identity, as Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic insights vindicate that all perspectives of identity are androcentric in nature, but female identity and experiences differs from the male model in profound and regular ways. This element of 'difference' contributes towards the evolution of a feminine aesthetic, a language which is particular to women's writing, whose 'difference' is pledged by the 'femaleness' of the author [Spaull, 1989: 84].

The Female Author - Gynocriticism

The evolution of the feminine aesthetic is complete when the 'psychodynamics of the individual or collective female literary tradition' [Showalter, 1981: 201] receives the vindication of the canon of 'great' literature, at par with the literature authored by men. Women writers being enthralled by their 'inspirational eleventh muse' [Dasgupta, 2017: 49]

successfully continue the tradition of ecriture féminine through a voice of their own rapidly contributing towards strengthening the exclusive style of women's writing 'which draws upon the formless primeval song that emanates from the voice of the mother' [Bhaduri and Malhotra, 2016: 112] which the male writing often attempts to erase and stereotype them as a 'subordinate to the main stream: an undercurrent' [Moi, 1985: 55] which thereby naturalize their gender roles as the virtuous woman, the seductress and the sacrificing mother [Nayar, 2010: 94]. As a result Elaine Showalter comments that 'each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex' [Showalter, 1977: 11-12] which contributed towards the birth of a strong subculture within patriarchy [Nayar, 2010: 97]. Such patriarchal mechanisms augmented through the naturalization of power structures are interrogated through women's writings which contribute towards the birth of a literature of their own bearing a feminine creativity and inventiveness which is established through the use of language by women authors to represent her female protagonists' 'journey towards self-fulfillment [inner awakening] with Jungian rites of passage' [Baym, 1978: 11]. This language used by women authors, poets contribute towards the birth of a literary canon by women as Showalter has argued by consigning the authors into three main types, equating to the three main stages in the evolution of women's writing itself in her *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977). She coined the term 'gynocriticism' which involves in

> the study of women as *writers*, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a feminist literary tradition [Showalter, 1982: 14-15]

to account for the woman writer as the author [creator] of texts and meanings involving critical interpretations and thereby 'uncover particular modes of women's writing by positioning the woman's experience as being at the centre of both writing and criticism' [Nayar, 2010: 97]. This 'unique difference' [Showalter, 1981: 186] in women's writing became a reality as women began to voice their causes, depict their real selves through their women characters as they should be, unlike the male authors whose women characters are repressed under patriarchy with limited opportunity to offer any kind of resistance against the exploitative institution. As a result the literary creation and critical interpretations by women authors gave birth to 'woman-centered criticism' and accelerated breaking their centuries' silence and ripping apart the imposed barriers of barbed wires towards 'a wider field of their talents'. Therefore women's literature is a firm response and challenge to patriarchy disintegrating at once 'the relative segregation of the women as [the second] sex, relaxes the restrictions that otherwise narrow women's functions' [Guha, 2012: 267] by probing the 'servile submission to custom and practice without regard to their tendency for good or evil' [Banerjea, 2009: 118]. This process aims to revive and preserve 'the echo of women's literature' [Moers, 1977: 66] and strengthens the female identity and the female literary tradition and for creating a world characterized by disenthralment, egalitarianism and erudition where the woman writer cannot be contained, smothered, confined or silenced from gyrating the world with her perception embodied through her writings [Fraser, 2015: 61]. The metaphorical concept of 'female identity' is an inherent process dependent upon a mother-daughter bond, which the female creators/authors develop with their female characters [Gardiner, 1982: 179]; and besides

being the hero of the author's creation, she also becomes her author's daughter as this connection contributes towards women's psychological identities [Gardiner, 1978, 244]. Therefore the female authorship creates this association and an identity of this association contributes towards the development of a distinct engagement between the woman writer and her characters and 'indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character' [Gardiner 1982: 179]. Through this literal identity often an individual/reader feels remarkable and cogent in spite of being pharmaceutically subjected to a state of identity dissipation. Therefore through this distinct female identity Indian women authors writing in English have been able to portray women as 'seats of consciousness' [Donovan, 1997: 212], their selves, their female voices, the social setting and audiences, and their responses towards it which differs to the male tradition, only to metamorphose the 'voice' as a woman-centered criticism [Showalter, 1981: 186] – portraying aspects of 'women's experience which generate the style and content of their writing; and to examine the means by which women offer some resistance to patriarchy through their writing' [Spaull, 1989, 86] and 'deactivates its components' [Kolodny, 1991: 113]. The female experience is the foundation of an 'autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature' [Showalter, 1997: 218].

The Bengali Gynocritic

Through her insightful contributions towards the genre of women's literature following an intuitive and distinctive style [Moers, 1977: 66] Sanjukta Dasgupta has effectively contributed towards maneuvering 'the echo of women's literature' [Moers, 1977: 66] which patriarchy tries to erase through several coercive mechanisms but remains unsuccessful. The dynamic feminine power of her creative outlook facilitates Dasgupta to re-vision women 'to seek out a feminine aesthetic, or 'essence', which differentiates women's writing from men's' [Spaull, 1989: 84] and their varied dimensions in their respective cultures, questioning and revising the passive, impoverished and anaemic stereotypes, to 'celebrate and venerate the dignity and strength of the enlightened woman and represent a critique of the regressive ideals of patriarchy' [Kumar, 2009: xxvi]. Like her poetry, the remarkable style of Dasgupta's short stories, endorses an expression of a woman author's experiences of the home and the world and vindicates the 'self-defined critical consciousness' of women as 'opposed to a mass-produced or stereotypical identity' [Donovan, 1997: 212]; contributing to the style and content of women's writing 'by which women offer some resistance to patriarchy through their writing' [Spaull, 1989: 86]. Her short stories facilitate the birth of a 'unique and uniquely powerful voice capable of cancelling all those other voices' [Capkova, 2011: 4]. They echo the birth of a female reader impeding the strategic patriarchal alienation and manipulation of the female reader/writer and the implanted male perspectives as expostulated by Judith Fetterley's arguments regarding the politics of manipulation, androcentric value system and the portrayal of female characters through 'male eyes' in her famous book *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978). Like other women writers, Sanjukta Dasgupta's short stories are deeply engaged with issues involving not only to women's history, culture and literature, but also their plight and neglect by patriarchal generations which are often suppressed, unheard and unrepresented. As a woman writer she addresses them from the woman's experience facilitating the woman as the producer of textual meaning. This intense association and commitment towards her [female] characters not only make them lively and familiar, but also connects to them as her daughters, whose unheard stories and issues of life get addressed through her creative medium as it reaches to the common ear

breaking the glass closet which patriarchy builds around women's writings. This is gynocriticism derived from Elaine Showalter's *la gynocritique: gynocritics* who are 'more self-contained and experimental, with connections to other modes of new feminist research' [Showalter, 1997: 216]. Through her short stories Dasgupta, an ardent gynocritic from Bengal [India] interrogates the Miltonic secondness and otherness imposed upon women [Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 191] only to create 'a new understanding of our literature [in order] to make possible a new effect of that literature on us, and to make possible a new effect in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the literature reflects' [Fetterley, 1991: 497]. Sanjukta Dasgupta is perhaps an Indian embodiment of Showalter's observations regarding the programme of gynocriticism which involves the fabrication of

> a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritic[ism] begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture [Showalter, 1997: 217].

This process of artistic creation by a woman author involves in her exploring the spirit of difference; it also involves her 'anxiety of authorship' which is due to the conventional 'male definitions of herself and her own potential' [Spaull and Millard, 1989: 127] enclosing her within the patriarchal gyres of the man's indecisive feelings about his impotence to reign his own birth, physical survival and death. This is a struggle which like all female authors, even Sanjukta Dasgupta undertakes, dealing 'not against her precursor's [male] reading of the world but against his reading of *her*' [Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 49] and her texts. Dasgupta's triumphant struggle vindicated through her characters [daughters] of her short stories as well as through her poetry bears the hallmark of [her] female creativity [Spaull and Millard, 1989: 128] which becomes the female precursor contributing towards a feminist poetics and a feminist literary tradition by transcending the anxiety of authorship by reviewing the male genres in order to enact 'a uniquely female process of revision and redefinition that necessarily caused them to seem 'odd" [Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 73]. Debriefing the androcentric codes and the cultural construction of femininity through her powerful feminist narrative in her short stories Sanjukta Dasgupta has been able to create some simple yet extremely powerful women characters who are very familiar to us, yet their stories are unknown and unheard. Dasgupta's association and feeling with them becomes lively in the course of the narratives, which establishes the metaphorical maternal association between the female author and her female characters who become her daughters. Dasgupta as the mother of all her characters [female] portray the dynamics of their life struggles within the patriarchal domain drawing her themes from our surroundings – it is their quest for their own identity, their self-definition [Showalter, 1977: 13] in order to be able to erase the lines of control which had trapped them within the humiliating and terrifying domestic space and to 'spread her arms like wings / [spin] wildly on her toes / [sing] like a Koel in spring' [Dasgupta, 2017: 15]. In this essay we will explore the struggles of Dasgupta's [fictional] daughters - Mira, Suchandra, Preetilata, Malati, and Alo, who have been able to resist 'the self-perpetuating and closed nature of patriarchal structure and institutions' [Palmer, 1987: 183] by relentlessly fighting their way for their rights and helping other women at times of need. They are very common people whom we perhaps meet every day, but seldom do we hear and come to know of their distinctive female experiences. Indoctrinated in the Marxian philosophy and enthralled by

her Eleventh Muse [Dasgupta, 2017: 49] Sanjukta Dasgupta's short stories speak of the regular grapples undertaken by the common women with whom majority of us [the readers] can relate and thereby feel the author's anger which proliferate every corner of the narratives, thereby contributing towards the development of women's writing and furthering the cause of women's literature.

The Daughters and Their Stories

Mira

Mira's story from Dasgupta's 'Mira's Madness' reflects the predicament of every [creatively] conscious middle-class woman struggling within the abysmal depths of the androcentric society to carve a space and a room of her own. Like the narrative of most of Dasgupta's stories, here too we observe how the society and the stereotyped conventions act as a trap to continue the act of coercing women in the name of conventions, marriage and family. Mira dreams to be a school teacher but her failure to clear the school-service examination at the first attempt becomes the yardstick to get her married off to a man, and marriage makes her life miserable. It is very interesting to observe that Dasgupta has used sentences which are very typical of the patriarchal Indian society exposing its gruesome reality. Some sentences like, 'She was thin, just what young men fancied, she was fair and beautiful and she was educated', 'Young girls are given away not to the bridegroom alone but they are given away to be guarded, groomed and gobbled by the *sasur bari*, the house of the father-in-law with its in-house residents', and 'Mira knew she had to attract him with her devotion, smiling silence, shyness, lisping tone and downcast eyes' [Dasgupta, 2014: 252] among others, vindicate the strategies of the institution of marriage existing in our society where parents of a girl child still feel the compulsion to marry off their daughter since the time of her birth. The story establishes how Mira's life and her bright dreams metamorphoses in to unnerving bleakness which creates an aura of inescapable illusion. Exploitation at the in-laws is not always physical, but even psychological, which interrogates the very existence of a sensitive individual. Trapped within the laborious chores and unable to stand against the 'relentless torture' [Dasgupta, 2014: 252] of the *sasur bari*, on the twenty-fifth day Mira takes advantage of the possible opportunity and returns to her father's home on the pretext of her sister's illness; it was more of an escape rather than just a mere return or a courtesy visit. This is evident when Mira dived into her mother's arms and cries her heart out, 'Take me back, please let me stay here. I'll find a job and go away if you don't want me her, but please, please don't send me back there' [Dasgupta, 2014: 252]. But her once supportive mother was different to her then. Instead of supporting and feeling for her maltreated, abused daughter, Alpana, her mother remained unaffected and unmoved and spoke as an extended manifestation of her *sasur-bari*, the prison house as Rabindranath Tagore had stated in *Tasher Desh*. Blatantly she stated, 'now that you are married Mira, your *sasur-bari*, your marital home, the house of your father-in-law is your real home. Girls have to obey their in-laws, no matter how unreasonable their demands are' [Dasgupta, 2014: 253]. In spite of being a very disturbing statement from a mother to her own daughter, yet this statement by Alpana deserves a close interrogation. It focuses on 'social structurally induced psychological processes' [Chodorow, 1978: 6-7] where we observe that psychic disparity between the sexes is historically inconsistent. It may not be the predicament of married women everywhere but the number of women subjected to such politics is not negligible, subjected to such an invisible machinery which confines them and grafts their position and identity in accordance to the androcentric desires. Alpana's words act as a polite rebuke to Mira who

finally gets entangled in the 'fear of losing one's unique identity' [Pratt, 1978: 11] and unable to get any support she returned to the in-laws home and committed suicide only to be rushed to the hospital. With Alpana's admonishing words to her daughter Mira we tend to think of her own predicament in her life after she got married, her struggle amidst the societal stereotypes which rendered her to a state of helpless existence where she was destined to accept her life within the space of her in-laws sacrificing at once the spirit of her own being. Though this has not been explicitly stated in this short story but Alpana's gestures and words to married Mira perhaps echo her own plight which she considers to be the fate of every woman after marriage. Though giving birth to a daughter and nurturing her is emotionally gratifying for a mother as it accelerates the mother to thoroughly return to the symbiotic and perceptive state that she would like to derive from mothering [Stone, 2011: 9-10]; this plight of the mother and her daughter echos Nancy Chodorow's first observation regarding the development of a girl's personality, i.e. a girl develops her gender identity conclusively, in becoming like the mother with whom she initiates life in a symbiotic combination [Chodorow, 2000: 348]. Though Mira was saved due to the advancement of medical science but no police complaint under section 498 of the Indian Penal Code was lodged. She began to be treated like an unknown being, while her mother did not want her back, her mother-in-law was eager to send her back to home, unable to do so she tagged her as 'bad and mad', and Mira became the mad Mira. Madness is one of the stereotypical identities which patriarchy imposes upon women who have transgressed their set orders and have become *alakshmi* instead of the much expected *lakshmi*. Mira tried her best to get a job by her own efforts but all appeared to be in vain. The concluding section of the short story not only voices Mira's present situation but also vindicates the necessity of certain factors for women like Mira to have a life of their own. It states 'Mira does not have a job yet. She has no money, she cannot speak English, she is not computer savvy, she is just a university graduate and now she is mad Mira' [Dasgupta, 2014: 253]. The story ends with a rhetorical question implying that Mira's position will not improve very easily as the system is corrupt and stereotypical towards women, and their education, vocational training and takes utmost careful measures to crush the woman's endeavour towards 'self-definition' of her own self as 'a woman's sense of gender, her sexuality, and her body may assume a different, perhaps a more prominent, shape in her conception of her self than these factors world for a man' [Gardiner, 1982: 190].

Suchandra

Suchandra in Dasgupta's 'Distress' is an embodiment of the 'new woman' who is intelligent, educated, self-sufficient, sensitive, hard working and is the ever assuring space to her psychologically tormented students [female and male]. Though through the narrative we come to know of certain important aspects of Suchandra's personal life, yet how she is a true mentor to her students to whom they could confide themselves draws our attention. Suchandra is perhaps very dear to our author; those of us who are Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta's students can surely realise how Suchandra is the creative incarnate of Dasgupta through a fictional vein. Though many aspects of Suchandra's life are fictitious, yet like Dasgupta, Suchandra is also a supportive and encouraging teacher, and a true scholar with a large heart who has time to patiently hear her students and their problems, only to help the person to solve or ease the matter with her pragmatic advice. In the first part of the story we can understand the bond between the author and her daughter, soon we realise how the bond gets depicted through a fictional vein within the narrative of the short story, i.e. Suchandra and her students who are almost like her children. Though the narrative

states of a bleak phase in Suchandra's emotional life, yet through certain descriptions in this story we can discover Dasgupta's interrogation of patriarchy or the exploitative androcentric traps to which women are succumbed. 'Why did women trust men so much?' [Dasgupta, 2018: 281] is perhaps the author's and her daughter's take upon this stereotyped society. Through certain aspects of her students' lives, like, Ajoy, Pulak, Mitali and Kanika, we not only become familiar regarding creative women's trauma within the turmoils of marriage, but also of the predicament of creative men when they tend to pursue a life and a career beyond the society accepted set parameters. Suchandra is the woman who is not only the reader but also the writer, and through the stories of her students she is successfully able to critique the society which coerces women and men, the former the most. Through her 'own subject, own system, own theory, and own voice' [Showalter, 1981: 184] Suchandra offers resistance and interrogates the violent gyres of the society through her creative medium. Her female imagination becomes the possible passage for her, more ardently for her students' true aspirations through which they are able to 'affirm in far-reaching ways the significance of their inner freedom' [Spacks, 1976: 316]. Her critique, like Dasgupta's, is to seek answers to the questions that derive from her experiences, and to underscore the subtle and often neglected problems and issues, and here the experiences, problems and issues are both from her own observations of the society, as well as the occurrences in the lives of her students who struggle to have a space exclusively of their own amidst the confinements of life. As a literary woman, Suchandra's indignation to such complexities of life rattle her nerves which get soothed only through her 'pen' [Dasgupta, 2018: 280], giving a free flow to her spirit and expression, contesting the excruciating gyres of patriarchy by not being a 'good, sane, silent Lakshmi', or an 'angel in someone's house', or 'a disembodied spirit', but by being *alakshmi* through her liberating intellectual activities [Showalter, 1982: 12] which transgresses the set guidelines only to enjoy liberty like an eagle [Dasgupta, 2017: 13]. Through the reference to the 'pen' in this story through which Suchandra enjoys her literary freedom, we are reminded of the metaphors of literary paternity as exposed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* through which they evaluate the theoretical injunction that

> the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis… [it is] not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim as… 'an increaser and thus a founder'… [therefore the pen] in patriarchy [is] more resonantly sexual [Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 6].

This inadvertently raises the interrogating question regarding the organ through which the females generate texts [Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 7], and this forms the foundation of the arguments for *ecricture feminine* and gynocriticism i.e. women write through their experiences and their body, their sexual differentiation [Burke, 1978: 851]. This argument has been augmented when *Of Woman Born* vindicates female 'physicality as a resource rather than a destiny' [Rich, 1977: 62] interrogating at once the Freudian coordinates of 'penis envy, the castration complex, and the Oedipal phase' which determine women's relationship with language, fantasy, and culture [Showalter, 1982: 24]. The stories of Mitali and Kanika whose affliction Suchandra portray in 'Distress' are two strong epitomes of women's anguish in this society which for many people is too common an affair to be discussed and intervened. However in both the situations we do not get to

know where and how they are at the present moment; the author leaves the readers to contemplate. Was Mitali able to get inspired by Ibsen's Nora and leave her home? Did Kanika overcome her domestic anguish and explore her hidden talents? Are they still alive? are some disturbing questions that continue to hover in the reader's mind. Sanjukta Dasgupta's Suchandra and her students are subjected to social contexts which get responded through their teacher, corroborating the author's attempts to establish that 'women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole', an encounter that attaches women to each other over time and space [Showalter, 1982: 27].

Preetilata and Malati

Preetilata in Sanjukta Dasgupta's 'Abuse' is perhaps the twenty-first century paragon of the women's culture within the cultural matrix of this society who aims towards connecting, helping and supporting women through her NGO named Mitali. Balancing subtly the home and the world, Preetilata is the modern middle aged woman who is conscious of women's predicament in the patriarchal society, therefore attempts in her own way to help women like Mira, Mitali and Kanika, perhaps aiming to create an awareness in the society in her own small yet constructive way to restore the 'balance for better'. Through this short story Dasgupta's pragmatic approach towards reaching out to women who need help and support is vindicated. Preetilata is Dasgupta's daughter who has ventured in this world to 'support, educate and empower the helpless' [Dasgupta, 2013: 2], an embodiment of her dynamism to stand by the oppressed and the wretched in the society, her sensible advice and suggestions have been conclusively life-changing for several individuals. As Suchandra is a feminist author writing her experiences, similarly Preetilata is the feminist activist empowering the defenceless, which unfortunately in the stereotyped society is the woman ever subjected to all kinds of torture. In this story before we explore the mother – daughter relationship which Dasgupta has fostered through Preetilata and Malati, it is interesting to notice the various social stereotypes the author has carefully grafted within the narrative in order to debrief it through her use of language. Though it is quite surprising, but we hardly interrogate the matter, in most of the families the male members expect the female member[s] of the family to cook good dishes on Saturdays and Sundays which are their weekly holidays, but have we ever noticed a change in this pattern. Have we ever seen that on Saturdays and Sundays the male members take the responsibility of cooking, and facilitate the women to relax from the activities at the kitchen? It may be one or two in a thousand, but it is never comprehensive. An inherent evil deep rooted within the immeasurable depths of our society is the inhuman stigmatization of the first born girl child, or sometimes the newly wedded daughter-in-law, as the cause of any mishap in the family after their birth or arrival. They are ever condemned as 'harbinger of bad luck' [Dasgupta, 2013: 3] and often disparaged as witches. The predicament of such a girl child or woman becomes repugnant as she continues to suffer physically and psychologically from such derogatory comments both at home and at the society outside. A very serious social problem is the molestation of girls and women within the home front and by their family members; they are often subjected to life threats by the convicted family members and die in their own selves by being silent only to face the consequences of such unprotected forceful sexual encounter. The evil does not cease here, when the unmarried girl being subjected to regular molestation becomes pregnant the society raises questions against her character, but no one hears her pangs of affliction and ordeal. She suffers within and unable to take any action, or speak to anyone she commits suicide; some of their deaths get reported in the newspapers, some to the court only to be

lost in the recesses of time and history in the androcentric world. Another social evil which is persistent even today is the importance of dowry [money and kind] in marriages – the father of the bride pays a huge amount of money and other gifts to the groom's family only to facilitate the marriage of his daughter, as if the daughter is a commodity who is being bargained and sold in the market of marriage. It is a shame for the Indian society that even today suicide deaths, and inhuman murder of wives by their husband and in-laws due to their father's inability to pay dowries promised before marriage gets recurrently reported in the media, yet women continue in their position as the second sex in this banal society. These are the primary issues which Dasgupta debriefs in 'Abuse' through the traumatic life of Malati who being subjected to repeated molestation by her own father becomes pregnant and is forcefully married off to evade the premarital pregnancy to a man who needed a maid for his family, and not a wife, lands up to Preetilata [Mitali] after being subjected to inhuman torture from her husband when her father had failed to deliver the promised money as marriage dowry, seeking help and advice. Preetilata succeeds in settling the matter in its own fashion, and presently Malati is at a peace as the money changed hands and her husband is caring towards her after receiving his due. The story apparently settles the deep rooted problem but disturbs a sensitive reader as it raises serious questions on the persisting issue of money [dowry] in marriage and the dilemma of women within such internment in the modern day. Towards the end of the story Preetilata as a mother advises Malati to pursue her dreams of becoming a school-teacher, and looks forward to her visit to Mitali after she has achieved it. The story vindicates the important role women play in supporting and helping other women to posses 'a self-defined critical consciousness' and thereby challenge the various complexities of life which aim towards establishing 'a mass produced or stereotypical identity' of these women [Donovan, 1997: 212]. Like *A Room of One's Own*, 'Abuse' facilitates a feminist analysis of the material conditions – social, political and economic – in which women struggle to have a sphere and room of their own [Whitson, 2004: 278]. The woman's sphere is governed by the 'cult of true womanhood' and the 'feminine ideal' which develop the women's culture redefining women's activities and objectives from a woman's perspective through an 'assertion of equality and an awareness of sisterhood, the community of women' based on values, institutions and relationships and processes of communication consolidating female ordeal and culture [Lerner, 1981: 52, 54].

Alo

While Malati accepted the life after the dowry was settled with the prudent help from Preetilata, Alo in 'Rage' is Sanjukta Dasgupta's rebellious daughter ready to confront the tormenting patriarchal system only to interrogate and teach it a lesson for a life time. Alo is Dasgupta's Nora who is infused with the determination to fight against all kinds of disrespect, injustice to have her due respect and share from the institution of marriage. Apart from the suggestive gruesome impact of the partition of India upon human lives, represented through the lives of Nibaran and Chhaya [Alo's parents] in the introductory section of the narrative, here too we read several social stereotypes carefully grafted by Dasgupta in order to interrogate them through her use of language in the course of the narrative. The social stigma of educating the boy and neglecting the education of the girl is vivid in this story where Sudhir is admitted to the school, while Alo remains at home to learn household duties only to be received by 'a suitable boy' [Dasgupta, 2013: 8] through the system of marriage. The evil system of dowry is prevalent, along with the trauma of a married girl being subjected to multiple pregnancies which are often a result of marital

rape. The irrational activities which women are forced to undertake due to the imposing patriarchal pressure upon them for the birth of a boy over a girl, and it is condemnable and irreligious if a woman has a caesarian baby get critiqued through this short story. Alo undergoes all trials and tribulations, has a caesarian baby boy after three daughters, only to receive the immutable thunderbolt of her life when her husband [Kartick] marries another woman [Maya], and within the house with her 'negative source of powerlessness' [Showalter, 1981: 204] Alo in spite of being 'quiet and submissive' [Dasgupta, 2013: 9] Alo becomes the neglected 'other' and the kitchen becomes her space with her children [Chini, Reba, Sabita and Bimal]. This repressive patriarchal process of 'otherness' is employed to render the women as the 'muted group' facilitating the development of a cultural cynicism as the fountain of competence and robustness which contributes towards the evolution of the female dialogue [Spaull, 1989: 95]. Alo revolts fiercely and much to everyone's surprise she rebels against her husband in a loud voice unknown to anyone [Dasgupta, 2013: 9], leaves her in-laws home after her father's demise for her mother and brother, she refuses to return to her in-laws and struggles vehemently by working as live-in maids at Calcutta, and finally files a divorce with the help of Mrs Gupta, another instance of women's sisterhood and association, against Kartick. Sanjukta Dasgupta had inversed the dominant ideology to enable the muted group, represented in 'Rage' by Alo, also in Mrinal Pande's 'Girls', to speak against androcentric cultural and gender differences which identify women 'as negative, as wrong, and their reality invalid' [Spaull, 1989: 105]. After a prolonged struggle she wins the court case and forces her husband to pay the alimony, the price for tormenting and abusing her. Therefore like Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Kartick gets thoroughly displaced from his tormenting male-dominated society, and comes one on one with the wild zone of female encounter or ordeal. Kartick subsequently begs forgiveness, and is ready to accept her but she refuses knowing how 'women are killed each year in the villages' [Dasgupta, 2013: 12]. Amidst this turmoil, Alo fights her way to save her second daughter from being sold off, a gruesome picture of the mysterious Calcutta where young women, like money, are abducted and change hands only to be lost from their homes for ever. After a year the alimony promised by Kartick stopped, and Alo's daughters were infuriated but Alo seemed to have lost her 'positive source of strength and solidarity' [Showalter, 1981: 204] to pursue the matter once again; she had won her disposition and thereby forgives the poor man as Christ had forgiven his crucifiers.

Conclusion

With the freedom of words and dynamic courage of expressing women's unique experiences Sanjukta Dasgupta is a Bengali gynocritic whose short stories bear 'a new conceptual vantage point' [Showalter, 1981: 185] of feminist literary tradition. It involves breaking free women's writings from 'the glass coffin of the male-authored text' only to attain and enjoy 'a dance of triumph, a dance into speech, a dance of authority' [Gilbert, 2000: 44]. The narrative in her short stories possess a distinct Indian character, context, tone, sensitivity and language [Peeradina, 2010: xi], intertextuality encapsulating that 'all creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place' [Gifford, 1986: 58] to 'open new windows and doors of perception enabling a holistic understanding of the world' [Dasgupta, 2016]. Dasgupta's entelechy is explored through her astute treatment of the issues of our everyday life through her short stories, like her poetry, which being embedded with a vibrant force inspires the sensitive reader to think and 'to stand up' against 'trauma, fears and oceans of tears' [Dasgupta, 2017: 73, 77]. Like Sanjukta Dasgupta's poetry collections *Snapshots* (1996), *Dilemma: A Second Book of Poems* (2002), *First*

Language (2005), *More Light* (2008) and *Lakshmi Unbound* (2017), her widely published short stories also interrogate and deconstruct 'the double blind with power and understanding' towards 'a wider trajectory of the cultural diversity' along with the 'ideological position of the subject's voice of power' [Dasgupta, 2006: 178]. Sanjukta Dasgupta's 'delicate perception' through an 'intense self-reflexivity' [Prasad, 2009] colour her 'female imagination' as the only feasible vent for women's true aspirations and interrogate the anxiety of authorship to emanate an emotion of motherhood towards her female characters, who as her daughters 'affirm in far-reaching ways the significance of their inner freedom' [Spacks, 1976: 316]. Dasgupta's short stories 'ceaselessly deconstructs the male [androcentric] discourse' [Jacobus, 1979: 12-13] only to provide a window to witness and hear the long unheard voices, which are different and distinct, but orchestrated together in its identity and sensibility [Vatsyayan, 2009: xviii]; facilitating a realization of gender inclusiveness and gender equality – the harmony of androgyny, instead of misandry and misogyny [Dasgupta, 2019]. The 'dynamics of female friendship' [Abel, 1981: 434] through the mother – daughter bond between Sanjukta Dasgupta and her female characters represent women's experiences which differ from men's in profound and regular ways – as 'for every aspect of identity as men define it, female experience varies from the male model' [Gardiner, 1982: 178-179]. It involves a shift in 'the point of view' [Spacks, 1976: 315] to emphasize female imagination – creativity – voice by transcending historical boundaries; and it is through these great experiences as a woman Sanjukta Dasgupta envisions a reiteration of women's literature through a creative genre of postcolonial women's writing in Indian English.

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