

many an immigrant who is caught between the need to belong to the culture of adoption and the need to project an independent, recognisable identity. Except that in this story the conflict is represented through a generational opposition.

Resistance discourse is not of recent origin. It has existed since the beginning of human history. All attempts at change have begun as resistance movements, whether it be the Buddhist questioning of hegemonic structures, Aristotle's response to Plato or the successive rewritings of the *Ramayana*. Intellectual resistance is innate to human growth and existence; the seed needs to push against the weight of the earth in order to sprout. All resistance defines the very organicity of human life; intellectual resistance goes further in its recognition of the human agency.

The writer does not begin with an ideology or necessarily work within a collectivity. The role of intellectuals vis-à-vis the establishment has never followed a straight line, yet whether as prophets, elites or as common protestors, intellectuals have invariably carried the burden of wisdom. The primary right of an intellectual to be in the position of an interrogator places him outside a hegemonic structure. Gandhi unhesitatingly changed his views whenever he felt that they had outgrown their utility or relevance; Arthur Koestler reviewed the communist ideology over and over again. Writers of our times have also done this, time and again, as they look into history and analyse the relationship of the past to the present. Thus the need to question, to evolve, to review, the refusal to be limited by an ideology is one characteristic of literary resistance. The individual being needs to be located in a contingent world, one which is sensitive to emotional responses and conflicts lest literary art becomes propaganda and an unfeeling, unthinking medium.

Why does one resist and how does one define 'essentialism'? Resistance is born out of anger, frustration or/and despair; a basic unhappiness pushes people to it. Race, colour, caste, class and religion are all categories that seek to bind and cohere. As such their boundaries seek to include as well as exclude giving rise to control on the one hand and discrimination on the other. When Fanon asks: 'What does the black man want?', the emphasis is on

the word 'black' that a black man has struggled to arrive at the category of manhood, of humanness. The white child's wonder, 'Look mama, a Negro' is indicative of a racial construct. The moment the situation is framed within human categorisations, the framing is a protest against commodification. Protest brings to the forefront both the historicity of time and the significance of the present. Protest is also indicative of the writer's ability to move ahead of his times. Essentialisms, in contrast, seek to imprison men, subtract from their dignity, individuation and personal space. The writer, then, even as he moves with his times, forms collectivities and supports ideologies, does not surrender his right to question. How then does he express himself? How does he put across his dissent, his recognition of the right to transgress, without getting locked into fixities, in the face of censorship, control and, at times, imprisonment? Books have often been banned: Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and Veer Savarkar's *The First War of Indian Independence* (1907) were both proscribed. Ismat Chughtai, Mridula Garg and Amrita Pritam either had to contest court cases or were threatened with censorship. Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) was also banned with the ban being lifted only after independence. Plays and films on Gandhi have been the subject of controversy; Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) was banned and those who spoke against censorship sidelined. States have tried to contain forces of resistance; religious heads have frowned upon personal freedom; the challenge facing a writer is always there as to how far he wishes to go.

Returning to Slemon's question about the location of resistance whether integrally generated by the text or produced through interpretation (Slemon 104), both, text and interpretation, can be said to be sites of resistance. Historical specificity and relationships of affiliation or otherwise with collectivities do impact the 'meaning' and 'reading' of a text, but resistance is embedded in narrative strategies and often shares its referential codes with essentialisms. The relationship of the writer with the reading community provides an additional context. The 'embeddedness' of meaning is clear when texts are censored or proscribed but writers can escape such censorship primarily

through the use of myth, legend and fantasy. These become aesthetic means of creating both meaning and acceptability. For example Rokeya Shakawat Hosain combines dream and fantasy in 'Sultana's Dream' (1905) wherein she makes fun of the masculinist position. But when Mukul Kesavan disrupts the linearity of historical time by transferring the unnamed narrator living in the 1980s to 1942, in *Looking Through Glass* (1995), he uses fantasy not merely to reinterpret history but to resist a monolithic construct of the nation. Resistance to a dominant essentialist thrust also marks the narrative of Manzoor Ehtesham in *Sookha Bargad* (1986), where resistance is firmly embedded in the structure of the text, its historical underpinnings and experiential base. Ehtesham uses both dreams and surrealistic narrative strategies to deconstruct the nation-construct which marginalises the Muslim identity. Rashida, the Muslim girl-narrator details the history of her family. Her father, who grew up in pre-independence India, chose to stay on, rather than move to Pakistan, and attempted to give his children a secular modern education but in the process he is isolated from his own community. Without the necessary acceptance by the mainstream, her brother Suhail, who is frustrated by the constant suspicion that a Muslim was subjected to during times of crises like the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, and a failed relationship with a Hindu girl, drops out from his engineering studies while Rashida herself is caught in the popular perception of Muslim girls being ghazal singers. The individuals are frozen into stereotypes. Suhail's recurring dream of seeking protection under the shade of a banyan tree turns into a nightmare, as he realises that the tree is already dead. The tree is a symbol of the nation which defines itself through exclusion and as it is dead, it can no longer grow:

I notice that the area the tree covers has expanded In order to protect myself from the sun, I move towards its shade but the moment I step under it, I sense that its heat is worse than the heat of the sun It is dead. Honest to god, it is absolutely dead! It has gone dry while still standing on its roots! (198, translation mine)

Narration of failed dreams is a form of a resistance to monolithic nation construction just as the nourishing of a dream

has the potential to become a resistance narrative. Giriraj Kishore in *Pahla Girmitiya* (The First Contractee, 1999) describes the awakening of Gandhi's resistance movement, by juxtaposing his dream to the imperial dream of conquest. The first line of the novel 'The white man had his dream' is countered by the first line of the third chapter, 'Mohandas also had his dream.' (52) Then step by step the sense of brotherhood and nationhood merge in the word *hum-watani* (fellow countrymen) and the multi-lingual nature of the signature sheet which the Indians plan to present to the authorities as a protest against discriminatory law, brings home to Gandhi the multi-lingual nature of India. Kishore's novel is of significance in the discourse of resistance for several reasons: it recalls history using it to establish continuities and project counter images, it reminds the reader of the difference between subjection and subjecthood; it defines assertion of one's right as a method of resistance. Published at a time when policies of exclusion and slogans of extinction were rampant, it projects the nation as one of plural identities and differentiates between aimless terror and legitimate resistance.

Retelling of myths and inventing new ones also constitute resistance narratives. Mahasweta Devi's novella *Operation? Bashai Tudu* falls into this category, when Bashai the man is lost in Bashai the legend. Bashai, as Samik Bandhopadhyay has pointed out, has been constructed out of several tribal heroes of the actual Naxalite movements. She 'lets him grow into a myth' and 'Even as the magic of the myth runs through the narrative and lends it coherence and unity, one has only to read between the lines to discern the revolutionary project that keeps the myth alive as a strategy. (xi) Bashai's physical death does not terminate the movement; the moment he dies, another steps into his role and the cycle goes on until the individual is submerged in the collectivity and grows larger than life. Devi's short story 'Draupadi' is equally evocative in its meaning as the tribal woman, who has been raped and violated, refuses to put on her clothes; her nakedness thus becomes an act of resistance not only to exclusionary, freedom-denying mainstream essentialism but also to male hegemony and false morality.

Literary resistance is not necessarily a militant voice: it functions subtly through literary modes such as humour and farce, emotions such as anguish and despair and narrative strategies like interiorisation and contrapuntal expositions. Resistance discourse has a socio-political context but at heart it is humanistic: it recognises the *essence* of man as a need for freedom and it questions the legitimacy of monolithic power structures. It interprets the term universal in a changed context – not as a single normative principle or as an all-absorbing, all controlling ideology or power structure but as an undercurrent of the new humanist discourse which emerges through resistance struggles – whether this be in Sartre's *Men Without Shadows* or Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, or through the figures of men like Kali Santra in Mahasweta Devi's *Bashai Tudu* or a woman like Draupadi (Devi's story 'Draupadi'). Resistance discourse parallels, reflects and supports resistance movements, movements that do not insist on submergence of individual dreams but become, in themselves, an enlargement of them.

Hanif Kureishi's story 'My Son the Fanatic', demands examination of the difference between the sense of commitment that resistance to an opposing force demands and the commitment which manifests itself as an essentialism. Why is one defined as resistance and the other as essentialism? Is it that while resistance permits both objectives and strategies to be fluid, essentialism frowns upon any deviation and remains anchored in a fixed point in the past, wary of any fresh reinterpretation? This distinction may explain religious fundamentalisms but is not an adequate explanation of dictatorial power which refuses to be human and rejects rationalism. A Hitler or a Stalin cannot be explained through this formulation. Yet their commitment to specific goals is beyond question. One could debate it further by examining the nature of power. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi refers to power as 'soul force', a term that lends itself to multiple interpretations and can cover a wide range from the ethical to the spiritual and could be hijacked by any essentialism. At best one can define the difference as a recognition of the human and the possibility of change in one kind of resistance, while the other sidelines both these values.

Resistance in itself has been an integral component of literature – at least all meaningful literature – ever since literature emerged as a discourse. Draupadi's questioning of the slave's right of ownership in *Mahabharata*, Cordelia's of Lear's paternal right to the total subjugation of the child are not merely voices of lone women. They raise issues of philosophical, moral and political import. Protest is simultaneously a dialogue, a deconstruction and an assertion – while also being a defining strategy. Furthermore being value-based, the applicability of this value makes protest both flexible and universal giving it both power and continuity. Literature enables the protest of an isolated situation to cross boundaries of time and space.

Today the publishing trade and the over-hype that the media creates also raise issues of visibility versus invisibility, of repetition and volume rather than meaning. The politics of awards provides another dimension to the confrontation between resistance discourse and essentialist constructs. I refrain from categorising essentialism as 'discourse', for if it attains the status of a dialogic discourse, its 'essentialism' will be deconstructed and softened. Because it allows no voices of dissent or questioning it has been frozen in its ideology unable to negotiate shifts in time and space. We, as readers, with our discriminating agency, have the responsibility of keeping the questioning image alive, through response, debate, action and ideology. By limiting literary resistance to ideological frameworks, we miss the point – the very organicity of resistance to human life – and fail to comprehend its 'essential' presence in all good writing.

Notes

1. 'Mimic' men is a term, she obviously borrows from V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men* (1967), which is a novel about the difficulty of breaking away from a colonial past and the powerlessness a new nation experiences in the face of neo-imperialism. 'Punkah Wallah' is a minor character from E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924), where the figure of the native with his handsome body, becomes a symbol of a mindless obedience, oblivious to all else.

2. For interpretations of *A Passage to India*, as part of a liberal discourse, despite the failure to connect the East and West, see Lionel Trilling, *E.M. Forster: A Study* (London: Hogarth Press, 1944). Also refer Peter Burra's introduction to the 1979 edition of *A Passage to India* (Penguin). For alternative, post David Lean interpretations refer Arun Prabha Mukherjee's *Oppositional Aesthetics* (Toronto: Tsar Publications, 1998) and Iqbal Masood's article in *The Indian Express*, 5 May, 1991, 'The Lean Legend'. The film brought about a sudden change in Indian interpretations of Forster, primarily as Lean's film begins in England and foregrounds the British perspective. The above references, for both kinds of interpretations, are just a sampling. One could produce a long list in support of both sides.
3. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2 volumes), mentions it as 1923. An online entry defines fundamentalism as, 'A type of militantly conservative religious movement characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts. Once used exclusively to refer to American Protestants who insisted on the inerrancy of the Bible, the term fundamentalism was employed more broadly in the late twentieth century to a variety of religious movements.' 'Fundamentalism', *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2007. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* 28 April, 2007 (<http://www.britannica.com/article.9390025>).