

Narrating Individuals; Narrating Communities: Perspective on Three Indian Novels of Colonial Consciousness

J.K. NAYAK H.S. MOHAPATRA

I

The realistic novel in the West can be said to have realised since its very inception the Freudian thesis about the individual, imaged as 'a bundle of instincts', being 'counterposed' to 'a blocked fact' called society or community.¹ Thus Raymond Williams is right when he says that the central bearing of the English novel from Dickens to Lawrence has been the exploration of community, with the focus especially on how 'men and women, directly engaged, see within them or beyond them, for but more often against them, the shape of a society' (Williams, 11). The novel in India, being basically an importation from the West, can only with difficulty free itself from this built-in Western bias in favour of the enclosing and the self-enclosed individual. Given the colonial context of the genre's development in various Indian literatures, it is only natural for it to want to celebrate bourgeois individuality at the expense of the values of collectivity and community.² Yet the very dynamic of colonial encounter sometimes decrees otherwise so that the individualistic propensity and potential of the realistic novel is held in check, challenged and undermined by the indigenous pre-colonial culture, which is communitarian, rural and oral. This point is sought to be illustrated in the present paper by a reading of *Mamu* (The Maternal Uncle), a classic of Oriya fiction serialised by Fakir Mohan Senapati from 1906 to 1908 and published in book form in 1913. To highlight the achievement of this novel it is necessary to play it off against two of its interesting but incomplete *avatars*, exemplified for our purposes by H.E. Beal's *Indian Ink*, a novel written much earlier, though not earlier than *Mamu*, but published only in 1954, and Gopinath Mahanty's 1955 novel *Danapani* (Bread and Butter). These two novels are being treated as incomplete or inadequate *avatars* of *Mamu*, because, although both portray a Natabara-like, money-making, money-worshipping, upwardly mobile colonised individual, they go on to portray, unlike *Mamu*, a devitalised and a thoroughly compromised community as the happy hunting-ground of the same individual. If *Mamu* is a masterpiece,³ it is because it provides the fullest and the most complex exploration of the articulations between the individual and the community. It is the novel where the Western colonial

legacy of individualism and officialdom is contested, as it is not in the other two novels, by the reassertion of the pre-colonial values of community and orality.

Of the three novels under consideration here, *Mamu* and *Indian Ink* were written during the pre-independent, colonial period, while *Danapani* was written in the post-independent, post-colonial period. But if a major feature of post-colonial writing is 'the abrogation of the imperial centre within the text' (Ashcroft et al, 83), then the emerging post-colonial or what might be called decolonising consciousness may with confidence be stated to be represented by *Mamu* rather than by *Danapani*. *Indian Ink*, being the work of a colonial administrator, is, of course, an unabashed apology for empire. That is why, we begin our analysis in this paper with Beal's *Indian Ink* and work our way through Mahanty's *Danapani* to Senapati's *Mamu*. The fracture of chronology will hopefully clarify and demonstrate the logic of the development of post-colonial consciousness.

II

Beal's *Indian Ink* is the work of a member of the colonial ruling elite having for its subject matter the rise to power and influence of a young upper caste Oriya from a village in the Balasore District of Orissa. The novel is interesting as a manifestation of the colonial assumptions and attitudes of the author who thoroughly identifies with the imperial centre. Thus it is of a piece with other such texts produced by the representatives of the imperial power, which inevitably privilege the centre, 'despite their detailed reportage of landscape, custom, and language' (Ashcroft et al, 5). 'It was a great day in the life of Krupasindhu Mahanty when he spoke with the Collector Sahib face to face for the first time' (1). This is how the first sentence which opens *Indian Ink* seems to instal the privileging norm securely at the centre of the novel. We are introduced to the world of bureaucracy with its reified and dehumanised ethos as epitomised in the relationship between the collector and the clerk. In the first two chapters of the novel suggestions abound of a momentous change having occurred in the life of Krupasindhu Mahanty when he exchanges his open-air and carefree life in the village for the servile life of a clerk in the colonial town.

The change is from a pastoral, largely oral world to a world of bureaucracy and writing, and, therefore, from variety and circularity to uniformity and linearity. Now, as Sumit Sarcar points out, 'regular hours of work throughout the year in offices must have contrasted sharply with the seasonal variation in labour-tempo normal to village life' (1550). But there is no hint in the novel about the abhorrent and intolerable nature of 'chakri' with its 'connotation of imperial cash nexus and authority' (1550), especially when it contrasts so sharply with 'the years of childhood passed happily in the peaceful village, where life was constantly diversified by the succession of seasons, crops, hopes, fears, and varying activities' (Beal, 7). If there is no

problematization of this shift from a pre-colonial to a colonial culture, it is because the latter represents the privileging norm. It is novelistically expressed in the form of the story of the social climber. Thus it comes about that the day Krupasindhu spoke to one of the 'heavenborns' face to face is such an important day in his life. Krupasindhu has not looked back since that day, having gone on to acquire more wealth and power with each passing day. It is interesting the way in which the expression 'to make money' runs like a refrain throughout the novel. On a rough count this particular expression and variants of this have been used more than twenty-five times in a novel of 249 pages; it also figures in the chapter heading of one of the early chapters entitled 'Krupa Learns to Make Money - His Second Marriage'.

Now money-making, as Marx has pointedly remarked, initiates the process of decomposition of community, that process whereby, to quote him, 'all that is solid melts into the air' (124). Money leads to the dissolution of all bonds among men by giving rise to a Darwinian competition for its acquisition. The individual discovers through money a new form of mastery, a new way of manipulating other human beings who can now be bought and sold. Natabara of *Mamu*, who is the prototype for both Krupasindhu in *Indian Ink* and Balidatta in *Danapani*, is the first to express his love of the filthy lucre, the first fictional character in Oriya literature to insist on the cash-nexus.

Money for them is the signifier of an atomised social fabric, and to justify the making of money is to justify individualism at the expense of community. Krupasindhu embraces this individualistic ethic and sets himself aggressively on the path towards money-making. His first act of taking money from others 'by cunning' shows him as sponging on his own village community, although this self-regarding act has been masked by the narrator's innocuous manner of reporting it. Since this is the passage which sets the tone and the tenor of the novel, it deserves to be quoted at some length. The passage clearly shows the pliability of the community in the hands of the individual who, as a functionary in the colonial bureaucratic set up, speaks an alien language.

Then they elected Krupasindhu, but he stood up in the meeting – a thing he had never dared do before – and protested.

'Neighbours', he said, 'I have recently been appointed a clerk in the office of the Magistrate-Collector, and it will ill become me, as a Government Servant, to take a leading part in fictitious litigation. And if the Sahib finds out that I filed a false case only to give my neighbours something to bet on, he will certainly dismiss me from the service, and that will be a disgrace to the whole village. Therefore I beg you to excuse me.'

Then Madhusudan stood up and supported his son. 'My son has been fortunate to secure an appointment in the service of Government, and he will rise to be a great man and he will be a credit to the village. But if he gets the name of being a litigant and a promoter of false cases

his career will be spoilt from the beginning.'

'Who is Krupasindhu,' said one of the villagers, 'that he should break the custom of the village?'

Then Krupasindhu stood up again.

'Neighbours,' he said, 'if you will let me off this time I will do one thing for you. I will take the complainants to the best lawyers in the town and see that their petitions are properly written, and I will do it better than any of the touts, and I will charge you nothing for it.'

When Krupasindhu went back to Balasore the complainants and the witnesses went with him. And he bade them wait in an orchard on the outskirts of the town while he went in search of the lawyers. He went to the mukhtarkhana, where mukhtars sit who practise in the magistrates' courts, and told the mukhtars that he had brought a complainant and a counter-complainant. And he sold the complainant to the highest bidder and the counter-complainant to the next highest bidder. Then he went back to the orchard and collected the complainants together with the witnesses and took and delivered them to the lawyers to whom he had sold them.

And Krupasindhu was very pleased because he had made some money for the first time. And indeed, he was glad of the money, because being newly appointed a member of the permanent establishment, his first month's pay was the customary perquisite of the head clerk. (31-32)

The passage not only highlights Krupasindhu's ability to make money by browbeating people; it also represents his refusal to participate in the customs, rituals and conventions of his community. The village community is cowed down because it finds the language of the colonial bureaucracy incomprehensible and Krupasindhu's grasp of this idiom daunting.

Community is imaged in *Indian Ink* as compromising and vulnerable; it does not offer any resistance to the wily, selfish individual. The point of course is that this sort of representation is itself the construct of a colonial discourse. Krupasindhu, with his fawning on his English masters and his massing and blackening of his own community, Krupasindhu with his philistine contempt for politics, is the supreme exemplar of the colonised native who regards his coloniser as a role model. Beal's *Indian Ink* is after all constructed around the idea of the bureaucratic as the vanishing point of the political. Most novels about bureaucracy reflect this apoliticism. Even a so-called 'angry' post-colonial novel like Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August: An Indian Story* (1988), featuring an unconventional bureaucrat, shows this in its preference for aesthetics and junk over politics.⁴

Krupasindhu then is the construct of a colonial discourse. This would seem to be amply illustrated by the casting of Krupa in the role of a servile anglophile, by the novel's charting of Krupa's worldly progress along a path strewn, as the blurb puts it, 'with rewarding "services" to the English Sahibs

and highly profitable "acts of kindness" to worthwhile, that is, rich fellow-Indians.' It is this discourse which requires that Krupa be posited as the authentic voice of the community which he exploits so that dissident and non-canonical voices represented by nationalism and the freedom struggle may be shown as inauthentic and marginal. This is brought home to us in the chapter where Krupa, acting as a government informer, reports the headmaster of a school, teaching 'boys to be patriotic and to desire emancipation from foreign rule' (171), for disloyalty, because, as he reasons, it is 'not right to teach boys to be disloyal to those whose salt they eat' (171). It is actually horrible in its revelation of the way in which the colonial discourse sets up a member of the converted species of the native community as a kind of buffer or screen between the rulers and the ruled and gives them lessons in treachery. This discourse rewards Krupasindhu for his loyalty to the Government ('Sir, it is not the way of us Oriyas to be against the Government' [198]), by conferring upon him the title of Rai Sahib. It can even condescend to approve of Krupa's facility with the English language, the most prized ideal, because the most crucial marker of anglicisation. But it is pre-eminently a discourse which grants citizenship by withdrawing subjecthood.

Thus Krupa must always remain a humble, despicable and lowly native, a member of 'the less sophisticated races' (Beal, 202) to whose quarters the burden of 'living' can be transferred so that the masters can get on with their 'lives'. He must not be allowed to cross the colour line, and he can be quickly put in his place for the slightest presumption of behaving in a manner which the Sahibs do not approve of. The scene where Krupa gets told off by the Assistant Magistrate for arousing his concupiscence and for having succeeded in doing it is indeed revealing:

'And what do I pay you?'

The young Sahib longed to kick him, but he had resolved to yield to the temptation, and he meant to stick to his resolution. (112)

So Krupasindhu is acceptable only insofar as he accepts the terms of the dominant discourse and abides by its unspoken edict to 'be law-abiding and loyal to Sri Bharateshwar, and to hate foreigners (especially Bengalis), but to love their own countrymen, and to love above all things the holy land of Utkal' (249). Retired and seated on the bank of the Old Twister,⁵ he passes this teaching to the future generation of his village. The image of integration on which the novel closes is really phoney if one remembers the decomposing principle that is secreted at its centre in the form of the individual, who begins as a comprador but goes on to assume the role of a bureaucratic, professional and tenure-holding collaborator.

III

Mahanty's *Danapani* in many ways reads like an Oriya version of *Indian Ink*. In place of Krupasindhu Mahanty we have Balidatta Das. In place of the government office there is the business firm of a private company, but managed all the same by the British. And the novel features the same unhindered and speedy rise of Balidatta from the position of a clerk to that of an officer. The setting of *Danapani* is a nondescript provincial town in the early 1950s in Orissa. Like Krupasindhu, Balidatta moves from the village to the town, but, unlike him, he does not return to the village at the close of the novel. There is a different kind of homecoming for him, though: we see him returning at the end as an officer to the same provincial town from where he had kicked off as a clerk a few years before. As an officer, however, his life seems to have suffered a drastic reduction with his domestic space rudely invaded by the office: 'This is a factory, life keeps away from it' (268). This indeed is the pointer to a fundamental difference between the vision of *Indian Ink* and the vision of *Danapani*. The latter novel savagely lampoons the social climbing tendency exhibited by the lower middle class office-goer. It concentrates on the loss of human dignity which the process involves. The short stature of the protagonist, of which he is always painfully aware, is in a sense a metaphor in the novel for his loss of dignity as a human being, his diminished self. *Danapani* with its sharp and sensitive registration of the world of 'chakri' is the supreme exemplar of what Sumit Sarkar has called 'Kalyug literature' (1550), which can of course be said to have been initiated by Senapati's *Mamu* with its portrayal in the person of Natabara of 'the goal-oriented instrumental rationality of the adult male' (Sarkar, 1548). It is in *Danapani*, however, that the world of 'chakri', the enclosed space of an office building, becomes 'a "chronotype" of alienated time and space, Kalyug's heart of darkness', the principal format, as Sarkar puts it, 'through which awareness of subjection spread among colonial middle class males' (1550). Thus it is elegiac in tone and structure, and not triumphalistic as *Indian Ink* is. But this is not to say that it provides the decolonising perspective which is conspicuous by its absence in *Indian Ink*.⁶

Danapani is a more poignant study in the colonial mentality bred by the English-inspired bureaucratic institutions. The opening of the novel demonstrates this graphically, more graphically than the opening of *Indian Ink* in its disclosure of self-induced submission.

Balidatta is walking briskly along the labyrinthine path, leading to the pig keepers' colony. With him is a carrier. He is in need of pig's poo, but not for himself, for the bungalow of the Sahib.

Mem Sahib said, "Gardener, if you feed these rose plants with pig's poo, you will have really large-sized roses. Just as Canya needs horse's dung, rose needs pig's poo. This apart, they both need plenty of water."

Balidatta is no gardener: he is a young employee of a private business concern.

He had overheard Memsahib's admonition to the gardener while returning from office to his house via the Eden of the Sahib. The time then was 12 noon. He swore then and there, "Pig's poo needed. I shall have it brought to one's heart's content. I am on my way now."

Memsahib had only smiled. (1)

Balidatta is a citizen of free India, not a colonised native like Krupasindhu. There is no 'Shri Bharateshwar' for him to kowtow to. Yet, having internalised the colonial mindset, Balidatta is the epitome of that oxymoron Eagleton has suggestively termed 'free bondage' (55). The point about the internalisation of the colonial psychology is important. The British may have left India, but they have left behind their elaborately conceived pyramidal structures of power as instruments of gentrification, which, coupled with the English notion of gentility and class, becomes an unattainable but always to be striven for ideal. Thus Balidatta is a believer in the cult of progress. He wants to make it to the top at any cost. The way has been shown by the conquering master race:

Memsahib is like a picture. She comes and goes like a picture. A trip to summer resorts like Ooty or Darjeeling during the hot months and shuttling between Bombay and Calcutta during the cold months. Flies in like a seasonal migratory bird, and flies away alone.

Their two children live in England. The old father lives in the countryside, where he rears sheep and catches fish by angling during leisure hours.

One brother has migrated to Africa, where he farms.

One sister is also there, according to the butler. Earlier she used to be a crooner in Germany. Now she happens to be the wife of a missionary in Hong Kong. Theirs is indeed a conquering world.

They have made the whole world their home. (38)

In the entire range of Oriya fiction there is no better example of the appropriation and internalisation of the privileging norm, the discourse of the coloniser.

Balidatta, we repeat, is not the construct of a colonial discourse, unlike Krupasindhu. The latter, as we have shown, exists as the result of a signifying practice which marks the native out as the white man's self-consolidating other. But Balidatta is the self-confessed subordinate. He is presented throughout the narrative as desiring subjection. Running errands for the superiors in the office, genuflecting before them inside and outside of the office, and even urging his wife to bestow sexual favours on the lecherous among them are what he sees as his particular province as a subordinate. Take, for instance, the scandalous episode early on in the novel where the

Sahib has a fall from his horse near Balidatta's house and Balidatta seizes hold of the opportunity to insinuate himself into the Sahib's favour.

A small procession in progress now. The Sahib in the front and the diminutive Balidatta, keeping respectful distance, bringing up the rear. He smiles a smile of triumph, looking at people, assembled. He knows this to be a rare stroke of luck, the Sahib's fall and his rise. (9)

But this rise is possible only through flattery. Balidatta explains this language of bureaucracy to his colleague, Banu, who is perennially prone to catching hold of the wrong end of the stick:

Brother Banu, do you want to read a book? The best book is 'How to Win Friends,' a study in how to keep your superior officers in good humour. The way is to say yes to whatever they say. Yes Sir, what you're saying is absolutely correct, who can speak more wisely than you? It is all your will and pleasure. Meaning in everything you have to say Sir, you are doing, you are thinking, not me. 'I' has no place in this relationship (71)

Thus the impersonal bureaucratic code is legitimised in the novel by being posed as an existential fact, although the character is subjected to devastating criticism on the part of the narrator.

Danapani presents a demoralised individual and a devitalised community. The only reality in this world is the office, and the only language here is the officialese. The pre-colonial moment, comprising non-alienated existence in a possible rural setting, flashes only intermittently in the protagonist's mind, as in the minds of other pushers of this world, when the colonial, bureaucratic world they have fashioned becomes something of a claustrophobic trap. But there is no way out. The novel ends on this note of no exit: "Bearer - 'Yes Sir' 'Call the Steno quickly.' This is fine; he is the master in this world. This is a factory, life keeps away from it" (268). The burden of analysis falls entirely on the narrator, although it must be said that he does a superb job of analysing and exposing the social aspirations of lower-middle-class clerical life.

IV

Both H.E. Beal and Gopinath Mahanty can be said to be in Senapati's debt for the latter's creation in *Mamu* of the first modern, rapacious individual who will not be contained within the bounds and the bonds of the community. This individual, as Senapati makes abundantly clear in the novel, is the product of a property-holding mercenary culture being imported into Orissa by the British in the mid nineteenth century. Money-craving, English-speaking, urban-dwelling and self-regarding, such an individual is an

antithesis to the traditional culture of Orissa which is agrarian, communal and oral. As a cross-cultural parallel, we can think of the rapacious and the transgressive James Carker of Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848). The whole novel is doing nothing if not enacting the drama of emergence of the individual through a process involving the decomposition of community in the colonial world. Such is Senapati's imaginative grasp that his vision ranges in the novel from the lowest reaches of community represented by the family and the village commune to its highest reaches represented by the state and the nation. The distinctive feature of *Mamu*, however, is that it is as much concerned with destruction as with resistance and contestation. By mobilising the native resources of community and orality against the Western legacy of individualism and officialdom, *Mamu* provides a clue to the recovery of our cultural past, our commonality, which is brilliantly defined by S.P. Mohanty as 'the imbrication of our various pasts and presents, the ineluctable relationships of shared and contested meanings, values, material resources' (13).

The first few chapters of the novel dramatise the break-up of the joint family system and the severance from rural roots of people under the impact of Western-directed urbanisation. This is typified by the changing fortunes of the family of Dasarathi Das. Although distanced from their rural homestead, they are not yet an uprooted family. The process of uprooting and the shattering of kinship obligations begins in the second generation when the younger son, Natabara, is employed as a Najir in the Cuttack Collectorate. It is this employment which changes his perspective on life. He is consumed by materialistic cravings. Everything for him is subordinated to money. Human beings are reduced in his eyes to the status of mere objects, mere means to the end of earning money. The only relationship he recognises is an instrumental one. This notion of relationship is fostered by a particular social structure based on the utilitarian view of society as being composed of a loose aggregate of atomised individuals who are ceaselessly pursuing their own pleasures. This structure is further complicated by the colonial context of nineteenth-century Orissa so that the pursuers of pleasure turn out to be the English bureaucrats and administrators and their native stooges in the office with the vast masses of Indian people simply providing for their pleasures. It is a feudal world in the process of being commodised by the arrival of money.

Natabara functions and flourishes in just such a world. In a sense Senapati's real achievement is to have shown the state of commodified consciousness as it corresponds to this commodised, money-centred society:

The Najir couple are living very happily in Cuttack. There seems to be considerable attachment between the two of them. There is no dearth of objects of enjoyment. . . . You may, if you so like, give this mutual love the name of conjugal love. Such strong bond is found to be present not only between a man and a woman, but also between two

men or even two women. . . . A friend is one who helps us procure what we want and an enemy, on the contrary, is one who gets in the way of our fulfilment of our wants. . . . It is because various objects, objects which are essential for the worldly man, can't be obtained without the mutual co-operation of man and woman. A relationship of convenience results from this. . . .

Man is basically a seeker after pleasure. . . . Anybody who is an accessory to pleasure is a friend.

Natabara babu believes that earning is the sole purpose of human life. Money it is which makes the world move. Money is the only means of securing happiness. He has tremendous faith in the astrological reading of Srinayaka. Who after all will distrust a tested and proven object? The bride is auspicious – money, power and pleasure have started pouring in ever since she stepped into the house. Najir babu is, therefore, enamoured of his wife. (41)

In this remarkable passage Senapati is addressing the problem of commodification of human relationships by showing the transformation of a human function into a commodity, into an abstract item of exchange. Although couched in universalist language, it is actually the registration of a specific crisis afflicting Oriya society under the impact of alien rule. What this new utilitarian dispensation has put paid to is the idea of love as mutual caring and sharing as exemplified for Senapati by the conjugal love between Pratap Uditmalla and Chandamani, which is movingly described in Sanskritised diction in Chapter 12. The pattern of contrast and discrimination used by Senapati throughout makes us aware that if the relationship between Pratap and Chandamani is based on love, then the relationship between Natabara and Chitrakala is based on lust. Their illicit relationship is a pointer to Natabara's essentially masculine and individualistic mode of orientation to his world.

It is appropriate, therefore, that Natabara should be the chief architect of the disintegration, first of all, of his own family, and then of the family of his own sister, Chandamani, which was the centre of a flourishing community. It is in the role of an arch exploiter of community that Senapati casts him. Natabara is surely the first powerful study in 'possessive individualism' in Oriya fiction. By making this acquisitive individualism squarely responsible for the loss of those values of collectivity and solidarity which had held the agrarian communities of Orissa together for ages, Senapati presents it as an unmitigated and unredeemable evil. The ultimate futility of such individualism is made manifest through the portrayal of Natabara's childlessness. The scene in *Mamu* which cuts every Oriya heart to the quick is surely one where Natabara, the agent of rootless individualism, joins forces against his aunt Saraswati Dei, known in the novel as Dhaima, the voice of age-old tradition and custom (Chapter 15: 'The Najir Couple's Journey to Cuttack'). The real flavour of the exchange between them can

only be had by reading the Oriya original. When Dhaima chastises Nata for having given expression to the unholy wish of breaking kinship ties, the latter retorts back sharply, 'Oh! my dear, it is a fact. If they can scold her so nastily in my presence, what mustn't they be doing behind my back? Who are you and what sacred woods are you from that you think you can get away with scolding my darling wife? You have yourself taken shelter in somebody's house and you have the cheek to give me advice' (36). In the long trek from *Mamu* to *Maya Miriga* (Mirage) the point of emotional interest in Oriya life has tended to be concentrated in the moment which marks the triumph of rootless individualism over the immemorial tradition.⁷

Natabara, like Krupasindhu of *Indian Ink*, goes on the rampage through the greater part of the novel, bullying people and extorting money from the tenants of his sister's estate. Senapati concentrates on one particular instance of his rapacity in order to highlight the enormity of Natabar's evil. This concerns Natabara's gross violation of the ethic of family as shown by his pitiless exploitation of his nephew, Naru Babu. The significance of the novel's title is brought home to us here. The relationship between the uncle and the nephew is the sweetest relationship imaginable in Indian culture. The maternal uncle is for ever generous and warm; he is always giving, always caring. If the young nephew can completely confide in anybody, it is the uncle. Yet we know from our mythology that uncle Kamsa was after his nephew Srikrishna's blood. Senapati portrays in his novel a Kamsa-like uncle who is out to grab everything belonging to his nephews. Thus there is the moving depiction in *Mamu* of the abdication of responsibility on the part of those patriarchs to whom the care of the young and the weak in society is entrusted. This is the Dickensian angle of Senapati, the presentation of an orphaned society.

In keeping with the novel's commitment to community values it is fitting that Natabara should be punished for his crime. The structure of *Mamu* is one of crime and punishment. Natabara is punished at the end. He ends up repentant and loses his mind in the court room. It is this structure which ultimately differentiates *Mamu* from both *Indian Ink* and *Danapani*. The point, of course, is that, although ostensibly presented as the implacable operation of a moral scheme, Natabara's fall is the handiwork, as we have it in the novel, of a vast groundswell of anger and discontent felt by the tenants of Naripur whom he has set out to dispossess. Senapati handles the situation with remarkable dexterity. From the very outset he orchestrates the events of his narrative in such a way as to use the communal sites of the village as a sounding board for plumbing the depths of new structures of feeling. Thus in Chapter 15 the action of the splinter group – the Najir couple – is the focus of considerable analysis, comment and caricature involving all the dynamics of oral transmission. Here is a brilliant example:

At the time of the morning ablutions the following day the eldest daughter-in-law of the Karana family, Makra's mother, Champi apa,

Saria, Gelhei, Chemi's niece, Kausuli, Pari and the wives, daughters and women of the village were engaged in animated conversation on the bathing ghat of the tank situated at the heart of the village

Gelhei was listening to everything being said, as she was brushing her teeth with a twig. She scraped her tongue, rinsed her mouth, spat out the water and began:

Well-born and selfish my daughter-in-law, and she's moon-faced.

Laps up three pots of gruel thrice a day, but still remains dry-faced.

Gelhei goes on and on in this jocular vein through the rest of the chapter, thus articulating through parodic songs the community's ringing denunciation of Natabara's individualistic and materialistic cravings.

But who is Gelhei? We are suddenly reminded of a whole chapter being devoted to this nondescript character earlier on in the novel. From the rationale proposed by the author for introducing such a character who appears only in three chapters, namely in 9, 10 and 12 and that too marginally, it would seem that she belongs to the category of what Lukacs calls 'maintaining individuals' (176). A little reflection, however, alerts us to the fact that Gelhei cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be described as an individual, maintaining or sustaining. Gelhei, like Dhaima, is the embodied voice of the community. It is the community which speaks through her as through a whole host of minor characters who lend density to the novel and help illumine important historical forces. A very significant point about *Mamu* suggests itself here. In the novel Natabara's ambition is pitted against the subtle, indestructible integrity of a community, a network of relationships with a life of their own. The focus of the narrative shifts from time to time to illuminate forces other than Natabara's consuming passion for power. We have here the sense of a dense, crowded community resisting, evaluating an individual, not a narrative obsessively concerned with tracing his progress.

Mention may be made here of two minor characters, Karuna, the servant, and Haribol, the barber. Both are loyal to the family of Naru babu, whose salt they have eaten – an altogether different concept to the interpretation Krupasindhu puts upon salt-eating – and they do their utmost to save the family honour. Karuna stays with Naru babu like the latter's shadow throughout the period of his residence at Cuttack. Haribol, the barber, displays the same intense loyalty to the family which has sustained him. It is worth pointing out at this stage that Pratap Uditmalla, in incarnating the ideal of local paternal care, is opposed in the novel to Natabara Das who is the epitome of irresponsible, acquisitive individualism. The plan of the novel, with its contrasting chapters, is designed to reflect the clash of two value systems. For instance, the description of the family of Dasarathi Das in the opening chapter is contrasted with the description of dynasty of Uttararay in the second chapter. Similarly, Chapters 11, 13, 15, and 17, describing Natabara's marriage, his materialism, his individualism and his

utilitarianism respectively are combated single-handed by Chapter 12, depicting Pratap Uditmalla's glorious reign and his benign influence and his idealism.

If Senapati privileges a paternalistic dispensation over a mercenary one, it is because the former is the locus of community, whereas the latter is the source of predatory individualism. This is why Pratap Uditmalla is also the offered alternative in the novel to the English administrators like Mr. Dawson and Mr. Jones. This point has been tellingly and pointedly made by Boulton:

Phakirmohana's novels contrast aristocrats like the Bagha Simhas of Ratanpur in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha*, Pratap Udit Malla in *Mamu* and Vaisnava Carana Mahapatra in *Prayascitta* with upstarts like Mangaraja in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha*, Natabara Dasa in *Mamu* and Sankarsana Mahanti in *Prayascitta*. The aristocrats embodied the values of the old regime: the upstarts the materialism of British rule.' (88)

Boulton has, however, got it all wrong when he goes on to comment that Senapati was basically a glorifier of India's feudal past and that, knowing that it was politically impossible to return to the old system, he made a desperate rearguard attempt to 'achieve it only in fiction' (89). Fakirmohan's subversion of alienated and uprooted consciousness, of arid cerebration in Chapter 25 ("The Assembly of Pundits") pleads against such a simplistic assumption. Boulton's comment betrays a profound misunderstanding of the politics of Senapati's fiction, and generally of the fictional as the political. No wonder, therefore, that he cannot appreciate the idealisation of India's feudal past in Senapati's fiction as a strategic intervention in the East-West dialogue. Natabara's machinations are ultimately foiled by the door-to-door campaign launched by Haribol, the barber, against the former's exploitative practices: 'Maybe some uninformed, ignorant and stupid people would have come, but Haribol, the barber, did make a round of every house in the village and persuaded them not to come' (158). This certainly marks the moment in the novel of the political mobilisation of communal and social forces.

We may end this analysis by remarking that there is a comic parallel to this triumph of the communal over the individualistic forces at the level of the sub-plot involving the gulling of Raghava Mahanty, the brother-in-law of Natabara and another uncle figure in the novel. Raghava typifies the pathetic and ludicrous plight of the country rustic being seduced and laid waste by urban glitter. Senapati is at his scathing and humorous best in narrating the incident of Raghava being duped in Chapter 57 entitled 'Bungalow Purchase,' where he walks into the trap laid for him by the wily Prabhu Dayal Bhagat and the clever Chitrakala. It is a measure of irony in the novel that it is Raghava who becomes the instrument of Natabara's punishment when he steals, at the behest of Prabhu Dayal, the government money lying in Natabara's custody. This chapter is, on one level, an eloquent

commentary on the town's easy victory over the village. Conversely, however, it makes us aware of the essential hollowness and rootlessness of pro-Western urban and materialistic culture. The humbling of Natabara in the novel is the final clinching evidence of the triumph of the clock-ridden official world created by colonialism. The office in the colonial setup, as Sarcar pointedly observes, 'was one obvious, highly visible site of racial discrimination, manifested in salary differentials and everyday behaviour of the white bosses' (1550). There is a graphic registration of this oppressive and stifling world of colonial bureaucracy in *Mamu* where Mr. Jones reigns supreme, ordering everybody, Natabara included, about. Incidentally, Natabara's greatest dream is to be able to quit this lowly and despicable 'chakri' on being admitted into the landed gentry through his possession of the Naripur estate. Senapati can, therefore, confidently offer the pre-colonial communal-rural-oral tradition of Orissa as the only valid basis for a happy society, imaged as 'Rama Rajya' (27) in Chapter 12, where use value will prevail over exchange value, and hence, communitarian values over individualism.⁸

V

Of all the three novels under discussion in the present paper, it can be said in closing that they deal with the social world of lower-level bureaucracy, its social aspirations. Senapati's *Mamu* may be said to be dramatising the rise and fall of a clerk, while Beal's *Indian Ink* and Mahanty's *Danapani* depict the rise of a clerk. Thus the three novels provide a fascinating contrast between the perspectives of the colonised and the coloniser. Senapati's perspective on his clerk-protagonist involves a moral judgement, deriving from his communal vision. Beal seems to endorse, applaud his clerk-protagonist's drive to power as long as it does not challenge the political power base of the coloniser. Again, as a European, Beal seems to organise his novel around the aggressive individualism of his protagonist. Mahanty in his novel presents the same consuming appetite for status and position on the part of his petty bourgeois protagonist, but, of course, he does not endorse it. His largely elegiac and self-deprecatory treatment is ultimately self-defeating insofar as it presents the colonial condition as an inescapable and ineluctable *condition humaine*. Moreover, in both Beal and Mahanty community appears as a card-board background; other characters exist as occasions for their protagonists to define and assert themselves. In this context it is salutary to think of an earlier novel, and, a regional language novel at that, which, by putting the individual protagonist to the test of the community, and which, by reading the community-individual transactions under the aegis of the colonial encounter, offers itself as a paradigm for what a post-colonial or decolonising perspective might look like in fiction.⁹ And it also provides, to return to the terms with which we opened this analysis, a refreshing alternative by positing a fictional world where a sense of community is never

abandoned, as in the case of the typical Western novel of realism, in favour of the solitary individual working out his private destiny in splendid isolation.

NOTES

1. Williams, 1979, 334. If we have appropriated the Freudian psychoanalytic vocabulary, as used by Williams, and deployed it here in the service of our notion of the rise of a new kind of property-owning individual, it is because we have taken the cue from Williams in treating the Freudian theory as stemming from classical bourgeois theory. As Williams says, 'The whole conception of the social order as a merely negative system of constraints and inhibitions belongs to the most classical bourgeois theory, to which I am naturally very hostile' (333).
2. Dasgupta, 1. That the rise of the novel in India can be partly explained in terms of the impact of the Western realistic novel on the consciousness of Indian authors is clear from Dasgupta's discussion of the contemporary reader's perception of Bankim Chandra's *Durgeshnandini*. To quote her, 'At the time of its publication, *Durgeshnandini* (1865) was not regarded as the first novel or the first "upanyas" as the word is known in Bengali, but as the first novel of a particular kind, one that was later identified as the novel proper.' In this construction, as Dasgupta further points out, 'originality is accorded an unprecedented value by the bourgeois individual and so the novel reflects bourgeois individuality.'
3. Mohanty, 1972, 83. One of the experienced and seasoned authors of Orissa has this to say about *Mamu*: 'Every department of the novel, *Mamu*, is as well conceived as it is well constructed. Therefore, in the opinion of many, *Mamu* is Fakir Mohan's masterpiece.'
4. Mahapatra, 314.
5. The river, Budha Balanga, which flows through the district of Balasore, has been translated as the Old Twister. When the other rivers of the state such as Mahanadi, Subarnarekha and Katjuri have been transliterated, this translation of the river with which the hero's childhood is intimately associated is bound to appear intriguing. Again why is the masculine form used? One plausible explanation that suggests itself is that the English translation is meant to strip it of local colour, and, thereby, to allow it to be appropriated by the alien power. As such the translation is of a piece with the attempt of the colonial administration to rename, to desexualise, and, thereby, to domesticate and fully possess their conquered territory. It is an aspect of what Greenblatt refers to as 'linguistic colonialism.' For the expanding English power, concerned with establishing cultural hegemony, as Greenblatt writes, 'the New World is a vast, rich field for the plantation of the English language' (561).
6. Mahapatra, 1992, 30-32. We may note here that Mahapatra's otherwise fine and sensitive reading of *Danapani* suffers on account of the critic's tendency to universalise the situation of Balidatta, to purge it of its colonial implications. Balidatta's single-minded obsession with status is not the struggle of Everyman to advance himself socially: it is the colonised subject's futile search for coherence in a bureaucratised world. Mahapatra should be given credit, however, for his perceptive analysis of Sarojini, and especially for showing the way in which the

- 'hidden craze for power and authority in Balidatta and the slowly unfolding propensity towards promiscuity in Sarojini only match each other.'
7. The award-winning Oriya film *Maya Miriga* made by Nirad Mahapatra in 1985 is a moving depiction of the disintegration of a lower-middle-class Oriya family, based in the village, as the younger members of the family move to urban centres in search of greener pastures.
 8. Thompson, 36. We are aware of being attacked by social historians for our tendency to mystify the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial Indian past. The point, however, is that under colonisation Indians were made to undergo a traumatic experience of violent uprooting by the sudden tearing entry of British capital and machinery. The process which had taken centuries to gain ground in Europe was 'telescoped' for India, as Sarcar has argued, 'within one or two generations' (1550). The idealisation of the slow-moving, agrarian and organic pre-colonial Indian past was, in this context, a natural and inevitable response on the part of Indian writers. Talking about a similar idealising move in the specific context of English literature, Thompson has shown how it was at bottom a movement of social protest and resistance. To quote him, 'we have to go on to ask: what form could a human protest take against an on-going, all-triumphant economic process unless as "retrospect"? And it is exactly this defense of use values against money values, of affections and loyalties against the marketing of values, of idealised old community against new competition that we find in some of the most interesting works of English literature.'
 9. Juneja, 37. Juneja's model of decolonisation involves the same construction of 'a sense of community which locates the centre of the novel in community rather than in the consciousness of the individual, as for example, in *Petals of Blood* or *Kanthapura*.' Juneja spoils his case, however, by confining himself exclusively to writers who write in the language of their erstwhile masters, namely English. A consideration of the Indian language novels of colonial consciousness – such as *Mamu*, for instance – would surely have led to a more authentic theorisation of the same.

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Studies in William Jones

An Interpreter of Oriental Literature

R.K. KAUL

Former Professor of English, Rajasthan University
Former National Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study

R.K. Kaul's work is the first full-length study of Jones's literary achievement as translator from three oriental languages – Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Kaul finds that Jones was the first to convince his readers that the imaginative power of the medieval Arabs was in no way less than that of the English of any age. And though Jones made his translations of Persian poetry more seductive and ornate than the original, this was due to his notion of the Persian as soft, pleasure loving, indolent and effeminate. In any case, Jones was appreciative of the fact that the delicacy of their lives and sentiments had made their language one of the richest and their poetry unequalled in the world. Kaul devotes a chapter to Jones's translations of *Sakuntala* and other Sanskrit classics. Jones deviates from the original, and is often uncritical, because he is unqualified in his devotion to the ancient literary and religious classics in Sanskrit. No Indian, says Kaul, can help feeling grateful to Jones for making several Sanskrit classics accessible to the English-reading public. Kaul also undertakes a vigorous defence of Jones from the calumnious attacks by Edward Said & Co.

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