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AUGUST 2017



Blood Ritual
Mark Ulyseas



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Cover photograph Mark Ulyseas

C O N T R I B U T O R S

**The Poetry of Dwelling**
Professor Ipshita Chanda

Ipshita Chanda is Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has been ICCR Visiting Professor of Indian Culture, Georgetown University (2013–14). A member of the Faculty Team in the International Faculty Exchange Programme of the Virginia Council for International Education and the Virginia Community College System, 2008–09, she has written extensively in books/journals including the edited volume *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals: 1865–1947* (Stree, 2014); *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and Popular Culture* (Stree, 2003). She is also a SAGE author.

**The Question of Silence**

Professor G. N. Devy, Chair, People's Linguistic Survey of India

Prof Devy, was educated at Shivaji University, Kolhapur and the University of Leeds, UK. Founder of the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre at Baroda and the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh. In January 2014, he was given the Padmashree by the Govt. of India. He was advisor to UNESCO on Intangible Heritage. Devy's books are published by Oxford University Press, Orient Blackswan, Penguin, Routledge, Sage among other publishers. His works are translated in French, Arabic, Chinese, German, Italian, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu and Bangla.

**Literary Dissent in the Democratic Space**

Professor Mini Chandran

Mini Chandran is Professor of English literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences Department, IIT Kanpur. She writes occasionally for The Indian Express. A practising translator, she translates from Malayalam to English and back, and has published translations of fiction and non-fiction titles, besides academic papers in national and international journals. Her translations include *A Revolutionary Life*, biography of Lakshmi Sahgal (from English to Malayalam) and *Autumnal Memories*, biography of prominent Malayalam critic Joseph Mundassery (from Malayalam to English). She has also co-edited *Textual Travels: Theory and Practice of Translation in India*.

**China's New Game in India's Northeast**

Dr Bibhu Prasad Routray

Dr. Routray served as a Deputy Director in the National Security Council Secretariat, Govt of India, Director of the Institute for Conflict Management (ICM)'s Database & Documentation Centre, Guwahati, Assam. He was a Visiting Research Fellow at the South Asia programme of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore between 2010 and 2012. Routray specialises in decision-making, governance, counter-terrorism, force modernisation, intelligence reforms, foreign policy and dissent articulation issues in South and South East Asia.

**Blood Ritual**

Mark Ulyseas

Ulyseas is founder and editor of Live Encounters Magazine and Live Encounters Poetry. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <http://www.amazon.com/author/markulyseas>

**Uspenski Cathedral**
Mikyoung Cha

Mikyoung Cha is a graduate in Oriental Painting from Hyosung Women's University, Daegu, South Korea. She has participated in a number of group art exhibitions in South Korea and Japan. In 2016 she took up photography – the camera becoming her paint brush. This globe trotting photographer is a regular contributor to Live Encounters Magazine.

**Wolf Counsel**

Roesy (Alan Roe)

Award winning singer-songwriter and artist Roesy (Alan Roe) has spent the first half of 2017 touring both Ireland and Australia. His audiences were listening to old favourites like 'Cast Your Line' which aired in early May on The Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch* and new material that he is currently writing and recording. Over the past 20 years he has shared the bill with international figures such as Bert Jansch, Paul Brady, Billy Bragg, John Martyn, Joan Armatrading, Donovan, Shane MacGowan and celebrated Irish author Paul Durcan. Roesy studied Fine Art and Design in Galway in 1993.

**Music From The Edge**

Randhir Khare

Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. Executive Editor of Heritage India, the International Culture Journal, a Director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy and Visiting Professor to the Dept Of English, Pune University. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures.

**Mantra of the Mandala for August**

Patricia Fitzgerald

Patricia studied Visual Education and Communication at Dun Laoghaire College of Art & Design (IADT) and also holds a first class honours degree in Philosophy and Sociology from University College, Dublin. Her first book *Healing Creations: Discover your mindful self through mandala colouring and journaling* was published in September 2016

**Mevlubi; Cevirme Pilav**

Ozlem Warren

International cooking teacher and Turkish culinary expert Ozlem Warren is a native of Turkey, lived there and extensively travelled for 30 years. She has been teaching wholesome, delicious Turkish cookery in the US, Jordan, Istanbul and England. Her recipes have been published in the local media in England, Hurriyet and Sabah national daily newspapers in Turkey. Ozlem also took part at the "Turkish Chefs of the World", "Dunyanin Turk Seftleri" TV program aired at TRT, National Turkish TV channel and in 37 countries.

Ipshita Chanda is Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has been ICCR Visiting Professor of Indian Culture, Georgetown University (2013–14). A member of the Faculty Team in the International Faculty Exchange Programme of the Virginia Council for International Education and the Virginia Community College System, 2008–09, she has written extensively in books/journals including the edited volume *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals: 1865–1947* (Stree, 2014); *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and Popular Culture* (Stree, 2003). She is also a SAGE author.



THE POETRY OF DWELLING

Ipshita Chanda, Professor, Department of Comparative Literature, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Author of **Selfing The City: Single Women Migrants And Their Lives in Kolkata**, Published by **SAGE** Publications

“Migrants” move from one place to another in search of jobs or better living conditions. But arriving there, what happens to them?

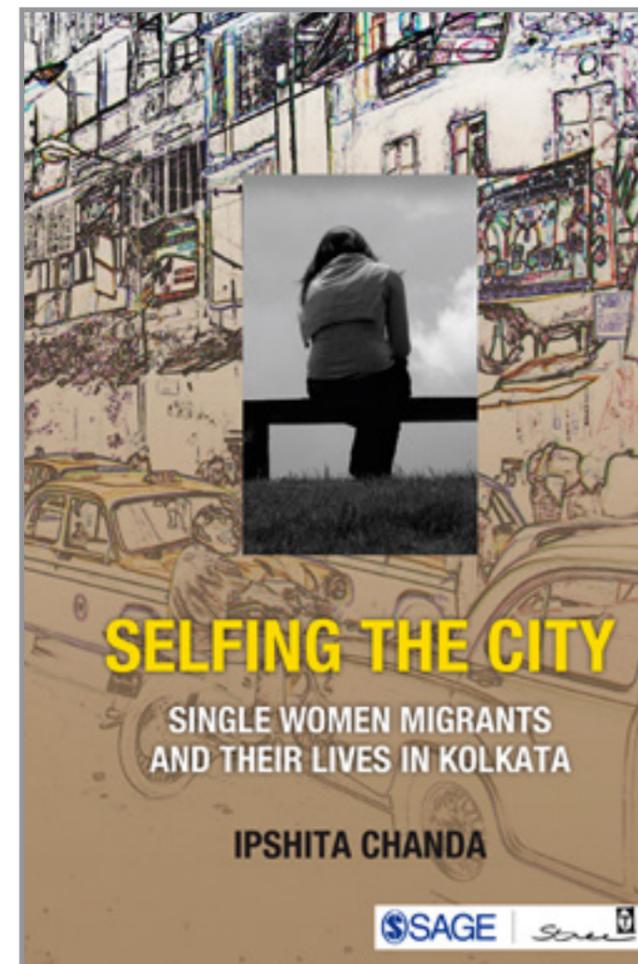
Having come to a city from a small town and then lived there for more than a decade, a mutuality took shape between the city and my self as our acquaintance grew. This was sometimes contradictory and mostly unremarked until I began to talk to other women who had done the same. They too had come from different small towns, villages or the suburbs and had to struggle to find a home and then craft a life in a strange place promising both the protection and the threat of anonymity. Our moving to the city was an undeniable fact; we were migrants, but the struggle of staying on was the reality that we wanted to understand. As single women who came to the city, we remained ‘outsiders’ in our own minds and in the minds of those who were around us, in myriad ways:

Some landladies provided palatable food and comfortable housing but were blessed with dodgy sons.

Some corner flat uncles were interested in where and how long and with whom one went out or returned.

Roommates were of different kinds, though we were all single women from small towns and smaller cities trying to “fit in” or at least become invisible and not attract attention: a condition that often gave us pleasure but in some circumstances, was terrifying.

Perhaps here a conflict appeared between the condition of our lives and our attempt to “fit in”, the latter an effort quite contradictory to the idea of the ‘outsider’ by choice. But we were constrained by the circumstances of our choice to relocate to the city. As ‘women’, as ‘single’ women, as aspiring ‘urban’ women, living alone sans family in a city which is in the popular imagination the hub of all opportunity, good and evil, with results joyous or harmful, we were subject to norms and conventions entirely foreign to our situation.



Perhaps here a conflict appeared between the condition of our lives and our attempt to “fit in”, the latter an effort quite contradictory to the idea of the ‘outsider’ by choice. But we were constrained by the circumstances of our choice to relocate to the city. As ‘women’, as ‘single’ women, as aspiring ‘urban’ women, living alone sans family in a city which is in the popular imagination the hub of all opportunity, good and evil, with results joyous or harmful, we were subject to norms and conventions entirely foreign to our situation. Some trivial instances: the gas delivery man will come between 10am and 4 pm because those are his work-hours – what can be done if they coincide with yours, so what if you are a single woman living alone? Nuclear families have the same problem. You have to move quite frequently – in the days before packers and movers, those whom you, as a single woman without ‘family’ in the city could rely on, were those whom you called ‘friends’. Our material condition as outsiders decided our lives and inclinations – whether we tended to cleave together or apart, the fact that we did not “belong”, were “outsiders” came to us again and again in the course of thinking about how having ‘migrated’, we experienced our destination which changed for us and through us, even in the process that it changed us.

Would this poetic description of making a home and then of being at home in it, dwelling within it not as an outsider but as if you are 'at home', include the presence across the road of people who watch your movements through the curtains and ask you why you were out late last Tuesday?

And in changing us, this encounter with the city brought to those of us who wanted to reflect upon the experience in the form of our past and the hopes and projects that are our future, the understanding that what we call change is not a great shattering event but a pragmatic necessity and a secret test of what we as the individuals we so strongly like to believe we are, are willing to undergo. The change which responds to my circumstances is not an alien reality outside the boundaries of my being – it is my self, made by my volition or lack of will. The boundaries that seem to define my limits reshape them constantly, urged by the thirst of being to meet what is beyond itself. For us this thirst is named by the city.

The city nurtures and challenges our humanity, with a welter of opportunities to approach what is concealed by strangeness; to approach the strange, or even the familiar is always fraught with the ambiguity of the possible. Will the magic of human warmth turn the gossamer veil of difference into a mystery to be revealed with care and love, or will the impenetrable barrier of difference harden and isolate a person or a group forever in recalcitrant animosity? Whatever categories and classification we impose upon our experience in order to turn it into material for social science, this uncertainty is the only certainty we have in our living with others in a shared world.

“Full of merit yet poetically/Man dwells....”

...says Holderlin, the German poet. To be at home anywhere, is to create a world in which you can be at home: poetry is creation, making in the sense of bringing into being something that has not existed before and exists only in what you have created.

Would this poetic description of making a home and then of being at home in it, dwelling within it not as an outsider but as if you are 'at home', include the presence across the road of people who watch your movements through the curtains and ask you why you were out late last Tuesday? Heidegger as a philosopher of experience, commenting upon these lines, also asks how dwelling can be poetic, when at the very least we are harassed by the housing shortage. Yet, despite everything, when man can, he achieves his highest spiritual comfort on earth in the very act of making his home. This is not an act out of which a solid thing appears; the very motions of life itself are anchored in a world that gives it a concrete here and now, and changes through this giving from 'the' world to 'a' world that stands in relation to my self, both self and world moulding each other in concert and contradiction. Had I been an artist this would have been poetry – but because I am no more than human, it is only my life in the world, created by entering and dwelling in an alien place.

Am I now an insider, no longer a migrant but a city woman : perhaps the city has given me a job, a relationship, a friend, confidence and pain – all which I can call my own , generated by my being here, and here alone?

It is a world now which you can measure by your footfalls echoing in its paths, glimpse in the sky that peeps out at you when you cross the railway tracks to return to the unwelcome emptiness of a 5pm single accommodation, find peace in a community of care growing from the condition in which one finds oneself amidst others. This is not a work of art or a bridge or even a home – soon the rooms will be bare, and the lives will move, maybe to another city or to another room in the city or to a permanent home somewhere. Our very lives grow in the climate of these realities, and our beings cannot be free of them.

Walking on the streets of a city in which I until recently knew no one, I am certain that I will not meet anyone I know. Yet one day, I do meet someone I know, someone who does not know where I come from, but that I 'live here'.

Am I now an insider, no longer a migrant but a city woman : perhaps the city has given me a job, a relationship, a friend, confidence and pain – all which I can call my own , generated by my being here, and here alone?

The human, full of merit, is capable of understanding the uniqueness of an other because she is herself a unique design for being, a singular actualized "life". She can learn to appreciate in an other the same ability that she recognizes in herself to make a dwelling, to make a singular life in the face of alien-ness. Both merit and the ability to make, poetically, are held together by the word 'yet', Holderlin not opposing one to the other, but gifting to the human being both at once, with the poet's belief that man will in his human capacity, transform his merit into action with the livening touch of the human warmth that the poet calls poetry.

Out of the narrative of our experience in an alien city, struggling against the alienation of categories and classifications, of conventions that bind and adventures that beckon, we have made our lives. In the dialectic between merit and poetic ability, a human life, like a wild flower, is. In the time of its blossoming, we have unlearned the received wisdom that lives are given to us to live according to the dictates of the normal or the extraordinary, the remarkable or the ordinary. These are words we ourselves craft for 'life in general' and suffer the consequences in our own particular living. We have learnt the recalcitrant fact of otherness that brings home to us the reality of difference, the reality of being in the world. We have learnt that lives are made by humans themselves, in company and in contradiction with humans, as diverse and as wonderful as one's own self, revealed in the community with others.

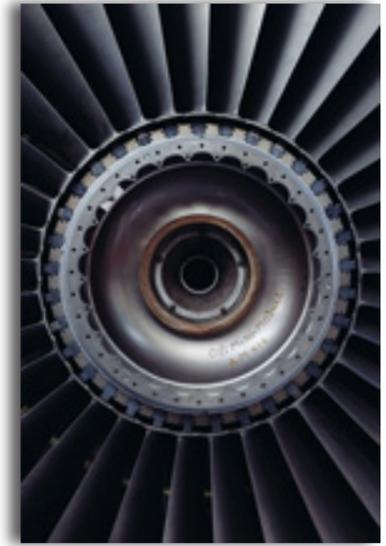
Professor G N Devy, was educated at Shivaji University, Kolhapur and the University of Leeds, UK. Founder of the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre at Baroda and the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh. In January 2014, he was given the Padmashree by the Govt. of India. He was advisor to UNESCO on Intangible Heritage. Devy's books are published by Oxford University Press, Orient Blackswan, Penguin, Routledge, Sage among other publishers. His works are translated in French, Arabic, Chinese, German, Italian, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu and Bangla.



Professor Ganesh N Devy,
Chair, People's Linguistic Survey of India
Excerpts from his forthcoming work

THE QUESTION OF SILENCE

PART THREE
One Space, Many Times - Recollections



There is another substance of silence threatening us. That is built into the almost entirely ethereal social bondage within the 'networked' societies of today. As compared to the humans just over half a century ago, individual members of the species today are far more taciturn and incapable of relating with other members of the species. The urbanized and networked habitats created by the preceding generations are currently the sites of silence within which the ease of human-to-human communication is no longer possible without mediation of a vast range of man-made memory and speech devices.

Prologue

The Question of Silence

The question of silence, despite the obvious mutual negation of the two terms, needs consideration now as never before. The question is no longer limited to any particular ethnic group, a single nation, gender, language and culture, or a given faith, philosophy, and ideology. It now starkly faces us as our collective destiny on several fronts.

The most widely perceived element of silence is that which the dominated peoples, genders, tongues, cultures and nations have to live with. The post-colonial and post-industrial societies have had to internalize silence in innumerable ways in all aspects of life including the forms of knowledge imposed on them, the architecture of habitats and urban designs brought to them, the truncated ecologies they are marooned in, the capital-lag and the energy deficits they live with, and finally the dipping of their self-esteem in their own eyes. The silence imposed by the dominant is a fall-out of the many known as well as as-yet-unstated histories of domination. Within these germinate phantasies of subversion, desires of resistance, negation of selfhood and suppression of memory.

There is another substance of silence threatening us. That is built into the almost entirely ethereal social bondage within the 'networked' societies of today. As compared to the humans just over half a century ago, individual members of the species today are far more taciturn and incapable of relating with other members of the species. The urbanized and networked habitats created by the preceding generations are currently the sites of silence within which the ease of human-to-human communication is no longer possible without mediation of a vast range of man-made memory and speech devices. It is as if we are getting enveloped on all sides by a sea of silence in which we cannot stay afloat despite having a massive communication gadgetry.

Alienation, which marked the initial phase of modernity, has attained a higher pitch and a scale, escape from where requires repeated reminders of the self in the form of 'selfies'. After spending nearly half a million years in forming human societies, we seem to have struck the mood of a 'specific' reversal brought about by an unprecedented isolation of members of the species. Probably, we have arrived at a juncture where being social is possible only in the no-dimensional cyberspace reality, within which signifiers seem to have come off their conventionally associated signification.

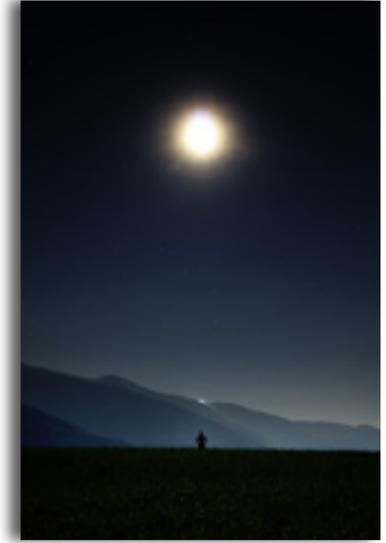
Then there is yet another more chilling and at the same time and yet more exciting experience of silence into which we are moving as rapidly as a water-walking strider – a water-bug-- caught in a giant waterfall. It appears that the human communication is getting ready to go beyond, or outside, the verbal language that we have used over the last seventy-thousand years. Natural languages based on verbal icons are dwindling in our time as if a mysterious epidemic has struck them at the root. Whether this is due to the neurological changes affecting the human brain, whether this is an expression of the evolutionary process guiding us through time, or whether this is an inauguration of a new era of knowledge-gathering by the human consciousness, the experience of it all now, in our generation, is simply unsettling.

The three-faced silence, arising out of power dynamics, technology-driven social changes and neurological-evolutionary compulsions have brought back to us the responsibility of reflecting on the nature of silence, our collective negotiation with it, the consequences it entails for the human consciousness--- both, what it knows and how it knows—and the very idea of being human. It is therefore that I thought of reflecting on the question of silence. I should add that reflecting on silence through words and sentences is a contradiction in terms. Yet, there is no known method of 'writing' without words. Such a method shall no doubt be known to humans and followed widely at some future date; in fact, the pervasive silences surrounding us all point to that imminent possibility. However, at this early stage of the new phase in human existence – which is one of the themes of this volume—I have chosen a form that is significantly different from the conventional forms of written books.

Silence, '*shanti*', has been an abiding interest for the visionaries and thinkers in all civilizations. Various traditions of aesthetics have devoted significant thought to unravelling the mystery and the beauty that silence holds within it. The tantra tradition of poetics articulated by Abhinavagupta makes '*shant*' as the *summum bonum* of aesthetic relish. Theologians have spoken about the 'silence' at the beginning of Creation, and mystics, Sufis and saint-poets have sung paeans to silence. However, the silence one is thinking of in our time has a different and terrifying quality, with its roots in the Nazi concentration camps and state sponsored genocides. It brings to one's mind the images of those who had to perish without a word facing nuclear arms assault and the Bhopal- like gas leakages or Chernobyl- like radiation disasters. The idea of silence evokes those millions of faces of food-starved children in Somalia and thousands on the run out of Syria ready for a death by drowning.

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The same cannot be said of Space. Doubting its existence is much more difficult. It is only the most sophisticated scientific mind, or alternately the most profound mystical vision, that will deny Space its substance and autonomy. Of course, if one is pitted against the factual reality of the presence of planets and stars in our view, those bodies that the naked human eye can perceive as being there - even if no proof of their being there is accessible to the non-experts - one tends to take for granted the realness of the spaces in between.



The women in India's North-Eastern state facing rapes by armed forces occupying their land, the tribals in central India falling to bullets in the name of either a revolution or the law, followers of diverse faiths burnt and killed in many parts of the world - all of these are the visible imagery of silence in our time. These imageries are at least visible. There are then the invisible losers of their native tongues, only occasionally reported in National Geographic or similar media shows. And, finally, all of us, almost without any exception, the severely alienated, isolated, unable to experience relations in any depth too are marooned in silence in our time. In a way, the question of silence is as important, or perhaps even more important than, the question of violence in our time.

The Space without Time

It is impossible for one to say which is more unreal, Space or Time? A simple glance around us, at the non-human world of beings, birds, animals, plants, will help show how utterly human is the notion of Time. Perhaps, had there been no language, enabling us to articulate our thoughts and sensations in a temporally dispersed form, there would have been no Time at all. Though the notion of time helps us in managing our lives by simplifying memory, we all know with an acute clarity that Time is an entirely human creation. Having once created it, it then acquires a certain solidity in our thoughts and becomes an un-erasable impulse in our cognitive ranges. Something that did not exist by itself, comes to be at least as real as we want it to be and starts regulating the daily manifestation of Life.

The same cannot be said of Space. Doubting its existence is much more difficult. It is only the most sophisticated scientific mind, or alternately the most profound mystical vision, that will deny Space its substance and autonomy. Of course, if one is pitted against the factual reality of the presence of planets and stars in our view, those bodies that the naked human eye can perceive as being there - even if no proof of their being there is accessible to the non-experts - one tends to take for granted the realness of the spaces in between.

This is not the case with those who make it their special activity to study the cosmos. They have various theories of the beginning, being, even the banality of what we call the universe. Given that certain scientific views reduce the idea of space to a perceptual quiz, given that numerous branches of theology speak of space as a 'creation' rather than a 'manifestation', and given that - at the same time -

the cognitive processes cannot even make the faintest beginnings without the backdrop of an all-enveloping space, the ordinary mind is forced to proceed in the business of living with a general acceptance of the idea of space as a kind of a reality. Moreover, the interconnectedness of space and time too is accepted in both the scientific and the general view - with varying degree of quantitative abstraction regarding their being 'real'. 'How much real?' is by far the most serious question that the untrained mind may occasionally come up with. But is it possible to imagine Space without Time, a state of being that has no memory of being?

I have struggled with the question of memory for a long time. The struggle has been tough, but not defeating. I have also struggled with the question of space. With it, the positions that have seemed tenable to me in different phases of my thinking have been somewhat similar to the positions that one takes with relation to God. One is a believer and approves the idea, or an atheist and dismisses it, or else one is an agnostic oscillating between affirmation and denial, not being able to come to any conclusive stand. Space is probably God-like, and in that sense in its most essential form it is beyond Time, not bound by the laws and logic of Time.

This space, imagined, god-like, is believed to have always been there and shall continue to be there long after the observing consciousness is removed from the scene. It is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. It pervades all. All comes out of it and all returns to it again. Space without Time appears to be 'that' which most theologies have tried to name, but have retreated from that impossible task. It seems to be the 'tat' of the Vedas and 'the Word' of the New Testament. Yet, it is much less mysterious than the entirely abstract idea of God, for space is also a part of one's direct and tangible experience.

Space outside Time defies a complete comprehension, but it does not elude sensory experience. It is less intangible than all other abstractions of the basis of existence. Space, therefore, has been the beginning and the end of my engagement with the world. The realization that it is so has taken several decades of looking at it. It has taken those several decades for me to understand that those decades were the endless curtain through which I was looking at space, that Time is not, space is, if one decides to see it.

Knowing for me has been seeing, though my seeing has remained largely unknown to me. Homer, Surdas and Milton, the greatest among the poets, fascinate me for their blindness. Sanjaya of the Mahabharata and Casandra of Troy fascinate me for their ability to see more than their sights would allow them to see. I think, the world can be seen only by those who cannot see at all or by those who can see even when they are not seen seeing. My experience of life has been through such seeing.



The Eye Sees, The World Is

Probably my life has been lived through my eyes, not so much through ears, touch and taste. I have so often noticed that my eyes grasp things faster than my mind does.

So very often even before the person before me has started conversation, said what is to be said, concealed what is intended to be concealed, tried the artful deceit or claimed effusively a non-existent momentary kinship, or just plainly placed facts, enquiries, questions before me, my eyes seem to grasp all, or almost all, before words frame those thoughts and convey them to me. So very often my colleagues and friends tell me how greatly intuitive I am, which I am not. It is just that my eyes work a wee bit faster than the rest of the means of my cognition.

When I was younger, I would occasionally look at my eyes in mirrors and try to see what colour they were. It was not easy for me to decide if they were dark, light or some shade in between. I recall that such moments of looking at my eyes, the looking at my looking, made me for those moments somewhat empty. My mind would cease to register anything at all, including the act of my looking at my looking, seen in mirror reflections. But, now I no longer have a very clear memory of the experience, for I am at an age when I hardly can see my eyes in mirror images with any clarity.

For over a decade now, when I see my image in mirrors, I am able to get only a vague outline. In place of my eyes, I see some vaguely eye-like spaces. I no longer have much idea of the colour they have. It is only if I look into the concave mirrors placed in hotel bathrooms or in side mirror of my car when I drive that I sometime notice my eyes in the dimension they really have, or I believe they have. So, here is a strange paradox: I know for sure that my eyes are far more intelligent, far more perceptive than I am, and yet I do not really know what they are like. I have known the world through a part of me that I used to know uncertainly and no longer know except in very rare moments of narcissistic self-examination.

During the last twenty years, I have visited ophthalmologists off and on to find out numbers for the spectacles I need to wear. Every time, the doctor asks me to look into a seeing instrument through which I see the eye of the doctor at the other end. The experience is not pleasant; and I do not like the intimidation involved. But, at the end of the examination, I gather the report and get new glasses made. I have with me quite a collection of spectacles that I have used over these years. Rarely have I discarded the old pairs. All of them sit on my study table and I try them out even if my sight has dipped a little

and acquired a higher number. All these glasses have been at different times such intimate parts of my knowing, being the material extension of my seeing. These too I have not observed with any much care.

My seeing is one thing that I have not seen with any insight, and yet it is in my seeing that my mind has felt spurred or stalled, spiralled, driven, drawn and illumined or blocked. As if it were, like an octopus, I have been a brainless being, but like a hundred-eyed hydra, my mind has been all eyes. Knowing for me has been seeing, though my seeing has remained largely unknown to me. Homer, Surdas and Milton, the greatest among the poets, fascinate me for their blindness. Sanjaya of the Mahabharata and Casandra of Troy fascinate me for their ability to see more than their sights would allow them to see. I think, the world can be seen only by those who cannot see at all or by those who can see even when they are not seen seeing. My experience of life has been through such seeing. Therefore, where there is Time, I see space, where there is motion, I see stillness and where there is silence I see voice. All this happens to me as naturally as – to use a contemporary idiom – humans respond to calls on their mobile phones, not aware that the chips inside get to hear your conversation a wee bit faster than your brain cells do.

My earliest memory of my eyes is related to train journeys. In those days, soon after Independence, the tracks were in most cases narrow-gauge and the engines were fuelled by coal. The window shutters were normally left open and children put their heads out of the windows to admire the landscape or, if the windows had any grills, kept their faces pressed against the iron bars. The speed of the train made the coal dust fly backward, and the particles entered one's eyes. No matter what you did, washing the eye or blowing moist air against it or rub the eye, helped and the pain continued till you ended the journey. This was exactly how I have passage through life, seeing and feeling hurt.

During my school days, peacock feathers had a special value. One often presented a feather to one's dearest friend, and if the friendship floundered after a few weeks, one would promptly ask the gift back. Such feathers were kept in our favourite books with as much care as emperors, I imagine, keep their precious treasures. The peacock feathers collected, kept, brushed a thousand times against one's cheeks, felt and soothened with one's palms, were believed to have eyes. I was more than convinced that a feather hidden in the pages of the book would read the page, and the entire book and store the lines in its head – I imagined the eye of the peacock feather having a head of its own. From these feathers, I learnt the art of reading books with rapidity that was uncommon for someone like me with not such a brilliant performance in school examinations.

When I decided to stop reading books, and as the peacock feather stuck to my eyes from my school days dropped off, I noticed that the Chaplin eye was waiting inside to take position. The activist work that I undertook at this stage was entirely carried through the vision lit up as well as occluded by the Chaplin eye that I had made mine during my days in Britain. Many of my friends have asked me how I could conduct myself as an activist without visibly getting angry. It is not that I have managed to free myself from anger.



I had seen elders and my teachers holding the pages of a book they read tightly between their thumbs and the other fingers. I figured out fairly early in school that it is possible to scan a page with the rapidity of a peacock feather's eye. This soon became a habit for me. There was a small public library in my village created towards the end of the nineteenth century in memory of a lady from the royal family that held the village as its State. The library was not too far off from home. I was introduced to it by one of my elder sisters. I would pick a book from it hold it before my eyes and walk home reading it. By the time, I reached home, I would return to the library having completed reading it. Having invented this method of reading, it became easy for me to remember what was in the books I read, and generally by the page numbers as well. And, once read a book would sit in my head—the head of my eye—for years and decades.

I was not aware that there is a thing called the reading speed till I heard for the first time from someone that there is a skill called typing which is measured in terms of the words typed per minute. This was when I was studying in high school. I had then not actually seen what a typewriter looks like. I had to take a 8 or 9 minutes bus ride to go to the school, two stops away from home. I remember going over 80 pages of a Marathi book – that was the only language I had learnt till then – during a single journey. This did not require any efforts from my side, nor did such an experience leave me fatigued.

When I entered college, my ability to write, speak or understand the English language was comparable to a new literate person. The inability to write effectively in English was one of the reasons – among other reasons—for my decision to drop out and start looking for a suitable job. Obviously, there were no jobs suitable for a 16 year old not knowing a language beyond Marathi. During this phase, I had taken residence in a village in Goa; and there existed a very small public library with Re 1 as the monthly fees. There I chanced upon a copy of *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, an American novelist quite popular in those times. I had to struggle with it, using an English-Marathi dictionary; but a couple of weeks later, I picked up another book, this time *The Guide* by R K Narayan. Having earlier seen a Hindi movie based on the novel, I could make a good progress through its pages. It was then that I decided that I could actually read and understand English fiction. This led to my joining college studies again – this time to study English literature. As was the practice in those years, a fairly large dose of the 19th century writers from Thomas Carlyle to Thomas Hardy had to be studied. I do not quite clearly recall when, but probably a year later, I concluded that I could pour over about 300 printed pages in English on a good day, and decided that I would make that my normal practice. With rare exceptions, I followed this practice till, at 43, my first book in English was given the Sahitya Academy Award in

the category of books in English. By 45, I decided that I would give up reading books. This decision was triggered by my resolve to move out of the university and to go to Tejgadh, a tribal village. It is not that since then I have not read any books. That I have done once in a while. Besides, I have been reading newspapers fairly regularly and have read essays, book chapters, reports and things like that; but not kept up my reading habit of the earlier years when on a single day, I would consume a book, two or even several of them every single day. All of those books I read with my 'peacock feather eye', scanning the pages and avidly stocking everything in the mind of that feather, available to my recall whenever I required anything out of it, but without ever bringing to my mind the awareness that I was well-read.

After completing my doctoral work at Kolhapur and before taking up a teaching job in Gujarat, I spent a year at a British university studying poetry. Given how little is taught there and how few a lectures one is required to attend, a lot of my time was spent in the large library available there. Generally, I would go to the library as its first visitor and stayed in for as long as I could. In between, if I went out for having a cup of tea, I visited a student cafeteria. In this cafeteria, there was a lot of remarkable range of paintings done by some past student or a local artist. The paintings, all of them, depicted scenes from various films of Charlie Chaplin. What struck me the most about those images was the significantly highlighted eye-shading of the actor. The deep dark corallium lining inside the eyes of this wonderful creator was used in those images as his way of looking at the world. Here, for the first time, I started thinking of activism. My early childhood train journeys, with coal-hurt eyes and the deep dark lined Chaplin eyes stood in contrast – in my eyes. I understood that the social problems and the rights issues cannot be seen merely as the bothersome unwanted of history. I surmised, they need to be looked at critically, with defiance and even contempt, but not without compassion for the victims as well as the perpetrators. Sitting there, I decided to borrow the Chaplin eye. Subsequently, my chase for Gandhi's idea of the world, made the meaning of Chaplin's defiance clearer to me. When I decided to stop reading books, and as the peacock feather stuck to my eyes from my school days dropped off, I noticed that the Chaplin eye was waiting inside to take position. The activist work that I undertook at this stage was entirely carried through the vision lit up as well as occluded by the Chaplin eye that I had made mine during my days in Britain. Many of my friends have asked me how I could conduct myself as an activist without visibly getting angry. It is not that I have managed to free myself from anger. In fact, in my personal life I have had to regret on numerous occasions for getting violently angry. But, in my eyes through which I approached the tribal communities, there was no space for any flashes of anger.

All of us did this as told, more out of the fear for punishment rather than any great love for the language. The motion of reciting was entirely mechanical, and we understood hardly any lines or words. Yet, the last line of the 10th couplet startled me a lot. It reads "*vimudha nanu-paschyanti, paschyanti gnan-cakshu-shah*" (He who knows not does not see, but the one who sees with the ' eye of knowledge knows). The idea of an 'eye of knowledge' caught my imagination and I made what was an easy conclusion for me at that age, namely, know with your eye so that you are less foolish.



Ananda K Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva* has been one of the most fascinating books on literary and cultural theory. Coomaraswamy was an outstanding commentator on the ancient Indian iconography. His description of the dancing Shiva makes a compelling reading. Yet, despite my admiration for the depth of his understanding, I have always felt — and this is in an entirely irrational way — a bit distant from Coomaraswamy. I have always wished that he had picked up a different focal symbol and a different title for his book, and not that of Shiva in his annihilistic mood. The Shiva with his third eye awakened may be a great symbol. My normal intellect and normal mind accepts and understands the symbolism. But I wish we had a Shiva with his eyes closed -- as they normally are through aeons -- who intuits the end of the world rather than effecting it though an 'eyeful dance'. This, I am aware, is only a fantasy related to our mythology.

My acquaintance with the Sanskrit language has been scant and discontinuous. The first time I was made to utter words and sentences in Sanskrit was when I was in the middle school. A teacher decided to get us reciting the Bhagwadgita. He chose the 15th chapter and asked us to cram the first ten verses. All of us did this as told, more out of the fear for punishment rather than any great love for the language. The motion of reciting was entirely mechanical, and we understood hardly any lines or words. Yet, the last line of the 10th couplet startled me a lot. It reads "*vimudha nanu-paschyanti, paschyanti gnan-cakshu-shah*" (He who knows not does not see, but the one who sees with the ' eye of knowledge knows). The idea of an 'eye of knowledge' caught my imagination and I made what was an easy conclusion for me at that age, namely, know with your eye so that you are less foolish.

Often in my career as a literary scholar, friends and admirers have paid compliments on some of my work. It is a normal practice among the community of scholars to flatter others in a face-to-face conversation. 'Insightful', they have said. I know that such praise is to be responded through complete silence, in humility. But, everytime I have heard the epithet, my mind has recoiled. I clearly know in my heart that I never had any insights, nor will I have any. 'Sightful' would have been a more realistic description of whatever I have done. For, all my life I have done nothing at all, except for allowing my eyes to be the superior of my mind and head. Life to me has been seeing, and the life was worth living as I could never see my own seeing.

Once a Maharashtrian lady decided to write my biography. A friend said to me, "won't it be much better if you do your own story, an autobiography?" I know that I shall never write my autobiography. I just cannot. For I know with utmost clarity that I shall never be able to tell myself what enabled me to see what I saw and the way I saw. Even if I try again and again at different times, I end up seeing the same space. It is the same space in different times, the same thought in different minds, the same continuity in different ruptures.

The unblinking gaze stares at life as a perennial witness of the million shifts, transformations and changes, without allowing the mind to know that seeing is knowing. I seem to have lived my life through my eyes; and, therefore, neither knowledge nor action have ever been any burden to my mind. Almost entirely, the ideas that I can call mine, the flashes of realization that fell in my lap, the strangeness of things that appear in my writings, the actions I planned and executed in my work related to communities and the manner in which I have conducted myself and understood myself – all of these have been a result of my seeing, without seeing how I see.

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Literary Dissent in the Democratic Space

Mini Chandran, Professor of English literature, Humanities and Social Sciences department, IIT Kanpur,

Author of *The Writer, the Reader and the State: Literary Censorship in India*, Published by [SAGE Publications](#)



We tend to believe that our world is freer and more tolerant of dissent than the medieval ages when writers and freethinkers were burnt as heretics or put behind bars till they relented and went against their convictions. However, we are made brutally aware that the situation has not improved drastically when we hear of a Salman Rushdie sentenced to death or a Liu Xiaobao imprisoned for life. Censorship has not gone anywhere and intolerance of dissent is still as virulent; even democracies insist that your freedom ends at the tip of another's nose. The nosy writer who pries beneath beautiful surfaces to ferret out dark and inconvenient secrets is unwelcome and will be silenced.

The book *The Writer, the Reader and the State: Literary Censorship in India* is an exploration of the phenomenon of being silenced or censored, especially in the world of letters where being eloquent is not merely a virtue but a veritable reason for existence. The attempt is to understand censorship as part of the triadic relationship forged between the writer, the reader and the state in the process of literary appreciation. However, rather than being a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the process, it seeks to

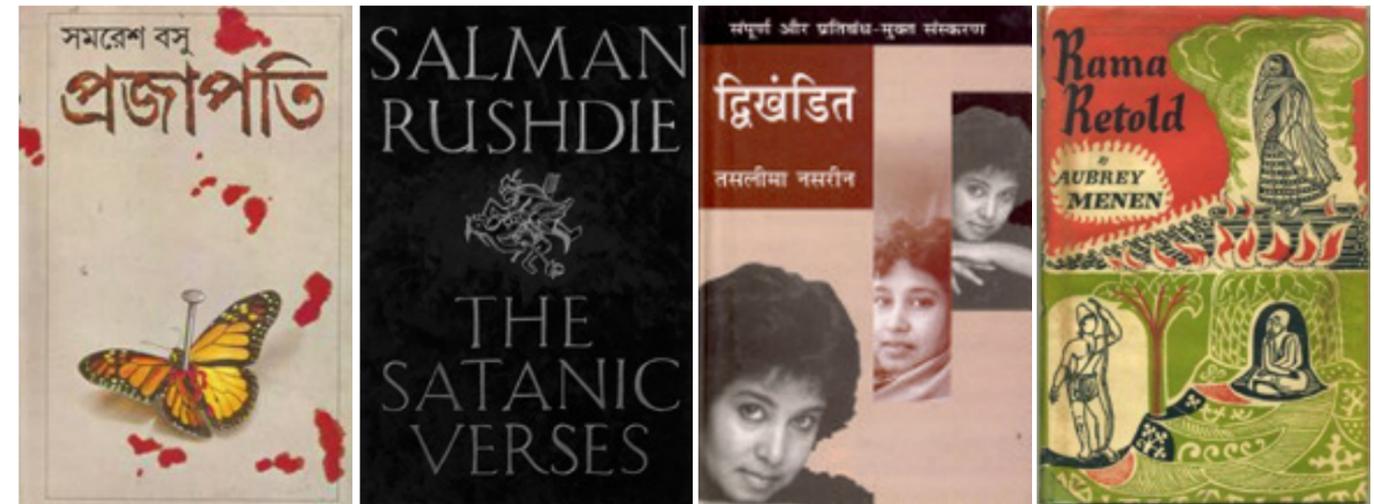
address the materialistic basis of thought control, by detailing concrete cases of censorship and legal battles fought by books. The term 'censorship' is used mainly in the more traditional sense in the course of the book, as a broad category that subsumes various repressive measures governmental and non-governmental. This includes bans that come after publication of a book, coercive tactics exercised by a group of people to withdraw a book, or suppression of a work on other grounds.

The focus is on India as literary censorship is an issue which has not been written about much here, even as writers continue to protest against what they perceive to be a rise in intolerance of dissenting voices. Moreover, the Platonic paradigm is the norm when it comes to censorship debates in India, just like the west. The book attempts to re-think this paradigm by situating the process of literary censorship within the socio-historical contexts specific to the Indian nation state or what constituted the Indian subcontinent before its independence in 1947. In the attempt to understand why India does not have a history of censorship like other countries of the world, it explores the literary tradition of India, the position of writing and writers in the Indian context, and whether the idea of free expression and thought control are western intellectual imports into India.

The analysis of literature and literary analysis in this context shows that *Kavyananda* (poetic bliss) was considered akin to *brahmananda* (spiritual beatitude) in the classical Indian tradition, and writers were considered to be seers who helped the reader attain this state of near-salvation. The book argues that this sublime view of art might have precluded the possibility of transgression as far as writers or artists were concerned, so much so that it was not easy for the writer or artist to be a rebel or freethinker. The inbuilt regulations governing art and art forms with regard to theme and style during the classical period probably prevented the possibility of literary transgressions which had to be monitored.

This exalted position of the writer changed and evolved from the classical period onwards but the idea of state control on creative work became more systematized only with the advent of the British colonial rule in India.

Books which were suppressed after 1947 in India thus include those banned by the government and books withdrawn because of public demand. So, while Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned by the Customs Act, Aubrey Menen's *Rama Retold* was suppressed on the basis of demands made by a group of people. This included fictional and non-fictional books written in English as well as regional language books; while some like Samaresh Bose's *Prajapati* fought a prolonged legal battle against charges of obscenity in the Supreme Court, Taslima Nasrin's *Dwikhandita* was banned because it offended religious sentiments.



The colonial period also ushered in printing and methods of surveillance like licensing of printing presses. This is also perhaps the period in which the idea of a more comprehensive state control over production of creative art enters the Indian subcontinent. The freedom from British rule should have ensured the freedom from all such restrictions but pragmatic administrative measures retained these laws. The religious, cultural and linguistic diversity of the new nation required the administration to be sensitive to the sensibilities of particular communities. Writers and artists now had to be careful not to overstep boundaries with respect to religious beliefs and communal sensitivities. Books which were suppressed after 1947 in India thus include those banned by the government and books withdrawn because of public demand. So, while Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned by the Customs Act, Aubrey Menen's *Rama Retold* was suppressed on the basis of demands made by a group of people. This included fictional and non-fictional books written in English as well as regional language books; while some like Samaresh Bose's *Prajapati* fought a prolonged legal battle against charges of obscenity in the Supreme Court, Taslima Nasrin's *Dwikhandita* was banned because it offended religious sentiments. These cases of social censorship are dealt with in detail along with case studies of books which were banned or had fought legal battles in the courts of India.

The analysis of the process of state censorship encompasses the period of the Emergency and uncovers an inexplicable aspect of writing and writers in India. This is the relative silence maintained by writers even when they were aware of the violation of democratic rights of free expression. The Emergency narratives, which are few and far between, point to an alarmingly apolitical writing community in India that existed then in the country.

The book concludes with an overview of censorship in India today. It analyses the contradiction apparent today, which is that of the public demands for bans from the people who wish to protect themselves. The sensitivity to communal sentiments which we saw immediately after independence in 1947 in the country has grown to an extreme form of political correctness that has shrunk the artist's domain to a few square inches of 'safe' material. Censorship has slipped out of the administrative machinery's grip and is threatening to become a weapon in the hands of the mob; political censorship has been superseded by social censorship. The fear of this social censorship has impacted the writer more – caught between the desire to be politically correct and the fear of being targeted, the writer now exercises self-censorship and chooses not to express unsafe ideas or thoughts; this makes for a sanitized but mediocre literature.

The writer's partner in the creative act – her decoder and confidante – is the reader. Censorship debates hardly acknowledge the personality of the reader; this is a paradox considering the fact that the debate is always about the impact of the work on the reader. Even though contemporary censorship laws take into account the impact of literature on the 'average person, applying contemporary community standards', it is precisely the average reader's voice that gets drowned in the din surrounding censorship controversies. The book tries to locate the elusive reader in the dust of censorship battles. However, it does not point an accusing finger at political authority and exonerate the reader but reminds the reader also of an activity that is underrated, which is of responsible reading.

The book is not a polemical treatise but an attempt to understand the power of writing and the position of the writer vis-à-vis social as well as political forces. It provides information about the various laws which govern censorship in India as well as the important legal disputes that have occurred with regard to free expression in the field of literature. It is thus a combination of archival information and insightful analysis into the theoretical aspects of the process of literary censorship in India.

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Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray, Director www.mantraya.org CHINA'S NEW GAME IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Abstract

Could China be drastically altering its policy with regard to insurgency movements in India's north-eastern region? A series of developments point at that direction. To blunt India's assertive postures under the BJP-led government, Beijing could be gradually unveiling a grand design to revive the battered insurgencies. Provision of safe houses, supply of weapons, and even playing a more prominent role in directing attacks on security forces could be emerging as Beijing's instrumentalities to disturb peace in the fragile northeast and checkmate India's Act East policy. India's relations with Myanmar that can defeat this Chinese ploy, therefore, assumes greater importance. New Delhi must take notice.

In the 1960s and 1970s, insurgents from Nagaland travelled to China for training and also to seek support for their armed struggle.[1] While some of the outfits received training in East Pakistan, till the late 1970s and early 1980s China reportedly provided arms and finances to these outfits. Beijing's support, however, ended coinciding with the power struggle within the Communist Party. While a minor flow of arms and ammunition did continue from the arms manufacturing units in mainland China to the war chests of various insurgent formations operating in the Northeast, Beijing's decision to stay clear of the insurgencies in the region continued. Naga and Manipuri insurgents' attempts to court Beijing in the 1980s was rebuffed. And when the Assam based insurgent formation United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) appealed to Beijing to let its battered cadres enter China for safety following the 2003 Operation All Clear in Bhutan, it faced immediate rejection. In response, the radical left-wing publication People's March commented, "Now that China has transformed into a capitalist country no revolutionary can expect any help from it. It is no more Mao's China." [2] This, however, could very well change, not because China is reinventing the spirits of internationalism and transforming itself into a safe house of insurgencies seeking self-determination, but because it feels that resuming its assistance to the insurgencies could be an effective instrument to blunt New Delhi's assertive posture vis-a-vis Beijing.

An Assertive New Delhi

The dispute over Arunachal Pradesh and China's frequent expression of displeasure over official visits by Indian ministers, politicians, and even foreign diplomats is well known. Frequent violation of the borders by PLA soldiers is common, whereby they have entered several kilometres into Indian territory and stayed put until New Delhi mounted diplomatic pressure. In the past, however, as well as during the initial period of the BJP-led NDA regime, New Delhi chose to take such transgressions in-stride. Its official explanations always attempted to play down the crises and link them to the unsolved boundary demarcation issues.

This policy has changed. In response to Beijing's recurrent disregard of Indian sensitivities over a range of issues that include attempts to ban Pakistani terrorist leader Masood Azhar at the United Nations and therouting of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), India has sought to assert its right over Arunachal Pradesh in a more forceful manner. This has included allowing foreign diplomats liberal access to the state, much to the consternation of Beijing. As an antidote to Chinese claiming Arunachal Pradesh as it own, New Delhi has demonstrated its willingness to play up the Tibet card more than usual, allowing the spiritual leader Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal Pradesh and heightening Beijing's concerns over the succession issue.

Peaceful Northeast

Taking insurgent violence as a parameter, it can be argued that in recent yearspace has indeed returned to the Northeastern region. Even though ongoing ceasefire agreements with a number of outfits have not resulted in peace deals, many of the pro-peace insurgent formations have chosen to remain committed to negotiations. Capacity of certain outfits in Assam and Manipur to indulge in occasional violence and the possibility of Islamist outfits from Bangladesh attempting to use the region as a hiding spacenotwithstanding, guns have fallen silent in large expanses of various states of the region. Available data on fatalities support such an assertion. Between 2012 and 2016, insurgent outfits in the region have lost a significant number of cadres to killings, arrests, and surrenders. Rather than insurgency, ethnic and communal clashes between Bodos and Santhals, and between Bodos and Muslims, that break out in the western part of Assam every few years remain the major source of civilian casualties. Northeast continues to remain a tinderbox, but insurgent capacity to challenge the might of the state has continuously declined.

The return of peace to the Northeast has opened up economic and investment opportunities. Whereas in the last decade, the public sector owned most of the investment – 92.8 percent in Mizoram, 88.6 percent in Assam, and 82.1 percent in Nagaland – private investment now has started rolling in. According to a report by ASSOCHAM India, insurgency-affected states such as Manipur did not attract any private investment in the last decade (from 2004-05 to 2013-14). However, that could gradually change. In December 2016, Assam government indicated that over 25 companies have committed cumulative investment of Rupees 5000 crore which will generate 44,000 jobs in the state.

The active insurgent outfits who have chosen to carry on with their armed struggle have dealt with their state of weakness in two ways: First, by lying low, carrying out occasional attacks on security forces, focusing on recruitment and extortion, and carrying on their activities from Myanmar; and second, by creating umbrella organisations to synergise operations. Today, a number of outfits from Manipur, Assam and Nagaland operate from Myanmar, which arguably is their last bastion. Two umbrella organisations – CORCOM (Co-ordination Committee) by seven Manipur based outfits and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)-led United Liberation Front of Western Southeast Asia (ULFWSA)– are active. The CORCOM was founded in 2011. It can be described as mostly a defensive organisation built around the key objective of survival. On the other hand, the ULFWSA, which has outfits like the ULFA, KLO, and NDFB as its members, has carried out few major strikes since its formation in 2015.[3] On odd occasions, ULFA has also operated with CORCOM. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, on 19 November 2016, ULFA and CORCOM ambushed a convoy of the Indian Army at Pengree in Assam's Tinsukia district, killing three army personnel and injuring four others.

The return of peace to the Northeast has opened up economic and investment opportunities. Whereas in the last decade, the public sector owned most of the investment – 92.8 percent in Mizoram, 88.6 percent in Assam, and 82.1 percent in Nagaland[4] – private investment now has started rolling in. According to a report by ASSOCHAM India, insurgency-affected states such as Manipur did not attract any private investment in the last decade (from 2004-05 to 2013-14). However, that could gradually change. In December 2016, Assam government indicated that over 25 companies have committed cumulative investment of Rupees 5000 crore which will generate 44,000 jobs in the state.[5]

Linked to the prevalence of peace in the region also is New Delhi's ambitious 'Act East' initiative launched in 2015. The Look East policy of the early 1990s talked of connecting the economies of the Northeast with Southeast Asia. The fact that much of that policy remained only on paper could also be ascribed to the insurgency, among other factors. The Act East policy intends to promote "economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region"[6] to provide "enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region"... through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts, and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.). Major projects such as the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats, etc. hence remain dependant on peace and stability in the Northeast.



Map of India's Northeastern States

Ascending Chinese Interest

Although Indian intelligence agencies have periodically pointed[7] at the Chinese trying to keep the north-eastern insurgent groups active by acting in collusion with Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the beginning of Chinese renewed interest in the Northeast as a counter to New Delhi's policy of assertion can be traced to 2014. In February, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi pointed at Beijing's 'expansionist' mindset and asserted that states such as Arunachal Pradesh would always remain an integral part of India. Two months later, just before the polls, Chinese official media zeroed in on the region. "India's North-eastern states — which also include Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland are said to be the country's most neglected region," state-run Xinhua news agency said in its report.[8] Through this sudden reference to the Northeast, even though in a report focusing on the elections in the region, Beijing appeared to remind New Delhi that Northeast remains a chink in India's armour.

In past years, a handful of reports in Indian and Myanmar media quoting unidentified Indian government sources[9] have directed attention to possible Chinese attempts to facilitate a revival of insurgency in the Northeast. These reports elaborate a range of short and long-term objectives that China could be focusing on. These include providing active help to insurgents to carry out attacks on the security forces, setting up a united Northeast insurgent front, and assisting formation of a Northeast government-in-exile with a mobile capital, which is similar to the Tibetan government-in-exile formed in Dharamsala. The formation of the ULFWSA, these reports further claim, could not have been possible without Chinese assistance.[10] Similarly, the sophistication with which the ULFWSA carried out some of its ambushes on the security forces could not have been possible without Beijing's active help, they argue.

While some of these claims could be exaggerated, independent analysts[11] do concur that Chinese policies could be much more than turning a blind eye to the arms traffic from places like Ruili in China to the Northeastern insurgent groups.[12] Since a revival of insurgency in the Northeast serves China's geopolitical interests in the region, Beijing could be causing "frictions and disruptions in Burma's relations with India." Insurgent attacks have led to India carrying out anti-insurgency operations within Myanmar and recurrent attacks of this nature without Myanmar's sanctions could ruin Indo-Myanmar relations. This would please Beijing which has soured its relations with Myanmar.



ULFA-Independent Chief Paresh Baruah with journalist Rajeev Bhattacharyya in Myanmar, Photo Courtesy: Rajeev Bhattacharyya

Partners with Benefits

Among the prominent insurgencies which now operate with diminished fire power is the ULFA. The outfit has suffered a series of setbacks since December 2003 and today operates with a much reduced cadre strength under the leadership of Paresh Baruah. A pro-talk faction continues its negotiations with the government, while the anti-talk faction that calls itself ULFA-Independent remains committed to an armed revolution to liberate Assam from India. Indian intelligence agencies believe that ULFA chief Paresh Baruah is based in China's Yunnan province and controls his outfit's activities from there. An independent journalist, Rajeev Bhattacharyya,[13]who made a trip to ULFA camps in Myanmar in 2011, confirmed that Baruah spends much of his time in China. It is also confirmed that apart from sheltering Baruah, Chinese intelligence officers have visited the ULFA camp near Taga in Myanmar on more than one occasion.[14]

Since 2015, such proximity with the Chinese has twice been mentioned prominently in the ULFA's press statements, thereby putting a halt to mere speculation concerning the probability of such a nexus.

In November 2015,the outfit's chairman, Abhizeet Asom, who the National Investigation Agency (NIA) believes to be a London-based general practitioner named Mukul Hazarika, said in a statement, "China is our next-door neighbour." [15]Hazarika went on to add that during the 1962 Sino-China war, the People's Liberation Army had not set foot on Assamese soil, which was due to China's respect for Assam. "Since then, I have been observing China closely and, in my best judgment, I have not seen any enmity towards Assam yet. In absence of enmity, building friendship should be easy. But, without taking a first step, there won't be any progress. The watershed moment has arrived for indigenous Assam to prompt us to build that friendship with China with confidence. We sincerely hope that China will put forward the hand of friendship towards Assam without hesitation." [16]

It was the most blatant soliciting of Chinese assistance by any insurgent outfit in recent times. This can be interpreted either as compulsion by an outfit that has found shelter in China or a conscious decision to make common cause with the adversary of its adversary. But the fact of the matter is, the proximity has grown,and both could now be willing to exploit such relationship to mutual advantage. The probability that ULFA-China relations have indeed progressed beyond soliciting was further evident in another statement made by ULFA in March 2017. Days before the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, ULFA asked the spiritual leader not to speak anything against China

Indian intelligence agencies believe that ULFA chief Paresh Baruah is based in China's Yunnan province and controls his outfit's activities from there. An independent journalist, Rajeev Bhattacharyya, who made a trip to ULFA camps in Myanmar in 2011, confirmed that Baruah spends much of his time in China. It is also confirmed that apart from sheltering Baruah, Chinese intelligence officers have visited the ULFA camp near Taga in Myanmar on more than one occasion. Since 2015, such proximity with the Chinese has twice been mentioned prominently in the ULFA's press statements, thereby putting a halt to mere speculation concerning the probability of such a nexus.

during his visit. "The caveat we would like you to honour upon making the trip that nothing against China will be uttered by you in private or public. China has always been a friendly neighbour of ours and the relationship between China and Assam is truly very deep in linguistic and cultural heritage of the two nations," [17] said a letter by the ULFA to the Dalai Lama.China had also warned India earlier that allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal Pradesh could "harm" peace and stability along their contested border and cause "serious damage" to bilateral relations. ULFA terming Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang as an "unwise plan" was yet another sign of its open expression of solidarity with Beijing.

Just as ULFA is desperate to receive Chinese assistance to boost its capacities, the same can be said about other active outfits in the region. Nothing would stop the CORCOM and other ULFWA members aligning their interests with those of the Chinese. A demand-supply relationship could always evolve into an active partnership with mutual benefits. Even the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN, which is negotiating with New Delhi since 1997, appears willing to walk the ULFA line as a pressure tactic. In April 2017, NSCN-IM's chief of army, Punthing Shimrang said exercising the "China option" is probably a better idea to force New Delhi stop its delaying tactic on the Naga issue.[18] NSCN-IM has a fairly long history of dealing with Chinese arms dealers and is known to have procured several consignments of Chinese arms for its cadres. Shimrang's statement reveals that reviving the old links certainly remains an option for the outfit should the solution proposed by New Delhi is unacceptable.

How Could it Evolve?

On 16 May 2017 in New Delhi, at the Northeast Security Review meeting presided over by India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Indian security agencies demanded a greater presence of intelligence and security force personnel in five contiguous districts of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland along the Indo-Myanmar border. A media report quoting an unnamed official who participated in the meeting said that that five districts – Tirap, Changlang, and Longding in Arunachal Pradesh and Mon and Tuensang districts in Nagaland – had emerged as the hub of the last remaining insurgents in the North-east." [19]Porous borders with Myanmar and an inadequate security establishment have allowed insurgents to make these five districts their base within the region. If this assessment is factually correct, New Delhi indeed has reason to worry. Chinese assistance to the Northeastern groups can either follow a path of direct provision of weapons or can use the Myanmar rebels to act as intermediaries in the weapons trade. Well established and intact routes and networks can facilitate such assistance without difficulty.



Map showing China's Yunnan and India's northeast, For representational purposes only.

How Could it Evolve? contd...

Compounding concern is the manner in which insurgency in the Northeast has declined. The success story, to a large extent, is not due to the achievements of the Indian state's counterinsurgency operations but mostly due to the cooperation extended by Bangladesh, which arrested and handed over a number of top insurgent leaders to India, even when both countries did not have an extradition treaty. A peace that has been achieved mostly due to the good gestures of one neighbour (Dhaka) can indeed be disturbed by another neighbour (Beijing).

Thus New Delhi's strategic relationship with Myanmar becomes extremely important. A range of treaties between the two countries for counter terrorism cooperation exists. Yet little has been done to implement these on the ground. Indian diplomacy must address this inadequacy and move to a proactive mode. A far stronger Indo-Myanmar tie is needed to counter Beijing's designs.

End Notes

[1] Bertil Lintner, *Great Game East: India, China and the struggle for Asia's most volatile frontier*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2012), p. 253.

[2] "Operation All Clear: Could the bullets suppress the aspirations of nationalities", *People's March*, Vol. 5, no. 2-3, February-March 2004, <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/PeoplesMarch/PM1999-2006/archives/2004/feb-mar2k4/bhutan.htm>. Accessed 30 June 2017.

[3] These attacks include the killing of 20 personnel of the Indian Army's Dogra regiment in an ambush in Manipur in June 2015 and the May 2015 ambush in Nagaland's Mon district that killed seven Assam Rifles and one Territorial Army personnel.

[4] Prabin Kalita, "Manipur draws a blank in pvt investment, Arunachal favourite", *Times of India*, 17 June 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Manipur-draws-a-blank-in-pvt-investment-Arunachal-favourite/articleshow/48103001.cms>. Accessed 28 June 2017.

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Thus New Delhi's strategic relationship with Myanmar becomes extremely important. A range of treaties between the two countries for counter terrorism cooperation exists. Yet little has been done to implement these on the ground. Indian diplomacy must address this inadequacy and move to a proactive mode. A far stronger Indo-Myanmar tie is needed to counter Beijing's designs.

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[10] "According to Indian security and intelligence agencies, the seeds for the formation of ULFWSA were sown at a 2011 meeting in Ruili in China's Yunnan province. ULFA leader Paresh Baruah, NSCN-K leader S S Khaplang and leaders of Manipuri outfits, United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and People's Liberation Army (PLA) attended the meeting. See Prabin Kalita, "UNLFW: The new name for terror in NE", *Times of India*, 5 June 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/UNLFW-The-new-name-for-terror-in-NE/articleshow/47547899.cms>. Accessed 24 June 2017.

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[12] The weapons used by the ULFWSA are acquired from arms dealers on China, or they are made in a gun factory at Pangwa, just across the border in Kachin State. See Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Made in Myanmar: Small Arms for North-eastern Insurgents", *Special Report#01*, Mantraya, 13 July 2015, <http://mantraya.org/made-in-myanmar-small-arms-for-the-north-eastern-insurgents/>. Accessed 25 June 2017.

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[15] Prabin Kalita, "ULFA seeks China help for 'sovereign' Assam", *Times of India*, 8 November 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Ulfa-seeks-China-help-for-sovereign-Assam/articleshow/49710303.cms>. Accessed 1 July 2017.

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Ulyseas is founder and editor of Live Encounters Magazine and Live Encounters Poetry & Writing. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. www.amazon.com



BLOOD RITUAL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MARK ULYSEAS

Legend has it that a famous priest, Kadamattathu Kathanar aka Reverend Kadamattom of the St. George Orthodox Syrian Church, situated close to Muvattupuzha town (forty five minute drive from Kochi in the Indian State of Kerala) learnt sorcery when he was held captive by the Mala Aryas (a cannibal tribe) that lived in the area at that time. This church was built in the 9th century and is considered one of the oldest churches in India. Apparently, the priest escaped from captivity and took refuge in the church. The enraged cannibals created a storm with their magic and scarred the church walls with lightning but they couldn't recapture the priest.

The well next to the church is believed to be a passage used by the priest to enter and exit the church whenever he embarked on his quest to fight the Mala Aryas with his supernatural powers.

Every year around February his feast is celebrated. People from all religions arrive from far-away places to perform the ritual of sacrificing a red rooster in the hope that the Reverend Kadamattom would answer their prayers.

Here are some photographs of the ceremony that I performed.

Note: The Church authorities are not involved in this ritual nor do they promote or support it in any manner whatsoever.



This is the well that was connected to the church and which Reverend Kadamattom to exit and enter the church when he embarked on his quest to fight the Mala Aryas' magic with his own supernatural powers.

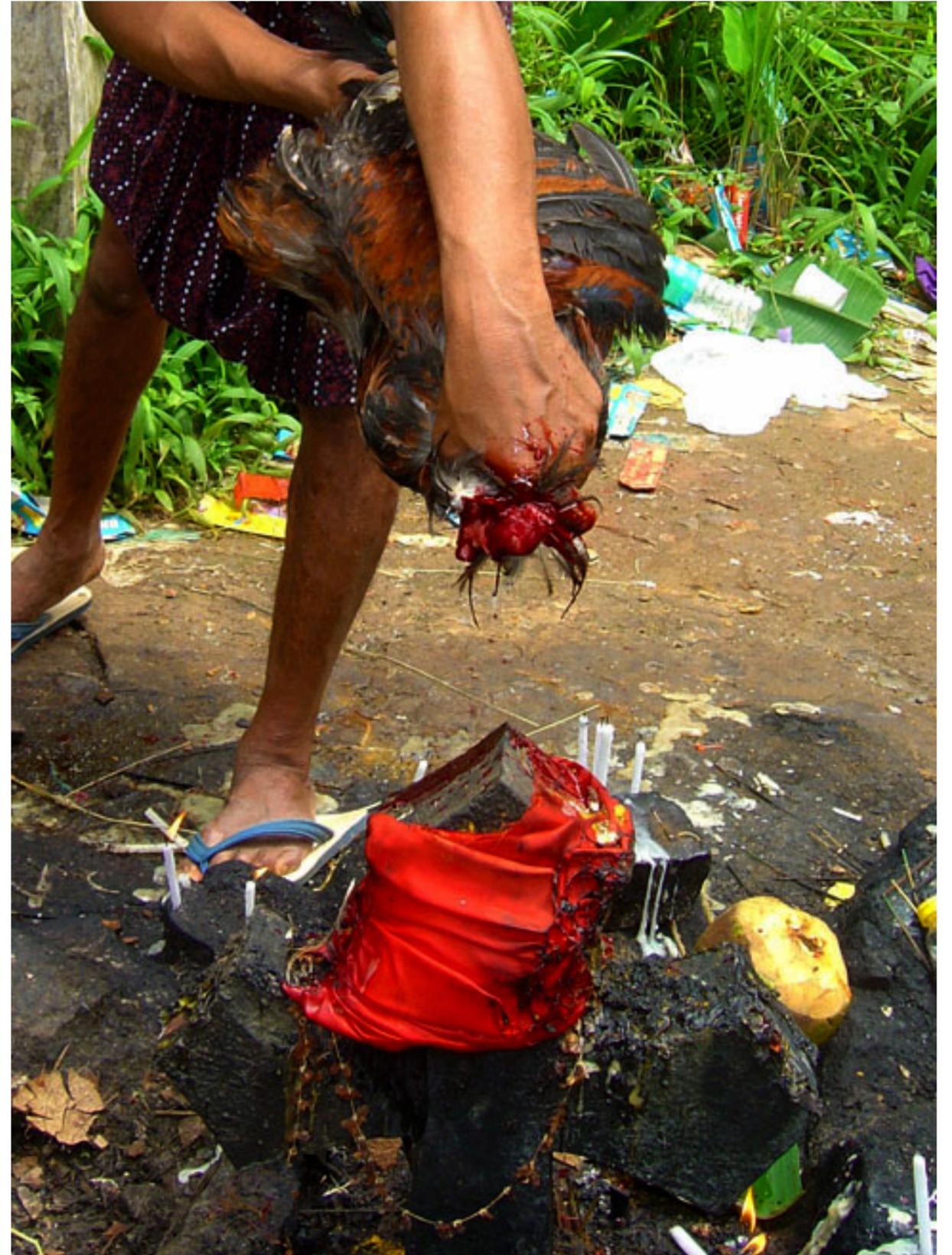


The Master of Ceremonies who resides next to the church. This is the red rooster that I bought to be sacrificed. The other ingredients were spices, local fried snacks, ladoos, a bottle of brandy, banana leaves, curry leaves, some vegetables, two loaves of sliced bread, pure ghee, candles, incense sticks, matches and a knife.

Slitting the throat of the rooster.



The severed head of the rooster was thrown into the well.



The Master of Ceremonies firmly holds the headless rooster over the ancient stone cross so that its blood may squirt onto the cross.



The Master of Ceremonies preparing the offering to Reverend Kadamattom. He cooked chicken masala and steamed rice.



The offering: Brandy, chicken masala, bananas, ladoos, sliced bread, fried local snacks, jelebis laid out on a banana leaf. I drank the brandy and ate some of the offering.

Mikyoung Cha is a graduate in Oriental Painting from Hyosung Women's University, Daegu, South Korea. She has participated in a number of group art exhibitions in South Korea and Japan. In 2016 she took up photography – the camera becoming her paint brush. This globe trotting photographer is a regular contributor to Live Encounters Magazine.



USPENSKI CATHEDRAL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MIKYOUNG CHA

Uspenski, *Uspenskin katedraali*, an Eastern Orthodox cathedral in Helsinki, Finland, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The imposing structure with its stunning interiors is home to many priceless Icons. It has been built on a hillside on the *Katajanokka* peninsula overlooking Helsinki.

There is a plaque commemorating Russian *Emperor Alexander II*, who was the sovereign of the Grand Duchy of Finland during the cathedral's construction in (1862–1868).



A



B



C



D



E



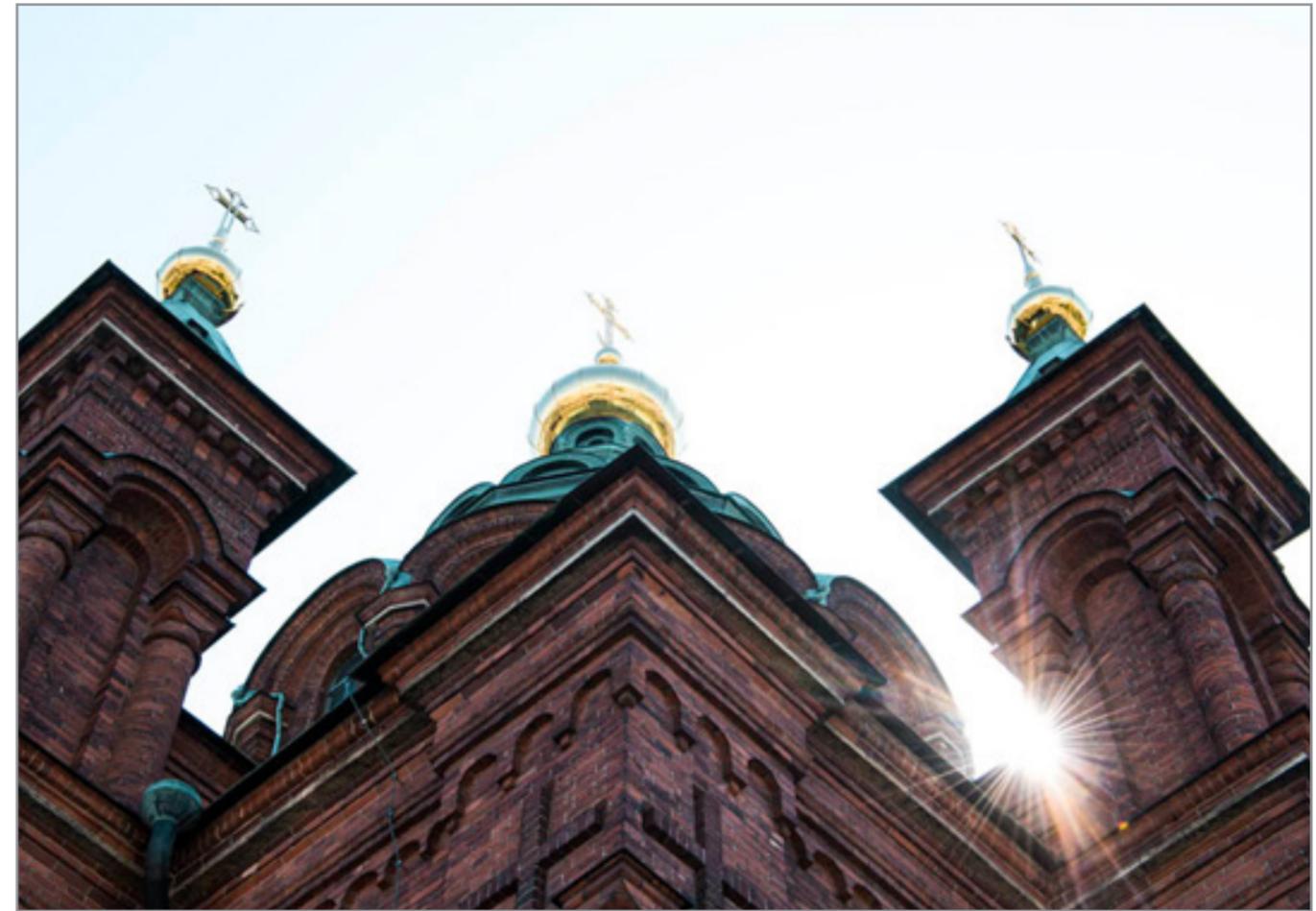
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G



H



I



WOLF COUNSEL

ROESY

Award winning singer-songwriter and artist Roesy (Alan Roe) has spent the first half of 2017 touring both Ireland and Australia. His audiences were listening to old favourites like 'Cast Your Line' which aired in early May on The Discovery Channel's Deadliest Catch and new material that he is currently writing and recording.

He is back in the painting studio again for an exhibition in December 2017 in his home town of Birr Co.Offaly, Ireland exhibiting with artists Emma and Tara Barone.

Over the past 20 years he has shared the bill with international figures such as Bert Jansch, Paul Brady, Billy Bragg, John Martyn, Joan Armatrading, Donovan, Shane MacGowan and celebrated Irish author Paul Durcan.

His art is what he calls 'eye candy' and there is a brilliance and lightness to the work portraying other worlds and fantastical creatures that would be at home in the stories of C S Lewis.

Roesy studied Fine Art and Design in Galway in 1993 but music took over his life and he followed its direction, all the while exhibiting his art in both Ireland Europe and the USA.

In 2011 he studied Graphic Design at Shillington College Melbourne and continually works as a freelance designer.

www.roesy.net



WOLF COUNSEL
2015
ACRYLIC/ADOBE PHOTOSHOP



MAD COW
2012
ADOBE PHOTOSHOP/ILLUSTRATOR



COSMIC DEER
2014
ACRYLIC/ADOBE PHOTOSHOP



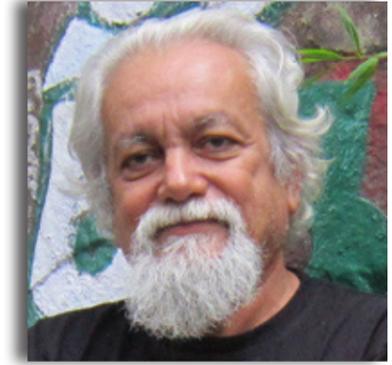
THE FOX AND DEN
2007
ACRYLIC ON BOARD



THE MIGHTY SPARROW
2005
INK ON PAPER

Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. Executive Editor of Heritage India, the International Culture Journal, a Director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy and Visiting Professor to the Dept Of English, Pune University. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures. Founding Contributor of Live Encounters Magazine (2010).

www.randhirkhare.in



MUSIC FROM THE EDGE

Folk musicians from Kutch (in Gujarat) have the odds stacked against them. Not only do most of them belong to marginal communities but they also play instruments that aren't respected any more.

- Randhir Khare

One of the few surviving music masters is **Musa Gulam Jath**, a Maldhari or cattle herder who lives on the lip of the Great Rann of Kutch. He plays the Jodia Pawa, a double flute. I remember the first time I heard him play at someone's residence in Bhuj, the district headquarters of Kutch (in Gujarat).

I was given the rare opportunity to experience the triumph of the creative spirit over the vicissitudes of injustice and misfortune.

A musician, powered by his talent and tradition, rising out of the difficulties in his personal life to play music that was inspirational.

It was both stimulating and humbling.



Family of Musa Gulam Jath © Randhir Khare

Most traditional Kutchi folk musicians are victims of humiliation, exploitation and neglect... creative fulfilment being their sole reward. Even under the Raos and other royalty, support and encouragement was extended only to those who were in favour. The others were forced to eke out a living by performing at community gatherings, festivals, and religious celebrations and on occasions in the homes of those who had specially hired their services. They had to, even in those times, supplement their earnings by working on their own land, grazing their herds and flocks, working as hired hands or developing other popular-craft skills. But integration with the Indian Union after Independence began to throw up a whole new set of demands and challenges – rapid urbanisation, the incursion of non-Kutchis into the region and increasing commercialism which affected not merely the social and economic life but also culture and entertainment were among the new pressures. Power and control that was once only enjoyed by landed families and royalty was wholly given over to a plethora of new holders, including businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats, armed forces and security personnel and a number of old and new landed families. Add to the list the long arms of international and national cultural bodies and agencies, the music, film and television industries and innumerable individuals who, in the name of culture carry away valuable recordings, after paying musicians a pittance.

The Festivals of India, which showcased the 'culture of India abroad', picked up a few musicians from Kutch, displayed them like performing fleas and then dropped them back into their homes so that they could continue to grovel for survival. It must have been a disorientating experience for many of them. After being feted in the world outside, returning to a life bereft of hope became even more difficult. Follow-up support by Government agencies for the chosen ones and others has been grossly insubstantial. Many of the new masters have been known to use their influence and public positions to make musicians perform at marriages, birthdays, official and semi-official gatherings, give them a meal and send them home without paying them even a rupee. The musicians do not complain because they innocently hold on to the hope that some day they will be able to get a favour or two in exchange for the performance. Expectedly, the favours are never forthcoming. Many of the new masters have been known to use their influence and public positions to make



Children of Musa Gulam Jath © Randhir Khare

musicians perform at marriages, birthdays, official and semi-official gatherings, give them a meal and send them home without paying them even a rupee. The musicians do not complain because they innocently hold on to the hope that some day they will be able to get a favour or two in exchange for the performance. Expectedly, the favours are never forthcoming.

The tendency to under-value traditional folk music in Kutch is growing at an appalling rate and the new masters often imagine that they are doing the musicians a favour by inviting them to perform. Like the master murli player Surath Nath who died of cold and over exposure to the inclement winter of Banni because he was forced to perform at the government sponsored arts festival to attract tourists – even though he was already very ill. No one seemed to care for the master musician's health. All they wanted was that he perform. Ironically, officialdom doesn't care a damn for the pitiful state of the Vaghdis (Surat Nath's community) a nomadic people but they wouldn't think twice to crucify one of their accomplished elders.

Of course he's just one of the many other musicians from traditional community who has got a raw deal. There's also Siddique Mitha Jath, master of the Surando, a stringed folk instrument in the shape of a peacock which originated in Sind and Baluchistan. He ended up doing a menial job in Ahmedabad. Then there's also the Borrindo maker and player who is the young potter Osmangani Kumbhar, grandson of the famed potter Buddhachacha Umar Kumbhar.

One of the few surviving music masters is Musa Gulam Jath, a Maldhari or cattle herder who lives on the lip of the Great Rann of Kutch. He plays the Jodia Pawa, a double flute. I remember the first time I heard him play at a someone's residence in Bhuj, the district headquarters of Kutch (in Gujarat). I was given the rare opportunity to experience the triumph of the creative spirit over the vicissitudes of injustice and misfortune. A musician, powered by his talent and tradition, rising out of the difficulties in his personal life to play music that was inspirational. It was both stimulating and humbling.



Family of Musa Gulam Jath © Randhir Khare

His son was in hospital, his wife seriously ill, his cattle had perished and prospects of farm labour had dwindled due to incessant drought, the roof of his house had collapsed in a storm and he had just about got himself out of a scrape with the security forces who had picked him up while he was grazing someone else's cattle on the border, suspecting him to be an 'enemy' infiltrator. I'd imagined that he'd be so weighed down that he'd hardly be in any position to even hold a conversation with us. He didn't do just that but also shared the music he made on his Jodiya Pawa.

As the notes poured out from the double flute and filled the room, I shut my eyes and wandered out into the Bhuj air and away northwards till I reached the rolling grasslands of Banni, then on to the Rann and across...below me the land was cracked, blistered, dusty and pitiless, around me the air was cool and flocks of migratory birds glided passed towards a blue horizon...I don't know how many lands I passed, how many borders, how many lives...all I know is that I was filled with the strength and wonder of those notes...when I returned, I found myself crying.

When the notes settled around us, we waited in silence for a few moments and then I stood up and left the room. The intensity in the air was more than I could handle. Musa Gulam Jat joined me sometime later. 'Have you heard anyone playing a Jodiya Pawa before this?' He asked, breaking the stillness between us.

'No.'

He began speaking as if he was setting a message out in a bottle to sea, hoping it would be picked up by someone, somewhere...

'This is my life,' he said, tapping the double flute. 'It's more precious to me than anything else in the world. It keeps me alive. Without this I'd be nothing, no one. So let me tell you about this that is so precious to me... see, one is the male and is called the Nar and the other is the female and is called Madi.



© Randhir Khare

The nar keeps the sur and the Madi plays the melody. Together they make the music of the spirit...the music of the desert, shepherds who brought this instrument from Sind when they crossed the border to India from Pakistan. That was a long time ago. In those days there were no borders and shepherds could travel with their flocks. Today, borders have divided people... sometimes I wonder, where do I belong? Whether I am that side of the border or this side, my lot will be the same. So it isn't the question of whether I'm rich or poor. I belong where my family is, my music is. There is no dignity in being a Jath. No one cares for our community and the pitiful way in which we live. You have to come and see for yourself. When there's a storm or it rains heavily, the roof over our heads is knocked down.'

And the message unravelled, about how he learnt the Jodiya Pawa from his father when he was fourteen, the years spent playing whilst he herded cattle, at fairs, on feast days, in melas... then out to perform in Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Pune, Nagpur, Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi.

It was curiosity and not appreciation that greeted him wherever he went because his instrument was an oddity, his music quaint. Neither fitted into the changing needs of his audiences. It was his performances in England, France and Germany that opened new possibilities for him. 'They may not have known all about the raags I played, but they liked the music, listened with respect. I felt I was being appreciated as a folk musician there. I was somebody.'

Those were real moments of sharing we spent together before the everydayness of survival took over again and he went away, leaving me with the message in the bottle and a night sky that was crowded with stars. In the years that followed, Musa and I became good friends and

I visited him in his makeshift home in Dayapar, near the Great Rann. The moments we shared were precious, the tea black, strong and sweet and the smell of dung hung in the air. In the home of the Master, the silences were filled with fellowship. Outside and far away, the winds came and went from the Great Rann, circling hysterically in the dusty spaces above.

© Randhir Khare

Patricia studied Visual Education and Communication at Dun Laoghaire College of Art & Design (IADT) and also holds a first class honours degree in Philosophy and Sociology from University College, Dublin. Her first book *Healing Creations: Discover your mindful self through mandala colouring and journaling* was published in September 2016 by The Collins Press. She hosts workshops on the art of mandala and meditation both in Ireland and abroad. You can see more about her work at www.healingcreations.ie



MANTRA OF THE MANDALA FOR AUGUST FRIENDSHIP BY PATRICIA FITZGERALD

This mandala was commissioned by the siblings of a wonderful friend of mine as a birthday gift. It was a joy to create and made me ponder friendship deeply. The Japanese have a word, *kenzoku*, which translated literally means “family.” This suggests an affiliation between people who have made a kindred commitment and who therefore may share a similar destiny. *Kenzoku* suggests the presence of the deepest connection of friendship, of lives lived as companions from the distant past.

Many of us have people in our lives with whom we feel the bond described by the word *kenzoku*. They may be a mother, a brother, a daughter, a cousin. Or a friend from school with whom we haven’t talked in decades. Time and space do nothing to dwindle the bond we have with these sorts of friends.

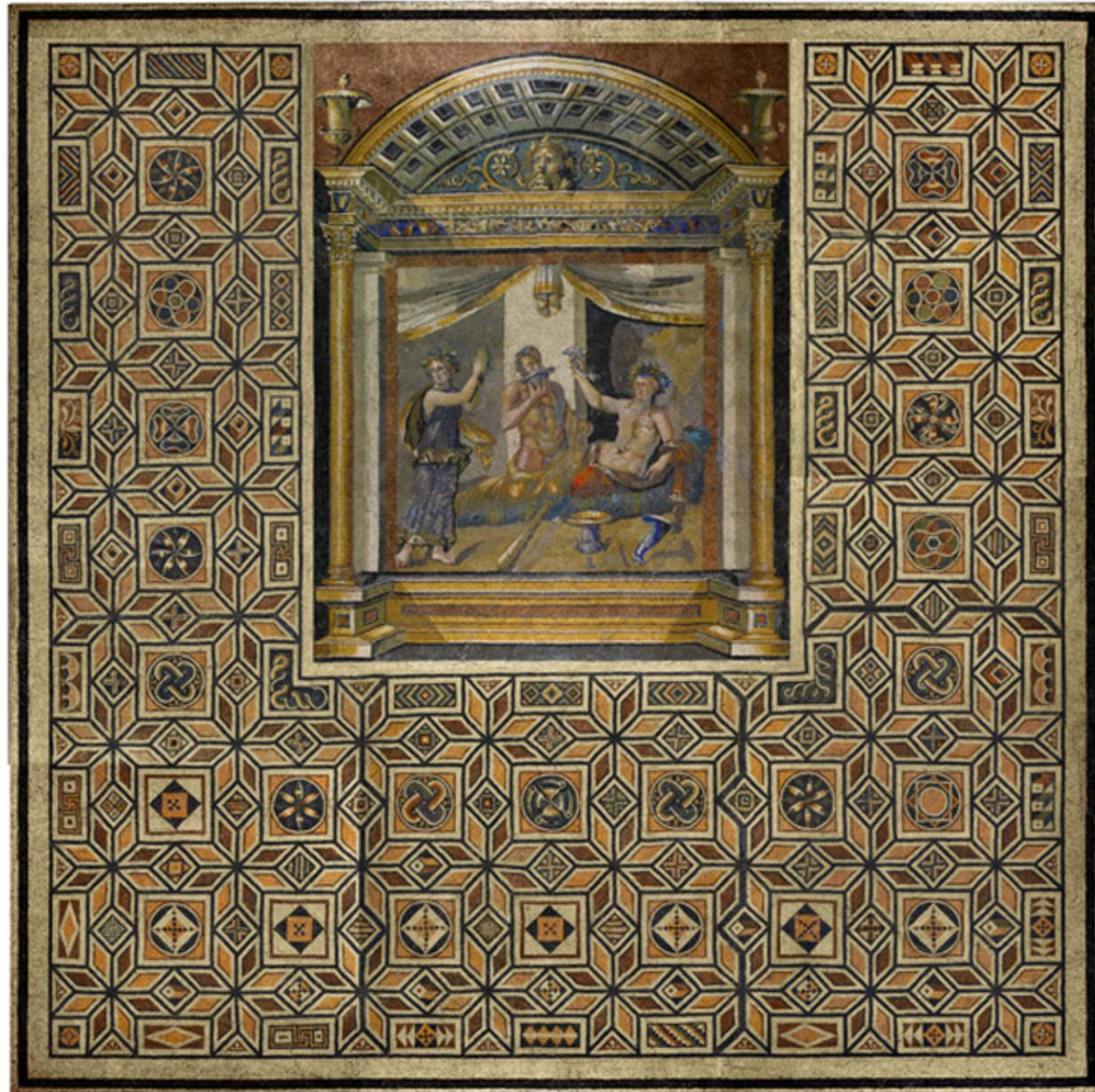
So how do we make such friends? Become a true friend yourself. As Gandhi put it: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” Be the friend to yourself that you want to have manifest in your life. We all attract people into our world whose character is a reflection of our own. You don’t have to change yourself into what you think others might find attractive. No matter what your interests are, others share them someplace. Be true to yourself. Embrace what truly interests you. You will find these connections will be drawn towards you like a magnet.

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www.facebook.com/healingcreationsbymandalafire



Friendship

www.ozlemsturkishtable.com
www.ozlemwarren.myforever.biz



Mosaic pavement: drinking contest of Herakles and Dionysos, Antioch,(Antakya),



MEVLUBI; CEVIRME PILAV

UPSIDE DOWN RICE WITH MEAT AND EGGPLANTS

I made my mother's signature dish, Mevlubi to enjoy with friends over the weekend. The recipe comes from Antakya, the Southern part of Turkey, where my roots are from. This special dish makes an appearance in every special occasion on my parent's table and I have been lucky enough to enjoy it with some of you over the years. As you can cook ahead of time, this wonderful all in one dish makes an impressive main course and you get to spend more time with your company. For maximum results, please cook on low heat, at least 2 hours before serving and let the Mevlubi rest.

Afiyet Olsun,

Ozlem

TURKEY



Chicken, Eggplant, layered over rice and topped with onions. Pics © Ozlem Warren

Serves 4 people (generously)

Ingredients:

- About 500 gr/1 1/4 lb chicken thighs or breasts or pieces of steak or lamb, flattened
- 2-3 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced as half-moon shape
- 2 small/medium eggplants (aubergines), sliced crossways
- 1 small onion, cut in half and thinly sliced
- 350 gr/12 oz/ 1 3/4 cups medium grain rice
- 900 ml/ 3 3/4 cups hot water
- Bowl of warm salted water to wash the rice
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- Sunflower oil for shallow frying
- Salt and pepper to taste

For marinating the meat:

- 15 ml/ 1 tablespoon plain yoghurt
- 15 ml / 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 5 ml /1 teaspoon cumin
- 5 ml / 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 tablespoon of red pepper paste or
- 10 ml/ 2 teaspoon tomato paste + 5 ml/ 1 teaspoon of red pepper flakes
- Salt and pepper to taste

OZLEM WARREN



Mevlubi - upside down rice with layers of sautéed eggplant, potatoes and meat. Pic © Ozlem Warren

Instructions

Marinate the meat pieces mixing all the marination ingredients above a day in advance, making sure that all meat pieces are well coated. Chicken thighs work better than the chicken breast, bring out more flavor. Cover and keep in the fridge until cooking. Slice the eggplants (aubergines) in half moon or circle shape, about 2 cm thick. If possible cut the eggplants a day in advance, lay on a tray and sprinkle salt over. Let them dry. Squeeze any water remained on them with paper towel. If you don't have time, you can slice the eggplants and put them in a bowl of salted cold water for 15 minutes. Then squeeze and dry them with paper towel. Sauté the eggplants (aubergines), potatoes, onions and the meat (all separately) in the casserole pan you will be cooking with the rice. We shall be using this very same pan to cook our dish. Do shallow frying not deep frying (make sure you have enough oil for eggplants though, since they soak oil a lot). Drain the excess oil by placing them on paper towel. You can do this phase a day in advance and keep all these in the fridge if you'd like. On the casserole pan, layer the meat pieces to cover the whole surface. Then layer the eggplant slices over the top and then the potatoes slices and the onions evenly. Soak the rice in warm salted water for 15 minutes, then drain this water and rinse the rice with cold water. Spread the rice over the potato layer evenly. Add hot water over, season with salt and pepper and cover. First start cooking on the medium heat, once it starts bubbling, keep on cooking on the low heat until the rice is cooked and all the water has been absorbed. Then put a tablespoon of butter in the middle of the rice and push down towards the middle. Add two tablespoon of hot water over the rice and cook for another 10-15 minutes on a very low heat. Once the rice is fully cooked, turn the heat off, put a paper towel over and cover with the lid tightly. The rice will keep on cooking with this steam. Make sure you cook the Mevlubi about 2 hours before you serve. That will give it a chance to rest and all the flavors blend together. 15 minutes before serving, reheat the casserole pan on a very low heat. Once it is hot, turn the casserole pan over a big serving plate or tray gently. With the moisture it has, it should come out like a cake. Non-stick pan work well, steel is good too.

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