

Nietzschean echo is very clear in these lines. Following Nietzsche's utterance that "I was there, I saw it" the writer becomes a witness to the whole process of writing itself. He moves not only through his consciousness but through an intersubjective domain. As a postmodern writer, Burroughs appears in a variety of alter egos and sometimes addresses the reader directly. In the Burroughsian universe, this is a position of tremendous responsibility, because writers make things happen, after all: "In the beginning was the word, (*Naked Lunch*, 61) and the universe itself was written into existence. Even allowing for what the various alter egos get up to in his texts, Burroughs' work can now be seen as a continuous autobiography of his ideas: the shifting planes of areas of interest are interconnected in a complex web like a three dimensional grid that his mind moves around in. Since we get a map of his own thought process, the very act of describing it is confessional. It means that Burroughs can jump from a fictional character to a piece of scientific theory without disturbing the structure of his work. He can move from the written word to the painting, tape recording, even to acting in films, and it is all part of a narrative in which the artistic self moves on in misrecognition of itself through 'fictions' of the self. *Naked Lunch* portrays a reality that is unreal and absent. It proclaims the essential absurdities of life and reduces it to a series of cruel and often pointless charades. Time, place, plot and characters are not important in the narrative except narrative effects – effects which are important for their disruptive traces, and hidden meanings. Burroughs portrays reality in such a way that the connection between religion and the state forms one of the themes of his work. *Naked Lunch* contains attacks on Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. It was Christianity that created the illiberal conditions which caused Burroughs to live outside the United States for 25 years, and it usually receives the full force of his criticism. When asked about Christianity, he said to Barry Miles in *A Portrait*: "I'm violently anti-Christian. It was the worst disaster that ever occurred on a disaster-prone planet, the most virulent spiritual poison Fundamentalists are dangerous lunatics. There's really no place for them in an over-crowded life boat. They're a menace." (102) There is an accumulation of material objects in *Naked Lunch*, a cluttered mosaic, a chaotic encyclopedia of things, but they whirl by us so quickly that they never acquire the weightiness of materiality as we find it in Balzac, Dickens, or Flaubert. The concreteness that anchors Burroughs' text is the literalness of absence, a materiality of loss: the disappearance of the sick or aged disposed of in jungles or death-dealing sanitariums; the absence of legs lost to gangrene infection; the absence of sound ("Silent Wings of the Anopheles Mosquito"); the absence of transcendent meaning ("TV antennas to the meaningless Sky"). This absence of any central or transcendental signifier, an absence which marks the nature of all discourse, finds in the language of *Naked Lunch* a peculiarly concrete representation. This paradoxical convergence of concreteness and absence reflects the technological mysticism of Burroughs' fiction, his scientific belief in what he calls "non-body experience". Burroughs suggests, again parenthetically, that some drug intoxications are actually

“space time travel”: (*Naked Lunch*, 110). Burroughs' philosophy and aesthetics of absence leads to a new way of thinking, a way which protects the integrity and will of the individual from the dualistic and hierarchical “mind locks” of western thought. He remarks to Daniel Odier in *The Job*: “It is no oceanic organismal subconscious body thinking. It is precisely delineated by what it is not. [...] There are no considerations here that would force thinking into certain lines of structural or environmental necessities”(91). The strategy is clearly a negative one and further maintains in *The Job*: “The first step is to stop doing everything you 'have to do'. Mock up a way of thinking you have to do. [...] Now mock up some thinking you don't have to do. [...] Wind up in you don't have to think anything”.(89-90). One recognizes here the deconstructive tendency to perceive sign, story, identity, or meaning as a deferred presence in which everything is, as Burroughs puts it, “delineated by what it is not”. While conventional narrative, as Barthes argues, tries in his *S/Z* to “impregnate the void of what it silences by the plenitude of what it says,”(162). Burroughs narratives repeatedly expose that void, accentuate that silence. His texts reveal that the true substance of writing is the hiatus it frames, the absence or gap it creates by displacing presence, reality, truth. This is the negative aesthetic.

In Burroughs' work, then, the absence or emptiness that is language is made literal and concrete. We must learn, he warns, in his *The Job* to “stop words to see and touch words to move and use words like objects.”(91). Not only must words become tangible (and thus controllable) objects, the entire manipulative system of western language and thought must be made visible. For Burroughs, the problem is presented more dramatically as the necessity of escape from a blinding addiction. To Kick the habits of Western discourse, to achieve the “total exposure” of all cultural addictions, one must follow the command to “see smell and listen”.(*Naked Lunch* xiv). If the word is made an object, a fact, a body, if it becomes external and visible, we can “see the enemy direct”. The alternative is to be trapped in body and word forever and comments in *The Yage Letters*: “Listen look or shit forever /.../ in thee beginning was the word /.../ come out of the time word the forever. /.../ all out of time and into space. /.../ the writing of space. the writing of silence. Look Look Look”.(61-62)

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The Nation and its (non)Citizens: The Hijra in Mahesh Dattani's *Seven Steps Around the Fire*

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Abstract: The paper shows how a masculinist heteronormative idea is perpetuated in the formation of nation. Such an idea not only deprives women from occupying the centre but also disallows sexual others from performing citizenship roles. The paper takes up Dattani's *Seven Steps Around the Fire* as a play that brings to our notice the derecognition of sexual minorities in the state and governmental apparatuses. Close textual analysis shows the internalization of sexual others as subalterns in the prevailing discourse. The paper concludes portraying the inherent difference between the western concept of nation and the understanding about nation as it has evolved in India. It is shown that the Indian nation raised in the pluralist ideas espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru is still capable of delivering democratic citizenship to its sexual others. A recent landmark Supreme Court judgement shows that, for all the voices of obscurantism and intolerance, sanity and good sense have not forsaken the nation.

Keywords: heteronormative, nation, citizenship, sexual others, hijra, assimilit, exclusionary, diversity, plurality

I

"The nation" Elleke Boehmer argues is "informed throughout by its gendered history [...] that gendered, predominantly familial (patriarchal), forms have been invoked, paradoxically, to imagine postcolonial nations into being" (3-4). Anne McClintock also feels that "all nationalisms are gendered" (89) and that "nationalism is [...] constituted [...] as a gendered discourse" (90). Along with the claims of masculinity on nationalism, in Cynthia Enloe's words, "masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (44), heterosexuality has remained the other dominating trope. Judith Butler, for example, ponders on how "the postulate of a founding heterosexuality [...] works in the building of a certain fantasy of state and nation" (34-35). Likewise, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in the introduction to their anthology *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* point to the fact that nation and citizenship continue to be "premised within normative parameters of masculinity and heterosexuality" (xiv). The Indian nation has similarly had a masculinist, heteronormative underpinning. While at one level it has led to the marginalization of women in the affairs of the nation state, at another level it consisted in denying sexual justice and equality to the sexual others. The sexual minorities, even after more than sixty years of independence are still therefore left wishing the status and privileges that a citizen ordinarily lays claim to and citizenship rights entails. Citizenship, following Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, we note over and above the familiar duties and obligations of civic citizenship implies "every day, existential negotiations with bureaucratic regulations, welfare institutions, and the functionaries

of the state; and entails being regulated by and having recourse to the laws of the land” (1). As Sunder Rajan points out referring to Yuval-Davis and Werbner, moving beyond “an earlier 'liberal and political science' understanding of the 'formal relationship' between the individual and the state” citizenship today instead indicates “a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices, and a sense of belonging” (1). The sad reality for sexual minorities is that their claim to such a “total relationship” has not still been recognized by the Indian nation-state. The ongoing events around the repeal of section 377 provide a more immediate context to our intolerance towards alternate sexuality. Introduced in 1861, Section 377 a reworking of the British antisodomy law of 1860 reads, “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine” (Vanita and Kidwai 221). Contested by the NAZ Foundation in the court of law, it was read down by the Delhi High Court in 2009 proclaiming,

If there is one constitutional tenet that can be said to be underlying theme of the Indian Constitution, it is that of “inclusiveness”. This Court believes that Indian Constitution reflects this value deeply ingrained in Indian society, nurtured over several generations. The inclusiveness that Indian society traditionally displayed, literally in every aspect of life, is manifest in recognising a role in society for everyone. Those perceived by the majority as “deviants” or “different” are not on that score excluded or ostracised. (WP(C) No.7455/2001 104)

However, the Supreme Court set aside the High Court's order in its ruling dated 11.12.2013 maintaining that the legislature is the competent authority “to consider the desirability and propriety of deleting Section 377 IPC from the statute book or amend the same” (97-98). Effectively it means recriminalization once again of consensual private homosexual acts between adults. It is surely a travesty of history that whereas the English who made the law have decriminalized homosexuality between consenting adults in 1967, we are still saddled with this colonial piece of legislation with not much hope of it being stuck down in the foreseeable future. The disillusionment resides in the response of the political class and the larger population to the ruling. Though the ruling party of that time Congress and its ministers (E.T. Bureau n.p.) along with the Left parties (Roy n.p.) came out against the Supreme Court order, the larger political community has veered from being hostile to indifferent to paying lip service. While the President of the BJP Rajnath Singh came out in support of the order claiming that “homosexuality is an unnatural act and cannot be supported,” (Ramaseshan n.p.), the other important national parties skirted the issue in election year. The Aam Aadmi Party prompt in expressing their disappointment with the judgement of the Supreme Court and their expectation that Parliament will step in to repeal the archaic law, however, felt it prudent not include it in their national manifesto (Ratnam n.p.). The general underlying feeling among the political class has been that rather than helping them get votes the issue will scare away many of their conservative voters. As far as the rabid right

and the religious denominations of all orders the ruling vindicated the law of nature. We are now back to those old days when what is natural will be fixed by the clergy.

II

Mahesh Dattani has been at the forefront of the nation's tryst with alternate, marginalized, non-normative sexuality. His plays have repeatedly taken on issues of homosexuality, child-sex abuse and the third gender. As Dattani indicates he is not squeamish about his choice of subjects, "Some subjects, which are under-explored, deserve their space. It's no use brushing them under the carpet" (De n.p.). He realizes the importance of establishing the rights of the marginalised in the society, upholding individual choices against social dikats urging conformity. "We have to understand the marginalised, including the gays. Each of us have a sense of isolation within given contexts. That's what makes us individual" (De n.p.). His plays convey the trauma of being the marginalized, the politics of being the minority in the country. In Dattani's words, "I talk about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand 'this' space. They live on the fringes of the society and are not looking for acceptance, but are struggling to grab as much fringe-space for themselves as they can" (Multani n.p.). They are as Susan Oommen notes about the non-heterosexual staking out his territory in the heterosexual world, about the non-majority negotiating when the majority holds control (348). And of all the marginalized characters that people his stage, none has perhaps been consigned to the fringes more than the hijra in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1999). None perhaps has been more derecognized by the nation-state. Their humanity itself being under suspect, they are perceived as non-humans, quite evident from Constable Munswamy's surprise at Uma's use of the feminine pronoun to refer to Anarkali: "She! Of course it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't" (Dattani 2000:7). And it is not just the lowly Constable Munswamy, even educated Suresh thinks on similar lines, "I hope this thing didn't give you any trouble" (Dattani 2000:16). Such is the societal prejudice against them that even crimes committed by them are deemed repulsive. As Constable Munswamy declares that a lady like Uma should look at more acceptable cases like "Man killing wife, wife killing man's lover, brother killing brother [...] dowry death cases" (Dattani 2000:7). It seems that the hijras who are marginalized in the social hierarchy are similarly disadvantaged in respect of crime. The reduction of the hijra to the lowest level is evident otherwise also. While the hijras are not directly represented as beggars, Constable Munswamy equates them with beggars in a scene in which street children approach Uma's car asking for money:

MUNSWAMY: Madam, be careful. The hijras will come running now.

UMA: There are no hijras. Children! Just children.

MUNSWAMY: Same thing. Beggars only, no? (Dattani 2000:18)

The threat to the hijras of sexual assaults not only from society at large but also from custodians of law is a further reminder of their social vulnerability. Kept in the male section of the prison Anarkali is under constant threat of physical and sexual violence. Under the circumstances,

sexual services are her only means of bargaining for life. Refusing to talk to Uma she says: "Go away. After servicing all these sons of whores, my mouth is too tired to talk" (Dattani 2000:8). But even these services are no guarantee against violence. Angered at Anarkali's insolence, the constable orders the other prisoners to beat her. The stage direction reads: "The other inmates scream with pleasure as they beat up Anarkali" (Dattani 2000:9). As far as the exploitation of sexual minorities by the law keepers, Anarkali's invitation to Constable Munswamy to exchange cigarettes for sex is chilling in its suggestive simplicity: "Just one, na. (Very sexual.) I will do anything for you, brother. Give, na [...] If you had a beautiful sister, you will give her a cigarette for a fuck, no"? (Dattani 2000:11).

The metaphorical voicelessness of the hijra in the nation-state is given a literal representation in an episode in Zia Jaffrey's *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India* that along with Serena Nanda's *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* remains a definitive study of the hijra community in India. Describing an incident where a hijra Kamal Baksh is summoned before her by the police to corroborate research findings, she notes the peculiar way the encounter proceeds: "Kamal Baksh was not compelled to actually speak the truth; she merely had to listen to police versions of their history, interrupting if she disagreed, then letting the officer correct the narrative, never having to say the words themselves. Thus there was little coercion, other than that the situation had arisen at all" (Jaffrey 124). Like the upper-class researcher in Dattani's play whose access to the community is predicated on her proximity to channels of state power, Jaffrey's police contacts lead her to the hijras to gain knowledge about them. The silencing of the subaltern is complete when the police narrate their history. Dattani's play, in contrast, allows the hijras to speak in their own voice. Still the difference in class and status between the researcher and her subject is too palpable to escape notice. Uma's interview with Anarkali begins with the researcher introducing herself. Anarkali's insouciant response to the introduction subverts Uma's attempt at egalitarianism:

UMA: I teach sociology.

ANARKALI (smokes): Very good.

UMA: I am doing my paper on class- and gender-related violence.

ANARKALI: What do you want me to do? Shall I come to sing and dance when you pass your exam?

UMA: I have told you a little bit about myself. Now tell me something about you.

ANARKALI: What is there to tell? I sing with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born people give us money otherwise I will put a curse on them. (Laughs) As if God is on our side. (Dattani 2000:12)

As the conversation proceeds Anarkali with growing intimacy tells Uma: "If you were a hijra, I would have made you my sister" (Dattani 2000:13). But on Uma's invoking the familial term in a different sense saying that they can be sisters despite her not being a hijra, Anarkali rubs in the obvious differences in their class and social position straight back at Uma:

'Where are you and where am I'? (Dattani 2000:13). Uma's invocation of a cross-class, cross-gender, and cross-cultural sisterhood, "One day you will understand. Anarkali, I would love to be your sister, if you will be mine" (Dattani 2000:13) collapses the moment she in response to Anarkali's cry of empathy begging Uma to save her blurts out that she's here "to gather some information for ... [her] thesis" (Dattani 2000:13). The withering "Then say that. Don't pretend to be my sister" (Dattani 2000:13) encapsulates the sense of betrayal that the ostracized feel when social do-gooders pursue their own agendas in the garb of social welfare. It is another matter that Uma will later rise to the occasion and redeem herself.

III

The homogeneous Western concept of the nation has no place for such aberrant elements. Existing in the fringes they go on to become subjects of the nation-state's project of what following Foucault can be termed as "normalization". "Normalization" in the case of such ambivalent sexuality takes the form of "irrevocable gender assignment" an "incorrigible belief in and insistence upon female and male as the only 'natural' options" (Lal 120). As in the well publicized case of Herculine Barbin, the state wants to pin down an individual's sexual identity to a cut and dried two-sex model. But that only results in shutting out all other options to those who think themselves "different" with disastrous consequences. Herculine Barbin committed suicide for she was denied the fluidity in sexual identity, to actually choose for herself whether she wanted to be recognized as a man or a woman. And this apparently innocent normalization often takes the form of invasive medical treatments. Thus, through the twin methods of assimilation and exclusion the modern nation-state creates "a glorious and stable self-image of the imagined community" (Bhattacharya 186). The Indian civilizational ethos, however, Vinay Lal argues, does not subscribe to the exclusionary, assimilationist Western model of the nation-state. He points out that that in the tale of the hijras cooption in erstwhile Indian society lies the tale "of the deep encrusting of Indian society in mythic structures, the resistance of Indian civilizational modes to the classificatory and confining imperatives of the modern nation-state, and the possibilities of being and imagining oneself that exceed what in the West are taken to be radical, if not deviant, forms of self-presentation" (122). Hijras being neither man nor woman, Vinay Lal indicates, defy paradigms of classification and enumeration dominant in modern knowledge systems. He goes on to compare their existence with those of the nomads and gypsies another class that defies the classificatory enumerative character of the modern nation-state. "A nomadic people in a world that knows how to cross borders rather than transgress boundaries, and where transculturalism only exists in prescribed modes, gypsies are the bane of the census enumerator, the enemy of the nation-state with its sacrosanct borders, the confounders of an overweening civility" (135). It is another matter that with the influence of colonization modern India has perforce moulded itself into the