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Topic	:	*Cultural Appropriations of The Mahabharata: A Continuous Battle between Colonization and Decolonization*

Brief Resume:

Dr. Manisha Patil, is an alumnus of prestigious Ramnarain Ruia College, Mumbai. She has been conferred with Doctorate degree in English Literature by University of Mumbai for her research on the novels of Noble Laureate Toni Morrison titled *'Playing with Darkness: A Study of Toni Morrison's Novels from Post Colonial Perspective'* under the supervision of Dr. Rambhau M. Badode. She is currently working as Asst. Professor at Guru Nanak College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mumbai. She is passionate about English language and literature. Her areas of interest include theatre, films, Science Fiction, Web Media, Indian culture, Indian literature, American literature and New Literatures in English, to name a few.

Cultural Appropriations of The Mahabharata: A Continuous Battle between Colonization and Decolonization

Abstract:

Ever since Charles Wilkins translated *The Bhagavat-Geeta*in English in 1785, Indian sacred texts, *The Mahabharata* being the foremost among them, have been continuously translated, adapted and appropriated by the Western Orientalists as the finest method of what Edward Said called "to domesticate the Orient and thereby turn it into a province of European learning." (Said 78) This entire enterprise of Orientalism is based on the famous maxim of Michael Foucault called 'knowledge is power'. The construction of knowledge about India was (and is) essential for the subjugation of India. Through a series of English translations of ancient Sanskrit texts like *The Mahabharata*, Western writers have created an 'authentic' textual account of India whereby India had a very rich ancient cultural heritage but has fallen from that grace to the present chaos. Even after independence, it remains the 'White Man's burden'(Rudyard Kipling's phrase) todiscover, appreciate, analyse and propagate the wisdom of ancient Indian literature as Indians themselves are incapable to do so. This process of neo-colonizing the mind of Indians by modern Orientalists has unauthenticated the lived experiences of millions of Indians and subtly imbibed self-directed racism, hatred and inferiority complex among them. As a result, it is necessary to interrogate the Western adaptations and cultural appropriations of the Indian texts like *The Mahabharata*and once again wage the battle for what Ngugi, Wa Thiong'o rightly calls 'Decolonizing the Mind'.

Key words:

Orientalism, Cultural Appropriation, Colonization, Decolonization, *The Mahabharata*

Cultural Appropriations of The Mahabharata: A Continuous Battle between Colonization and Decolonization

"William Jones who had arrived as a judge during Hasting's time as Governor General, pioneered the idea that the ancient classical languages of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and Iranian have a common root. He labelled this family of languages Indo-European. It was his programme to establish the parallels between the languages and introduce the classics of ancient India to Western readers…The label Indo-European (rather than, say, Euro-Indian) had a profound significance on modern Indian perception of itself. The idea that one branch of Indo-Europeans—Aryans as they were called before the Nazis devalued the term—had come to India from somewhere in central Europe while others had gone to Greece gave Indians a claim to cousinhood with their masters. The idea of an Aryan 'invasion' which then settled and ruled over India took hold. Only the discovery in 1926 of the Mohenjo-Daro shook that idea somewhat. But until then the affinity between Sanskrit and Greek/Latin was a point of exclusive pride for many Indians.

The translation of the *Gita* as the first Sanskrit text in English and later in other European languages confirmed its special status. Its compactness commended itself to foreigners as the best short introduction to Brahmanism. It hitched the star of Indian consciousness away from the rest of Asia and towards the West. The reception of *Gita* was part of the process whereby Indians recovered pride in their ancient culture." (Desai 11-12)

The above passage illuminates the subtle nuances of the cultural encounter between Great Britain as the colonizer and India as the colonized from 1770s onwards till date. First of all, it foregrounds the role of Sir William Jones in promoting Orientalism as a tool of cultural and psychological subjugation of India apart from her very obvious political and economic colonization. According to Edward Said, Orientalism is a discourse about the Orient (object to be colonized) by the Western scholars (subject/colonizer) aimed at creating a 'Manichean Allegory' (Abdul JanMohamad's term) and a tactic hierarchy between the West and the East whereby a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced—white as rational, intelligent, civilized, masculine, powerful, hardworking, dynamic, virtuous, mature

and superior; and black as its opposite, irrational, ignorant/emotional, barbaric, feminine, defeated/weak, lazy, static, fallen, immature and therefore inferior. However, the mixed racial heritage of India along with the discovery of Sanskrit as a classical Indian language with notable affinities with the classical European languagesand rich ancient literature posed a problem to the water-tight compartmentalization of black and white. Jones solved this dilemma by creating a family of Indo-European languageswhich later degenerated into the 'Aryan' invasion theory. By focusing exclusively on Sanskrit and its ancient outdated texts at the expense of contemporary Indian languages and literatures, Jones and his successors constructed an a-temporal, irrational Indian subject against the rational and historical Oriental scholar. According to G. N. Devy, "Jones was the first British scholar to perceive India in terms of a literary culture and his discovery of India as a nation with a literature, and a literature extending to remote antiquity, enthused his readers in Britain to look to India for literary inspiration." (Devy 78)Through a series of English translations of ancient Sanskrit texts like *The Mahabharata*, Orientalists created an 'authentic' textual account of India whereby India had a very rich ancient cultural heritage but had fallen from that grace to the present chaos.To rejuvenation India, her ancient language and literature must be studied and propagated under the able British rule as Indians themselves were incapable to do so. This theory served the purpose of validating British rule in India. Edward Said writes,

> "Language and race seemed inextricably tied and the "good" Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in a long-gone India, whereas the "bad" Orient lingered in present day Asia, parts of North Africa and Islam everywhere. "Aryans" were confined to Europe and the ancient Orient… the Aryan myth dominated historical and cultural anthropology at the expense of "lesser" peoples." (Said 99)

Thus, it was the ancient Sanskrit texts through their translations in English that defined the Indian ethos and pathos not only for the Europeans but also for the Indians. So, it is necessary to understand how subtly the entire enterprise of Orientalism has distorted the perception of Indians about themselves as listed below.

(a) Indians perceive themselves through a Western lens whereby their own 'Indian Self' is perceived as an'other', devalued, displaced, andlocated in the West.

(b) Being desperately in need of a positive 'Self' image, Indians take up the position of the White Man and disown their own 'Indian Self'. Known as the 'double consciousness', this self-division turns Indians into their own enemy.

(c) As a result, even when political and economic (?) freedoms are achieved, psychologically, Indians remain enslaved to the White Man.

Let's understand these points in the context of translations, adaptations and appropriations of the *Mahabharata* (including *Gita*) by the Orientalists. For the brevity of understanding, the essay is divided into three parts. Part I discusses how *Bhagavat Gita* became the battle ground between British colonial and Indian anti-colonial forces whereby *Gita* was constantly adapted and interpreted as the source text of Indian nationalism. Part II focuses on Peter Brook's adaptation of *The Mahabharata* (1985) as an example of cultural appropriation in post-independence period. Part III critically analyses Alf Hiltebeitel's book *Freud's Mahabharata* (2018) as an attempt to neo-colonize the mind of Indians by modern Orientalists.

I

The Bhagavat-Geeta was the first sacred Indian text to be translated in English by Charles Wilkins in 1785. It was the first translation directly from Sanskrit and created "a fine, philosophical other-worldly view of the Orient" which Warren Hastings considered "an ideal means of propaganda to make a case for an Indianized administration" (Kothari 12) arguing,

> "Every accumulation of the knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the State …it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence." (Qt. Hastings; Kothari 12)

The choice of *Gita* was significant as it suited the European notion of Semitic religion: "Central to it are the notions of the Revelation, the Prophet, and the Book… Krishna and his Song Celestial seemed to meet the Semitic notion of a revealed religion. Here was an incarnation, a saviour who…revealed Himself through His Words. He seemed to fit into the Semitic pattern the Europeans knew of. Krishna became to Hinduism what Jesus was to Christianity, and the Bhagavad *Gita* the Hindu Bible." (Gowda 2-3) Unaware of the colonial

motivation of the Orientalism, Indians interpreted the study of *Gita* by Europeans as the positive evidence that"the west began not only to make efforts to understand, but value India and her culture" (Kejriwal21) thereby turning *Gita* into "a symbol of Hindu conscience" (Gowda 4).

As Nagappa Gowda shows in his seminal book *The Bhagavad Gita in the Nationalist Discourse* (2011), *Gita* was adapted and interpreted (frequently in contradictory ways) by various Indian scholars and leaders as the source text inspiring anti-colonial Indian nationalism. For Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the *Mahabharata* was "unquestionably historical" (Gowda 13) and application of scientific-rational method of history to the text could discard the imaginary episodes and bring forth the 'genuinely historical' material. He considered Sri Krishna as "the role model for the nation and the citizen" (Gowda 20), nation being essential for the protection of self and the society and violence for the protection of one's rights justified as *'Svadharma'*by Krishna himself in *Gita*. Thus,while Hastings considered *Gita* as a tool to 'lessen the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection', Bankimchandra considers *Gita* as atool of anti-colonial struggle. Gowda comments,

> "Nationalism developed as a response to colonial rule, and not necessarily as a reaction against it. The response largely hovered between a critical admiration for the West and a growing awareness of one's own foundational heritage which could be critiqued but not repudiated, although sometimes we stumble upon uncritical acceptance of both." (Gowda 45)

In his *Gita-Rahasya* (original Marathi 1915; English translation 1935),Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak rejected all the pre-modern interpretations of *Gita* by various Acharyas such as Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and Jnaneshwara. In his contemporary context of freedom movement, he interpreted"the central theme of *Gita*" as "Karmayoga", its "central figure" as "Sthitaprajna" (Gowda 53) and condoned the use of violence against the colonial oppressors for "self-protection, the protection of innocents and general welfare" (Gowda 65). He considered the religion of *Gita* not only as superior to that of Christianity but as a source of Greek philosophy as well, whereby he drew the parallels between Sthitaprajna in *Gita* and the 'philosopher-king' in Plato's *Republic*.For him, "nationalism is not an ultimate object to be realized by mankind; the final goal is 'universal welfare'." (Gowda 72) However, it is to be noted that "in politics and in matters of social reforms he was an arch conservative… a

champion of social orthodoxy" (Gowda 82) which he defended on the basis of *Gita* and advocated "an all-India Hinduism as the basis of Indian nationalism." (Gowda 84)

In sharp contrast to Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi believed that the core message of *Gita* is non-violence. "Gandhi recognized the fact that Tilak's interpretation appealed to the revolutionaries. He seemed to be rejecting both the philosophy of the revolutionaries in theory and practice and interpretation of Tilak." (Gowda 170) Gandhi derived his core concepts of *Satya* (Truth)*, Ahimsa* (Non-violence)*,* and *Swaraj* (Home-rule) from *Gita* and considered *Gita* not as a historical narrative but as a 'great allegory':

> "The *BhagavadGita* is not a historical work…The poet has seized the occasion of the war…on the field of Kurukshetra for drawing attention to the war going on in our bodies between the forces of Good (Pandavas) and the forces of Evil (Kauravas)…" (Gandhi*CWMG,*Vol. 15: 288-89; Vol. 18: 115)

Gandhi considered the concept of '*Avatar'* not as a descent of God but as a "man's ascent to the state of God by wholly divesting himself of all his earthliness through engaging in selfless actions." (Gowda 182) For Gandhi, *Gita* was the *'Dharma-Granth'* and Krishna *Avatar* "the personification of right knowledge" (Gowda 181).Therefore, he endorsed and vehemently defended the *Varna-Dharma*based on *Guna* (one's inborn qualities based on one's birth) and *Karma*(one's caste-based duties according to one's birth) as "a useful institution for the organization of contemporary society" (Gowda 194) propounded by Krishna in the *Gita*. However, he condemned the social hierarchy inbuilt in the caste system and instead wanted it to be based on equality, never realizing the inherent contradiction in his proposal.

It was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who pointed out the contradictions in Gandhi's views about *Gita*. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar considered *Gita* as a historical text, a later post-Buddhist interpolation into the *Mahabharata* providing the philosophical support to Jaimini's *Purvamimansa*which strongly advocates Vedic *Karma-Kanda* and *Chaturvarna* system. Ambedkar writes,

> "The soul of *BhagavadGita* seems to be the defence of Chaturvana and securing its observance in practice, Krishna does not merely rest content with saying that Chaturvana is based on Guna-Karma but he goes further…Krishna tells that…a Sudra however great he may be as a devotee will not get salvation if he has

transgressed the duty of the Sudra—namely to live and die in the service of the higher classes." (Qt. Ambedkar;Gowda 228)

According to Ambedkar, Buddhism emerged as a revolution againstVedic *Karma-Kanda* and *Chaturvarna* system based on violence and inequality. To counter the growing influence of Buddhism which preached non-violence and equality, Brahmanism appropriated the central doctrines of Buddhism but superimposed on it the graded inequality of *Chaturvana* through divine sanction of Krishna in *Gita*, making "the system more cruel, unkind, inflexible and binding." (Qt. Ambedkar; Gowda 229)This counter-revolution used certain concepts like *Swadarma*, *Sthitaprajna*, and *Anasakti* (foregrounded as the basic principles of *Gita* by Bankimchandra, Tilak and Gandhi respectively) "as mere reinforcement of theChaturvana…*Gita* primarily offers a defence of Brahmanical priesthood against democratic and emancipatory striving of the masses that Buddhism upholds." (Gowda 234)As a result, Ambedkar rejects *Gita* as the foundational text of the Indian nation.

Thus, we find that as a part of anti-colonial struggle for independence, nation-building and social reforms between 1880 to 1950, *Gita* was used as the foundational text, often contested regarding its core content by the various nationalist leaders; but at the same time, generating mass support for the "essentially a secular project" of nation-building through frequent invocation of the "divine sanction". (Gowda 246) Once, the Indian nation materialized as a political entity, *Gita* receded back into the realm of religion, making way for the other modern concepts related to nationalism. However, political decolonization of India has not necessarily brought about the decolonization of mind of the Indians as can be seen in the next two sections.

II

"One of the difficulties we encounter when we see traditional theatre from east is that we admire without understanding." (Brook 41)

Perhaps the same type of 'admiration without understanding'we Indians encounter when we see western adaptations of traditional Indian theatre. The text in question here is Peter Brook's 1985 'international', 'multi-cultural' production of *The Mahabharata.*As a modern counterpart of the pioneer Orientalist scholar Sir William Jones who translated Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*in English as *Sakontala or The Fatal Ring* (1789), and created an

idyllic, pastoral image of India which not just fired enormous interest all over the Europe, but also defined the Indian ethos for the Indians themselves; Brook succeeded in creating a culturally exotic image of India through enthralling visual effects to be sold across the globe and to be repackaged for India itself. Attracted by both the "richness of dramatic content" and "underpinning archetype and myth" (Williams 22) of an essentially ancient Indian text, Brook nonetheless "repeatedly claimed it belongs to the world, not only to India" (Williams 24) to justify his reworking it within the Orientalist framework of 'essentialist', 'humanist', 'idealist' and 'universalist' literature and then selling it in the international market.Wilfully ignoring the *Mahabharata's* status as *'Itihasa'* and instead treating it as a "a series of stories" (Brook 41) to decontextualize it from its Hindu social and philosophical ethos—whereby the very essence of'warrior's duty'(*Ksatra-Dharma)* as the main motivation for war is lost through its gloss over the caste distinctions of various characters such as Drona and Aswhattaman (Brahmins), Bhishma, Krishna, Arjun and Duryodhan (Ksatriyas), Eklavya (Nishad / tribal) and Karna (Suta)—Brook still claimed "to suggest the flavour of India" (Brook 44) in "the performance of racially mixed actors" (Brook 49). What Brook achieved in the process was turning the *Mahabharata* into a Shakespearean drama in which "Duryodhana fights like Macbeth, ranting and raving" (Bharucha 240); "Dhritarashtra comes across as King Lear; Krishna as Prospero; Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi as Lear's daughters" (Dasgupta 266). The implicit message, this modern Orientalist imparts, is that the *Mahabharata* cannot be an 'essentialist', 'humanist', 'idealist' and 'universalist' text unless and until it is stripped off its organic Indian features and draped into the alien European garb. Brook rationalizes this erasure of 'Indianness' as follows:

> "By looking closely at Indian theatre (and we have had to remain open to Indian ways of telling the story), <u>it became immediately apparent that we would have to completely eliminate classical Indian art at every level: in the style of acting, dance, song and music</u>. [1] Because it is an art only accessible to those Indians who have devoted themselves to it for several generations…The other possibility was to do something which comes from our own work: <u>to introduce a storyteller who is on our side</u>[2], a Frenchman close to the French audience." (Brook 49-50)

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[1]Please note the absolute terms of erasure in the underlined sentence.

[2]Please note the characteristic self v/s other consciousness implicit in the whole Orientalist discourse.

The above statement poses a number of epistemological challenges that Orientalist scholars will to forget but the Postcolonial readers need to remember:

(a) Orientalism is a discourse about the Orient (object to be colonized) by the Western scholars (subject / colonizer) aimed at colonizing it.

(b) The so-called Orientalist scholars, in reality, are quite ignorant about the Orient.

(c) The Orientalist scholars are not really interested in understanding the Orient. Their sole objective is to appropriate / steal / plunder / rape the Oriental material to suit their own purpose.

(d) The Orientalist scholars assume the role of the learned narrator by silencing the original narrator. 'Who' tells the story is more important than 'which' story is being told because it is the articulator who determines and controls the content of the articulation by adding (the Boy, the listener) and subtracting (Vidur) characters, episodesand the philosophical milieu (the dialogue between Krishna and Arjun i.e.,*Gita* is over even before one becomes aware that it has started).

(e) The entire enterprise of Orientalism is based on Michael Foucault's famous concept of confluence between knowledge and power. It is true that knowledge gives power. But it is equally true that power creates knowledge by silencing / erasing / eliminating the more advanced but less powerful rival sources of knowledge.

(f) The power imbalance between the Orientalist scholars (?) and their Indian counterparts also creates an imbalance of attitude: while White Man invalidates the local Indian knowledge and experience through the "glorious trivialization of our epic" (Bharucha 248), the Indians look upon the White Man for validation at the global level, as a "part of our colonial residue, our hankering for some sanction from the west, even after being exploited by it." (Bharucha 250)

(g) The Orientalist scholars assume the absolute positive qualitative terminology such as 'essentialist', 'humanist', 'idealist' and 'universalist' for themselves as inherent; while others (in this case Indians) must strive to become 'essentialist', 'humanist', 'idealist' and 'universalist' by overcoming their inherent opposite / negative qualities as exemplified by the 'Manichean Allegory'.

(h) Unlike William Jones, the pioneer Orientalist scholar whose ambition was "to know *India* better than any other European ever knew it." (Qt. Jones; Said 78), the modern Orientalists, like Brook, have realized that Indian classical art forms (let alone the Indian philosophy behind those art forms) "take at least a lifetime to master, and that a

foreigner can only admire, not imitate." (Brook 43) Yet, the way Orientalists represent the Orient, with no framework of reference, and the general confusion as to "it doesn't want to be Indian, and yet it tries to be Indian in its own way" (Bharucha 247) constitutes what Gayatri Spivak calls the 'epistemic violence'.

In his adaptation and appropriation of *The Mahabharata*, Brook perpetuates the 'epistemic violence'in a number of ways as listed below.

(a) By decontextualizing and suspending the whole narrative somewhere elusively between ancient and modern; universal and specific; realism and fantasy.

(b) By effacing its socio-cultural and philosophical context (as in the case of 'warrior's duty' not sufficiently discussed in the truncated version of the *Gita*).

(c) By changing the time frame of the narrative from cyclic to linear, the sense of "interpenetration of past, present and future" is lost: "What one misses is a sense of time that transcends chronology, time concretized through gestures and echoes, time that stretches into infinity." (Bharucha 237)

(d) By trying "to suggest the flavour of India" (Brook 44) by "completely eliminat[ing] classical Indian art at every level: in the style of acting, dance, song and music" (Brook 49) and then recasting it as a Shakespearean drama in an empty space of the theatre.

(e) By creating and presenting the flat characters "in outline, with their inner energies and fire missing" (Bharucha 239) simply because neither writer and director nor the actors have tried to get under the skin of the characters as they really are and therefore contrary to Brook's claim, are unable to bring to it something of their own.

(f) By using the international cast but superimposing European "tradition of heroic romance" (Williams 22)upon them in a fashion of "neo-colonist paternalism…for behind his 'mask' of tolerant liberalism Brook is authoritarian and self-serving. As the self-appointed representative of a 'universal culture'…he has pillaged world culture in search of new territories, then planted his own imperialist flag in the flank of the quintessential Hindu work…" (Williams 24)

(g) By inserting the virus of racism in the main narrative through subtle modification not in the text but in the performance: Brook boasts his role in making the *Mahabharata* 'universal' / 'global' through his use of racially mixed actors in the depiction of various *Mahabharata* characters but fails to realize (or deliberately chooses not to realize) that he has casted them in the stereotypical black and white racist images.

Ignoring the original *Mahabharata* text which adores the blackness of three main characters viz. Krishna, Krishnaa (Draupadi) and Krishna-Dwaipayana (Rishi Vyas), Brook portrays Vyas and Krishna along with Arjun as 'White Men' reinforcing the white racial stereotype as rational, intelligent, civilized, masculine, powerful, hardworking, dynamic, virtuous, mature and superior. Again, willfully overlooking the possible fair complexion of Bhishma as a son of the river goddess Ganga and his position as a patriarch of Kuru dynasty, he is presented as the (black) 'noble savage', a primitive man uncorrupted by civilization, symbolizing innate goodness and moral superiorityof those who live in the harmony of nature. In contrast, the roles of Bhima and his tribal Indian wife Hidimba / Hidimbi are enacted by the African actors with unmistakable undertones of the N-word 'nigger' such as irrational, ignorant / emotional, barbaric, feminine, defeated / weak, lazy, static, fallen, immature and therefore inferior. Draupadi is the only character which is played by an Indian actress Mallika Sarabhai in the whole cast, which denotes her the 'authentic look' (black hair, brown skin and large black eyes) but not the 'authentic feel' as she speaks the Queen's English and acts like an Elizabethan heroin, completely devoid of Indianness.

Thus, by erasing every trace of Indianness in the *Mahabharata,* Brook discovers, appreciates, analyses and propagates the wisdom of ancient Indian literature to his global audience.

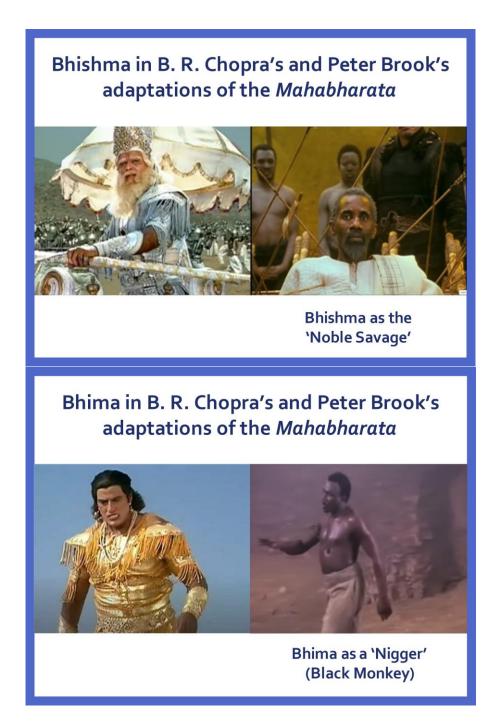# Rishi Vyas in B. R. Chopra's and Peter Brook's adaptations of the *Mahabharata*

Rishi Vyas as a 'White Man'

Krishna and Arjun in B. R. Chopra's and Peter Brook's adaptations of the *Mahabharata*

Krishna and Arjun as 'White Men'

Bhishma in B. R. Chopra's and Peter Brook's adaptations of the *Mahabharata*

Bhishma as the 'Noble Savage'

Bhima in B. R. Chopra's and Peter Brook's adaptations of the *Mahabharata*

Bhima as a 'Nigger'
(Black Monkey)

III

In his book *Freud's Mahabharata*(2018)*,* Alf Hiltebeitel attempts to apply (rather incorrectly and disastrously) the Freudian theory of Oedipus Complex to the *Mahabharata.* He himself admits in the very first sentence of its *Preface* that "Freud never refers to the *Mahabharata*" (Hiltebeitel ix) but still insists on reading Oedipal symbols in the ancient Indian text. He writes,

> "Without saying it precisely, if "they *all* slept in that hole with their weapons"— that is in this transparent image of a womb—the still unmarried but sexually

matured young Pandavas must have done so with Kunti… Sleeping in a womblike tunnel with one's mother and one's weapons…are sturdy snakelike metonyms of the Pandavas' manhood, presents a fairly obvious situation for a tension between pre-Oedipal fantasies involving both desire and aversion and Oedipal drives toward manhood—that is for maternal love and aversion versus sexual independence." (Hiltebeitel 76-77)

Here Hiltebeitel refers to the very transparent literal description of Pandavas' escape from the lacquer house with their mother through an underground tunnel at night. It is but obvious that they are carrying their weapons with them for their safety. Turning it into a sexual metaphor where 'hole' stands for vagina, 'weapon' stands for penis, and 'sleeping' stands for having sexual intercourse and that too between five sons and their old mother while they are on a run to save their lives, can be a product of only an abnormal mind.

Furthermore, in his abnormal zeal to apply Freud to the *Mahabharata*, Hiltebeitel ignores the majestic Bhishma who is an anti-thesis to the incestuous Greek Oedipus. Instead of killing his father and marrying his mother, Bhishma takes the terrible oath of celibacy to facilitate his father's second marriage.[3] It is very interesting to note that while Hiltebeitel devotes almost 70 pages (133-201) for the psychoanalysis of a minor character Aravan, he hardly mentions the possible psychological motivations of Bhishma behind his terrible oath of celibacy. Even in case of Aravan—the son of Arjun and his Naga wife Ulupi; who "agrees to sacrifice himself to Kali at the beginning of the *Mahabharata* war" (Hiltebeitel 134)—the Freudian concept of castration complex is not applicable. His willing sacrifice to the Mother Goddess symbolizes what Girindrasekhar Bose called the castration wish in contrast to Freud's notion of castration dread on the part of a male child. "Bose said, contrary to Freud, that a wish for castration comes early in childhood development, during a phase when the male child identifies with the mother and wishes to be female." (Hiltebeitel 134)

The only Freudian concept that can be applied to the *Mahabharata* is the pre-Oedipal fantasy of return to the mother's womb exemplified in the foeticide of Bhishma's seven elder brothers who were the cursed Vasu gods whom their immortal river goddess mother Ganga drowned in her own waters. However, as per Hiltebeitel's own admission, "between Oedipal anxieties and pre-Oedipal fantasies (such as return to the mother's womb), Freud typically gives priority in *The Uncanny* to Oedipal anxieties by the quantity of his examples related to

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[3]For better understanding of father-son relationship in the Indian context, please refer to my paper titled "*Sacrificing the Son: Patriarchal Power Politics in Hindu Mythology*"

castration anxiety" (Hiltebeitel 7).Thus, the application of Freud to the *Mahabharata* is not only far-fetched but also nasty and malicious.

Hiltebeitel goes on with his pseudo-Freudian reading of the *Mahabharata* and invents a new idea of "urban unconscious" (Hiltebeitel 205) which he explains (?) as "the traumatic unconscious impact of cities during the second urbanization" (Hiltebeitel213) upon the Brahmins wherein urbanization went hand in hand with the rise of Buddhism which posed a serious challenge to Brahminism. He says, "It was also probably during the early Mauryan period that Buddhist texts started critiquing the Brahmin's rote recitation as mumbo jumbo." (Hiltebeitel 220) In their obsession with preserving the sounds / words of Vedas almost like a tape-recorder, the Brahmins missed out on their meanings. As a result, as Frits Staal says, quotes Hiltebeitel, "The RgVeda is the earliest, the most venerable, obscure, distant and difficult for moderns to understand—hence it is often misinterpreted or worse, used as a peg on which to hang an idea or theory." (Qt. Staal; Hiltebeitel 219) Unfortunately, Hiltebeitel seems to do the same with the *Mahabharata* i.e. to hang modern European Freud on the peg of an ancient Indian epic. According to Hiltebeitel, the numerous Vedic allusions in the *Mahabharata*imply distancing and displacement, as per Freud's analysis of jokes and dreams. But he is not sure what this displacement is all about as Freud's "'great man' theory of the trauma resulting from the murder of Moses finds no analog in the total blank the *Mahabharata* has on the origin, development and decay of cities." (Hiltebeitel 205) He is aware that his theory on "[a]n urban unconscious may not convince everyone" but still insists that "it is needed to explain the lack of memory about the rise of cities…" (Hiltebeitel 263) On the whole, he is too adamant to acknowledge the absurdity of application of Freud to the *Mahabharata*.

As a modern Orientalist Hiltebeitel also advocates the old Orientalist theory that the *Mahabharata* is inspired by the Greek epic*Iliad* drawing a number of parallels between the two such as,

(a) The 'Plan of Zeus' in *Iliad* and the 'work of the gods' (*Devakarya*) in *Mahabharata* being identical i.e., the 'Unburdening of the Earth'. (Hiltebeitel 95)

(b) "Mount Olympus and Mount Meru as homes of the gods" (Hiltebeitel 95)

(c) "Kali has the greatest affinity among Greek goddesses with Medusa, with whom Freud associates the fear of castration." (Hiltebeitel 133)

(d) "[N]ew and significant connections" found by Fernando Wulff Alonso between "immortal river goddess [Ganga] who succors, instructs and protects her son Bhishma" in *Mahabharata* and the "sea goddess Thetis and her son Achilles" in *Iliad*. (Hiltebeitel 97)

(e) Even no connection between two diverse characters in the two epics is turned into a connection: "What we have not yet found are ways that Uma, a counterpart to Hera, joins that divine consensus as the wife of Siva. Generally, and in contrast to Hera, Uma's stakes in the *Mahabharata* war are represented only indirectly and in cameo roles that portray her acting little on her own and only in concert with her husband." (Hiltebeitel 117)

What we find here in case of Hiltebeitel is, in fact, a parallel to the frame narrative of the *Mahabharata.* Originally, *Mahabharata* was a Prakrit oral tale of charioteers which was fashioned as a Sanskrit literary text titled *Jaya* by sage Vyasa. *Jaya* was later expanded into *Bharata* by one of the Vyasa's disciples *Vaiśampāyana*(comprising of only 24000 verses without the episodes, termed as the original 'old' epic by V. S. Sukathankar, the chief editor of the *Critical Edition of the Mahabharata* published by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune). In turn, *Bharata* was further expanded into *Mahabharata* by *UgrashravasSauti*during its retelling in the Naimisa Forest in the presence of Kulapati Saunaka who belonged to the Bhrgu clan of the Brahmins. This expansion mostly consisted of the episodes which were only indirectly connected with the main story of the Bharata war, and instead of Kuru dynasty, focused on and glorified the Bhargava legends.Sukathankar considers Bhargava legends as "entirely foreign to the plan of the original saga of the Bharatas, occurring as it does almost wholly in the episodic portion of the epic" (Sukathankar,1936: 70), thereby reflecting "a conscious—nay deliberate—weaving together or rather stitching together of the Bharata legends with the Bhargava stories." (Sukathankar, 1936: 70) He further explains the motive behind such an enterprise as follows:

"There is only one explanation of the childish exaggeration and this repeated mention of the annihilation of the Ksatriyas by the Bhargava Rama. A deep analysis of the motives underlying this (phenomenon) would suggest that these fabricationsare only a form of 'over-compensation', and endeavour to make the Bhrgus feel important and 'worth-while', after the disastrous blow to their ego ideals. It is the psychological response of the Bhrgus who were all but exterminated by the Ksatriyas. The slaughter of the Bhrgus admitted by the

Bhrgus themselves in the Aurva legend deserves all the credence which unfavourable evidence by a witness against one's own self ordinarily does; what the Bhrgus in turn did to the Ksatriyas—namely the annihilation of the Ksatriyas by Bhargava Rama 3 x 7 is known to us only from the account of the event from Brahmin sources. This myth—the dream of Bhrgus—is the sublimation of that intolerable inferiority feeling which had been repressed, but which has clamouring for expression." (Sukathankar, 1944: 330 n. 1)

So, drawing further parallels upon the above insights of Sukathankar, one can say that there is only one explanation of the childish exaggeration and this repeated mention of the influence of *Iliad* on *Mahabharata* by the modern Orientalists like Hiltebeitel. A deep analysis of the motives underlying this (phenomenon) would suggest that these fabrications are only a form of 'over-compensation', and endeavour to make the modern Orientalists feel important and 'worth-while', after the disastrous blow of decolonization to their ego ideals. It is the psychological response of the modern Orientalists who were completely overthrown by the Indians. The application of the Freudian myth to the *Mahabharata*—the dream of modern Orientalists—is the sublimation of that intolerable inferiority feeling which had been repressed, but which has clamouring for expression.

However, the so-called childish response of modern Orientalists is neither innocent nor harmless. Unlike the myth of annihilation of the Ksatriyas by the Bhargava Rama, the British colonization of India is not only a historical reality but also a future threat in terms of neo-colonization. The continuous thriving enterprise of the modern Orientalists demonstrates that the process of unleashing the 'the cultural bomb' is still on. Ngugi says,

"The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." (Ngugi 3)

Therefore, in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1989), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argues that mere physical decolonization is not enough. It is not enough to alter just the socio-economic-political conditions of the colonized; it is also necessary to undo the psychological effects of colonization by defusing the biggest weapon of imperialism 'the cultural bomb' which creates inferiority complex in the colonized. Only when the colonized people decolonize their minds, reclaim their true self and assert their subjectivity (their right as historical subjects to mould their own destinies), they become truly free.

The modern Orientalism flourishes on the assumption that even after independence, it remains the 'White Man's burden' (Rudyard Kipling's phrase) to discover, appreciate, analyse and propagate the wisdom of ancient Indian literature as Indians themselves are incapable to do so. This process of neo-colonizing the mind of Indians by modern Orientalists has unauthenticated the lived experiences of millions of Indians and subtly imbibed self-directed racism, hatred and inferiority complex among them. To cite an 'uncanny'[4] example of this process, one can compare and contrast the depiction of Krishna in the Bhakti tradition in India. In the ancient Sanskrit text of *Gita,* the word 'Krishna' meaning 'Dark' is venerated several times.[5]During medieval times, the Vaishnav Bhakti poets such as Jayadeva in his*Gita-Govinda*[6]and Meera in her *bhajans*[7]*,* celebrate the blackness of the Lord Krishna/Shyam who shares the complexion of his most Indian devotees who are not white in colour. However, in the post-independence period, one finds a *bhajan* sungas a songin a blockbuster Bollywood movie *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978), where one comes across a colour-conscious Krishna who asks his mother Yashodain a complaining tone as to why his complexion is dark, while that of Radha is fair.[8]Thus, one can understand the gravity of the Western adaptations and cultural appropriations of Indian texts like the *Mahabharata* and the necessity of defusing'the

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[4]"'Known' and 'unknown', 'familiar' yet 'kept out of sight'…what 'ought to have remained secret but has come to light,' has the potential to play itself out in what may be conscious or unconscious, brought to awareness or repressed." (Hiltebeitel, 2018: 6)

[5]यत्रयोगेश्वरः**कृष्णो**यत्रपार्थोधनुर्धरः। तत्रश्रीर्विजयोभूतिर्ध्रुवानीतिर्मतिर्मम॥१८-७८॥

[6]चन्दनचर्चित**नीलकलेवर**पीतवसनवनमाली। केलिचलन्मणिकुण्डलमण्डितगण्डयुगस्मितशाली॥ हरिरिहमुग्धवधूनिकरेविलासिनिविलसतिकेलिपरे॥ धृवम्॥अप४-१॥

[7]**श्याम**पियामोरी, रंगदेचुनरिया ॥
ऐसीरंगदेके, रंगनाहींछुटे, | धोबियाधोयेचाहे, सारीउमरिया ॥
लालनारंगाऊंमैंतो, हरीनारंगाऊ, | **अपनेहीरंगमें, रंगदेचुनरिया** ॥
बिनारंगायेमैंतो, घरनहीजाउंगी, |बीतहीजाएचाहे, सारीउमरिया ॥
मीराकेप्रभु, गिरिधरनागर, | प्रभुचरणनमें, लागीनजरिया ॥
श्यामपियामोरी, रंगदेचुनरिया ॥   —मीराबाई (1498-1547)

[8]यशोमतीमईयासे, बोले**नंदलाला**,। राधाक्यूँगोरी, **मैंक्यूँकाला**।।
बोलीमुस्कातीमईया, ललनकोबताया, । कालीअँधीयारी, आधीरातमेंतूआया, ।
लाडलाकन्हैयामेरा, कालीकमलीवाला, । इसीलिएकाला।।
बोलीमुस्कातीमईया, सुनमेरेप्यारे, । गोरीगोरीराधिकाके, नैनकजरारे, ।
कालेनैनोवालीने, ऐसाजादूडाला, । इसीलिएकाला।।
यशोमतीमईयासे, बोले**नंदलाला**, । राधाक्यूँगोरी, **मैंक्यूँकाला**।।   —पं. नरेंद्रशर्मा (1978)

cultural bomb' of Orientalism through their constant interrogations as a continuous battle for decolonization.

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