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La Nuit Bengali and Na Hanyate: Exploring the Narrative of Cultural Politics and Resistance

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to study the clash and conflict of cultures and perspectives with reference to Mircea Eliade's La Nuit Bengali (The Bengali Night) and Maitreyi Devi's Na Hanyate (It Does Not Die). It also addresses the point of contact and separation between Eliade and Devi re-visiting the liminality and the changing dynamics of the Self-Other, centre-margin, and so on. Eliade's point of view of Indian culture, Indian people, and particularly Indian women seems like a typical European as he misconstrues an Indian family's etiquette to suit his own understanding. His Eurocentric attention to Indian culture finds it a conventional society that cannot go beyond its religious and cultural prejudices. On the other hand, Devi's idea of a European outsider is unconventional as she belongs to an educated Indian elite class. Devi, through her version, turns into a linguistic agency of resistance although an attempt of self-censorship is noticeable in her description. This study, primarily focusing on theorist Homi K. Bhabha, also offers an analysis of race, gender, family, concept of love and physique, etc. as part of culture to address major points of argument between these two romance tales of colonial India.

KEY WORDS

Cross-cultural Relations, Liminal Space, Question of Authenticity, Quest for Identity, Stereotype and Mimicry, Resistance as Declaration of Emergence.

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1. Introduction

Culture is a complex web of language, interpretation, and negotiation that deals with people, their ideology, articulation, and their operation in society. Again, culture is political (Kuumba 112) which, in a broader sense, is the reflection of power dynamics that can be found in the form of ruler/ruled structure, colonizer/colonized relationship, gender and race, etc. Besides, culture is not a monolithic and discrete phenomenon; for Bhabha, cultures are always in contact with one another

referring to the process of “hybridization” (Bhabha 3-11). The ever-evolving dynamics of culture and its historical assimilation turn the understanding of it into a more complex discourse creating nuances and liminal space.

The liminality or the intersection in the cultural junction can turn into a point of “debate” with a diachronic view of interpretation and negotiation. Again, this interpretation and negotiation can be a form of discursive resistance where the concept of “mimicry” by Bhabha is a significant tool. In this

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discourse creation process, the question of perception comes to the forefront because resistance in the form of interpretation and negotiation is highly connected to the creation of perspectives. John Berger, an English art critic, in his 1972 book titled *Ways of Seeing* says, "Perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world" (Berger16). That this perspective is a combination of context, temporal and spatial denominator, and social education that work as catalysts behind entities perceives and analyzes things. With reference to Mircea Eliade's *La Nuit Bengali (Bengal Nights)* and Maitreyi Devi's *Na Hanyate (It Does not Die)*, this research explores that perception through the "Western eye" and the liminal space of contact between the Western "self" and the cultural "other" based primarily on theorist Homi K. Bhabha revisiting the changing dynamics of the "self" and the "other", the "global" and the "local", the "centre" and the "margin," so on and so forth. Besides, the discourse produced by the cultural "other", in the formational process of interpretation and negotiation, is a discursive strategy of resistance through redoing and re-narrating with difference which is not an act of servitude but a declaration of emergence. Therefore, the quest for identity through mimicry, redoing, re-narrating, and reorientation has a major socio-cultural, political, and literary entanglement. This study also locates this quest for identity examining Devi's version that has turned into a narrative of resistance, re-orientation of the "self" and re-

textualization of "Indian culture". In addition, this study also explores race, gender, family, concept of love and physique, etc. as part of culture to address major points of argument between these two romance tales of colonial India.

2. The Background of the Memoirs

Mircea Eliade's *Bengal Nights* and Maitreyi Devi's *It Does not Die* are two separate attempts to recount the identical history of romance, set against the backdrop of colonial India, where the concept of "love" and "erotic" become major points of argument between the two. Eliade composed his version of affairs in the Romanian language and first published it in 1933. Later, in 1950 it was translated into French as *La Nuit Bengali* and then into English in 1994 as *Bengal Nights*. In this fictive first-person narrative, the young protagonist, a Frenchman named Alain meets Surendranath DasGupta (fictive name Narendra Sen in Eliade's account) in India and eventually starts living with the DasGupta family. Eventually, Alain and Maitreyi fall in love and when Maitreyi's father discovers this, Alain is asked to leave the DasGupta residence. Interestingly, this story of the "failed" romance between a Western "self" and a non-Western "Other" did not fail to bring fortune to Eliade's literary career.

Much later, in the year 1938, Devi became aware of Eliade's autobiographical novel from her father, Surendranath DasGupta, but did not understand the explicit sexual nature of romance written in the text between herself and the disguised

Alain (Eliade) until Sergui, a friend of Eliade, came to Calcutta to meet Devi in 1972. Then she had the book translated and read it where she found a serious mismatch in the depiction of the events. And this incident, probably, made her re-tell the entire narrative in her own version of affairs titled *Na Hanyate (It Does not Die)* which was “love” as understood by her, devoid of sexual intimacy but not of sexual contact. From Devi’s account it is clearly evident that, “[l]ove is not only and simply the physical intercourses; rather love has deeper association with mentality, family, friends, relatives, and society” (Mamun 10).

3. The “Dispute” and the concept of “Authenticity”

It is clearly evident after reading both the texts that Devi’s one, to a large extent, is a rejoinder to Eliade’s account. Hence, conflicts in expression, in negotiation, and in interpretation of that negotiation are aftermaths of events that took place in a larger context of cultural assimilation. In other words, between the two far distant cultures perception of the “self” and the “other”, hierarchical position in terms of colonialism, race, and gender among others create different narratives and discourses of ruling and servitude. That is why — despite the narratives of both — the texts deal with a uniform storyline, particularly the encounter between the protagonists, their coming together, and then their separation: this cross-cultural romance tale follows the path of dispute and conflict. To be more

specific these two accounts become the battleground, whether or not their romance involves sexual union. Consequently, the question of authenticity and fabrication, specifically centered on the role of physique and “Indian hospitality”, stems from the representation of Devi as a non-western “self” and as a sexual “other” in *La Nuit Bengali*, most significantly from Devi’s rebuttal of re-narrating herself in *Na Hanyate*. On the one hand, jotting down events regularly in a diary, for example, has been a habit of Eliade’s marking his indication towards his text — a narrative with a proper demonstration of time, date, and chronology of happenings and, Devi’s claim of a “fabricated” narrative about physicality by Eliade puts that very “authenticity” under question in *Na Hanyate*, on the other. According to Devi (1988):

Why so much untruth is in your writing, Mircea? The truth that happened, was not that enough? You became mendacious for a good sale of the book. Alas, people do not seem to appreciate books anymore if it is not licentious—these ungraceful and indecent things are here from your country—uncomely, objectionable brass of love locked in the body (Devi 25).

It seems that Devi’s utterance is not only a denial of Eliade’s claim but her version is meant to be taken as “accurate” also. Besides, any understanding of truth greatly relies upon temporal and spatial factors—who, from where, at what moment of the history describing the “truth”.

Friedrich Nietzsche in his essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" claims that truth is:

A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms; in short a sum of relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a notion fixed, canonic, and binding...(Revkin and Ryan 263).

Therefore, truth is always context relative and is based on perspective as well. Reiteration of a concept, idea, or statement can emerge as truth for people. Moreover, what is truth for one can be an utter lie for another and that is why attempting to pursue only "truth" in these memoirs will not be a productive approach to understanding their narratives deeply. Reading of the texts instead should incorporate tracing that liminal space, keeping the binary logics: "truth" or "false", "east" or "west" etc. under inspection, where the "truth" factor overlaps or has conflict of interest. Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*: "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha 2).

4. Stereotyping, Perception, and Liminal space in the narratives

Therefore, the process of objectification by the Western "self" incorporates the production of certain ideas about non-west and reiteration of it

which in Bhabha's understanding is "stereotyping" the "other". Bhabha problematizes the idea of "stereotype" and finds it as a repercussion of the "anxiety" of the West. For Bhabha, "[t]he stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...." (94-95).

Therefore, the supposed inferiority of the colonized people has been a tool for colonialism to the justification of their perpetuating authority. And that is why they made use of different stereotypes utilizing various modes, for instance, through racist jokes, cinematic images, literary characters, and other forms of representations that ensured the circulation of "laziness", "stupidity", and "unintelligence" of the colonized "other". This question of the "stereotypes", as understood by Bhabha, stems from the anxiety of the colonizer: the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness (Huddart 4). As an attempt to perpetuate colonial domination, colonizers always focused and depended on the assertion of difference and that is where the reason behind the anxiety lies. Besides, for Bhabha, according to David Huddart (2006), "Colonial power is anxious, and never get what it wants- a stable, final distinction between the colonizers and the colonized" (Huddart 4).

For Eliade, even the guest-host and teacher-student relationship becomes an element of disavowal, and violating this relationship he further goes on

offending his guru by the fantasy that Mr. DasGupta, Devi's father, wanted Eliade to marry his daughter. Eliade, even further, does not leave stereotyping his guru that can be found in his description of Mr. DasGupta. Eliade (2015) writes in *Bengal Nights*:

I wondered how (Mr. DasGupta) could be so ugly, could lack expression so completely. He resembled a frog: bulging eyes, enormous mouth, round, black, iron pot of a head, low forehead and jet-black curls, squat body and sloping shoulders, protruding belly, short legs (Eliade 14).

Eliade's method of describing the characters in his novel closely resembles the colonizer's system of dominance through their portrayal of the non-western, wherein the colonized must never be equal and certainly not better than the colonizer. Even DasGupta's erudition and mastery of his own culture do not fall under Eliade's radar. However, this should be noticed that reverse stereotyping of foreigners also happens as is evident in the conversation between Devi and her mother where Mrs. DasGupta says that Devi's father shows his doubt about Eliade's ancestry. Not only that, for Devi's mother, the French are totally "uncivilized" (Devi 70) and since the DasGupta family knows nothing about his family, they doubt that he might carry some foul diseases. As stereotype and its impact is a matter of power position, so this stereotype by the oppositional

"other" hardly seems to affect Eliade's course of life.

5. Cross-cultural Relations and loop-holes of "(Mis)judgements"

In order to properly get the process of shift in meaning, a clear understanding of the word "culture" is necessary since it is an umbrella term and can be ambiguous as well under which individual subject, family, society, religions, food, dress, history, myth, behavior, etc. may come. Stephen Duncombe (2007) in his essay "(From) Cultural Resistance to Community Development" writes:

It helps to think of culture in at least two ways; first, culture with small c: culture as a set of values and norms and patterns of action that a people follow... Then as culture with capital C: Culture as a thing, an artefact- the way an artist might understand the term (Hall, 1977)... Whether it be through street fashions, graffiti murals, styles of music or dance (Duncombe 490-491).

But for Raymond Williams, culture, "[i]ncludes the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate" (Sardar and Loon 5). Therefore, structural and functional patterns of a family, society, and other institutions of a society provide a set of values and norms in the upbringing of beings although these values and norms vary in terms of region. In the process of growing up, members of a family internalize those culturally set

values and judge and act as per the rules. However, it does not necessarily mean that one passively adopts those norms; rather it is a two-way process where both adoption and articulation take place in an interpersonal context of social reality. But as long as family's hold over its members is concerned, it is a generally known factor that family in India or the Indian sub-continent has a greater grip on one in comparison to families in the West. Careful study of Eliade's and Devi's argument suggests how family as a source of cultural difference can be a cause of debate. Devi in her story tells Sergui:

'If he (Eliade) really was so much in love, why did he run away at one snubbing from my father? Had he no duty towards me? Have you ever known of such cowardice?' (Devi 10).

These lines by Devi affirm how much both family and love are significant to her. Although Eliade has plans to elope with Devi, Devi on the other hand, can neither leave her father nor be with her beloved. Her education, her ideology, and her upbringing do not allow her to get segregated from family and society substantiating her devotion to Indian mores. Another event can be added here as an example of a difference in perception due to distant cultural upbringing is that when Eliade is told to leave the Sen family, he seems to think of Devi's attempt (in eloping with him) because he believes she needs to tackle her family since both love each other. He cannot take further steps on his own when it is the question of living

together forever with Devi. Devi, on the other hand, feels it is Eliade who has to come forward and manage her family to win her. Hence, the question of role-play becomes the point of dispute. Devi's assertion of Eliade to bell the cat refers to the Indian context and internalization of those norms and acting as such particularly against the backdrop of 1930s India. While commenting on Devi's understanding of culture and nation, Sriparna Basu (2017) makes her observation in her essay "Passionate Fictions: Horizons of the Exotic and Colonial Self-fashioning in Mircea Eliade's *Bengal Nights* and Maitreyi Devi's *Na Hanyate*:

In responding to Eliade's fiction, Maitreyi draws on archetypes of Indian cultural nationalism, also structured by a trope of discovery or recovery of submerged aspects of self. Reading her Bengali novel *Na Hanyate* alongside Eliade's versions of the encounter poses fascinating questions not only of intertextuality and of literary mediations of "real" characters or events, but also of the erotics of the East/ West encounter and of the Indian woman writing back from within a script of cultural nationalism to her representation in an exoticizing fiction (Basu 2017).

Furthermore, in the same context of the 1930s, Devi's repeated claim of fabrication in Eliade's description of physical intercourse indirectly shows her concern of "existential crisis" as a female entity that marks the gender treatment in India which is not untrue in today's context either, for instance,

as Devi says, "I am an Indian woman, I have family, future, and fame, and for me defamation is more than death" (Devi 25). Even her letter to Mac Linscott Ricketts, publisher and translator of Eliade's books, shows that concern: "I forgive him for the harm he (Eliade) has done to me by writing things which were not true and also were unworthy of an Indian woman"² (Gligor 135).

It is true that the perception of an individual entity, as understood by John Berger, is an amalgamation of complex thought processes that our eyes meet in different layers of knowledge from the past to the present: knowledge of history, beauty, truth, genius, civilization, form, status, taste, etc. create different levels of assumptions leading to the consciousness of individuality with the help of which one's eye experiences and analyzes things that come before him (Berger, 10-11). Although Berger's observation here basically focuses on the critique of art form i.e. painting, his idea is no less relevant in the understanding of society and culture as a whole and how we act on the basis of those understandings. In light of Berger's view, careful examination of the texts suggests how perception can also become a source of misjudgment because difference in context gives birth to difference in perception. Eliade's interpretation, for instance, of the DasGupta family's

hospitality, directs readers to such realization although his fellow compatriot Mihaela Gligor, a Romanian academic and philosopher, seems to understand the hospitality rightly. In her essay "Maitreyi: The Bengali Connection" she says:

Young Mircea Eliade met Maitreyi Devi in Surendranath DasGupta's house.....where he lived for a while at the invitation of his professor, who was eager to show him the true India, and to facilitate his student a direct contact with the authentic Bengali life (Gligor 136).

But Eliade's version says, "Sometimes a doubt comes to mind that they might consider arranging their daughter's marriage with me" (Eliade 39). Devi's version, on the other hand, explains it as her father's belief that if Eliade had resided with them, there would have been an opportunity for an exercise of Indian and Western culture together. In addition, Eliade would have got a homely environment as he came to India from a far-off country and would not have missed his family. Another instance can be cited here as evidence of such an assessment by Eliade of the DasGupta family: sometimes Eliade finds Devi alone at noon in the house, when the Sen family takes rest or passes their time alone. He assumes it as a ploy so that both can pass time together. Hence, these doubts (about marriage

²Maitreyi Devi to Mac Linscott Ricketts, letter from February 20, 1976, in Maitreyi Devi, Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Correspondență. 1976&1988*, Preface by Mihaela Gligor, Introduction by Mac Linscott Ricketts, Translated by Mihaela

Gligor and Maria, Daniela Pomohaci. Edition by Mihaela Gligor, Cluj, Napoca, Casa Cărții de 3tiință, 2012, p. 22. The original letters can be found in Mihaela Gligor's Archive.

and finding alone at noon) of Eliade show his perception backed by his Eurocentric notion that conforms to the typical “Western” understanding of the “self” over the cultural “other”.

6. “Western Discovery”, Objectification, and Positional Superiority

While giving the definition of culture Clifford Geertz claims, “Culture is simply the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves” (Sardar and Loon 5). However, this is not a naive attempt of handing over stories generation after generation, for it is deeply connected to power politics, knowledge creation, and having authority over others. One can ask who produces the story and who accepts it. And Edward Said has his observation on this power politics and authority in his book *Orientalism*. For Said, it is a question of authority:

“[d]ealing with it [the orient], by making statements about it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient” (Said 3).

Therefore, the production of knowledge and spreading of it does not remain a simple and naive attempt since knowledge serves as a means to authority over its receivers. As a result, the formation of binary opposition established by the West in the form of “self” and “other”, “civilized” and “primitive”, “white” and “black”, “centre” and “margin”, “colonizer” and “colonized” etc. refers to the western way of seeing the world. In this categorization of identities, the

construction of knowledge has been a tool for perpetuating the authority over the colonized. Mircea Eliade’s memoir *La Nuit Bengali* abounds in that categorization of the oppositional “others”. For instance, when Alain first meets Devi’s family members, he gives a description of Devi’s mother: “Her uncovered legs, darkish face, crimsoned lips, deep black eyes, and slightly curly hair remind me the bohemian girls of our country” (Eliade 9).

From this description, it can be easily assumed that this passage is replete with suggestions of discovery or exploration. It is understandably evident that a European suddenly makes the “discovery” of the remotest things and the world is “illuminated” with that newly “discovered” information. Apparently, Eliade’s description helps understand his assumed “positional superiority” (Said 95) where this Western observer positions himself as an explorer who seems to ascertain the secrets of the “other” world. For Azim, the woman is seen to be the repository of those secrets, made to open the secret to the explorer. Firdaus Azim in her essay *Bengal Nights: A Novel by Mircea Eliade: It Does not Die: A Romance by Maitreyi Devi* observes:

The eastern man opens his woman to the purview of the western male gaze, while the woman remains the passive object, transferred from one man to the other. She becomes an object of knowledge, the medium through which other cultures can

be gleaned and understood (Azim 1035).

Eliade at his later stage of life got fame for his scholarly work on the history of religions and new humanism where he expresses the necessity for broader assimilation of religio-cultural experiences across time and space and focuses on the encounters between cultures. However, his urge on the dialogue between cultures follows the pattern of an anthropologist because his discourse of assimilating others seems to appropriate the non-western difference with a subtle and indirect claim of proprietary of famous discoveries are of the Westerns. Even his discourse suggests that articulating the non-west and incorporating them under new humanism is a prerogative of the West. As mentioned by Eliade in his essay "History of Religions and a New Humanism":

We have in mind the discovery of the exotic and primitive arts, which revived modern Western aesthetics. We have in mind especially the discovery of the unconscious by psychoanalysis, which opened new perspectives for our understanding of man..... The "world" in which preanalytic man lived became obsolete after Freud's discoveries. But these "destructions" opened new vistas to Western creative genius (Eliade 3).

Discoveries", as understood by Eliade, is the task meant for "*Western creative genius*", likewise his depiction, like a

common European or a colonial enterprise, includes objectification of the "other" - Devi and her family. Eliade in his account states:

I can remember when I saw her for the first time, a strange tremor passed through

my body.....My inquisitive eyes were ogling at her big dark eyes and thick lips...I was feeling strangely uncomfortable since her hands looked very mannish (Eliade

These utterances carry the view of both an anthropologist and an orientalist that describes the "*defected other*". In other words, Devi becomes an object in Eliade's narration that can be given any structural shape he wants. While commenting on that, Ginu Kamani (1996) in her essay titled "A Terrible Hurt: The Untold Story behind the publishing of Maitreyi Devi" tells of *La Nuit Bengali*:

Eliade had perhaps come to India to transcend the Judeo-Christian sexual repression in himself, which experience he could only attempt to describe in fiction, rendering his object into a caricature of a tantric goddess, transforming her inexplicably from virgin to sex queen in his unrealistic self-indulgent fantasy (Kamani 1996).

It was stated earlier that how perspective directs an individual subject in his or her navigation of thought process. With the passage of time, this perspective changes and

takes different shapes but in terms of Eliade, even at his later stages of life, his orientalist view on India seems unchanged. India remains a “mystery” to him and he, like a European explorer, cannot stop deciphering that. His view of Devi and her family is an evidence of his Eurocentric notion that he carries from Romania to India during the 1930s but the discourse of his autobiography is a display of his fostering of that notion even at the later stages of his life. He writes effusively the meaning of India for him in his autobiography:

India fascinated me (Eliade), it drew me like a mystery through which I seemed to foresee my destiny.... To encounter the mystery that was waiting for me somewhere in India, that mystery of which I knew nothing except that it was there for me to decipher.... (Kamani 1996).

The question of objectification of a non-western individual, as understood by Ginu Kamani, stems from her reading of both the texts and their backgrounds. Her essay explores Eliade’s attempt to write this semi-autobiography for a literary contest. As a consequence of it, Eliade probably had to add a more fictional touch in his text along with documenting facts of his stay in India.

7. Creation of Knowledge through Narratology, and “Cultural Politics”

The narratology of this memoir *La Nuit Bengali* by Mircea Eliade, as explained by Kamani, is symptomatic of popular

western formulaic writing technique. Ginu Kamani (1996) in her essay says:

This erotic formula (seduction, climax, denouement) is one of the many individual centered formulas of western popular culture, such as one finds in adventure stories, detective stories, romance which center around individuals in isolation from the social webbing of inhibiting responsibilities and controlling hierarchies...(Kamani 1996).

Therefore, the question of the conscious and intentional attempt to write this “fictive memoir” by Eliade stems from its narratology that this text cannot be merely an outcome of a youth’s emotional outburst. Since it was written for a literary contest, the author did not forget to follow the structural pattern of Western popular formula writing where the erotic focus should be on the lovers themselves (Kamani 1996). Furthermore, this can be assumed that Eliade was well aware of the trending stylistics and hence of meeting the demand of the trend. Therefore, facts acquire an overly fictional touch in Eliade’s hand. Additionally, this narratology also incorporates fictive naming of the characters: readers of Eliade’s text will find the changing names (Surendranath DasGupta becomes Narendra Sen, Mircea Eliade becomes Alain etc.) where Maitreyi Devi and her sister Chabu remain the same. This gives birth to a question, and that is why did Eliade keep Maitreyi’s name unchanged? Geoffrey James Aguirre in his essay, “Maitreyi Devi and Mircea

Eliade: One moment as fractal" explains this as Eliade's direct attempt to count his memoir as a subjective rather than an objective impression. He questions, "Why does Eliade tamper with such things? One might ask and one answer is that he did not want his text to be mistaken as an objective text by those who would classify this as such" (Aguirre 12).

However, this explanation seems not enough to mark Eliade's text as a fully subjective one, because if this is so, then the author would not have renamed his protagonist at least. Not only is Eliade's protagonist, Alain, a French person; Eliade himself is actually from Romania. Rather changing both name and location suggests his conscious attempt to disengage himself from the sensation that he creates through the text for readers. Subsequently one can ask, does being a Frenchman carry more weight than being a Romanian or is this an example of Eliade's inferiority complex? In Devi's memoir *La Nuit Bengali*, the protagonist and her counterpart are named Amrita, whereas Mircea Eliade prefers to utilize fictional names in his work. Such an attempt by Devi shows both her self-censorship and her concern about negative recognition as a woman in Indian society, and moreover, she has become a celebrated poet and intellectual in Bengal by the time she attempts to write her version. Both Eliade and Devi remain stereotypical as Firdaus Azim(1996) observes: "Surprisingly, both the writers play the accepted, almost stereotypical role in love and sex. Eliade remains the young

western male adventurer....Maitreyi plays the eastern woman, coy and protesting innocence, a good wife" (Azim 1036).

Therefore, this phenomenon of changing and unchanging names can be understood in light of Freud's term "The Uncanny" which Bhabha employs in his explication of post-colonial experience in his book *The Location of Culture*. Freud's analysis of the story "The Sand-Man" by Hoffmann suggests that "the uncanny" is the repetition compulsion in the subconscious mind: the way the mind repeats traumatic experiences in order to deal with them (Revkin and Ryan427). But Bhabha reads this slightly differently. For him, the past of an individual self can be a way of re-evaluation of one's identity in the culture analysis through self-observation and self-objectification (Huddart 56). Consequently, the individual falls into a complex realm of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* (Revkin and Ryan 418), that is "homely" (to those who connect themselves to the culture) and "unhomely" (those who find culture ever-changing) situations. Hence, the similarity for both Bhabha and Freud is that this uncanny works at the psychical level. Now, if Eliade is looked at from Freud's point of "Uncanny", then probably the Eurocentric Alain's stay at DasGupta home with his presupposed "positional superiority" (Said 9) refers to a "superiority complex" in the form of a past trauma that he cannot but confront through his writing with the eye of an orientalist who explores and explains the "Other" world. And his

centre of attention – the physique of an Indian woman (that reminds him of exotic bohemian girls of his country) and reference to Devi's coming to his room at night (Devi denies that outright) might be an attempt to overcome his trauma by shifting his guilt to Devi. But from Bhabha's "uncanny" to Eliade's "homely" is as long as he can treat the "other" to suit his content as a western "self" and "unhomely" is when he fails to accept that in his "mysterious" India, Devi is growing up in a "liberal" family and getting educated not only institutionally but also in contact with other erudite people from home and abroad resulting in another Devi, an active linguistic agency.

8. Question of Identity and the concept of "Centre" and "Margin"

From the understanding of "centre" and "margin" discourse of colonialism and oriental studies, a question arises about what would be the articulation of the "margins" if they had ample opportunities. What would be the pattern of their self-representation? How would they position themselves as an identity? For a long time in history, the orientalist and the anthropologists from the West have been making that representation of the "Other" who are "mysterious" entities to "decipher" and "visualize". For Peter Hulme, an English academic, this task of "visualization" of the "margins" is not an easy one. His observation of "visualizing" Caliban in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "The difficulty in visualizing Caliban cannot be put down to a failure of clarity in the text. Caliban, as a

compromise formation, can exist only within discourse: he is fundamentally and essentially beyond the bounds of representation" (Hulme 108). Therefore, looking into Devi's text in light of the idea of articulation from the "margin" will be a productive approach for an in-depth understanding. However, after the publication of Maitreyi Devi's autobiographical novel *Na Hanyate*, there is no reference found from Eliade's end about what he feels about Devi's state of affairs narrated in her version. A reply as such would give an opportunity to readers/critics to get to know how Eliade views "a response novel" coming from a "bohemian" woman from his "mysterious" India. Moreover, it would give scope to know how he translates and perceives in his mind the time frame between the 1930s and the 1970s when the teenage "coy" and "unsmart" girl Devi transformed herself into a learned intellectual, and a celebrated poet, lecturer, and vice-president of the All-India Women's Coordinating Council.

9. Cultural Nationalism and Linguistic Agency of Resistance

The way Devi puts into her version the events with Eliade, the description of family members, events with Rabindranath Tagore whom she addressed as gurudev (mentor) we get a picture of a time lived and experienced by an erudite person. Unlike Eliade, her version does not incorporate a chronology of events and obviously not any so-called "formula" for writing. Re-narration of Devi does merely involve a sequential description of events; rather it is more like a philosophical observation of the

past and present relations. And one can identify this observation as a discourse for re-textualization, re-speculation, re-telling, and restructuring of her own. This narrative of resistance can be spectacted through Bhabha's understanding of "mimicry". Taking the term from Derrida, Bhabha further problematizes this idea that is applicable for both the colonized and the colonizer. "Mimicry" for Bhabha is:

[t]he representation of a difference that it itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers (Bhabha 122-23).

Therefore, mimicry is an act by the colonized where they follow the colonizer's culture but not blindly. To put it differently, mimicry is redoing or repetition with a difference and not an act of their servitude. Additionally, its inherent characteristics can be a form of mockery that turns into response to the circulation of stereotyping discourse by the colonized. Colonial mimicry, on the other hand, for Bhabha, "[i]s the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a

subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (122). In Bhabha's understanding, colonial discourse as a representation of the colonial ruler's mission that wants a section of the colonized to be like the ruler but not identical as representative of the rulers. Besides, this creation of this educated class by the British makes them anxious since it ensures the colonial subject's "partial" presence (Bhabha 122) in decision-making body and this class through the negotiation with the colonizers re-orient themselves in different modes of presentation. Maitreyi's memoir is one such self-orientation among others breaking the stereotyping discourse of the West. The question of self-orientation in the text *It Does not Die* by Maitreyi Devi stems from the depiction of her satisfactory life at the very beginning of the memoir. Here, she gives an account of her family members specifically her husband with whom she has had a magnificent and sublime conjugal life (Devi 7) that quite fits with Indian, particularly Bengali tradition: understanding of "fulfilled life". Her narrative of cultural nationalism gives an impression that her life is full to the brim with members of her family not "ruptured" by the absence of a European "self", Eliade. Further, her philosophy of life uttered in reply to Sergui's (Eliade's friend) sighed comment that her father destroyed her life, indicates her resistance. According to Devi (1988):

How much do you (Sergui) know of my life? Who can spoil my life? My life is rich. I have built up an

ideal home. I live happily surrounded by children and grandchildren. So many persons love and respect me. Granted the unbounded affection of my guru (Rabindranath Tagore), I have experienced ecstasy that is beyond the world of mind and words (10).

Devi's account includes the information that her family was regularly visited by various erudite people even from different regions of Europe. Encounter different cultures and illuminate yourself- was the philosophy of Mr. DasGupta. In the context of 1930s Bengal, allowing a non-Hindu male foreigner in a Brahmin family is adequate to imagine the liberal view of DasGupta household. In DasGupta's words:

If you (Euclid) would have to stay at my father's time, my wife would have to come with a veil over her face before you,.....you must have to eat separately, people from out of community were thought of unclean and untouchable- comparing that your stay here today is a revolution (Devi 29).

Exposure to such a liberal view of multi-cultural entanglement is actually a reply to Eliade's homogenizing Eurocentric notion about India. Additionally, it should be noted that Devi's version as words of resistance does not include any word or event connected to vengeance. This gives a picture of her family that holds a liberal view of society and culture.

10. Conclusion

To conclude, the discussion above about the two texts *La Nuit Bengali* and *Na Hanyate* shows how cultural assimilation and perception between Western "self" and cultural "other" can be an object of examination. Besides, attempts to determine one as true or authentic between the two will be an unproductive approach for a better understanding of clashes and conflicts of culture and perspectives. Instead, analyzing why both texts are presented in such a way and why the concept of love and physique become a common battleground will open the premise for endless interpretation.

On reading both the memoirs together, it is apparent that one is written as a love story with a western eye and the other account incorporates the retrospection and introspection of a woman reconnecting the girl and the woman. Therefore, it is clear that Devi's narrative of *Na Hanyate* is a display of her grown-up and thoughtful vindication of life. Her version not only explores the past but also turns into a linguistic agency of resistance through her rebuttal Eliade's claim of a physical relationship and his attitudes toward Indian culture, etiquette, and hospitality. Her text becomes an attempt to break down West's stereotypical notion about East and emphasizes the mental and inner union rather than the physical. Despite all the conflicts and differences, "love" remains a common factor that connects both Eliade and Devi in a relationship that "does not die" (Azim 1037).

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